



liquid blackness

Passing Through Film

Staff

Editorial Board

Alessandra Raengo

Lauren M. Cramer

Kristin Juarez

Cameron Kunzelman

Michele Prettyman-Beverly

Social Media

Lauren M. Cramer

Managing Editor

Richard Moyer

Visual Design and Layout

Samantha Bowersock

Chris Hunt

Cover Image

Chris Hunt

Cameron Kunzelman

Issue Staff

Daren Fowler

Jenny Gunn

Joss Wakamo (Layout)

Consultant

Angelo Restivo

liquid blackness

Passing Through Film:

The Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5

SEPTEMBER 2015

Contents

ALESSANDRA RAENGO

08 Introduction: Passing Through Film /
Passing Through Jazz

ANGELO RESTIVO

28 The Sound of Color / The Color of Sound:
The Aesthetics of *Passing Through*

LAUREN M. CRAMER

40 *Passing Through: A Methodology for Close Analysis*

AYANNA DOZIER

52 Affect and the "Fluidity" of the Black Gendered Body in
Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification and Cycles

NICHOLAS FORSTER

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

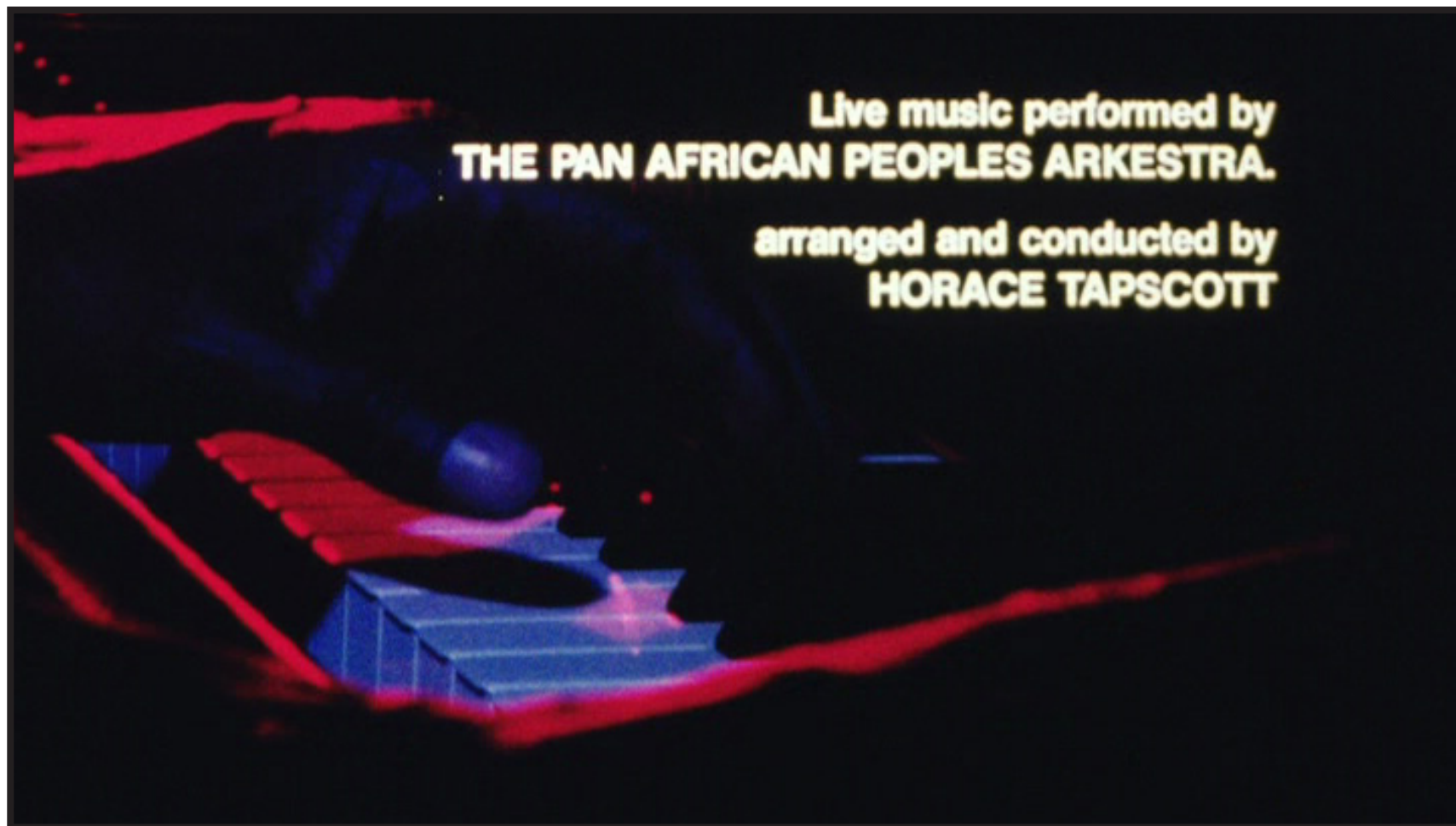
JAMES TOBIAS

86 Three Lines for *Passing Through*: The Sound, Image, and
Haptics of Radical Insight from the Undercommons

OVERVIEW

05	Contents
08	Introduction
28	Essays
100	Contributors
102	Acknowledgements

OPENING CREDITS, *PASSING THROUGH* (DIRECTED BY LARRY CLARK, 1977), FRAME GRAB.



Introduction: *Passing Through Film/ Passing Through Jazz*

ALESSANDRA RAENGO

This publication is part of an experimental project of collective research inspired by the encounter with Larry Clark's film *Passing Through* (1977), a cult film that by many accounts has successfully transposed the compositional principles of jazz improvisation into filmmaking and thus reached a powerful synergy between free jazz and film form.

The encounter with both the film and the filmmaker occurred during the "L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema Tour" that *liquid blackness* and the Department of Communication at Georgia State University co-sponsored with Emory's Department of Film and Media Studies in the Fall 2013.¹ My first reaction, as I walked to the stage at the end of the screening to lead a Q&A with the filmmaker, in awe of what I had just seen, was to describe

the film as *sublime*; partly because of the jarringly complex movement engendered by the propulsive force of its musical score and partly for its rejection of narrative and formal closure.² The film's free form, an expression of its 'passage through' jazz, is utilized in order to usher in elements of the radical political imagination elaborated by black artistic avant-gardes of its time.

The plot of *Passing Through* follows a jazz musician's struggle against the recording industry while in search of a sound that would reconcile his personal artistic vision with the sensibility of his community and the political urgencies of his highly repressive historical moment. The protagonist's attempt to record independently from the white-controlled record industry is profoundly imbricated with his search for the meaning

(and the (political) possibilities) of artistic experimentation, the desire to share it with one's community, as well as the attempt to heal a masculinity wounded by the experience of confinement, brutality, and the constant reminder of the worthlessness of black lives.

Through its "liquid" aesthetics the film displays the ability to *pass through* a variety of seemingly incongruous or remote spaces. It connects spaces of artistic improvisation, such as jam sessions, to spaces of systemic oppression—a reconstruction of the 1971 Attica prison revolt interwoven with archival newsreel footage of the revolt's repression (a sequence Lauren Cramer discusses in this issue), for instance—in the U.S. national scene—including the now iconic footage of the fire hoses and police dogs in Birmingham, AL, the police

shooting of a black family driving through a riot zone in Cleveland, among others—to images of African revolutionary leaders; spaces of addiction—a flashback that shows a band member overdosing—to spaces of healing—the sudden appearance of the musicians' mentor who blows an African horn and brings the band member back to life.³

These transitions—these "passages"—constitute the ways in which the film is both deeply rooted in its locality, while it also participates in and engenders transnational streams of radical politics. The film was made by leveraging existing artists communities, in particular the Central Avenue musicians—a vital portion of "all the musicians known and unknown," to whom the film is dedicated—and the community of actors and film crew from UCLA, PASLA, the Performance Art Society

of Los Angeles (some of whom Clark directly trained), who worked on the film. *Passing Through* features Horace Tapscott and the Pan-Afrikan People's Arkestra, jazz musicians who were already deliberately experimenting with alternative forms of collective political action through their community presence and through their musical practice. For example, they had decided not to abide by the demands of the record industry and instead bring their music, live, to their community.⁴ Both *Passing Through's* main character Warmack, played by Nathaniel Taylor, and his mentor Poppa Harris, played by veteran actor Clarence Muse, are modeled after Tapscott.

(RIGHT) FIGURE 1:

Clarence Muse with Dorian Gibb (who plays the young Warmack) at Brockman Art Gallery preparing for the scene. Courtesy of Brockman Gallery.



“THE FILM EXPLORES IN THE SAME BREATH BOTH THE CONFINEMENT AND THE EXPANSIVENESS OF BLACK ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL RADICALISM.”

Rooted in a vibrant post-Watts artistic community, comprising also assemblage and “junk” art, poetry, and the very experimental cinema created by the filmmakers of the L.A. Rebellion, the film is part of what Daniel Widener has identified as a concerted effort to develop non-representational and free-form modes of art practice, and ultimately improvisations of subjectivity articulated through a strong Third Worldist perspective.⁵

Passing Through premiered at FILMEX, the Los Angeles International Film Festival alongside David Lynch’s *Eraserhead* and Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*, and then circulated in international film festivals—Locarno, Edinburgh, Milan, Amiens, Douarnenez, Berlin, London, Amsterdam, Moscow, and was shown also in Martinique, Mozambique, Senegal, Algeria, Ghana, among others—as both an *art* and a *political* film.⁶ The absolute conviction that one is not separable

from the other is one of the film’s most powerful and enduring traits. Even though more contemporary descriptions of the film have often used a rhetoric of immersion, seduction, and “emotional spasm”—thus posing, at least for me, the question of what might be the proper affect of radical politics—the film’s political vision, as many international audiences of the time recognized, is biting and defiantly affirmative.⁷

**“THAT THE
ENSEMBLE
WORKS IS THE
PROOF OF THE
VIABILITY OF
ITS VISIONARY
ELEMENTS.”**

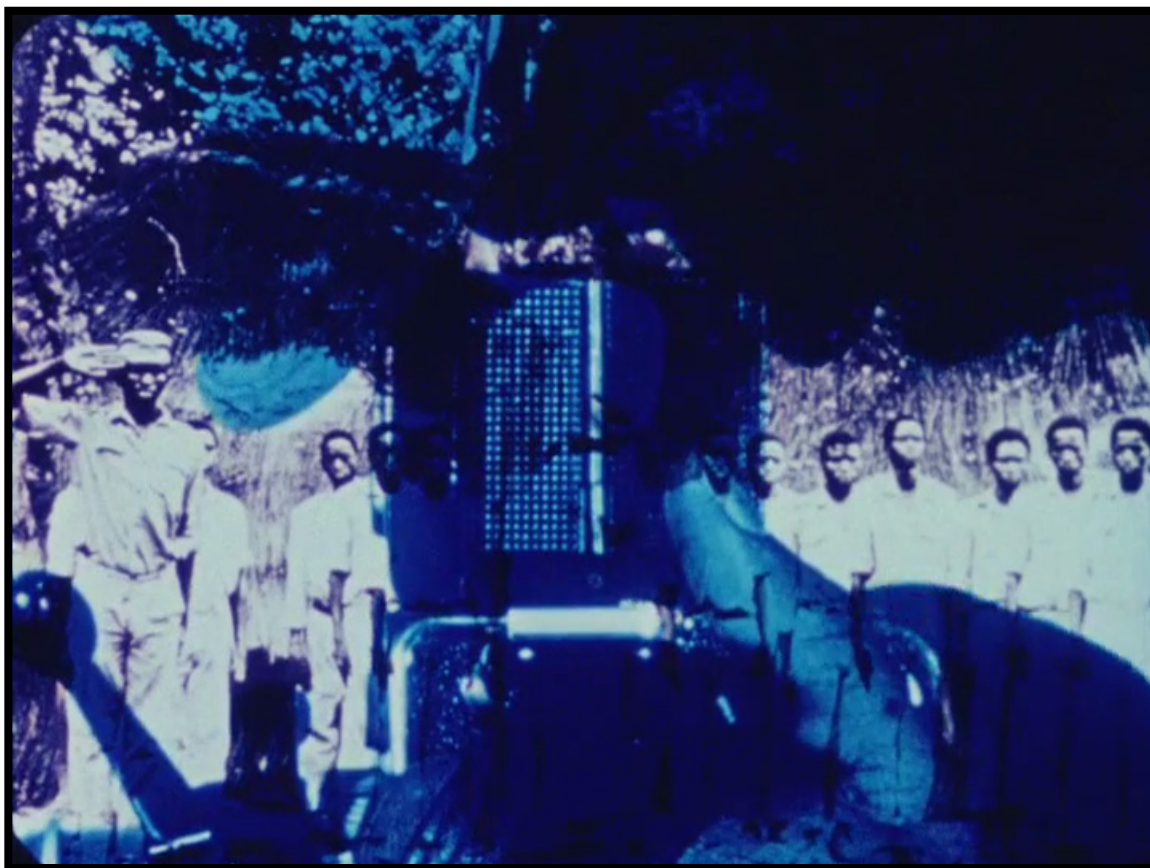
liquid blackness was immediately drawn to the aesthetic fluidity of *Passing Through* for how it renders the multiple ways in which blackness exists in space and time, simultaneously indexing rootedness and displacement, originarity and alienation. By presenting as adjacent incongruous aspects of human life—the seemingly unbound creativity of the musicians on the one hand, and the worthlessness of their lives within oppressive labor conditions, on the other; the conditions of Los Angeles black artists’ communities and the pervasive domestic and international anti-black violence—the film explores in the same breath both the confinement and the expansiveness of black artistic and political radicalism.

More specifically, *Passing Through* reflects on forms of sociality and political action that coalesce

around the jazz ensemble. In this respect, the film is about “black study” in the sense elaborated by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*.⁸ And it is around this idea of “study” that our guiding research questions finally emerged: what does it mean to take the jazz ensemble as a model for the relationship between artistic experimentation and radical politics, the individual and the

(RIGHT) FIGURE 2:

The film’s concern with mediatization extends to the visual recording of revolutionary struggles. Here we see the act of photographing superimposed to archival footage from Guinea Bissau. *Passing Through* (Directed by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.



collective, theory and praxis? Is the potential of the 1970s exhausted and inaccessible? Or does the notion of “passing through” present us with a concept of space that links to contemporary struggles in everyday life, especially at this moment of continued endangerment of black youths in public spaces? What kind of artistic vision does politics “pass through” in the digital age to produce spaces of communal vision and praxis? These are some of the questions that prompted the object-oriented mode of inquiry *liquid blackness* has been pursuing, an approach that lets the object dictate the terms of engagement.

