

DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH (DIRECTED BY ARTHUR Jafa, 2013), FRAME GRAB.



Introduction

ALESSANDRA RAENGO

The present issue—Black Ontology and the Love of Blackness—was conceived as the culmination of a research project on Arthur Jafa’s 2013 essay film *Dreams are colder than Death*. Jafa is a crucial voice in a lineage of artists and filmmakers particularly concerned with the creation of a black aesthetics that *liquid blackness* has been studying since its inception in the fall of 2013 when we co-hosted, with Matthew Bernstein, chair of the Department of Film and Media Studies at Emory University, the “L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black American Cinema” film series. In that context, we examined Jafa’s groundbreaking work as the acclaimed cinematographer of Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), a film where he experimented with the possibility of instituting a specifically black aesthetic inspired by the cadence and the form of free jazz and black vocal intonation—what he

calls a “black visual intonation.”¹ We encountered his work again as the cinematographer of John Akomfrah’s *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* (1993), which we screened in the fall of 2014 as part of our Black Audio Film Collective Film and Speakers Series.

But there is another important conceptual connection with recent *liquid blackness* projects. For years Arthur Jafa has been an avid student of Larry Clark’s *Passing Through* (1977), which was the focus of an experimental collective research project that *liquid blackness* named the Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble and that was conducted in 2015. Clark’s film has been essential to Jafa’s own formulation of a black visual aesthetics because of its visionary qualities and its unwavering commitment to experimenting with the possibility of translating the improvisational logic of free jazz into film form and attempting to confer to

the image the malleability of sound, the intensity of a live performance, and the complex dynamics of group creation and interaction.²

As I wrote in the journal issue featuring our research on the film, in his work, Clark leverages the adventurous expansiveness of free jazz to connect, and therefore *pass through*, a variety of seemingly incongruous or remote spaces, making adjacent, for example, sites of artistic improvisation and sites of systemic oppression, spaces of addiction and spaces of healing, the US racial scene and Third World revolutionary struggles. In this way, and by uninhibitedly transitioning between archival footage, re-enactments and original footage, *Passing Through* renders the multiple ways in which blackness exists in space and time, simultaneously indexing rootedness and displacement,



FIGURE 1
OPENING SEQUENCE
PASSING THROUGH (DIRECTED BY LARRY CLARK, 1977), FRAME GRAB.

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originarity and alienation. From our study of this film we learned a greater attention to issues of sensitometry, pace, and rhythm, but also to the idea of film motion and editing patterns that function fluidly and demand to be followed rather than fixated and analyzed.

Dreams features similar “passages,” i.e. aesthetically and formally audacious but politically necessary visual transitions pioneered by Clark’s film, toward the realization of a visual environment that revels in what Jafa described as the “dark matter of black being.”³

Concurrent with his filmmaking practice, Jafa has also worked as a conceptual artist and in his installation practice, he has been relentlessly researching the possibility of creating an *authentically black visual aesthetics*, which he models after the centrality of black music in American culture

