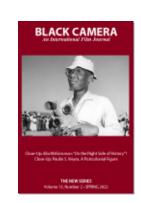# Kahlil Joseph, New Media, and the New Black Cinema: A Case for Situating Kahlil Joseph's Audiovisual Work Within the Theoretical Frameworks of African Film

Joseph Owen Jackson

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Abstract

This article explores the various ways that African American filmmaker Kahlil Joseph represents contemporary experiences of the African diaspora in his new media work, Belhaven Meridian *(2010). Reflecting the present world system's complex network environment, Joseph's screen text is a node within numerous theoretical networks, oscillating within disparate conceptual frameworks concurrently. Weaving the strands of these divergent theories together with the "crossroads" concepts from Harry J. Elam Jr., Kennell Jackson's* Black Cultural Traffic *(2005), and Akin Adesokan's* Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics *(2011), this article scrutinizes Joseph's work through intersections of emergent music video and new media theories, as well as film theories from African, American, and European perspectives. The article argues that such an approach enriches the didactic possibilities of their respective and, simultaneously, entwined theoretical branches.*

Kahlil Joseph is a director whose music videos, films, and commercial collaborations draw from various forms of African culture—referencing Yoruba deities, Senegalese film masters, and Sierra Leonean literature—while expressing the diaspora's contemporary condition in a range of locations. He has collaborated with an array of influential musicians including Beyoncé, FKA Twigs, Flying Lotus, Kendrick Lamar, Sampha Sisay, and Shabazz Palaces, achieving millions of views across various digital platforms. Under the stewardship of Georgia State University's Alessandra Raengo, the *liquid blackness* research group commemorated his achievements by organizing a special Joseph-themed week through the online MediaCommons project *In Media Res* and arranging a public symposium with Joseph as the keynote

speaker.[1] Members of the group have also produced a series of highly original and sophisticated publications centering around the director's work: Lauren M. Cramer uses an architectural practice called "diagramming" to address the aesthetics of suspension and weightlessness in Joseph's music video *Until the Quiet Comes* (2012);[2] Charles P. Linscott argues for an audiovisual lineage between William Greaves's feature film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* (1968), Spike Lee's music video *Tutu Medley* (1986), and Joseph's short film *Wildcat* (2012);[3] and James Tobias locates Joseph's visual album *Process* (2017) and installation *Fly Paper* (2018) within the context of the essay film tradition.[4]

The *liquid blackness* project has produced important research outputs in relation to the director's valuable body of work, yet Joseph's contributions to the development of audiovisual art in the twenty-first century are under-explored by other sections of contemporary film and screen studies scholarship. While a variety of academic sources argue for the cultural significance of the visual album *Lemonade* (2016) in both regional, national, and global terms, *Lemonade* scholarship tends to focus on Beyoncé's creative input at the screen text's encoding stages rather than Joseph's contribution as one of the project's video directors.[5] Similarly, Joseph has produced a vast array of media works since he commenced his directorial career in 2010, yet many of his earliest projects—including *I Need A Dollar* (2010), *The Model* (2010), and *Black Up* (2011) remain largely undiscussed within the academy.

Analyzing the ways that contemporary experiences of the African diaspora are depicted within his screen text *Belhaven Meridian* (2010), this article develops the emergent branches of Joseph scholarship further by selecting a rarely discussed sample of his work spanning disparate African and African American cultures and settings. Joseph is an accomplished artist across a broad range of visual practices, and I will trace the numerous multicultural sources and collaborative influences shaping *Belhaven Meridian*, emphasizing how the director answers Donald Bogle's call for "a new black cinema"[6] while simultaneously promulgating Joseph's position within theoretical frameworks of African cinema.[7]

In *Belhaven Meridian*, black-and-white footage of the neglected Watts neighborhood pays homage to Charles Burnett's 1978 cult film *Killer of Sheep*. Crucially, Joseph's style of filmmaking plays with the structural parameters of disparate media forms, hybridizing film, music video, and advertisement qualities to reflect contemporary experiences of the African diaspora. *Belhaven Meridian* offers an underexplored example of Joseph's media work, which might be considered an abstract piece or "difficult" screen text in terms of unpacking and negotiating its various signs and significations. I argue that the lens of African film theory offers valuable avenues for engagement when read in conversation with African American cinema concepts and, in turn, captures the interdisciplinary and transnational aesthetics of the artist's new media work.