The jazz ensemble is a space of political praxis because it offers an immediate “translation of vision into act,” especially when free-form aesthetics do not guarantee a predictable outcome and there

is always a chance that this alternative mode of sociality will implode into chaos.⁹ Yet, in the jazz ensemble, praxis is *the* vehicle for conceptualization: that the ensemble *works* is the proof of the viability of its visionary elements. I want to claim the same for Clark's film: in *Passing Through*, as James Tobias argues, jazz is not "an industrial product or musical genre" but "a complex streaming of heterogeneous, historical modalities of action;" one that keeps the history of jazz recording in tension with the history of improvised historical struggle.¹⁰ And in fact, in his additional reflections on the film contained in this issue, Tobias continues to explore ways in which *Passing Through* pursues its multiple commitments to local, national and international struggles by approaching "the historical struggle for a renewed music in a larger homology with

the struggle for a renewed political identity," and concerning itself with "the *mediatization* of Black music's capacities for transforming memory."¹¹

Passing Through renders the inextricability of artistic experimentation and radical political praxis unambiguously. It does so by enshrining the jazz ensemble as the aesthetic and political unit of the black radical tradition where more expansive forms of potentially contagious collectivity could be both imagined and practiced.¹² Central to this *expansion* is the practice of improvisation. As a site of experimentation with intellectual and spatial mobility and invention, improvisation, argues Kimberly Benston, thrives on the tension between "deformation and reformation," assemblage, bricolage, taking off and taking leave. Indeed the "process requires that the 'topic'

of improvisation initiates, as if within the logic of its own cellular structure, a movement which necessarily bears the piece further and further away from that theme."¹³ Improvisation, Moten further claims, is a kind of "foreshadowing, if not prophetic, description" because, "[t]hat which is without foresight is *nothing other than* foresight."¹⁴ This is an important reason why, as Benston further argues "the artist-hero in modern African-American writing is, typically, a musician ... for it is only in music that renovated aesthetic conventions can touch upon both the pure energy and improvisational wit deemed necessary for survival in the black diaspora."¹⁵

Clark never sought a theatrical release for his film and claims that this choice was inspired by Sekou Toure's views about art: the idea that "art has to be demanded," that

“FOR IT IS ONLY IN MUSIC THAT RENOVATED AESTHETIC CONVENTIONS CAN TOUCH UPON BOTH THE PURE ENERGY AND IMPROVISATIONAL WIT DEEMED NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL IN THE BLACK DIASPORA.”

“the people have to ask for it.”¹⁶ The important point here is that this restricted circulation —*Passing Through* has only been available exclusively on film until its recent digital transfer curated by the UCLA Film and Television Archive—has historically demanded a collective audience. Furthermore, the fact that the film only exists in 16mm in a handful of archives around the world (with the exception of a few

jealously guarded DVD transfers) reproduces some of the same collective conditions of production and fruition of the jazz ensemble. That is, *Passing Through* demands a collectivity both at the point of production and of reception. And for this reason *liquid blackness* only screened the film collectively so as to honor the way that the film has historically performed its critical and political work.

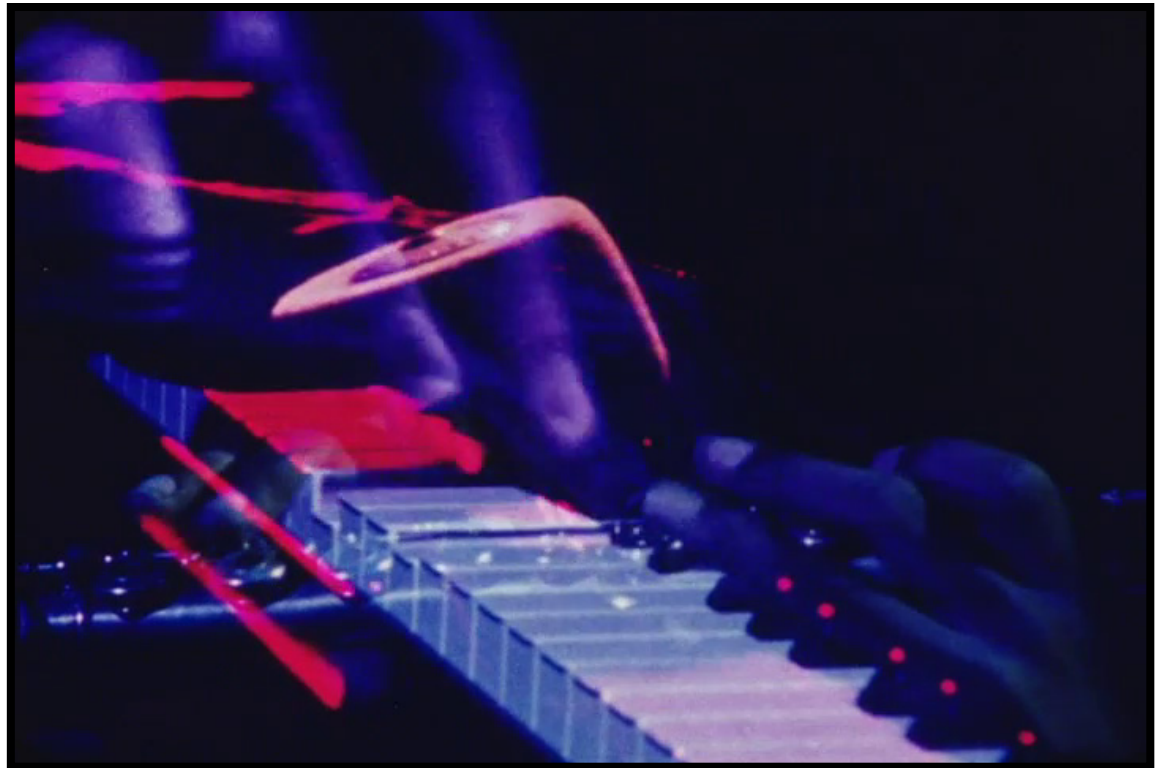
Several research questions and challenges quickly emerge from the very fact of studying a deliberately withdrawing object, which sides with the ephemeral over the permanent, and the performative and contingent over the institutional or the scripted: a fugitive film, with fugitive sounds, and a fugitive imagination.¹⁷ How to reconcile the demands of close analysis—i.e. repeated viewing, segmentation, stillness... (captivity?)—

with the film's understanding of itself as an unbound flow? If the "passages" are the most powerful sites of the film's political work, what are the implications of stilling *this* film for analysis?

From its opening sequence, the most celebrated in the film, *Passing Through* reflects on the stakes of fixing and recording (both the visual and the sonic) and attempts to confer to the image the malleability of sound, the intensity of a live performance and the complex dynamics of group creation and interaction. The opening sequence is the first existing recording of a

(RIGHT) FIGURE 3:

Opening sequence, *Passing Through* (Directed by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.



“HOW TO RECONCILE THE DEMANDS OF CLOSE ANALYSIS— I.E. REPEATED VIEWING, SEGMENTATION, STILLNESS... (CAPTIVITY?)—WITH THE FILM’S UNDERSTANDING OF ITSELF AS AN UNBOUND FLOW?”

performance of Herbert Baker’s “Flight 71” arranged by Tapscott.¹⁸ Emerging from a deep black background, Tapscott’s hands on the piano move like brush strokes across the frame. After a solo prelude, one by one, images of the ensemble’s various musical instruments are overlaid onto one another according to an aesthetics inspired by jazz album covers, that are in themselves a form of *passage*, as Tobias argues, a way of “holding” music, and the

asynchronous meeting point of musicians and audiences’ gestures.¹⁹

This sequence speaks also directly to the film’s intervention against the limitations of sensitometry that had limited the visibility of the black body on film. Before beginning to shoot, Clark had conducted secret screen tests to identify the type of film that would best record black skin against a deep black background. He was eventually satisfied with

the malleability of reverse FUJI film, at a time when it was not yet imported in the U.S., and had it shipped directly from Japan.²⁰ The film’s commitment to the moving and yet lingering image is reminiscent of jazz photography—such as the uncannily resonant Hart Leroy Bibbs’ *Manifesto Optksorption*, which strives to capture a sense of the living gesture of performing musicians—but it is also an expression of Clark’s understanding of filmmaking

**“REVERBERATION RECONFIGURE[S] TEMPORALITY
INSOFAR AS THE RIPPLE-LIKE, PARTIALLY FOLDING/
PARTIALLY ACCUMULATING REPETITION OF THE
RECORDING OF IMPROVISED MUSIC MIGHT CLAIM
SOME STAKES ON THE FUTURE.”**

as a form of painterly layering according to an aesthetics he has described as “soft cubism.”²¹

It is the porosity and fugitive nature of its transitions that ultimately allow the film to mobilize the idea of “*passing through*.” Sequences where the music itself propels and sustains a desire to surrender to its energizing and adventurous improvisatory logic follow this same logic *through* to

some of its most radical conclusions. And this is precisely the point: how far can the ensemble’s practical imagination go? And how dangerous might that territory be? A jam session (beginning with Horace Tapscott at the piano) transitions into historical footage of a KKK march in Washington, to the dogs and fire hoses in Birmingham, but also to creative forms of resistance

such as a line of women advancing and retreating in a dance-like manner while snapping their fingers. This choreography of resistance is reminiscent of the moving line of women featured at the end of Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which dramatizes the formation of the avant-garde as individual women alternate taking leave from the group to push ahead

and then retreating to be absorbed and to back up the group itself. Then, in the same breath, the sequence transitions back again into diegetic time where it initiates a flashback to a band member's overdose and near death, until the musicians' mentor, Poppa Harris, who visits him in the hospital room, blows an African horn, in yet another place and time not clearly identified within this heterogeneous filmic stream, and brings the musician back to life. Through this layering the film creates a number of virtual spaces—spaces nested within the irreducible tensions between creation and oppression—that can be seized for action.

And it is Moten that connects sound more directly to the question of political action, especially as he claims the ability for the black avant-garde to linger *in the break*, “as a necessary preface to

action.”²² Lingering in the break also requires a type of temporality that moves in two directions: forward, since foreshadowing is what improvisation does, and backwards, as jazz phrasing only becomes comprehensible to the listener through a different analytics that retroactively perceives it as indeed possessing its own type of dangerous, daring, and sometimes barely perceptible form.²³ It also introduces the importance of reverberation, as connected to the way in which technologies of sound reproduction both recalibrate localities but also reconfigure temporality insofar as the ripple-like, partially folding/partially accumulating repetition of the recording of improvised music might claim some stake on the future.²⁴

Shortly after *Passing Through's* opening sequence, Warmack, just

released from prison, practices his saxophone under a pier in the attempt to re-synchronize himself and his sound not only with the specific locality of his band but also with the transnational reverberations of his everyday struggle with larger decolonization struggles across the world. Clark combined different shots taken at different piers in the Los Angeles area so that he could create the effect of an indefinite space. When Clark mixed the sound in postproduction, the various soundtracks began to reverberate with one another as if they had occurred in actual space, as if the locality—in this case, the specific spatial/architectonical configuration of the (composite) pier itself—was reasserting itself by producing the echoing sounds. In this new virtual space created by sound reverberation, the spatial property of the particular location comes

to join the indefinite quality of the “whatever” space the filmmaker was trying to produce, offering an unplanned but effective way to convey the multiplicity of spaces in which the jazz artist as a potential political agent finds himself.²⁵ But it also crystalizes what can be accessed through the generative practice of free-jazz: the possibility to multiply one’s time and space, to expand across them, simultaneously inhabit the here and the elsewhere, and to synchronize oneself, for example, with the praxis outlined in the preacher’s sermon that opens Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*: to think, as Benston summarizes it, about blackness not as “an inevitable object, but rather a motivated, constructed, corrosive, and productive process;” blackness itself as *practice*.²⁶ And by extension, to think about jazz as a praxis of sociality, foreshadowing sonic resistance, and ultimately

improvisation of a transnational subjectivity at work in liberation struggles across the world.

This reverberation is both a powerful formal matrix in the film and also a way in which we can see our own collective processes—the way our own academic research builds on each other’s work, for example—somewhat mirrored in the film.²⁷ Moving from the observations just outlined, we have conceived of this fifth issue of *liquid blackness* as an opportunity to pursue a larger reflection on some of the questions posed by the film as well as to continue to “improvise” the configuration within which the film’s *study* might occur.

One exciting spinoff of our research has been *Drawing Through*, a project designed by painting, drawing and printmaking professor Craig Dongoski, with Georgia State

University students and alumni in occasion of Larry Clark’s campus visit and the screening of *Passing Through* in Atlanta in April 2015.²⁸ Bringing together painters and musicians, *Drawing Through* unfolded as a study in group meditation, sound visualization, and improvised creation. The LP record produced from this event captures the uniquely layered experience of the creative interaction between media practices—visual arts, music, and film—and will be released during an event at the Mammal Gallery that will conclude the September 18-19 symposium on “The Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble,” that *liquid blackness* has organized as part of this study. The event will also feature artwork from a range of media including live meditations and musical performances inspired by the film.

This issue features a variety of

compelling essays that are further testimony to the collective and experimental modes that have inspired this research project. James Tobias's return to *Passing Through*, a film he has already written about, is testimony to its continued relevance and in fact, to the way its transnational breadth as well as its commitment to the mediatization of cultural memory and its haptic communicability continue to be relevant in the present moment. Angelo Restivo has discovered the film through the *liquid blackness* research and his formal approach is sensitive to

(RIGHT) FIGURE 4:
Pursuing forms of liquidity in the sound/
image relation. *Passing Through* (Directed
by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.



“WHAT CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE GENERATIVE PRACTICE OF FREE-JAZZ: THE POSSIBILITY TO MULTIPLY ONE’S TIME AND SPACE, TO EXPAND ACROSS THEM, SIMULTANEOUSLY INHABIT THE HERE AND THE ELSEWHERE.”

the way the use of color in the film connects, in a utopian way, to Walter Benjamin’s idea of the outmoded. As Restivo argues, the film’s pursuit of the “mathematical sublime”—particularly the musical potentiality of color—acts as a form of “profane illumination” that, among other things, functions as a way to explore the possibility of the production and emergence of “the new.”

Essays by Ayanna Dozier and

Nicholas Forster pursue, likewise, some of this sensibility in the reading of other objects. Dozier focuses on Barbara McCullough’s *Water Ritual #1: A Urban Rite of Purification* and a Zeinabu irene Davis’s *Cycles*. Both filmmakers from the L.A. Rebellion pursued the radical gesture of framing women’s bodily fluids (urine in the former and menstruation in the latter) as acts of bodily expansion and as forms of assertion of *living*

bodies *existing in time*. They thus rescued these same bodies from the default association with filth and abjection and, at the same time, upset the way the cinematic image wraps itself too tightly around the black female body. Forster’s essay on Curtis Mayfield’s powerful cinematic presence in 1970s films advances the idea that Mayfield was instrumental in creating a soul counterpublic, which articulated political and economic

aspirations even though it had to unavoidably rely on the existing structure of the record industry. Appearing in some of the films for which he provided the soundtrack, Mayfield's presence commanded a shift from compliance to resistance that was understandable to the soul community.²⁹ Forster's close analysis of a pivotal scene in Robert M. Young's 1977 prison film, *Short Eyes* bears this out and effectively contributes to the understanding of the radical power of fabulation in 1970s music. ■

(LEFT) FIGURE 5:

Sound reverberates under the pier. *Passing Through* (directed by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.