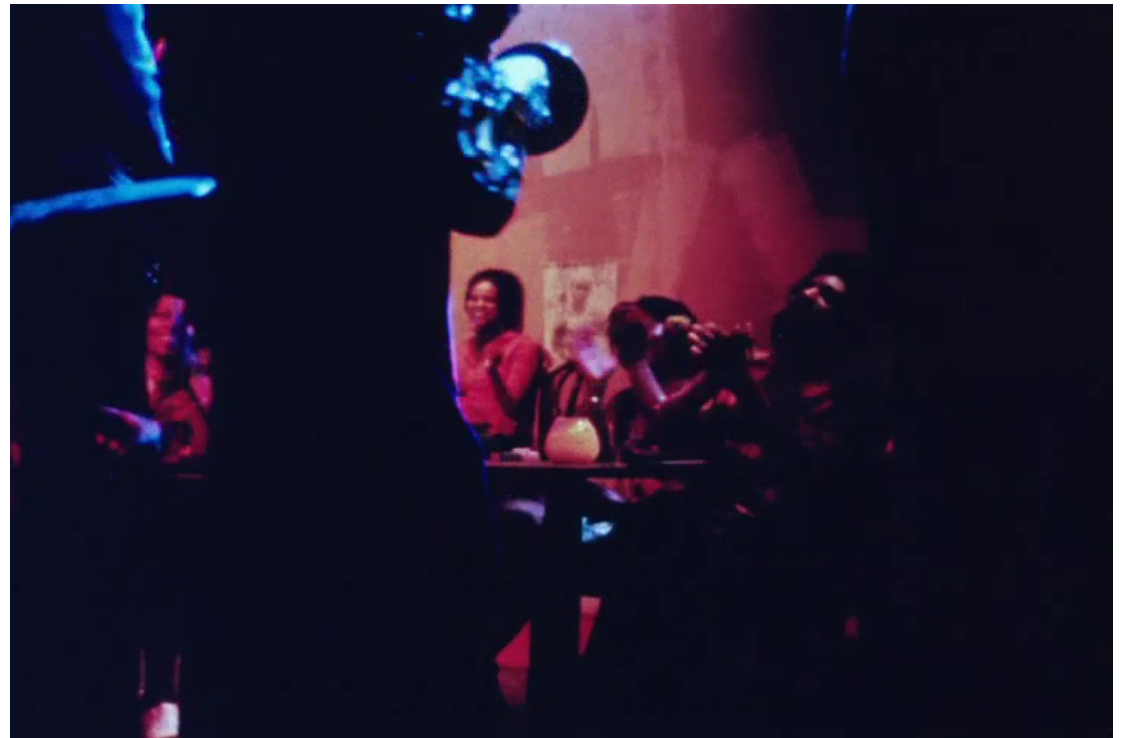


FIGURE 2
SPACES OF RESISTANCE: THE CLUB.
PASSING THROUGH (DIRECTED BY LARRY CLARK, 1977), FRAME GRAB.

“*DREAMS*...FEATURE[S] SIMILAR ‘PASSAGES,’ I.E. AESTHETICALLY AND FORMALLY AUDACIOUS BUT POLITICALLY NECESSARY VISUAL TRANSITIONS PIONEERED BY CLARK’S FILM.”

and life. Jafa is inspired in this quest by the way black musicians focused their collective genius toward operating within very specific constraints. Similarly, a black visual aesthetics for Jafa might become available when every technological, aesthetic, and methodological protocol used by dominant cinema is challenged and adapted to the specific socio-cultural conditions of American black life. Since the late 1990s, his work, research, and writing have focused on this possibility.

In *Dreams* specifically one is struck by the filmmaker’s particular use of formal techniques to say something about the state of blackness in the afterlife of slavery. Jafa deploys a variety of formal techniques including slow motion, superimposition, reverse motion photography, image overexposure, the long take, the voiceover, and the close-up to create opportunities for the black body to signify more than the trappings of the flesh so achingly described in the personal

stories shared by some of the film’s featured speakers. Jafa’s use of these formal techniques, especially the close-up, also produces a kind of disorientation among viewers that is key to opening such a possibility.⁴

The choice of focusing on *Dreams are colder than Death*, therefore, is the culmination of both long term and short term research projects, including our continued preoccupation with pursuing expansive expressive possibilities for blackness and, beginning

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specifically with this film, our study of philosophical and aesthetic approaches to the value, meaning, and ontological standing of black lives as articulated through the scholarly literature on Afro-Pessimism in the context of the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.⁵

Dreams are colder than Death begins as a reflection on the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech but quickly transforms

into a meditation on the ontology of blackness and its relationship to life, death, and the concept of the human in the context of the afterlife of slavery. The film weaves together interviews with African-American scholars and intellectuals, such as Hortense Spillers, Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, and Nicole Fleetwood; filmmaker Charles Burnett, ex-Black Panther and professor Kathleen Cleaver, musicians

Flying Lotus and Melvin Gibbs, and visual artists Kara Walker and Wangechi Mutu, among others, and an array of lyrical images of people, water, deep space, and more. It is a stunning-looking film: inspired, mournful, and uncompromising in demanding a reckoning with the finality of black death. The film was produced and edited by Kahlil Joseph whose work is equally committed to black beauty and has

**“CAN BLACK PEOPLE BE LOVED?” [FRED MOTEN] ASKS,
“NOT DESIRED, NOT WANTED, NOT ACQUIRED, NOT
LUSTED AFTER...CAN BLACKNESS BE LOVED?”**

