

these pages over and over, listened to my doubts, held my hand, tolerated my whiny insecurities, and told me to keep going and never stop. They shaped it like clay and kept my eyes on the prize.

Finally, I must thank the two prongs of my personal support system over this last extremely challenging year. One is the anchor of my life, William Nitzberg. Stalwart, unflappable, a man who makes Job look ill-tempered and impatient—I am so grateful to have you in my life and by my side. The other is the three-woman mutual-aid society that kept my head above water throughout the pandemic through our weekly Zoom meetings: Saidiya, Simone, and Okwui. Ladies, we did it. We held each other through the depths and came out on the other side. Three words: Black girls rule!

Notes

Prelude to a Black Gaze

Parts of this chapter appeared in my article “The Grain of the Amateur,” *Third Text* 34, no. 1 (2020): 37–47.

- 1 I am grateful to Jacqueline Nassy Brown for illuminating this important contextual framework.
- 2 Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 44.
- 3 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 185.
- 4 I am indebted to Michael Gillespie for helping me clarify this important distinction in his thoughtful comments on the manuscript.
- 5 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, 2018), 101. My thanks as well to Jamieson Webster for pointing me to delve deeper into Lacan’s thinking.
- 6 I am grateful to Leigh Raiford for sharing this insightful formulation of this dynamic in her careful review of the manuscript.

- 7 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 14.
- 8 "I Was That Alien: Filmmaker Arthur Jafa in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," *o32c*, June 26, 2017, <https://o32c.com/arthur-jafa/>.

Verse One

- 1 See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18, for this seminal definition of the gaze. See also bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115–132, reprinted in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 247 (subsequent citations of hooks's essay refer to this edition); and Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 66–79, for two of the most influential critiques of the concept of the gaze from the perspective of Black studies.
- 2 Here again, my thanks to Michael Gillespie for making this important point in an early reading of the manuscript.
- 3 hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 247.
- 4 Diawara, "Black Spectatorship," 72, 75–76. In "The Oppositional Gaze," hooks famously takes issue both with Diawara, for his dismissal of identification aligned with gender differences for Black women and men, and with Mulvey, critiquing the limitations of Mulvey's definition of the gaze.
- 5 It also bears noting that in their early work both Diawara and hooks, as well as feminist film theorists like Mulvey and Kaja Silverman, locate the possibility for escaping or circumventing the dominant gaze only outside of mainstream Hollywood studio production, specifically in the work of independent cinema. While the artists explored in these pages are certainly independent artists

whose work is not dependent upon the studio system, their global prominence and, with it, their influence and cache within the art world challenge us to consider what counts in the contemporary moment as "independent" when the circulation of capital is part and parcel of the success of independent artists.

- 6 See hooks's essay "Eating the Other," in hooks, *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21–39.

Verse Two

- 1 Hilton Als, "The Black Excellence of Kahlil Joseph," *New Yorker*, November 6, 2017.
- 2 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 106.
- 3 My concept of Black countergravity is in direct dialogue with Kathryn Yusoff's articulation of countergravity as a state of suspension between fungibility (enforced precarity and disposability) and fugitivity (embracing placelessness as a refusal to be captured). Building on Dionne Brand's poetic yet unequivocal insistence that for Black women, "The problem was gravity and the answer was gravity," Yusoff proffers a notion of countergravity that renders the Black body "invulnerable, held in the possible, awaiting a different tense of being." As she writes: "the black woman held in countergravity expands the dimensions of geologic force through a different tense of possibility and relation to the earth. Rather than being framed in the 'vexed genealogy of freedom' that forged the liberal imagination through 'entanglements of bondage and liberty' (Hartman 1997, 115), she is partaking of a different gravitational opening, in Césaire's ([1972] 2000, 42) words, 'made to the measure of the world.'" Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 99.
- 4 Larry O'Dell, "All-Black Towns," Oklahoma Historical Society, n.d., accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AL009>.

- 5 "10 Most Dangerous Housing Projects in Los Angeles," *United Gangs* (blog), n.d., accessed September 17, 2020, <https://unitedgangs.com/2017/01/16/the-10-most-dangerous-housing-projects-in-los-angeles/>.
- 6 As with 4:44, I hesitate to reduce *Until the Quiet Comes* to the genre of "music video," as it too does not strictly conform to the genre. The collaboration between Joseph and Flying Lotus is another example of the creative tension of works that create a mutuality between images and sound that exceeds the musical tracks that animate and enliven them. For this reason, I engage video as a sonovisual text in ways analogous to my reading of *Wildcat*.
- 7 In my 2018 blog "Black Visual Frequency: A Glossary" commissioned by the Fotomuseum Winterthur, I define still-moving-images as: "images that hover between still and moving images; animated still images, slowed or stilled images in motion or visual renderings that blur the distinctions between these multiple genres; images that require the labor of feeling with or through them" (<https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/154951-still-moving-images>).
- 8 This recitation within the film is taken from Chris Marker's experimental film *Sans Soleil* (France, 1983, 103 minutes, color, 1.66:1, French).
- 9 Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955; repr., New York: First Print Press, 2018).

Verse Three

An earlier version of this chapter was published as "The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor and the Practice of Refusal," *Social Text* 37, no. 3 (2019): 25–46.

- 1 Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

- 2 Arthur Jafa, "69," in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michelle Wallace*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 254.
- 3 Jafa, "69," 267.
- 4 This excerpt is quoted with permission from Isaac's marvelous final paper, a "Practicing Refusal Glossary," submitted for my 2018 seminar *The Practice of Refusal*, taught at the Columbia University Institute for Research on African American Studies.
- 5 Jafa, "69," 267.
- 6 Huey Copeland, "Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death," *Black One Shot* (blog), June 4, 2018, <http://asapjournal.com/love-is-the-message-the-message-is-death-huey-copeland/>.
- 7 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 20–21.
- 8 See my introduction of this term in "The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor, and the Practice of Refusal," *Social Text* 37, no. 3 (2019): 25–46.
- 9 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 72.
- 10 The concept of hapticity I develop here differs in important ways from the idea of *hapticality* articulated by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, which they describe in *Undercommons* as "the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, the feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem. . . . Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other. . . . This is our hapticity, our love. This is love for the shipped, love as the shipped." Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 98–99.