¹ For an account of how the organization of the L.A. Rebellion Tour coincided with the coming together of *liquid blackness* as a research group see Alessandra Raengo, "Encountering the Rebellion: *liquid blackness* reflects on the expansive possibilities of the L.A. Rebellion films," in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*, ed. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, Jacqueline Stewart (University of California Press, forthcoming, November 2015).

² At least this is was my reaction at a first viewing—a sense that the film (paradoxically) loses cohesion as its narrative line takes hold. Upon closer study of the film, one becomes aware that a reason for this reaction is the very fact that the jazz ensemble and its music are by far the most powerful cohesive forces in the film.

³ In thinking about the political commitment of the film, it is important to know that Clark purchased the Attica and the Cleveland footage with the very first funds he was able to raise for the film.

⁴ See Steven Isoardi, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) and Steven Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

⁵ Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

⁶ I owe this observation to Kristin Juarez who first consulted Larry Clark's papers at UCLA in the Spring 2014 and noticed the double life of the film. See a map of the film's exhibition history here: <http://bit.ly/16upXPv>.

⁷ See for instance, Gary Giddins, "Boiling Point," *Film Comment*, 44, no. 4 (2008): 20-21.

⁸ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

⁹ Kimberly Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 116.

¹⁰ James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 154.

¹¹ James Tobias, "Three Lines for *Passing Through*: The Sound, Image, and Haptics of Radical Insight from the Undercommons," in this issue.

¹² Fred Moten advances the idea of the jazz ensemble as the aesthetic unit of the black radical tradition in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

¹³ Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 126.

¹⁴ Fred Moten, *In the Break*, 63.

¹⁵ Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 119.

¹⁶ Larry Clark, Interview for "Dossier on *Passing Through*" by Alessandra Raengo, San Francisco State University March 19, 2014, available at <https://vimeo.com/liquidblackness/videos/sort:alphabetical/format:thumbnail/>.

¹⁷ My use of the term “fugitive” is inspired both by Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, but also by Stephen Best, *The Fugitive’s Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁸ As Tobias discusses in this issue, this is an important memorializing act toward a young composer killed in a car crash in 1970 at age seventeen.

¹⁹ Tobias, *Sync*, 162. See the *liquid blackness* dossier for some of the album covers that have inspired Clark’s aesthetics, <http://passingthroughdossier.tumblr.com/>.

²⁰ Larry Clark, oral history interview by Jacqueline Stewart and Christopher Horak, June 2, 2010, and Julie Dash, oral history interview by Jacqueline Stewart, June 8, 2010, both unpublished L.A. Rebellion oral history Project, UCLA Film & Television Archive. See also the *liquid blackness* “Dossier on *Passing Through*,” curated by Kristin Juarez, for production stills and contact sheets that suggest Clark’s research on sensitometry. In particular, see the close up of Clarence Muse with the handwritten note, “match this contrast.” <http://passingthroughdossier.tumblr.com/>.

²¹ Hart Leroy Bibbs, *Manifesto Optksorption* (Framingham, Mass: Wooley the Newt Productions, Ltd., 1980). A painter before he became a filmmaker, Clark said his paintings were very layered and thick. Only after he started film school did he realize that he had been trying to make a film all along. Clark, oral history interview.

²² Moten, *In the Break*, 85.

²³ *Ibid*, 81.

²⁴ For the idea of sound recording as a form of recalibration of locality see Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2005), 20-30.

²⁵ The sequence concludes with a shot of magnificent waves that were actually outtakes from Cecil B. DeMille’s *Ten Commandments* (1956) that Clark acquired from a warehouse in L.A., another instance of proximity between experimental filmmaking and assemblage art.

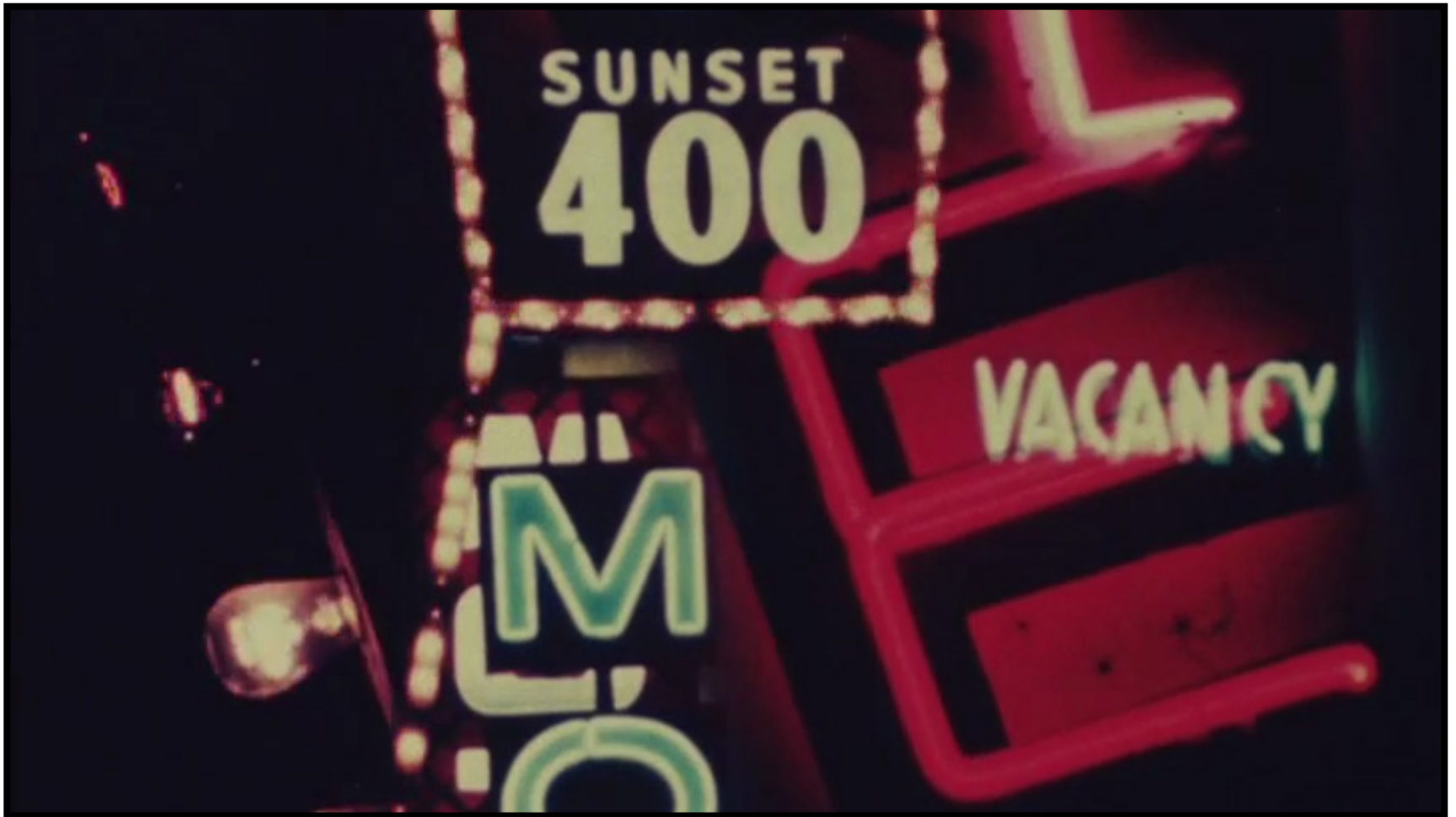
²⁶ Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 9.

²⁷ The presentation of this work in progress at the CURVE (an interactive media facility at Georgia State University), for example, highlighted this type of collaboration. It featured presentations by Lauren Cramer, Kristin Juarez, myself and showcased, among other things, Nedda Ahmed’s work on the film’s exhibition map.

²⁸ With Kristin Juarez acting as liaison between the *liquid blackness* research and Professor Dongoski.

²⁹ For the idea of how soul constructs, demands, and constantly addresses its community, see Kevin Young, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2012).

NEON ADVERTISING IN *PASSING THROUGH* (DIRECTED BY LARRY CLARK, 1977), FRAME GRAB.



The Sound of Color / The Color of Sound: The Aesthetics of *Passing Through*

ANGELO RESTIVO

How does the new emerge in the world? This question has, of course, a formidable philosophical pedigree: but it has perhaps been an especially urgent question for scholars of cultural production, as the mass industrial arts of the 20th century have rather suddenly morphed into the frenzied image production—the “digital delirium”—of the 21st. For a time, in the 1970s—incidentally the decade which saw the production of Larry Clark’s *Passing Through*—film theory took as its major project the analysis of the ways in which this cultural production served as a means for the social reproduction of capitalism; the question of “political cinema,” then, was constructed in a “reactive” way, so that the radical work was characterized precisely in relation to the dominant codes which it was violating. The problem with all this was that what ended up

getting ignored was the *aesthetic* question; aesthetics here taken to be that which brings to our perception the indeterminate, the indiscernible, the virtual. To recast the question of political cinema as a question fundamentally connected to aesthetics, then, is to assert that we can't possibly know in advance when, where, or how a new sensibility or a new engagement with the world will emerge: we can only "attend" to it, in all the senses the Romance languages give to this word. Depending on the variant of critical theory you subscribe to, you can call this moment an encounter with the Real, an instance of counter-actualization, or a speculative engagement with the foreign, but in any case, we must see these as fundamentally connected to aesthetic experience.¹

Clark's *Passing Through*—like the jazz ensemble which the film takes

not simply as its nominal subject but as its formal model—is very much centered on this close attention to the new in emergence. It goes without saying that "free jazz" tries to distance itself from pre-given progressions that anchor the improvisation of the more traditional jazz ensemble. And in several early rehearsal sequences, we see the main character, saxophonist Warmack, as he searches for the right sound, having just returned to Los Angeles from a stint in Attica prison. But more than this: Warmack (and his girlfriend Maya) search for new paths out of the neocolonial economic structures of South Central. In this, Maya takes the lead by quitting her job as photographer for a glossy black magazine owned and run by whites. Warmack, too, understands how the white music industry appropriates for its own profit the

artistic production of black men, which leads him to attempt—in one of the film's few narrative lines—to start an independent record label. Within this system, heroin becomes the perfect metaphor (however real its presence in the music industry): for it points at the profound psychic risks that accompany the constant pressure to move into new and uncharted terrain, which then can be exploited by the white drug dealers who form part of the infrastructure of the entertainment industry.

But the fact that Maya is a step ahead of Warmack in her decision to break with these structures points to yet another way in which the film engages with the new, insofar as it attempts to understand new modes of relationality between black men and black women. An entire section of the film—woven together by a seemingly incessant rain that

joins the sequences together—explores the slow development, with all its vicissitudes, of the relationship between Warmack and Maya, as Warmack confronts his insecurities in the face of an accomplished and independent woman, whose political awareness extends beyond the local and links the African-American struggle to anti-colonialist movements across the globe. In this way, the film—though never invoking it explicitly—brings to mind the charged sexual politics of the radical black left in its attempt to reconcile women's rights and equality with the need to nourish a black masculinity made precarious by centuries of slavery and racism. One thinks, for example,

(RIGHT) FIGURE 1:

Flashing neon sign outside Warmack's apartment window in *Passing Through* (Directed by Larry Clack, 1977), frame grab.



“HISTORY INHABITS EVERY FRAME, EVERY SPACE, OF THE FILM, AS THE URGENT RAW MATERIAL FROM WHICH THE NEW MUST BE FASHIONED.”

of the ways in which, in the decade preceding this film, this very issue in the Black Panther Party led to the development of the “Womanist” position; or of the ways in which the sexual violence recounted in Eldridge Cleaver’s collected prison writings, *Soul on Ice*, created a firestorm of controversy in the national (white) press, even as Cleaver acknowledged the misguidedness of his earlier acts. Indeed, history inhabits every frame, every space, of the film, as the urgent raw material from which the new must be fashioned.

All of this, I want to argue, is linked formally to the film’s extensive use of the color red. Certainly, one can’t help but notice the way that most of the film’s interiors—with exceptions like the offices of Maya’s magazine, the corporate headquarters of the record company executive, and Attica prison—are lit with lighting instruments gelled red. This is especially prominent in Warmack’s apartment (Figure 1); but it is noticeable in almost every instance of what I would call the “spaces of resistance” in the film (Figure 2),

those spaces whose cracked and textured plaster walls give a vague suggestion of “the outmoded,” in contrast to the glassy smoothness of the corporate office (Figure 3). For Walter Benjamin, the value of the outmoded, its “revolutionary potential,” lay precisely in the way it makes capitalist production visible per se: the novelty that renders an object outmoded has nothing to do with the really new, but rather illustrates how, despite appearances, everything remains the same.²

“THE TECHNICAL AND AESTHETIC PROBLEM CLARK FACED THUS OPENS UP TO A UTOPIAN ASPIRATION: TO SEE BLACK SKIN ‘IN A NEW LIGHT,’ LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY.”