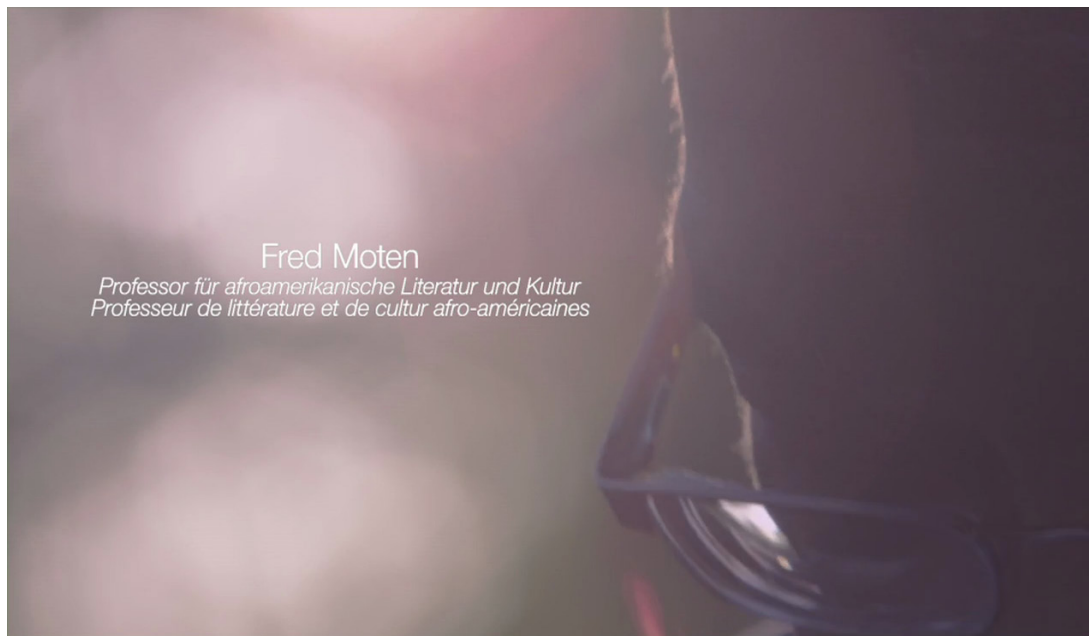


FIGURE 3
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH
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been the subject of the following *liquid blackness* research project, which included a screening and symposium titled “Holding Blackness in Suspension: The Films of Kahlil Joseph” that we hosted at Georgia State University in October 2016.

These are the reasons that led me to suggest *Dreams* as the centerpiece for the special event for the Host committee I co-chaired with Matthew Bernstein for the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies that took place in Atlanta in the spring of 2016. Specifically, I proposed a screening and discussion of the essay film at Atlanta’s Center for Civil and Human Rights in order to create a productive tension with the values and attitude of that specific location. The Center offers an immersive, multi-mediatic and interactive environment, and a rich archive documenting the Civil Rights Movement within its historic media

“WHAT IS THE ONTOLOGY OF BLACK LIVES, WHEN THEY ARE SO THOROUGHLY WRAPPED IN AN ATMOSPHERIC ANTI-BLACKNESS?”

landscape. Through its layout and architectural design, it promotes a view of Martin Luther King Jr. as a leader who continuously expanded his commitment, ultimately shifting from an investment in domestic civil rights to global human rights. This narrative bolsters the Center’s mission to foster personal investment in the rights of every human being. By putting *Dreams* in conversation with the Civil Rights and Human Rights Galleries, we were hoping that the screening, panel discussion, and a visit to the Center might invite a retroactive reflection on MLK’s dream of black love and equality as sustaining a specific vision of what blackness is. In broader historical terms, it invited us to pause and wonder: under what circumstances has the question of the ontology of blackness become available as a way to reassess the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech?

Through the words of Fred Moten, *Dreams* offers a possible answer by reflecting on the possibility to love black people—“Can black people be loved?” he asks, “not desired, not wanted, not acquired, not lusted after...Can blackness be loved?”—as well as what it might mean to commit to blackness against fantasies of flight. It is for this reason that the event was called, “Can Blackness be Loved?”

As a multiracial research group that has focused on issues of blackness and aesthetics with particular attention to modes of artistic, creative, and affective liquidity in the visual arts of the black diaspora, *liquid blackness* is strongly invested in the implications of this question. Through a close engagement with *Dreams are colder than Death*, in the context of some recurring concerns of the group, such as ideas of aesthetic liquidity, experimentations

with sensitometry, black bodies in motion, and in particular the “Black Visual Intonation” Jafa has theorized since his work with Julie Dash on *Daughters of the Dust*, we wrote a call for papers which collected a series of observations collectively made on the film.⁶

They are:

Epistemology:

- “I know it”: blackness and knowledge; blackness and belief
- Flesh memory and phantom limbs: role of embodiment in re-membering, mourning, and empathizing; embodiment as both conduit and limit to empathy and grief
- The aim, object, and practice of black studies
- Types of knowledge that blackness affords and for whom?



FIGURE 4
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH
(DIRECTED BY ARTHUR JAJA, 2013), FRAME GRAB.

“ONE CANNOT ASK A QUESTION ABOUT THE LONGEVITY OF THE HOPES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT BEFORE FIRST ADDRESSING THE ONTOLOGICAL PARADOX OF BLACK LIVES.”