Larry Clark, in talking about the overall chromatic design of his film (and not specifically, I should add, addressing the use of red gels) has said that he was lighting for black skin. In other words, by-the-book lighting of the kind that one might learn in film school is going to tell you how to light skin that is by default white skin. The technical and aesthetic problem Clark faced thus opens up to a utopian aspiration: to see black skin “in a new light,” literally and figuratively. Whether or not pushing tungsten light toward the red part of the spectrum was done toward this end or some other one, I would like to argue that this utopian aspiration produces, almost as if a byproduct, the red glows that pulsate through the various spaces of the film. That light suggests at once the state of emergency that characterized black urban experience in 1977

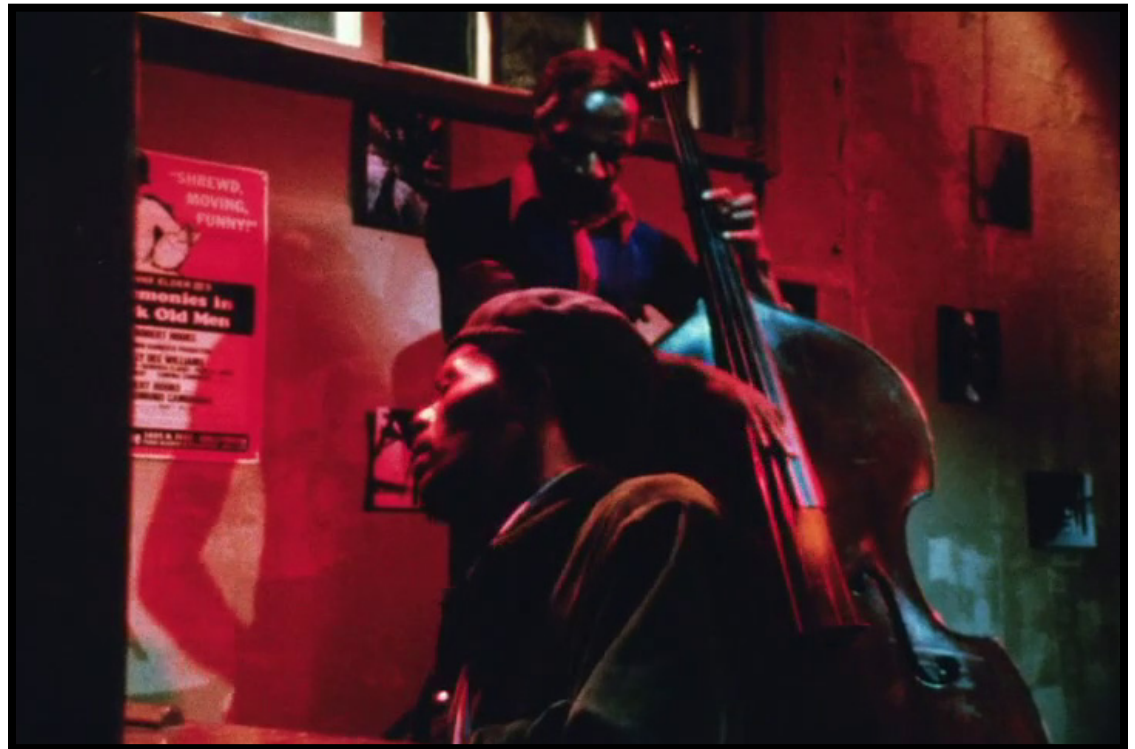
(and given recent events regarding the policing of black communities today, suggests that the state of emergency is far from over); but also states of emergence: of new modes of relationality, new distributions of the sensible, a politics “to come.”

For Walter Benjamin, color was a privileged means through which our experience might open up to new potentialities, insofar as color is able to move across boundaries and expresses itself as an intensity rather than a fixed property of a thing. These ideas are beautifully compressed into what has become a rather well-known entry in the *Arcades Project*: where Benjamin writes, “What, in the end, makes advertisement so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says—but the fiery red pool reflecting it in the asphalt.”³ Benjamin, too, is talking about a redness as

a kind of byproduct: in this case, one produced by capital itself. The red glow on the pavement, like the outmoded object or space, is one of those “unintended consequences” that have the potential to expose, in a “profane illumination,” the irrationality of what we normally take to be the common sense of everyday life. Significantly, Benjamin gave this entry a title, “This Space for Rent,” suggesting that underlying the capitalist exchange of spaces for rents, there is the potential for a “montage” to emerge which would disrupt this circuit of exchange.⁴

(RIGHT) FIGURE 2:

Spaces of resistance: the jazz club in *Passing Through* (directed by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.



The reds of *Passing Through* are not the same as Benjamin's reds: they are not the reflected glows of the phantasmagoria of capital, but as I indicated earlier, instead come about as the result of a utopian aspiration. Indeed, the only red "advertising" signs we see are the block-lettered names of the string of motels lined up one after another in a strip mall (image on page 27); and the only neon is a partially visible flashing sign which is outside Warmack's apartment window, put there, according to Clark, because he needed to give the impression the apartment was above ground level in order to link continuity with the exterior sequences outside the apartment (Figure 1). But in a sense, what Benjamin was getting at in treating color as expressive intensity was to bring out its *musical* qualities: like music, color can overrun fixed boundaries, can pass through

certain thresholds. And affectively, this is the sense that we get from the reds in the film: feelings of linkages across distances, of rising and falling intensities. (In fact, the film's opening sequence makes an explicit connection between music and color: against a deep black background, colored lights become associated with particular instruments, and as the instruments interact with one another, the colors begin to occupy various zones of the processed image.)

When Warmack returns to L.A. from the prison stint, there is an amazing monochromatic sequence in which Warmack takes his saxophone to a pier on the Pacific Ocean and improvises, with the sound of the ocean waves present in the background. These sounds of waves return periodically at key moments through the film, and formally they

correspond sonically to how the film is handling color in the image. The waves, that is to say, produce constantly shifting rhythmic patterns, and constantly varying levels of intensity, from a vast number of "micro-movements." In this way they are akin to free jazz, insofar as in both the rhythmic structures are in constant variation. But in a larger sense, the waves of the ocean present us with a case of the "mathematical sublime": the reference point for measurement is constantly in flux. And finally, the ocean creates a metaphor, as it alludes to the traumatic histories of diaspora that make up the black musical tradition.

Given the details of Benjamin's entry, "This Space for Rent," it might be instructive to look briefly at a film made around the same time as *Passing Through*, one in which the red is directly linked, as

“THE OCEAN CREATES A METAPHOR, AS IT ALLUDES TO THE TRAUMATIC HISTORIES OF DIASPORA THAT MAKE UP THE BLACK MUSICAL TRADITION.”

Benjamin describes, to the capitalist phantasmagoria: Martin Scorsese’s 1976 *Taxi Driver*. In fact, Scorsese’s film so exactly reproduces the images Benjamin evokes that one might think Scorsese was deliberately referring to it! The film’s noir-inspired hosed-down streets, the windshield and mirrors of the taxi, the glass storefronts, all of these reflective surfaces take up and redistribute the glowing red neon signs, with signifiers like “FASCINATION,” strewn across the urban landscape of the city seemingly on the verge

of collapse. We must then ask, what “profane illumination” will arise from all the fragmented signs? Unfortunately, the film’s formal system encloses all of this mise-en-scène in a kind of circular movement that is nothing if not the formal manifestation of a repetition compulsion; the only available politics is the missed encounter between a venal presidential candidate and a borderline vigilante. In a humorous but telling detail of the film, a political button manufacturer has misprinted the campaign slogan of

the candidate: “We are the people” instead of (the correct) “We are the people.” We can see here the way the first slogan gives us the formula for fascism; while the second gives us the formula for identity politics, as the protest of those excluded from the emphasized “we.” But what is most evident in *Taxi Driver* is that in the emergent regime of neoliberalism (which in hindsight was what all the “creative destruction” was preparing the ground for), “the people are missing.”

In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze takes this quote of Paul Klee and develops it into a theory of Third Cinema. In particular, he argues that what the formal devices deployed in Third Cinema attempt to do is to “invent a people” via the powers of fabulation.⁵ In other words, this is the way the new comes to appearance in Third Cinema. And this is indeed where all the formal resonances and affective relays—of sound and color—lead us in *Passing Through*. Toward the end, the film presents us with a series of fabulations. In one of these—the killing of the murderous record company executive who is

(RIGHT) FIGURE 3:

Red accent marks in the corporate office in *Passing Through* (directed by Larry Clark, 1977) frame grab.



trying to prevent the group from forming a new label—the popular is invoked via a send-up of the genre of Blaxploitation. After the death of Clarence Muse, i.e. Poppa Harris, the old man who serves as mentor to Warmack, a clairvoyant friend of Muse presents Warmack with gifts from his mentor, while also doing a

Tarot reading which fabulates the future not only for Warmack, but—because of its abstractions, such as “you must slay the dragon”—for a potential people to come. Muse leaves Warmack a cryptic poem which, when deciphered, reveals to Warmack that the legacy of the jazz greats who preceded him point as

well to an as-yet-unrealized futurity. And while this genealogy might seem to invoke the “African tree” and an “arborescent” structure, the violent history of the diaspora makes this really a “rhizome,” where inventions of the new leap from one place to another, in all manner of improbable connections.⁶ ■

¹ In this essay, we must leave to the side the relatively recent “accelerationist” position: in this view, capitalism has achieved “full subsumption,” the aesthetic event has become fully accounted for and even “monetized,” and so the only strategy left is to plunge fully into the production of simulacra, to the point where some vaguely conceived implosion (maybe? hopefully?) occurs. See Steven Shaviro, *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

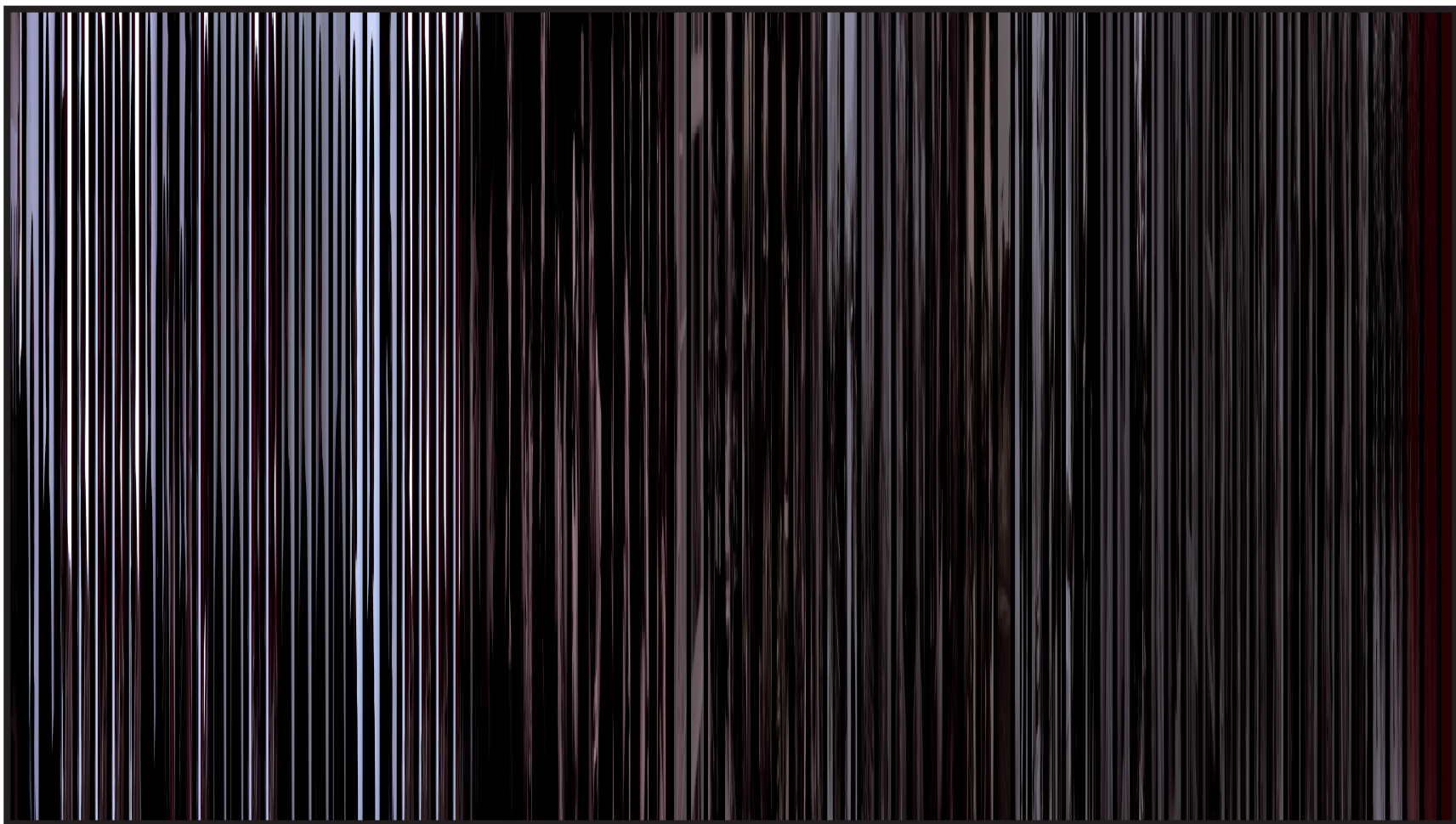
² Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” *Collected Writings* v. 2 part 1 (1927-1930), trans. R. Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 216-218.

³ Quoted in Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (University of California Press, 2012), 154; for a quick outline of Benjamin’s “philosophy of color” more generally, see her footnote to this quote, 329 n78.

⁴ “Montage” insofar as from the point of view of exchange, every successive rental is independent of the others; but to the extent that the space holds within it inscriptions from the past elements of this series, it acquires a density of potential if improbable linkages. Imagine, for example, that “this space for rent” is a billboard: with each economic exchange, the new image is supposed to obliterate the one underneath. But if the space of the billboard loses its value for some reason and falls into disuse, then the tolls taken by weather and aging might bring separated layers to the surface.

⁵ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson, R. Galeta, (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 214.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari begin *A Thousand Plateaus* with an extended discussion of the binary opposition arborescent / rhizomatic. The arborescent stands for structures that are tree-like and hierarchical (whether social formations or philosophical systems); whereas the rhizomatic stands for formations that are characterized by multiple points of entry, multiple ways of negotiating pathways, etc. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), plateau 1.



Passing Through: A Methodology for Close Analysis

LAUREN CRAMER

As Alessandra Raengo explains in her Introduction to this issue of *liquid blackness*, studying Larry Clark's *Passing Through* has presented both practical and theoretical challenges. Collectively, we found the solution to those obstacles was to fully embrace the possibilities of film study, by adopting methodologies that compliment the shape of the film. For example, Kristin Juarez's archival research featured in the "Dossier on *Passing Through*," which is connected to this publication, produces a historical network and visual ecology that has as many spatial, political, and aesthetic linkages as the film itself.¹ Considering film study as its own form means being explicit about research as a process of making. Therefore, when I wanted to initiate a close reading of the film, I was confronted with the fact that I did not want to *make* pieces of *Passing*

Through. As the title suggests, this film is about movement, connectivity, and scale—there must be room to pass through, and this passing should not be interrupted. The tools of ‘close’ reading (cropped screen-captures or enlarged frames) clearly produce a completely different construction of the cinematic space. While these challenges remain, this piece and the entire issue feature stills from the film; foregrounding these concerns may help us better understand what passes through in this film, and how movement might shape black cinema.