Ontology:

- Flesh and fungibility: availability “in the flesh” (Hortense Spillers)
- Heavy presence/heavy nonpresence (Kara Walker)
- Blackness and thingness
- Blackness and personhood
- The personal and the cosmic

Necropolitics:

- Fragility of black freedom
- Finality of death
- Intimacy with death
- Self-possession, self-determination, and the critique of ownership

Ethics:

- Loving blackness/ loving black people
- Black love
- Grief and grievability: shareability of black death/ shareability of black mourning
- Commitment to blackness against fantasies of flight

Form and Affect:

- Chiasm and schism: figures of reversibility, reciprocity, and dividedness
- Between the cosmic and the minute; the metaphysical and the everyday
- Suspended motion: aesthetics of floating, slowness, and dis-alignment
- Making space: the void, the empty, the still
- Rendering flesh: aural *puncta* and sonic textures
- Liquidity and flow
- Blackness and the generation of energy
- Blackness as jurisgenerative process: law making and law breaking; invention and deconstruction; form and freedom



FIGURE 5
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH
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The fundamental question *Dreams* poses and that we set out to investigate concerns the repercussions of approaching the ontology of blackness from the point of view of death rather than the point of view of life. Said otherwise, what is the ontology of black lives, when they are so thoroughly wrapped in an atmospheric anti-blackness?⁷

By straddling the line between Afro-Pessimism and Optimism, as I argue in an essay for *Black Camera* which I wrote just before this introduction, the film investigates the ontological paradox of black lives, insofar as they are lives lived in an essential intimacy with death—as Saidiya Hartman explains in the film, in conjunction with an image of a mother and three girls absorbed in their own thoughts, walking in slow motion toward the camera (figure 5). Black lives are lives whose expendability is “necessary” for the sustenance

of our current democracy and the maintenance of white safety.⁸

A few minutes into the film a voice overlaid to cosmological images, including an image of a Black Star Child, explains that *Dreams* began as an assessment of “the roles and ambitions of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States,” fifty years after Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech, yet in the process “the filmmakers discovered even a more fundamental set of questions: What is the concept of blackness? Where did it come from? And what does it mean for people of color living in America today?” In other words, the film realizes how one cannot ask a question about the longevity of the hopes of the Civil Rights movement before first addressing the ontological paradox of black lives as well as the metaphysical reach of the question posed by this same paradox. “What is inadequate to blackness

is already given ontologies,” writes Fred Moten, “The lived experience of blackness is, among other things, a constant demand for an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence.”⁹

Several fundamental aesthetic choices in *Dreams* set the stage for a searching investigation of the ontological paradox of black lives. First, the strategic decision to separate the visual and sonic tracks and record the interviews separately from the images. This disjunction afforded the interviewees a greater freedom of expression by disrupting the surveillance image at a very basic level. Second, the sensitive cinematography that frames both speakers and a host of unnamed black people within warm lights and lush natural color also strategically weaponizes overexposure, whereby close-ups of faces are made unreadable by sunlight behind them, and goes against the visual



FIGURE 6
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH
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and sonic integration the black filmic body is traditionally forced to perform.¹⁰ Jafa introduces nearly all of the speakers in his film through some combination of the techniques mentioned above that obscure them in some way, and also open up new possibilities for how viewers both see and hear them. We may point to numerous examples, such as Jafa's treatment of the appearances of filmmaker Charles Burnett who is seen in the film obliquely, often in profile through a close-up or medium shot whereby his face becomes obscured by the rays of a setting sun, or hidden by visible hexagons of pinkish light produced by the glare of the camera's lens, or even darkened completely by shadows. At other times, we only see the back of his neck and head as we listen to his voiceover. This is also how the artist Wangechi Mutu first appears in the film, through a close-up of the back of her head and nape of her neck as

**“DREAMS HOLDS IN BALANCE THE
RECOGNITION OF THE LINGERING
PRESENCE OF SLAVERY WITH THE LIFE-
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we hear her begin to speak. These shots recall the artist Lyle Ashton Harris's *The Chocolate Portraits*, which consist of dual portraits of individuals that include close-ups of the backs of their heads and necks. As with Harris's project, the need to reconsider harmful perceptions of black bodies in particular, and blackness more broadly, by using concealment as a tool comes through in Jafa's film, especially through his treatment of the featured speakers.¹¹ Similarly, odd camera angles which

linger in “whatever” spaces, such as the distance between two empty couches (as in figure on pg. 38) function not to narrate, describe, or assert, but simply to connect and therefore offer a way toward the possibility of black care. These aesthetic and stylistic choices are vital to the invention of a different environment, a different “atmosphere,” one in which, for example, people can freely express what they know and believe.

One of the challenges of the #BLM movement has been how to transition from the “particular universal” of the queer identities of #BlackLivesMatter's founders to the capaciously collective (“All Black Lives Matter” claims their website) and, by extension “all people.”¹² The film attempts this transition through a number of *passages* that connect scholars' voiceovers with images of beautiful, intense, and yet unnamed black people, shot within a lush and warm cinematography

as well as offering images of galaxies, planets, and deep space.