The trajectory of Warmack, the main character in *Passing Through*, is not unlike a classic hero on a quest for self-actualization in the face of forces attempting to restrain him. But at the end of the film, he does not ride into the sunset. Instead, he remains in the same dark apartment flooded in neon light from the

depressing motel sign outside of his window. Yet, when Warmack picks up his saxophone and plays, it is clear that he is not bounded to this space. Like his grandfather, Poppa Harris, Warmack is not defined by his particular position at any time (prison, a record contract, etc.); instead, Warmack is the possibility of connecting to any moment in space and time. Contrary to the notion of blackness as a kind of confinement, the collectivity of the jazz ensemble allows Warmack to become the embodiment of dynamism. My aim is to adopt a reading strategy that can account for this reversal. I choose to view the film in a linear fashion, to produce images that have the potential to move forward and backward, and to pay particular attention to the moments Clark calls “accent marks,” that initiate movement across time and space.²

The completion of Warmack’s journey is significant in light of his previous state of restriction, which we see throughout the film. In the film sequence shown in Figure 1, Warmack is reminded of a painful memory, a violent attack on a member of his jazz ensemble and his subsequent incarceration at Attica Correctional Facility—which is represented by actual footage of the infamous Attica prison rebellion. While the use of archival footage helps to enrich our main character’s backstory, it also provides a moment to consider the ‘landmarks’ of black visual culture, moments of overwhelming familiarity, that black cinema must also pass through. Within the film Warmack is trapped by governmentality, the historical moment, and an exploitative music industry. Similarly, the well-known “burden of representation” confines black cinema within

FIGURE 1:
The Ensemble



particular categories of genre, narrative, and style. *Passing Through* is a complex film precisely because it does not want to be paused. *Passing Through* comfortably moves through multiple artistic traditions (photography, jazz, drawing, poetry),

film genres (film noir, Blaxploitation), and expressions of culture (religious ritual, ancestral lineages, folklore) so that no one of these individual tropes of black expressive culture can define the film. For that reason, in the following exercise, I will identify

ways to see the film stage the sometimes difficult movement of a black body through space and time.

The Ensemble (Figure 1)

While this sequence focuses primarily on Warmack's experience at the

FIGURE 2:
The Break



center of the Attica prison rebellion, I suggest it begins with the jazz ensemble. Embedded within this group is a political formation that has the ability to record, preserve, and perform a racial black politics. As Clark explains, this group performs

the music that “makes you think and makes you reflect.”³ In other words, this moment of practice, as a double for the forward playing or screening of the film, facilitates a reflective moment of looking backward. Thus, the improvisational

work of the ensemble allows us to *pass through* and connect these characters to a black radical tradition.

The Break (Figure 2)

At the beginning of the rehearsal, Warmack struggles to reconnect

with his bandmates, but the use of eyeline matches and establishing shots clearly make the spatial relationship between the group clear. However, when one member reminds everyone of a racist encounter that left a musician blinded, the group is incapable of maintaining their rhythm. Clark refers to these moments that signal a stylistic change as “accent marks.” Clark argues these moments do not require explanation, they simply work in the moment of improvisation or not.⁴ The characters register their emotional discomfort silently, but it is clear that this is an improvisational fail. The ensemble cannot recover without activating and working through the painful memory. In other words, they cannot move forward without looking back. By superimposing the first shot of the flashback over Warmack’s face, the transition visualizes an impossible space/time evoked by

the ensemble that allows Warmack to be both ‘here’ and ‘there.’

The Attack or “The Sound Before the Fury of Those Oppressed” (Figure 3)

After the transition from the band rehearsal into the past, we see Skeeter, a member of the ensemble, being attacked. Enraged, Warmack comes to Skeeter’s defense and repeatedly punches the attacker. It is meaningful that the film visualizes violence against black bodies, a kind of violence that often remained off screen. However, Warmack’s subsequent attack and the image of violent black masculinity are all too familiar. This is yet another “accent mark.” However, instead of initiating contemplation like the previous segment, Warmack is shuttled forward in time to his inevitable incarceration. The film is making literal the fixity that emerges when

a particular kind of racial image is deployed. Immediately, the image of Warmack’s violent aggression becomes another familiar image of imprisonment. The inevitability of this moment is reinforced by the care in which the fictional and documentary footage are combined, particularly in the color processing.

The War - Attica Correctional Facility, 1971 (Figure 4)

By utilizing archival footage in the Attica scenes, *Passing Through* necessarily considers this historical moment through the lens of media. During the Attica prison rebellion, prisoners tried to bring human rights violations that were occurring behind bars to light. Thus, it is fitting that the combination of footage in *Passing Through* visualizes the sides of the rebellion as a conflict of image production. In between a visual exchange between prisoners making

FIGURE 3:
The Attack or "The Sound Before the Fury of Those Oppressed"



FIGURE 4:
The War - Attica Correctional Facility, 1971



demands and white onlookers, the film inserts more explicitly militaristic imagery. For example, prisoners dig trenches in one shot while correctional officers arrive in tanks and helicopters in another. Similarly, the leaders of the warring sides (Russell G. Oswald, Chief of New York State's Penal System and prison spokesperson, Elliot Barkley) look on. It is undeniable that the prisoners were trapped within the prison walls; however, the film makes this issue of confinement a problem of visibility.

The Black Body in Pain (Figure 5)

If the previous segment of the film argues black radical politics are a response to black bodies being

fixed or caught within an anti-black visual economy, this last part of the sequence offers a possibility for liberating the black image. In the wake of the violence at Attica, the details of many prisoner deaths were shrouded in mystery and the prison denied involvement. Therefore, it is significant that the last major movements in this sequence are fictional images of black bodies in pain. In close ups, we see prisoners succumb to gunshot wounds and, in a moment of solidarity, two prisoners rush an injured body toward the camera. The film does something that would have been impossible for the real prisoners by filling an absence in the archive. This final accent provides the most explicit contemplation of movement

and stillness by ending with a still photograph of naked prisoners being arranged by guards that slowly fades to red. This ending defies traditional filmmaking in the unconventional use of color and the more obvious pausing of the moving image. Again, this allows the film to do work that the prisoners cannot by making the images of their abuse visible and, notably, moving outside of it. ■

¹ *liquid blackness* "Dossier on *Passing Through*." Curated by Kristin Juarez, available at <http://passingthroughdossier.tumblr.com>.

² Larry Clark, Interview for "Dossier on *Passing Through*" by Alessandra Raengo, San Francisco State University, March 19, 2014, available at <https://vimeo.com/liquidblackness/videos/sort:alphabetical/format:thumbnail/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

FIGURE 5:
The Black Body in Pain



CYCLES (DIRECTED BY ZEINABU IRENE DAVIS, 1989), FRAME GRAB.



Affect and the “Fluidity” of the Black Gendered *Body in Water Ritual #1:* An Urban Rite of Purification and Cycles

AYANNA DOZIER

“Give me a body then ... The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life.”—Gilles Deleuze¹

“My body, an object destined to move other objects, is, then, a centre of action; it cannot give birth to a representation.”—Henri Bergson²

The use of menstruation and urination in the films *Cycles* (Zeinabu irene Davis, 1989) and *Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification* (Barbara McCullough, 1979) affectively engages with the cinematic image of the black gendered body to produce a body that moves beyond the appearance of blackness. I derive my use of affect from Kara Keeling’s conceptualization

of the same in *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*:

*Affect ... is a form of labor that is intrinsic to the body's self-constitution. While one's perception measures the possible or virtual action of a thing on one's body, affection can be understood initially as the moment in which one's perception ceases to measure an object's potential action upon one's body and begins to sketch out the object's actual action.*³

To engage with bodily fluids on the level of affect illuminates the ways in which these fluids sketch out a temporal existence of bodily materiality. Through affect, these bodily fluids offer a perspective of the lived experience of the black gendered body; they extend the black body's spatio-temporal existence and allow for the possibility

to view the black body as a lived body, because we see it as a body *in time*. As Gilles Deleuze elaborates in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, "It is through the body that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought. 'Give me a body then' is first to mount the camera on an everyday body." Further, Deleuze states that "the daily attitude is what puts the before and after into the body, time into the body."⁴ Thus, Zeinabu irene Davis and Barbara McCullough use bodily fluids to transgress the representation of phenomenal blackness, by making visible the "fluidity" that is the lived "daily" experience of black bodies.

Harvey Young defines phenomenal blackness, in *Embodying Black Experience*, as: "When popular connotations of blackness are mapped across or internalized within black people, the result is

the creation of *the black body*. This second body, an abstracted and imagined figure, shadows or doubles the real one."⁵ This is the same black body that Frantz Fanon waited for in trepidation while viewing *Tarzan* (W.S. Van Dyke and Richard Thorpe, 1932) in an Antillean theater.⁶ It is this body that stands in for the lived black body and gives, in its stead, a shadow that devalues black humanity. For Fanon this was the experience of viewing the "savage" blacks in *Tarzan* that "represented" his body. As Kara Keeling clarifies, the "social reality" of the black body is one partly produced by cinematic processes so much so that "each appearance of a black image to an eye is an appearance of every black insofar as 'black identity' is a historical project predicated upon a substitution that implies an aporia."⁷ It is an aporia insofar as each

“VIDATO’S BODY SOWS THE EARTH THROUGH PRAYER AND PHYSICAL LABOR.”

appearance of a black image always refers back to a previous appearance of similarly “black” images.

Thus, before the reel of *Cycles* and *Water Ritual #1* even begin, the black bodies within the screen exist in a temporal gap, between prior historical images of blacks and their impending cinematic appearance. Similarly, the bodies moving onscreen interact with past appearances of

their cinematic body. Both films cleverly address this temporal gap by using ritual as a way to conjure the historical, non-cinematic, black lived experience alongside the present one. It is important to note here that, as a concept, blackness does not necessarily refer to negative images of blacks or black culture. Rather, it describes a quality mapped onto the lived black body because of its phenomenal appearance. Both films use bodily fluids as a way to extend the black body’s (and the black image’s) spatio-temporal reach beyond the limited possibilities that phenomenal blackness might otherwise make available. In so doing, Davis and McCullough are able to situate the black cinematic body in the present to form new meanings beyond the appearance of blackness. While both films manage to accomplish this, they do so in different ways.

The Uncontained Body in *Cycles* and *Water Ritual #1*

Released a decade apart, *Water Ritual #1* and *Cycles* both deal with aspects of ritual, cleansing, and the black female body as a site for psychological healing. The filmmakers, McCullough and Davis, were part of the L.A. Rebellion, a movement of black experimental film art that was created by graduate students of UCLA’s School of Theater, Film and Television from the 1970s to the early 1990s.⁸ *Water Ritual #1*, shot on 16mm black-and-white film then colored to the appearance of infrared color film stock, features artist Yolanda Vidato roaming through the urban abandonment of the I-105 freeway construction site in Watts, California. During this brief but intense six-minute film, Vidato’s body sows the earth through prayer and physical labor. Vidato uses a

mortar and pestle to grind herbs for the earth. She proceeds to repeatedly blow the herbs in the air, before stripping bare and squatting down to replenish the barren earth with her urine. The infrared colored painting of the black-and-white film that McCullough used abstracts Vidato's body as does the camera's shot as it pans down to spotlight her act of urination. The camera abstracts Vidato's body through a continuous tight shot that moves along her skin, rendering specific zones of her body indiscernible at times. Hence, its abstraction contributes to the removal of a sexual gaze once the

“TO ENGAGE WITH BODILY FLUIDS ON THE LEVEL OF AFFECT ILLUMINATES THE WAYS IN WHICH THESE FLUIDS SKETCH OUT A TEMPORAL EXISTENCE OF BODILY MATERIALITY.”

“COLOR AND BODILY MATTER SEEP FROM HER, SUGGESTING THAT THE AUDIENCE VIEW VIDATO’S BODY NOT AS A SITE FOR CONSUMPTION, BUT RATHER AS ONE OF PERCOLATION.”

camera pans to Vidato’s genitalia. Vidato’s body further loses its shape and stability as a fixed entity when the outline of her body blurs with the desert background—an effect that is heightened through the hypnotic coloring of the film stock. Through the use of color, which shifts between cool and warm tones and is present throughout, Vidato’s body extends its boundaries to blend with the environment as a body. The land is the body and the

body is the land. Color and bodily matter seep from her, suggesting that the audience view Vidato’s body not as a site for consumption, but rather as one of percolation.

If color was used to extend Vidato’s spatio-temporal reach, then the use of shadow in *Cycles* achieves a similar effect. In *Cycles*, Stephanie Ingram’s body is a body in and out of stasis as she awaits the arrival of her menstrual period; Ingram, now two weeks late, anxiously bides her

time by cleaning both the house and her body as a “ritual” to purify the self. Also shot on black-and-white 16mm film, *Cycles* deploys the use of stop motion technique in some scenes, quite similar to *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962), to propel the film’s narrative. In addition, the use of natural light illuminates Ingram’s domestic setting and pierces partially closed rooms where Ingram’s shadows trace her movements. The shadows and stop motion technique

animate Ingram's body as she cleans multiple locations within her home including the kitchen, the bedroom, and the bathroom where she prepares her body for a deep cleanse (Figure 3). While the domestic setting certainly implies a ceremonial aspect to Ingram's cleanse, it is crucial to note the ritualistic elements of the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom as rooms where Ingram eats, defecates, and fucks.

Ingram's body exercises itself firmly within the confines of the domestic setting of the home before taking a nap to sleep away her anxious state. The film then cuts to a dream sequence, during which multiple women including Ingram can be seen roaming the city chanting, clapping, running, hugging; the black female body is thus presented as a force of action in both environments. The seventeen-minute film ends with

Ingram awaking from her roaming dream with menstrual blood staining her white sheets. Unlike *Water Ritual #1, Cycles* uses the stain to mark the appearance of bodily fluids. In a discussion on the ethics of dirty work and the body, Sheena J. Vachhani notes the distinction of the stain as a visible mark of bodily difference; the stain makes the hidden perceptible on the body while the materiality of the body also stains its spatio-temporal environment:

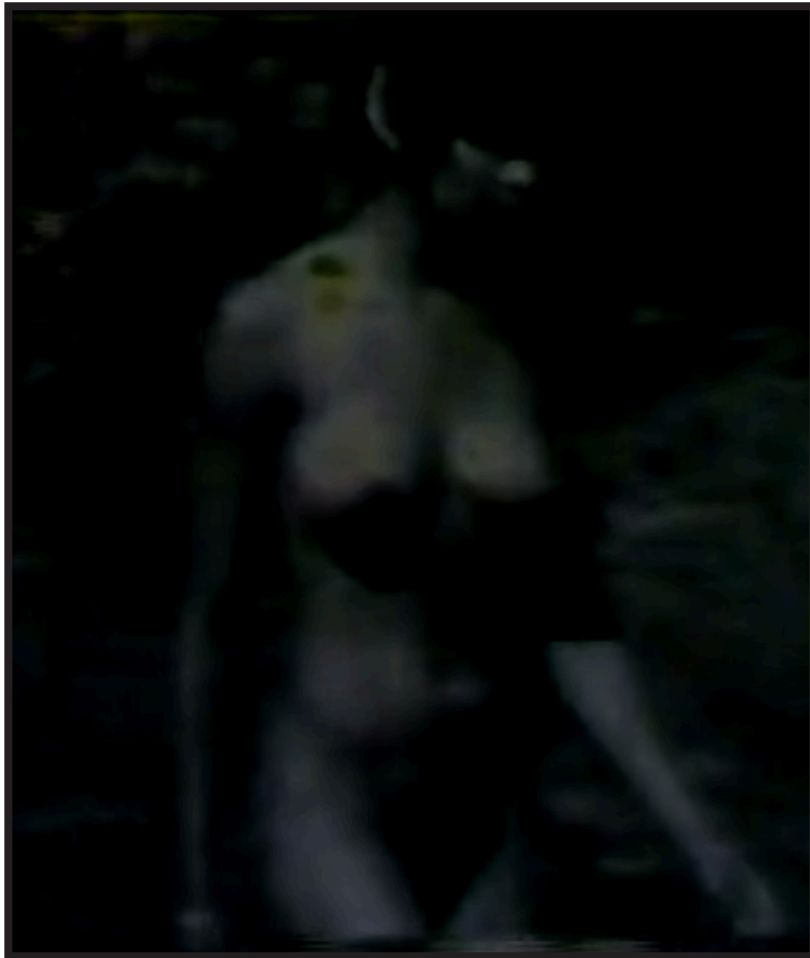
*The stain presents a way by which to demarcate and draw different zones of corporeality given the 'horror' or intense discomfort felt in response to the leaking, permeable and absorptive feminine body, in which boundaries between inside and outside and self and Other are constantly blurred.*¹⁰

Bodily fluids are socially inscribed with deeply gendered meanings, as Julia Kristeva's groundbreaking

work on abjection has illustrated. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva argues that defilement is attached to excrement and menstruation much more so than other bodily fluids:

*While they always relate to corporeal orifices as to so many landmarks parceling-constituting the body's territory, polluting objects fall schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value.*¹¹

Kristeva's work on abjection sets the foundation for interpreting the social and hierarchical relationship of affective responses attached to particular bodily fluids; arousal with sperm, sympathy with tears, and disgust with excrement and menstruation. Kristeva is quick to address how abjection is socially



inscribed upon menstruation, which signifies reproduction, to give it the same “polluting” value as excrement, which is human waste. Kristeva says little else about how these reactions differ in relation to race. In most scholarly work concerning bodily fluids, finding the connections between the reaction to bodily fluids and race is all but absent. For example, Elizabeth Grosz’s exploration of bodily fluids in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* argues for a feminism that thinks through female corporeality and places an emphasis on biological determinism over culture, racial,

(LEFT) FIGURE 2:
Yolanda Vidato performs the
water ritual for the earth in *Water
Ritual #1* (Directed by Barbara
McCullough, 1979), frame grab.

and gender differences. This neglects to account for the ways in which social inscriptions on materials such as bodily fluids or the body itself in society might intertwine with our understanding of a body in the first place. Or, more simply put, how cultural, racial, and gender differences might take into consideration the lived experience of the body and the biological factors that induce bodily fluids as a *productive* social cinematic experience.

Through the use of ritual (watering the earth for *Water Ritual #1* and cleaning the body for *Cycles*) and the focus on the black female body in both films, the audience perceives bodily fluids as forms of expansiveness that result in a more liquid conception of the body. The audience sees the performers' bodies exert themselves as forces

that do not seek to contain fluids but rather to expel them. This perspective is a critical response to the more common engagement with the female body as receptacle—something to be penetrated. I argue that with regard to the cinematic image of blackness, the fluidity of the female bodies in these films does not contribute to the dated metaphor of the “uncontrollable female body.”¹² Rather, the agency granted to the female protagonists of *Water Ritual #1* and *Cycles* in the act of releasing their urine and menstruation respectively illustrates the productive potential of theorizing the body as liquidity.¹³ This is to say that, in *Water Ritual #1* and *Cycles*, the black female body becomes something that is both fluid and unfixed, blurring the demarcation of its boundaries while proclaiming its vitality with equal assertion. As Vachhani states:

“THE BLACK FEMALE BODY IS PRESENTED AS A FORCE OF ACTION”

Bodily fluids have symbolic significance and can be said to mediate the realm between the sacred and the profane ... Bodily fluids become present, visible and matter out of place. Blood and sweat in particular accord a significance that marks the identity and viscosity of the [body].¹⁴

“THE AUDIENCE PERCEIVES BODILY FLUIDS AS FORMS OF EXPANSIVENESS THAT RESULT IN A MORE LIQUID CONCEPTION OF THE BODY.”

Similarly, in her work on photographic representation of blackness, Alessandra Raengo argues that visual elements associated with the black body might become extensions of the body in the photograph, “the shadow is the trace of a body’s extension beyond itself by means of light. The body is not in the shadow, in its projection, and yet the shadow doubles the body, extending its reach.”¹⁵ Likewise, the bodily fluids seeping from Ingram and Vidato blur the distinction of the boundary line of the body, extending its spatio-temporal reach, “and locating it in

two places at the same time.”¹⁶ For *Water Ritual #1* the viewer encounters the fluidity of the body’s materiality at the point of materialization. And while *Cycles* lacks the shot of liquid expulsion present in *Water Ritual #1*, the film’s high contrast lighting and its emphasis on the passage of time animate Ingram’s anxiety as she waits on the uncertain arrival of her menstruation, and anticipates the reassurance of its stain.

Conclusion

The cinematic image of a black woman bears the social markings of

the way her phenomenal blackness has been understood historically. This is the problem with the mere face value of representation: it cannot show us the lived experience of the body beyond its appearance. The fluidity of Vidato and Ingram’s bodies, however, offer a way of engaging with the cinematic image of gendered blackness that works through bodily affect as its basis for engagement. The use of fluids in an attempt to represent blackness draws attention to the ways in which phenomenal surface appearances and reactions fall short



of a more nuanced engagement. What is more present than the body leaking its own materiality?

The bodies of Ingram and Vidato in *Cycles* and *Water Ritual #1*, respectively, transcend the cinematic body. Having their bodies bleed into their environments through the use of shadow and color enables their narratives to continue outside of the body of the film. These uncanny bodies are everyday bodies, and their actions are never arrested in time.

(LEFT) FIGURE 3:

Stephanie Ingram turns her back to the audience as she waits for her period. The shadows cast against her back animate her body to visualize the stillness implied in this waiting in *Cycles* (Directed by Zeinabu irene Davis, 1989), frame grab.

**“WHAT IS MORE
PRESENT THAN
THE BODY
LEAKING ITS
OWN
MATERIALITY?”**

As fluid entities, bodies constantly emit a changing materiality. *Water Ritual #1* and *Cycles* ask audience members to relate to the films, to experience them, as fluid bodies themselves. Rosalyn Diprose defines this potential relationally as a corporeal generosity: an ethics of generosity that can see a body as lived experience:

Generosity is most effective at a carnal level, rather than as a practice directed by thought or will, but the injustice that inflects its operation is governed by the way social norms and values determine which bodies are recognized as possessing property that can be given and which bodies are devoid of property and so can only benefit from the generosity of others.¹⁷

This affective response to bodily fluids highlights the distinction of an

“embodied encounter that begins to understand morality, or moral taint, in more expansive terms.”¹⁸ Indeed, the films’ experimental nature encourages an interpretation of these bodies that moves beyond binary categories of unclean/clean, good/bad, internal/external, pure/un-pure, etc. Both Vidato and Ingram complete their purification rituals before these fluids seep out; thus, they are already clean, with Vidato cleansing the earth and Ingram cleansing the home. Diprose’s claim for a corporeal generosity then echoes Fanon’s oft quoted declaration at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, “Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover the other?”¹⁹ The use of bodily fluids opens a dialogue to the lived experience of the body through their affective use of corporeality. While our initial reaction might seemingly be to

recoil, a closer examination proves that the assertion of bodily fluids in *Water Ritual #1's* and *Cycles* is far beyond surface representation. These fluids are extensions of their

(cinematic) bodies, thus creating new meaning and opening up a dialogue concerning identity, the black body, gender, and the cinematic image. ■

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 189. *Cinema*, ed. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, Jacqueline Stewart (University of California Press, forthcoming, November 2015).

² Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2011), 5.

³ Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 13.

⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 189.

⁵ Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 7.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 131.

⁷ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 43.

⁸ See Allyson Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, eds., *L.A. Rebellion: Creating New Black Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

⁹ Sheena J. Vachhani, "Stains, Staining and the Ethics of Dirty Work," in *Dirty Work: Concepts and Identity*, ed. Ruth Simpson, Natasha Slutskaya, Patricia Lewis, and Heather Höpfl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35.

¹⁰ Ibid. 43-4.

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 71.

¹² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 203.

¹³ Zoe Sofia, "Container Technologies," *Hypatia* 15. 2 (2000): 181-201.

¹⁴ Vachhani, "Stains, Staining and the Ethics of Dirty Work," 38.

¹⁵ Alessandra Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), 29.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 9.

¹⁸ Vachhani, "Stains, Staining and the Ethics of Dirty Work," 46.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 206.

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

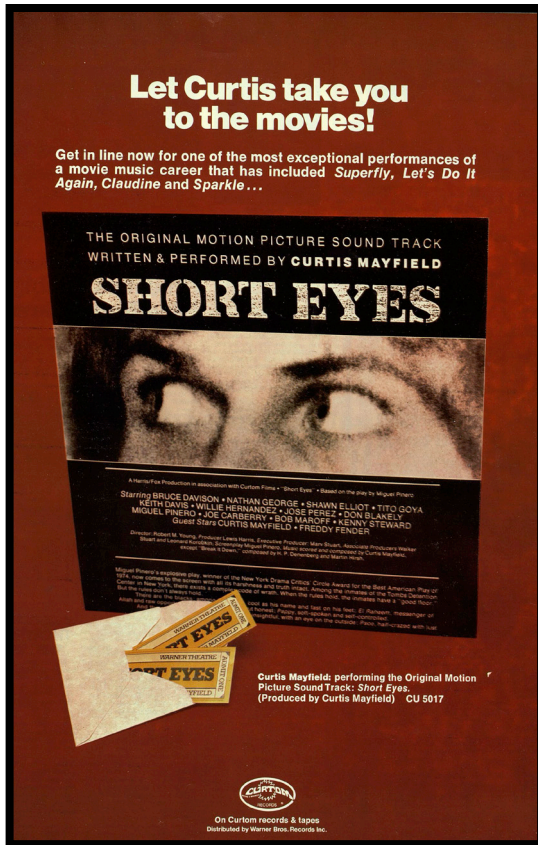
and gain access into a community of viewers/listeners. The advertisement implied that the community was housed in a theater named for one of the major motion picture studios of the classical era (Warner Bros.) Left with more than a stub, viewers/listeners would hear the music of the film and encounter 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

grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”³

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.”**

(LEFT) FIGURE 1:
Curtum 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.



politically resonant and commercially successful, soul was, as Nathan L. Grant claims, “the raw material for a new cultural revolution.”⁴ 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.

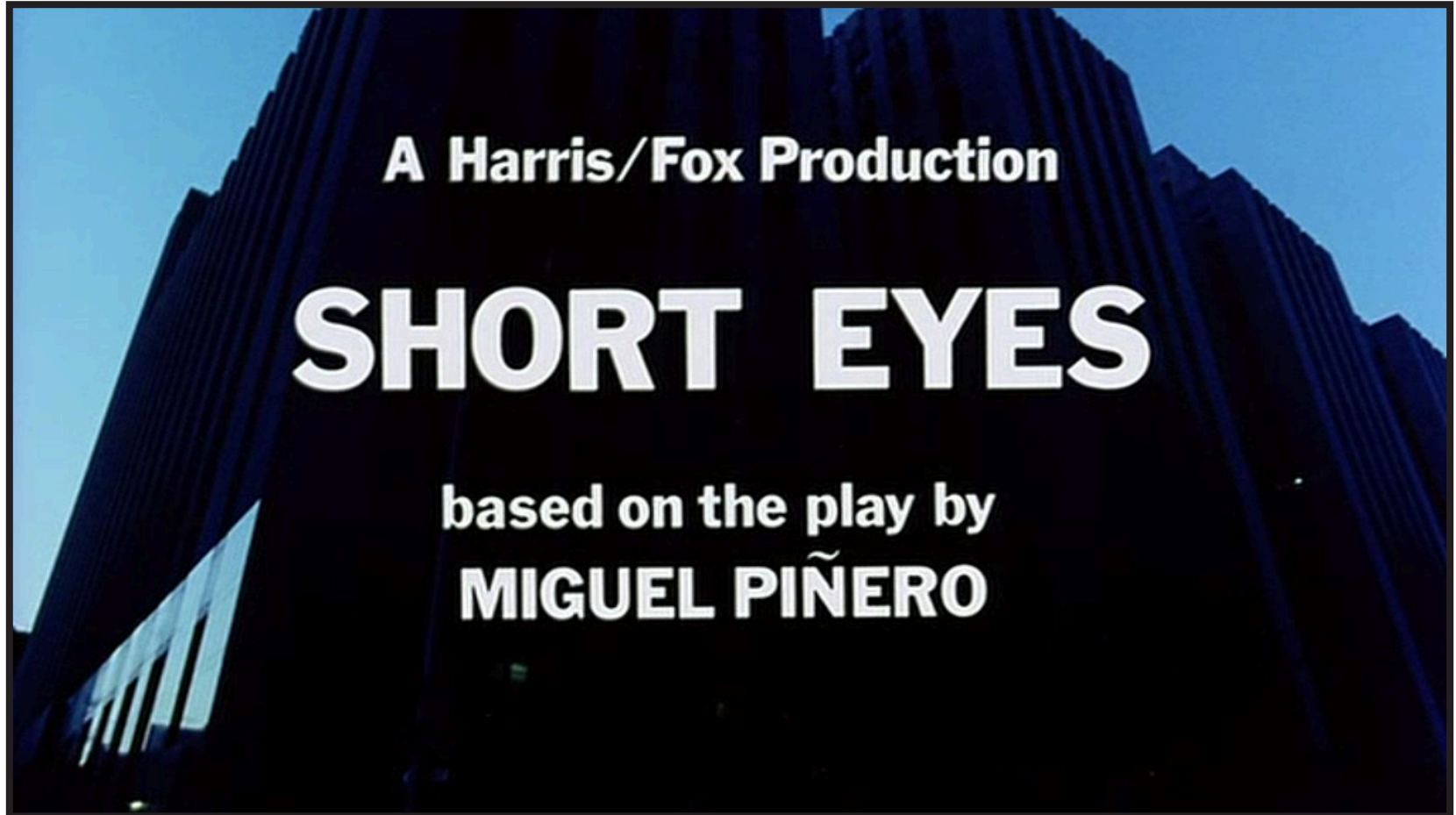
The shared symbolic grammar of soul was part of a religiously-inflected musical discourse that not only elongated and re-membered the word (one of the foundations of that shared grammar) but called for economic, political, cultural, and perhaps even ontological shifts in America. Soul had existed long 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 the movie 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

(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.