Three such passages in particular stand out. The film opens with a quasi-still and fairly flat image of a young man slowly turning his head right to left while also making a knowing eye-contact with the camera. Hortense Spillers's "I know that" is the first line in the film, immediately followed by the echoing voice of Martin Luther King Jr. heard saying "I have a dream." Spillers, however, continues in a different direction and her words are overlaid on images of a backward movement: we see young men spiraling and somersaulting out (instead of jumping into) a swimming pool in slow motion, their bodies remaining temporarily suspended in mid-air: "We are going to lose this gift of black culture unless we are careful," she elaborates over an exchange we don't hear between

a young mother and her sweetly pouting daughter seen in slow motion walking uphill toward the camera (figure 5). The way these lines of withheld dialog write themselves on their faces is essential to showing the profound connection between them, as well as their connection to what Spillers is saying, which the film takes as a model of a series of other, more theoretical connections it establishes through these passages. The second comes quickly after, when Spillers's voice continues: "this gift that is given to people who don't have a prayer." Her voice screeches for emphasis around the word "prayer" which is cued to the frozen close up of one of the young men in the pool looking intensely at the camera (figure on page 31).

Later, while she explains her concept of the flesh, Spillers states: "We were available in the flesh to the slave master. Immediate; hands on," words

that are juxtaposed to a slow-motion image of a woman crossing the street. "I can pluck your nappy head from wherever it is. Bang!" Spillers continues. The sound of her "Bang!" is cued to the image of the same woman, who now turns in slow motion toward the camera with a puzzled and inquisitive look, as if she was reacting to Spillers' mimicked slap (figure 6).

Through the aesthetic "liquidity" engendered by these "passages" as well as the facility with which it travels across scale—from the molecular to the celestial—*Dreams* holds in balance the recognition of the lingering presence of slavery with the life-giving force and cosmic reach of blackness. In other words, it becomes possible for black life and bodies to traverse great distances and become imbued with a profound sense of weight and matter that is beyond time and history. The

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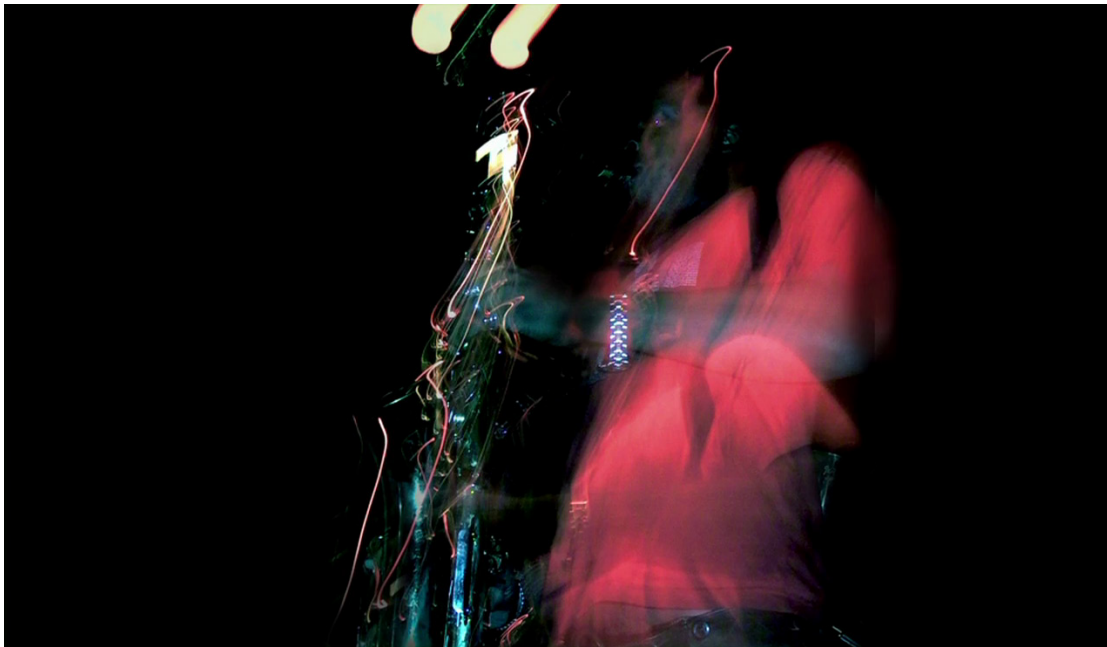


FIGURE 7
LONG-EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPHY REMINISCENT OF HART LEROY BIBBS' *MANIFESTO OPTKSORPTION*, 1977.
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH (DIRECTED BY ARTHUR JAJA, 2013), FRAME GRAB.

black body becomes re-centered in the cosmos, not only through the inclusion of the cosmological imagery but also through the intense, steady whirring—almost sucking—sound that comes through at certain moments in the film and that invokes an artistic representation of the vastness of space. For example, this sound competes with the beginning of Hortense Spillers's voiceover near the film's end as she discusses the devastating loss of her niece and subsequently her sister. Before it fades away, this sound provides an aural connection to the cosmological imagery preceding Spillers's appearance, and suggests the extension of black bodies, black suffering, black love, and blackness more generally into the cosmos.¹³ Through these passages the film performs what Jared Sexton describes as a series of conceptual moves "from the empirical to the structural or, more

precisely, from the experiential to the political ontological.”¹⁴

In her catalog essay for Arthur Jafa’s *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, a 7-minute video on view at Gavin Brown’s enterprise in New York City, a video that Jafa shared with us in Atlanta when it was still untitled, Christina Sharpe describes *Dreams are colder than Death* as organized according to composure, exertion, and force. She answers Moten’s question about the possibility of loving blackness so, “*Dreams* stages and moves viewers through several certain knowledges and believes **of and in** some of the gifts, possibilities, and refusals enacted by Black Culture; the labor, possibilities in and of Blackness, the knowledge that Blackness and Black people are lovable; that in the midst of everything else, Black people **are**, also about the practice of,

knowledge in, and attention to, and enactment of ‘deeply loved flesh.’”¹⁵

Both Jafa’s film and the essays gathered here engage with the paradoxical ontology of black lives in original ways. They also uncannily initiate a tight dialog with Christina Sharpe’s just released second book, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. “Wake” is a capacious term Sharpe uses to address the ontological paradox of black lives as lives lived in a wake, where “wake” simultaneously means “the watching of relatives and friends besides the body of the dead person,” “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship,” and “in the line of recoil of (a gun).” Through the concepts of the ship, the hold, and the weather, which crystallize her reflection on an atmospheric anti-blackness—antiblackness as “total climate”—Sharpe describes black lives as “lived under occupation,” “peoples in the wake with no state

or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected,” and strives instead “to position us in the modalities of Black lives lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there.”¹⁶

We have included here Jericho Brown’s powerful poem *bullet points*—with gracious permission of the author—in order to precisely mark the type of wake work *Dreams* also performs, one that “annotates” “those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable.”¹⁷ We have placed it alongside the image of the intense close-up that accompanies Spillers’s utterance of the word “prayer,” to tie together the wake work performed by both texts.

In the first essay of this issue, Calvin Warren poses the question of black care, reflecting on the circumstances under which it might occur when black injury has metaphysical

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repercussions that remain overwhelmingly incomprehensible and neither law, ethics, nor politics can adequately *redress* an injury they cannot *address*. He appeals to Sharpe's idea of anagrammatical blackness, of Black lives made opaque by a linguistic scrambling where "the meaning of words falls apart [and] we encounter again the difficulty of sticking the signification." In anagrammatical blackness, Sharpe explains, "girl doesn't mean 'girl' but, for example, 'prostitute' or 'felon,' boy doesn't mean 'boy,' but 'Hulk Hogan' or 'gunman,' 'thug' or 'urban youth.'"¹⁸

Just like Sharpe's book, but independently from it, Mars McDougall's essay takes on the issue of the Oceanic through Kamau Brathwaite's idea of tidalectics as a way to render the "afterlife of slavery" or what Sharpe describes as the wake of the ship, not as an hauntology—a grammar of

specters and ghosts which fails to address "not only the matter of black life, but also the meanings and implications of the continued un-mattering of black life"—but rather through the idea of tides that "turn and re-turn, not perfectly cyclical, but with an accumulation of time, of material, and of water."¹⁹ This is a way to acknowledge the material pressure placed upon black lives as well as to address a Middle Passage that doesn't simply "haunt" the present but is rather "still open...with water flowing forth in a constant, violent rush."²⁰

Sharpe's image of the wake of the ship, the historical weight of water, and even more her discussion of the "residence time" of substances in the Ocean, which describes the fact that the bodies of drowned slaves are still literally in it, perform a molecularization of blackness that ultimately expresses also the

corresponding atmospheric reach of antiblackness, its existence as a "total climate." As McDougall concludes, "The march of history means nothing underwater."²¹

At the same time, it also molecularizes what in *Dreams* Hortense Spillers calls "flesh memory," by describing the pain her sister, who had been subjected to a partial amputation, felt from her phantom leg. Echoing Elizabeth Alexander's argument in her commentary on the Rodney King video, that there is a bodily archive of practical memory that is reactivated at the moment of collective spectatorship of the black body in pain, Spillers grounds it even more profoundly in the sentient body which remembers a part that is no longer there.²²