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 oiled, 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

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 N'yongo 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

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, NY: 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, *Redefining 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.

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. ■

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.

FIGURE 1: EDDIE WARMACK IN *PASSING THROUGH* (DIRECTED BY LARRY CLARK, 1977), FRAME GRAB.



Three Lines for *Passing Through*: The Sound, Image, and Haptics of Radical Insight from the Undercommons

JAMES TOBIAS

I. Matter, Memory, and Futurity in *Passing Through*: Larry Clark's Classic Film as Study of a Musical Undercommons

Watch closely as you listen: in the final moments of Larry Clark's *Passing Through* (1976), Eddie Warmack (Nathaniel Taylor) improvises a saxophone solo backed by a wavering drone in lower sonic registers. As a medium shot holds on his profile, a wash of light delineates the planes of his gently moving face (Figure 1). The effect is to superimpose a glowing lightning bolt over his profile, before a close-up shows a single eye suddenly opening—Warmack “waking up,” at the center of a circle within the frame. After Warmack has this flash of insight, a prior scene from the film appears in the same circular frame. We see a flashback of Warmack's grandfather and mentor, Poppa,

teaching him a lesson, the meaning of which has been deferred until this sequence. Next, we see a montage of portraits of historical figures crucial to various moments of resistance and liberation politics (including Kwame Nkrumah and other leaders of Africa's de-colonization struggle). The musician's awakening here makes explicit what had only been an implicit argument of the film to this point: the soundtrack of *Passing Through* has provided the guiding frame for the film's comparison of the radical musician and the political radical to prove their common cause.¹ In other words, in *Passing Through*, the historical development of free jazz in the post-war U.S. is placed alongside the political transformations of Africa's liberation struggles. Attending to this blaze of insight and the memory work it illuminates means that we may remember the meanings of jazz in

different terms than those in which it has often been advertised: rather than simply as the musical output allotted to a select few individual geniuses, we see the historical struggle for a renewed music in a larger homology with the struggle for a renewed political identity, one not only national but global.

Warmack's struggle for both the memory and future of jazz as a site of radical political theory and practice traces, in the cinematic medium, the kinds of material transformations of consciousness and collectivity that Angela Davis sees at work in early twentieth century Blues women's song and performance. "Through the blues," Davis argues, "Black women were autonomously able to work out—as audiences and performers—a working class model of womanhood." This gendered consciousness, mediated in modern

cultural forms like the blues, Davis argues, "transformed collective memories of slavery as it worked with a new social construction of love and sexuality."² In *Passing Through*, a gendered transformation of historical memory plays out in Warmack and Maya's relationship, he in search of a new sound to be made of historical memory, for the future of the music, she in search of a new image similarly historically grounded and similarly holding futural potential (Figure 2). Through each character, distinct strands of Africana and Afro-diasporic struggle intersect: while Warmack works through traumatic memories associated with largely national sites of struggle, Maya offers a historical and visual link to pan-African struggle.

Maya's role as both advertising artist and social photographer also suggests a qualification with

“WE SEE THE HISTORICAL STRUGGLE FOR A RENEWED MUSIC IN A LARGER HOMOLGY WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR A RENEWED POLITICAL IDENTITY, ONE NOT ONLY NATIONAL BUT GLOBAL.”

regards to Davis’ observations about blues as memory. An important part of this film’s achievement is its audiovisual depiction of free jazz evoking a politics of de-colonization that is subnational, national, and transnational, and that thus counters the industrial politics of the Hollywood sensorium’s global reach. So *Passing Through*’s visual style, its remarkable narrative and the affective powers of its soundtrack all re-frame the way the cinema synchronizes jazz sound

with moving images. More than re-performing and renovating historical memory is at stake here: also at stake is the *mediatization* of Black music’s capacities for transforming memory. Beyond the political import of how Black music has helped to transform and renovate historical memory, *Passing Through* also asks us to consider the inscription of memory in a cinematic form (that is, as media memory) which also requires radicalization. The film’s double achievement in its depiction

of musical insight is this: not only does it set a feature-length film to a groundbreaking jazz soundtrack but more importantly it aligns the musical metamorphoses with larger political transformations, all while breaking with the stereotypical conventions of jazz depiction in audiovisual media. *Passing Through* subjects audiovisual composition and reception to the imperatives of Black memory and futurity in ways similar to those Davis argues animate Blues songwriting and listening.



Davis' discussion of blues memory, then, informs my understanding of *Passing Through*, as a study of the ways in which the indexicalities, virtualities, and haptics of audiovisual media may be instrumentalized in the interest of elucidating the classical problem of putting intellection, affect, and memory—here specifically related as “insight”—on screen and speaker. The film mediates historical memories of both bondage and autonomy, as Davis observes of Blues songs, but it also studies and radicalizes the *mediatization* of such memories as they have been expropriated by industrial cinemas.

(LEFT) FIGURE 2:

Maya (Pamela Jones) unknowingly photographs the killing of one of the band members in *Passing Through* (Directed by Larry Clark, 1977), frame grab.

**“AT STAKE IS THE
MEDIATIZATION
OF BLACK MUSIC’S
CAPACITIES FOR
TRANSFORMING
MEMORY.”**

Perhaps the film’s multi-perspectival, antiphonic, back-and-forth exchanges—between ensemble and soloist, between Warmack and Maya, between Poppa’s memory or Oshun’s vision, between autonomous musical ensemble and Hollywood media bondage—can be located

on the West African cultural continuum Davis argues is the appropriate cultural, historical site at which to situate Blues lyric. Yet when oracle Oshun tells Warmack that he is to “slay the dragon,” Warmack’s quest also reinscribes the Black searcher into cinema history’s spectacular dragon-slaying adventurisms, defiantly breaking those conventions.³ The “dragon” Warmack must slay is media industry control of cultural expression and memory, rather than a visual symbol of the individual’s sublimation to a dominating social order.

Passing Through’s counter-mediatization of historical and media memory plays out significantly in the character Maya, the rebelling visual artist who prompts Warmack’s closing insight. For Black music to become autonomous, vital, creative, and properly historical, it must

stand with, struggle for, even act as an audiovisual synecdoche of the communicability of radical Black politics in both locally situated and transnational modalities. As a study of critical insight joining radical intellection with radical affection so as to renew memory, *Passing Through* worries through an additional register of history: that of media memory in addition to personal or cultural memory.

As a study of insight, *Passing Through* anticipates major problems in contemporary thought. For example, the film’s relation of insight to liberatory experience arguably supersedes the determination of thought as requiring differentiation from action in Jean-Luc Nancy’s probing of the nature of liberatory experience.⁴ Depicting critical insight as necessary for historicizing and memorializing musical labor, on one

“THE ‘DRAGON’ WARMACK MUST SLAY IS MEDIA INDUSTRY CONTROL OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND MEMORY.”

hand, and for cultural innovation and political transformation, on the other, the film also demonstrates how a Black *instrumental* voice, as well as the Black *singing* voice, can, as Lindon Barrett has shown, interrupt the value regimes that diminish, marginalize, or destroy Black thought and action.⁵ Insight here crosses aesthetic sense and political materiality; sonic disruption and historical memory are convoked in stylistic transformation as thought and action proceed in some shared, indeterminate ratio before finally fading to black.

As a musical study of the cinematic exposition of a mode of insight whose critical power enfolds historical memory with political futurity, *Passing Through* is a signal instance of freeing liberation histories from industrial or academic sites of containment and reduction. Even now, its play of ensemble-belonging and solo-innovation devote audiovisual resources towards articulating a complex politics of memory often refused representational relevance. In that, it models how a “refusal of what has been refused,” as Fred Moten

and Stefano Harney propose, may give rise to “an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question.”⁶

II. Warmack’s Sound

The auditory, visual, and haptic insight that opens Warmack’s eyes to the larger meanings of his music follows from the film’s opening dedication: to “Herbert Baker” and Black musicians everywhere. That dedication memorializes unknown “local” figures as part of projecting Black music and Black cinema as properly historical and

“PASSING THROUGH WORRIES THROUGH AN ADDITIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORY: THAT OF MEDIA MEMORY IN ADDITION TO PERSONAL OR CULTURAL MEMORY.”

global projects, recasting the radical, local musical ensemble as capable of registering world historical transformation. At the same time, precarious local musical production, by virtue of the primacy of the film’s soundtrack, is recorded so that it won’t soon be forgotten. The film’s dedication to Herbert Baker and to other “Black musicians known and unknown,” and the film’s central concern with Warmack’s nomadic mentor Poppa, make clear that the film’s larger concern in positing musical

innovation in terms homologous to political revolution requires placing the tensions between the musical ensemble and the soloist within the specific context of the theory and practice of Black Arts movements.

Recent biographical research allows us to see the film’s conceptual relation of contemporary to non-contemporary Afro-diasporic cultural production in terms of specific local actions, sites, and events. For instance, the film’s initial homage to Herbert Baker, a pianist, composer,

and bandleader killed in 1970, continues with the use of a Baker composition on the soundtrack. In so doing, the film echoes a prior dedication: Horace Tapscott’s 1972 course at the University of California, Riverside that celebrated the recently deceased Baker: “[O]ur emphasis is on the unknowns, and we’d like for them to become known at least to the people that are close to them. And Herbert Baker was definitely one of the greatest unknowns ever known.”⁷ Known or unknown, local or globally celebrated, the musical

ensemble as site of memory and futurity means that it is also a fugitive site, a kind of “undercommons” for political work in the guise of musical work. In this way, *Passing Through* presents a close study of the musical instrumentalization of insight so that its narrative may operate through both thought and feeling through both local and global material cultures.

As Moten and Harney’s discussion of the “undercommons” makes clear, the question of memory and futurity is not simply one of making audible or visible; the communicability of the undercommons may be haptic.⁸ Here, too, the film conceptualizes the haptic in ways that recalls specific, local practices. Michael Wilcots, remembering a 1971 Riverside Community College performance with Tapscott and members of the UGMAA (Union of God’s Musicians and Artists of Ascension), describes

Roland Rahsaan Kirk’s working in terms of haptic communicability: “Rahsaan would walk around and throughout the band touching the bell of his horn to each player, and as he did the players would begin to shake and tremble from the vibration of his playing.”⁹ In *Passing Through*, this haptic dimension of musical communicability throws Warmack out of balance as he tries to regain a place in the ensemble that he is not quite ready for yet. Repeatedly, as Warmack tries to find his musical voice, we hear something like a droning vibration that throws him off from the work of the ensemble, a kind of haptic disturbance that doesn’t so much place him within the present tense of the ensemble but pushes him out of it. This vibrating wave of sound overcomes him and carries Warmack away from his immediate environs in musical fugue states that break with linear time, prompting Warmack

“THE COMMUNICABILITY OF THE UNDERCOMMONS MAY BE HAPTIC.”

to recall forgotten memories or to bring him an asubjective, futural knowledge of events happening elsewhere, including, most crucially, Poppa’s death. During scenes of these fugue states, while we revisit the Attica prison uprising, or see Poppa’s funeral attended by bickering relatives concerned more with material inheritance than cultural legacy or renewal, Warmack begins



to understand what the music of the ensemble must do. (And not only Warmack; in another, similar narrative flight, a musician shares his own near-death experience from drug addiction, and of being reborn to the sound of Poppa's horn.) In the film's musical flights, then, sonic disruption traces and materializes, by turns, traumatic memory and prophetic anagogy, which coincide and commingle in the final sequence in which an undercommons renovating and re-inscribing musical memory also becomes a site for reproducing the meanings of political transformation.

(LEFT) FIGURE 3:
Eldridge Cleaver's *DIG* vinyl release:
detail from a page of advertisements of
"revolutionary literature," *Black Panther
Party Newspaper*, July 7, 1970, 22

III. Maya's Vision

In modeling critical insight in the way that it does, *Passing Through* is very much of its time, and the historical materials it deploys are key to understanding its lessons. For example, the closing images picturing Warmack or Poppa at the center of a record label also occupied by political revolutionaries specifically recalls *DIG*, the Eldridge Cleaver recording that similarly placed Cleaver's image at the center of the label, an image that was used in advertisements of the record as "revolutionary literature" (Figure 3). But these images in the film are the result of the insight Warmack has gained in woodshedding not simply his music but also his life and memory. Since Poppa has in fact gone missing, the crucial visual material that will support Warmack's musical insight must come from someone else.

Enter Maya (Pamela Jones), Warmack's romantic interest and his counterpart as cultural worker, but in the visual rather than the sonic domain. While Warmack attempts to regroup with his ensemble and renew his musical virtuosity, Maya takes photographs, designs album art and advertising. In her virtuosity with visual materials, Maya artfully renders visual aspects of the musical undercommons, helping to piece together its histories, practices, and theoretical and affective implications. Maya's role emphasizes, too, that a social-cultural memory and visuality adequate to radical sound and listening are as important in transforming jazz aesthetics and production as a political project as is the sound of the ensemble itself. To understand that radical music can be made radically political, sound and image must be viewed as historical projects in their own right that

can be aligned with larger political projects. Through Maya's artistic or documentary vision, *Passing Through* insists on local, national, and transnational dimensions of its study of critical Black insight, while the film's Los Angeles setting specifically invokes the Watts Rebellion of 1965, its repetitions, and its aftershocks and afterlives.