Air, and more specifically wind, is the focus of Parisa Vaziri's "Windridden: Historical Oblivion and

the Nonvalue of Nonidentification,” where she addresses the question of whether flesh memory carries over across generations by arguing that sometimes concepts of “lineage” unwillingly reinforce “our modern-day understanding of race [which] is predicated upon a philosophical alignment between interiority and historicity that braces the self-possessed subject.”²³ Vaziri focuses on “zar,” the name for a “pan-Afroasiatic belief in malignant winds circulating through hives inhumed under the earth and which infest human intestines and penetrate the skeletal frame.” These winds are removed through ceremonies during which the windridden person might begin to speak in tongues unknown to her such as Swahili, Arabic, Persian, or Hindi. Vaziri reads this mysterious glossolalia as a case of unpossessed speech, which “renders blackness as a kind of ambivalent displacement from place and time.”²⁴

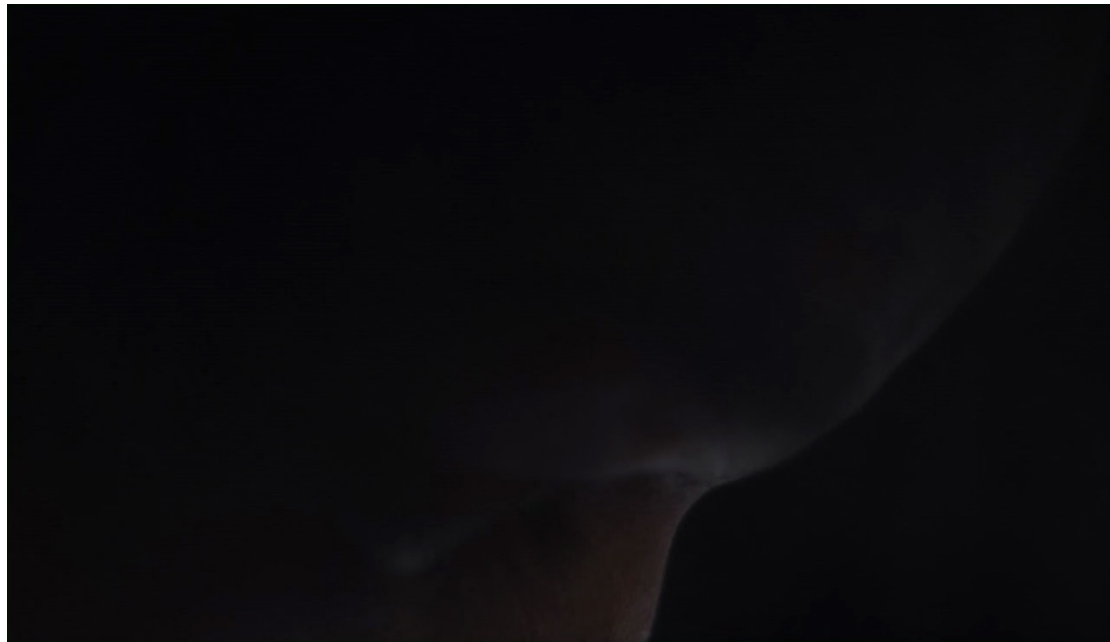


FIGURE 8
BLACK STAR CHILD,
DREAMS ARE COLDER THAN DEATH (DIRECTED BY ARTHUR JAJA, 2013), FRAME GRAB.

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The essay “Loving the Alien” by tobias vanVeen concludes this issue by mobilizing an increasingly pervasive term across Afrofuturist literature and object-oriented and new materialist philosophies, while also powerfully engaging queer inhumanism and performance theory, in order to disrupt enduring racialized distinctions between subject and object.²⁵ The essay is about “loving an-other whose otherness transgresses all that is presupposed in the possessive of the ‘whose’: an-other who is not a *who*, but a *what*.” At stake is the participation, or not, of the Black rendered as robot alien to the concept of the human within the context of Afrofuturist love which, paradoxically, yet strategically, “remakes alienation as Alien Nation” and “arises by “exappropriating [the alien] for the project of decolonization.” The critique that vanVeen sees enacted by Janelle Monae’s videos

is the queering of the straight line that maintains the distinction between the who and the what or, the “improper praxis of becoming exhuman.” Ex-humanity is at the core of a critique that, following Kodwo Eshun, is both aesthetic and philosophical insofar as, for Eshun, “interrogating the human means a like critique of black realness, representation, and authenticity.”

In the essay for *Black Camera* I explain how I believe that the complex tapestry of cosmological images Jafa deploys throughout the film is in dialog with his own admiration for Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* which he sees as organized around a profound fear of black contamination of whiteness. His early encounter with the “atavistic whiteness” and the “glacial pageantry” of the film made him realize, instead, the “arresting beauty and dense corporeal being”

of the inhabitants of the Mississippi Delta region where he grew up, which he ultimately described as “the dark matter of black being.”²⁶

I believe a commitment to this thick materiality of blackness animates all of the essays featured here and the way they attempt in a variety of ways to get at black Being, despite its constant withdrawal and excess over our own understanding. This is the reason we have distributed some poignant images from the film throughout the issue so that they would offer further coherence to the common concerns of the essays featured here. In *Dreams* as well as in this issue, blackness is unbound: an always sentient, always sensing, cosmic matter. ■

¹ Arthur Jafa, “Black Visual Intonation,” *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, edited by Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 264-268.

² See *liquid blackness* 2, no. 5 (2015), “Passing Through Film: The Arts and Politics of the Jazz Ensemble,” <http://liquidblackness.com/publications/passing-through-film/>, last accessed Nov. 1, 2016 for an account of this research project and essays on Clark’s film.

³ Arthur Jafa, “My Black Death,” *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black culture*, edited by Greg Tate (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 252. Methodologically speaking, I interpret the film’s editing structure—beautifully executed by *Dreams*’ producer, editor, and cinematographer Kahlil Joseph—and, in particular, the elements that the film posits as adjacent—as indices of the network of love and care that #BlackLivesMatter also seeks to establish as a way to counteract state-sanctioned anti-black violence.

⁴ I want to thank Charleen Wilcox for writing these observations.

⁵ Some of the material gathered for this research project is available on the *liquid blackness* website, here: <http://liquidblackness.com/dreams-are-colder-than-death/>

⁶ The following people were part of the reading group that generated this call for papers:

Jenny Gunn, Brooke Sonenreich, Charleen Wilcox, Shady Patterson, Daren Fowler, Lauren Cramer, and Akil Brooks. Michael Gillespie emphasizes some of the same points in the introduction to his just published book, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁷ I refer here to Christina Sharpe’s concept of the “weather,” in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), as I will explain below, but also to an exchange with Sarah Jane Cervenak and Jay Kameron Carter about their idea of “black ether,” which occurred in the empyre listserv in April 2016. The entire conversation on “Liquid Blackness: Formal Approaches to Blackness and/as Aesthetics” as it unfolded over the whole month, is available here: <http://lists.cofa.unsw.edu.au/pipermail/empyre/2016-April/date.html> (last accessed on Nov. 10, 2016).

⁸ Alessandra Raengo, “*Dreams are colder than Death* and the Gathering of Black Sociality,” forthcoming in *Black Camera*, 8, no. 2 (2016). This essay, for a Close-Up section on the mediatic life of the #BlackLivesMatter movement edited by Charles “Chip” Linscott, explores more explicitly points of contact between the film and #BLM in the context of the Afro-Pessimist/Afro-Optimist conversation. I am paraphrasing Sharpe who claims that black death is normative and necessary for this democracy (*In the Wake*, 7) and Tamara Lomax’s statement that “white safety equals black murder,” cited in Jared Sexton, “Afro-pessimism: The Unclear Word,” *rhizomes* 29, <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/sexton.html> last accessed Nov. 1, 2016.

⁹ Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 187.

¹⁰ I develop this idea of integrity and the way the black body has historically “integrated” the filmic image in Alessandra Raengo, “Blackness and the Image of Motility: A Suspenseful Critique,” *Black Camera*, 8, no. 1 (2016): 191-206. The essay builds on the argument put forth by Alice Maurice in *The Cinema and Its Shadow, Race and Technology in Early Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

¹¹ I want to thank Charleen Wilcox for writing this perceptive paragraph.

¹² See Jared Sexton, “Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word,” *rhizomes* 29, <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/sexton.html> last accessed Nov. 1, 2016

¹³ I want to thank Charleen Wilcox for writing these observations.

¹⁴ Sexton, “Afro-pessimism: The Unclear Word.”

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¹⁵ Christina Sharpe, "Love is the Message, the Message is Death" in Arthur Jafa, *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* (TNEG, GBE, 2016), n.p.j. This 7-minute montage that gathers what, in the same catalog, Greg Tate describes as "dynamism of culturally and rhythmically-confident Black bodies in swooning, swaying, sanctified, synaptic, erotic, choreographic, athletic, cognitive and violently-assaulted motion," seems to us a poignant and achingly urgent synthesis of Jafa's reflection on black motion and/as sound.

¹⁶ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹ This issue, p. 53

²⁰ This issue, p. 52

²¹ This issue, p. 56

²² Elizabeth Alexander, "'Can You Be Black and Look at This?': Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 77-94.

²³ This issue, p. 63

²⁴ This issue, p. 63

²⁵ Consider some recent special issues, such as *The Black Scholar* 44 (Summer 2014), *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21, no. 2-3 (2015) on "Queer Inhumanisms," *Rhizomes* no. 29, on "Black Holes: Afro-pessimism, Blackness and the discourses of Modernity" <http://rhizomes.net/issue29/index.html> and *The Drama Review*, special issue on "New Materialisms and Performance Studies," 59, no. 4 (Winter 2015).

²⁶ Jafa, "My Black Death," 252.