Maya's observations, photographs, and drawings not only provide the images that will help Warmack instrumentalize his musical voice, but also orient the narrative towards a specific set of historical materials and media intertexts that broaden the film's materials and resources from those limited to Southern California cultural activism or Black Panther demands. Maya's biography evokes, in some ways, the historical biography of Maya Angelou. In the film, Maya's deceased husband is



(LEFT) FIGURE 4:
Warmack and Maya discuss their
different outlooks in *Passing
Through* (Directed by Larry
Clark, 1977), frame grab.

described as a documentarian of African decolonization struggles. A musician, dancer, writer, poet, Angelou also worked as an editor of the radical *African Review* in Egypt from 1961-62, and lived with exiled Pan-African Congress member Vusumzi Make of South Africa before moving to Ghana to take a university teaching position. Just as Maya quits her advertising job, Angelou had worked in Watts doing door-to-door “Random Research” tasked to ask southern L.A. housewives about “dishwashing Dove and Bold and Crisco” but finding instead “hardworking women and hard-thinking men.”¹⁰ A few weeks into this market research position, in August 1965, Watts rebelled; Angelou drove down to witness this historic event, narrowly escaping arrest on the first occasion, more calmly and critically observing on the second. Having quit her temp job in market

research, she would later revisit Watts, demystifying the rebellion, countering its stereotypical reporting in the news media, and holding forth on the lessons she felt the upheavals in Watts, Newark and Detroit in 1965 continued to hold for the future in her 1968 KQED television series *Blacks, Blues, Black!*, even as she was recovering from, and reflected on, the April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

If Maya introduces to *Passing Through* the larger political dimension of the decolonization struggle contemporaneous with the rise of free jazz music to the otherwise largely sub- and counter-national Black history traced by Warmack in his quest to recover his sound, then the power of her challenge to Warmack mirrors the achievements of Black feminists like Angelou.¹¹ That is, if Warmack’s

search is for a transformed style of belonging and of individuation apposite to new political demands for autonomy being made subnationally, nationally, and transnationally, Maya’s reflects feminist concerns with the ethical capacities to be engaged through mass-mediation of those demands. When we see the photos of figures like Ghana’s Nkrumah in the closing montage, we can understand that this montage sequence relays, in part, feminist insight crucial to the transformed character of Black aesthetics and politics otherwise heard through Warmack’s recovered sound.

While *Passing Through* thus relates in an important way to the revised interest in post-Civil Rights era narrative “sites of slavery”—and its music, thematics, and materials suggest a depiction of the musical ensemble as a potential site for

re-conceptualizing the *demos*—its concern with subnational, national, and transnational registers really asks us to think about modes of radical belonging across these registers.¹² As Kevin Gaines observes, what was, in retrospect, at stake in the African-American ex-patriot community's residency in Ghana was the emergence, under the influence of both Civil Rights struggles and Ghanaian Pan-Africanism, of new conceptions of African American belonging whereby demands for national citizenship would be re-cast in terms like “transnational” notions of citizenship.¹³ These are modalities

of belonging founded in (and transforming) alternatives to national and nationalist citizenship formation, and specifically countering the U.S. liberal notions of citizenship that co-opt the radical insights and political projects associated with the broader concepts and critiques of historical and futural belonging traced in *Passing Through*. Today the tensions of such potentially radical modes of belonging and individuation, along with the power of historicization adequate to its articulation, seem largely to have been occupied by the pseudo-democratization of the Internet, web, and social media.

Perhaps that is why *Passing Through* seems at once so fresh and yet so familiar today. If we fail to see the way the *Passing Through* makes a study not only of transformations of historical memory but also of modes in which we mediatize historical memory, perhaps that is because the work this film did in its own moment is exactly the kind of work we are pressed into doing—and yet may become distracted from achieving—in re-thinking and re-enacting the work of radical belonging at the global interface of the local digital screen. ■

¹ James Tobias, *Music, Image, Gesture: The Graphical Score and the Visual Representation of Music in Cinema and Digital Media* (Ph.D. Thesis), University of Southern California, 2001; David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2005): 322-325; James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010). I have read this image as evocatively suggesting a record label: Warmack's sound not simply as newly found, but newly inscribed in material, musical history. In conversation with Alessandra Raengo, Larry Clark has said that his intent was not to portray a vinyl recording in this scene; still, reflexively, Warmack's sound here is recorded: the soundtrack recording so important to the film itself. In making the claim that the film's narrative speaks as much to history as to cinema's mediation of history, I am interested in reading the film for its considerable critical and conceptual affordances to generate critical readings of the political valences of Black music.

² Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Random House, 1998), 47.

³ Going back to Fritz Lang's 1924 blockbuster, *Die Nibelungen*, in which Siegfried must slay a dragon to reap its metamorphic powers—and also, of course, to Lang's operatic predecessors, Wagnerian and otherwise.

⁴ Consider Jean-Luc Nancy on “the experience of freedom,” in which he draws back from just such a gesture of thinking feeling: “I would have liked, and it would have been necessary, for this work to have been able to go further—I do not mean only in analysis or problematization, but actually to the point of withdrawing and putting under erasure all its discourse into material freedom. I could have been tempted to make you hear music now, or laughter, or cannon shots taken here and there in the world, or moans of famine, shrieks of revolt—or even to present you with a painting, as we find in Hegel when the young girl presents the outstanding products of ancient art and the divine places that the gods have left. Quite clearly, this would be temptation itself, the cunning abdication of thought into the immediate, into the “lived,” into the ineffable, or into the praxis and art designated as the others of thought. On the contrary, it is a question of returning praxis to thinking.” See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press [1988] 1993), 156-157. *Passing Through* arguably proceeds precisely where Nancy retreats.

⁵ Lindon Barrett, *Seeing Double: Blackness and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58.

⁶ Fred Moten, and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), 96.

⁷ Steven L. Isoardi, and Michael Dett Wilcots, “Black Experience in the Fine Arts: An African American Community Arts Movement in a University Setting,” in *Current Research in Jazz* 6, (2014). Available at: <http://www.crj-online.org/v6/CRJ-BlackExperience.php> [downloaded June 15 2015]. Unpaginated.

⁸ Moten and Harney, 98.

⁹ See Isoardi and Wilcots as cited above; unpaginated.

¹⁰ Maya Angelou, *A Song Flung Up To Heaven* (Random House: New York, 2002), 60.


¹¹ In fact, in important ways, the closing “liberation montage” of *Passing Through* revises and extends a similar, more nationally oriented “liberation montage” which Angelou narrates in song in the historical episode of *Blacks, Blues, Black!* I will explore this comparison in more detail in future work.

¹² Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).


¹³ Kevin Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2012), 7.

Contributors


Alessandra Raengo is Associate Professor of Moving Image Studies in the Department of Communication at Georgia State University and coordinator of *liquid blackness*. Her work focuses on blackness in the visual and aesthetic fields. She is the author of *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (Dartmouth College Press, 2013) and *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled*, forthcoming from Bloomsbury Press.




Angelo Restivo is Associate Professor in the program in Moving Image Studies, Department of Communication, Georgia State University. His research focuses on the relationship between aesthetic forms and processes of modernization. His most recent essay, "The Optics of the Virtual," is forthcoming in December 2015 in *The Companion to Wong Kar-Wai*.



Lauren M. Cramer is a PhD Candidate at Georgia State University in the Department of Communication's Moving Image Studies program. Her research is focused on visual culture, popular culture, hip-hop, and the aesthetics of the racial encounter. Lauren is currently writing a dissertation entitled, "A Hip-Hop Joint: Thinking Architecturally About Blackness." She is an Associate Editor of the collaborative online scholarship project, *In Media Res*, part of Media Common's digital scholarly network and an Editorial Board member of *liquid blackness*.



Ayanna Dozier is a second year doctoral student in the department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University, under the supervision of Dr. Carrie Rentschler. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies at McGill, she obtained her undergraduate degree in Art History and French at Chapman University and her graduate degree at New York University in the department of Media, Culture, and Communication. She currently resides in Montréal, Québec in Canada.



Nicholas Forster is a PhD student in Film and Media Studies and African American Studies at Yale University. He completed a BS in Film and Television from Boston University's College of Communication in 2011. His research interests include the work of Nicholas Ray, the films of the Black Power era, sound recording technologies, and hip-hop. He is the founder and host of the Yale podcast *The Lower Frequencies* ([THELOWERFREQUENCIESPODCAST.COM](http://thelowerfrequenciespodcast.com)) which features interviews with academics, artists, and activists to examine the relationship between creative production and personal histories.

James Tobias is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of California, Riverside. He is the author of *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010). His research interests span musicality in audiovisual media, digital media cultures, theories of corporeality and embodiment, and critical and cultural theory. He lives in Los Angeles.

Acknowledgements

The experimental research project culminating in the present publication and this month's symposium on The Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble (September 18-19, 2015), is the result of collaborations that began two years ago with the L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema Tour, co-organized with the Department of Film and Media Studies at Emory University and in collaboration with the Atlanta Film Festival. The seeds of this project were planted then, when we first saw the film and met Larry Clark. Our first and warmest thank you goes to Larry who has been immensely gracious and patient with us and has generously shared his personal papers and other important materials. Among other things, Larry made time for an interview I conducted with him at San Francisco State in the Spring 2014, which was generously shot by Russ Kiel and Juhee So (with Daniel Robin and Chris Hunt acting as liaisons) and edited by Joey Molina. We thank also Billy Woodberry and Brockman Gallery for sharing photos we have posted on our online dossier on the film: <http://passingthroughdossier.tumblr.com/>, curated by Kristin Juarez.

We thank Matthew Bernstein, the chair of the Department of Film and Media Studies at Emory, who approached me three summers ago with the opportunity to bring

the L.A. Rebellion films to Atlanta. He was an inspiring partner throughout the film series and has been an essential supporter of several *liquid blackness* events since. David Cheshier, in his role as chair of the Department of Communication and now as Director of the Creative Media Industries Institute at Georgia State University has always shared and supported the vision *liquid blackness* pursues in its various initiatives; and so has Dean Pearl McHaney, director of CENCIA, the Center for Collaborative and International Arts, at Georgia State. CENCIA has co-sponsored our *liquid blackness* Symposium in the Spring 2014, the Black Audio Film Collective Film and Speaker series we organized last fall (2014), the April 2015 screening of *Passing Through*, and is the main sponsor of the upcoming Symposium on The Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble. We thank Greg Lisby, chair of the Department of Communication for the additional support and graduate directors Jennifer Barker and Natalie Tindall for coordinating GRA support.

We are grateful to the L.A. Rebellion Tour's curators, Jacqueline Stewart, Allyson Field, and Jan-Christopher Horak who have coordinated access to research materials on the L.A. Rebellion and *Passing Through*,

and to Daniel Langford for getting the materials to us (with Kristin Juarez contributing to the research and acting as liaison). We thank the UCLA Film & Television Archive for expediting the digital transfer of *Passing Through* and to Steven Hill for coordinating the loan.

The conceptual structure of this research project first came together in the form of an application to an NEH grant that sought to explore ways to “spatialize the avant-garde” in order to create a digital archive of black radicalism. We want to thank Fred Moten and Matthew Bernstein for writing in support of our project, Nedda Ahmed, Allyson Field, David James, Tara McPherson, Jacqueline Stewart, James Tobias and Daniel Widener, and for their enthusiastic response to the idea and Angelo Restivo for co-authoring the grant application.

The current research unfolded through a series of events: a public presentation at GSU library’s CURVE (Collaborative University Research & Visualization Environment), organized with Lauren Cramer, Kristin Juarez and Nedda Ahmed; a public presentation at Space 2, The Sound Table, hosted by Karl Injex and his wife Mona organized by Lauren Cramer; a free screening at The Plaza Theater

co-organized with Kristy Breneman, Creative Director of the Atlanta Film Festival (and Josephine Figueira acting as initial liaison), in cooperation with the Plaza Foundation. The Plaza Theater was also the site of the opening night of the L.A. Rebellion film series in the Fall 2013. The screening was made possible by additional support from Patrick Freer, then acting chair of the School of Music at GSU, Sima Kokotovich, chair of the Visual Scholarship Initiative at Emory University, and funds from CENCIA, CMII, and Emory’s Department of Film and Media Studies. We thank Andy Diztler, of Film Love, who has collaborated with this and other events as well.

Craig Dongoski, from the Welch School of Arts and Design has spearheaded the spinoff project *Drawing Through* which will culminate in an art show, LP release and free jazz mediations and performances at the Mammal Gallery on September 19. Inspired by the dynamics of group creation inherent in the jazz ensemble, *Drawing Through* was designed as a workshop/collaboration between filmmaker Larry Clark and emerging Atlanta-based artists and musicians following the screening of *Passing Through*. An LP capturing the unique layered experience of the creative interaction between visual arts, music, and film

will be released at the event. We thank Brian Egan, gallery director, for hosting this event. The LP was made possible with the kind support and collaboration of Michael White, Chair of the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, and Adrienne Gonzalez; David Cheshier, Director of the Creative Media Industries Institute and founder of the Center for Collaborative Research in the Humanities; Dean Pearl McHaney, Director of the Center for Collaborative and International Arts (CENCIA), and Annie Latta, and Kristin Juarez, liaison for this project. It was realized and directed by Craig Dongoski with graphic design by Jeff Boortz.

This entire research project would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of the core members of the *liquid blackness* group—Lauren Cramer, Cameron Kunzelman, Kristin Juarez, Richard Moye, and our long-time collaborator and co-conspirator Chris Hunt who has designed the postcard for each one of our events. We are also grateful for the help of new members Akil Brooks, Daren Fowler, Jenny Gunn, and Shady Patterson. We thank Angelo Restivo, Associate Professor of Moving Image Studies in the Department of Communication, for his conceptual contributions and Louis Ruprecht, William M. Suttles Chair, Religious Studies, Georgia State University for his enthusiastic support of this project.

We also want to acknowledge old members and supporters who helped us getting started during the L.A. Rebellion Tour and our first Symposium: Michele Prettyman Beverly, Dorothy Hendricks, Christina Price Washington, Christina Romo, Michael Sanders, Jasmine Tillman, and Katie Zakos and previous staffers Mary Feld and Christopher Mintz, and our community supporters People Store and The Sound Table. And finally we want to express appreciation to Marilyn Stiggers, office manager, Jani Faison, finance manager, and Amanda Letaw, in the Department of Communication for their logistical help.



Our Speakers:

Matthew Duerstan
freelance writer, Los Angeles

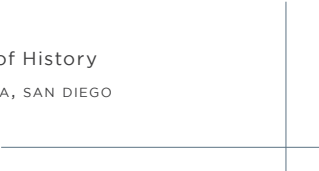
Kevin Jerome Everson
Professor of Art
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Charles P. ("Chip") Linscott
PhD
OHIO UNIVERSITY

Barbara McCullough
Professor and Chair of Visual
Effects
SCAD, SAVANNAH

James Tobias
Associate Professor of Cinema and Digital
Media Studies, English Department
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

Danny Widener
Associate Professor of History
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



Our Supporters:

Pearl McHaney and Annie Latta
CENCIA, Center for Collaborative and
International Arts
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

David Cheshier
Director, Creative Media
Industries Institute
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Michael White
Chair, Welch School of Arts and Design
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Gregory Lisby
Chair, Department of Communication
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Matthew Bernstein
Chair, Department of Film and Media
Studies
EMORY UNIVERSITY

*Allyson Field, Jacqueline Stewart,
Jan-Christopher Horak*
Curators of the L.A. Rebellion:
Creating a New Black Cinema

Nedda Ahmed
Arts Librarian and Archivist
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Angelo Restivo
Department of Communication
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Louis Ruprecht
William M. Suttles Chair,
Religious Studies
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Andy Ditzler
FILM LOVE

Our Community Supporters:

Marshall Davis
The Oakhurst Market

Tamara Vrooman Lucas