Film Theories: Africa and Afro-America

By "[articulating] the contemporary African American's mind, his/her perspectives, aspirations, and goals" and, importantly, pioneering new forms of filmic expression which "capture and extend one's imagination,"[8] Joseph's works neatly situate themselves within the context of American filmmaking practice and ongoing debates about African American representation on screen.[9] However, one of the central aims of this article is also to emphasize the director's relationship with the heritage of African filmmaking. Anjali Prabhu contends that African cinema is defined by "the ways in which Africa and its diaspora are anticipated, imagined, and captured on screen;"[10] and, according to Valérie K. Orlando, African filmmaking practices are "the product of the past as well as the current transnational and transcontinental stories of globalized cultures."[11] Joseph's work may fall into the brackets of African American *and* African cinema,[12] specifically because the director's explorations of the past consider "how best to use African traditions in order to create an African public space that fosters the flowering of critique . . . [to maintain] the fibres that weave the living together."[13] A few years after the Civil Rights Act's passing through Congress, Ousmane Sembène made the sagacious declaration that "knowing Africa better will solidify [an individual's] personality with the new black personality now emerging in American society because we all have the same cultural matrix."[14] As well as answering Bogle's search for a "new black cinema" oriented towards Afro-America, I suggest that fruitful discussions and new forms of knowledge relating to Afro-diasporic experiences in our contemporary epoch are produced when one situates Joseph's works within the frameworks of African *and* African American filmmaking practices.

Traffic, Crossroads, and Multiplicity

Joseph's screen texts are nodes within numerous theoretical networks, mimicking the complex network environment of the present world system. Tying the strands of these divergent theories together with the "crossroads" concepts from Harry Elam and Kennell Jackson's *Black Cultural Traffic* (2005) and Akin Adesokan's *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (2011), this article scrutinizes Joseph's work through overlaps of emergent music video and new media theories that emphasize hybridity[15] and perspectives from African film theorists[16] as well as American[17] and European voices.[18] As the director's footage shifts from the urbanized settings of Watts to the opulent networks of the Hollywood Hills, Black cultural traffic's notion of crossroads articulates the flows between Joseph's multifarious influences and

his contemporaneous representations of the diaspora. These cultural cross-roads transcend geographical and temporal boundaries as past and present cultures from across the globe collide. By merging advertisements, films, and music videos through sophisticated audiovisual artistry, the "transformation, change and hybridity" of artifacts within the movement of Black cultural traffic[19] communicate Joseph's ability to shift formal boundaries as the shapes of his works fluctuate and his structural parameters transform. In turn, Adesokan uses the analogous crossroads of the African marketplace to illustrate the complex social, economic, and political processes which shape cultural production and global aesthetics. He argues the crossroads analogy encapsulates "the philosophical *and* practical dynamics of cultural pluralism."[20] This article explores the ways that Adesokan's concept overlaps with Elam and Jackson's Black cultural traffic theories, developing crossroads between other theoretical crossroads.

Cramer's reading of Joseph's award-winning short film *Until the Quiet Comes* (2012) through the lens of "diagramming" illustrates how the aesthetics of suspension in the screen text's underwater scenes allow representations of blackness "to float . . . unmooring [blackness] from the histories, politics, and technologies that cohere the notion of blackness."[21] Stuart Hall's theorization of race as a "floating signifier" captures how a concept's meaning becomes dependent on the social and cultural contexts of its usage rather than fixed to a particular referent.[22] And theorists may avoid the post-modern crisis of "the proliferation of meaning"[23] by anchoring conceptualizations of "blackness" to fixed geographical areas through engagement with both African *and* African American film theories. It is therefore possible to read the suspended mask in *Belhaven Meridian* as a reference to Sembène's feature-length film *La Noire De . . .* (1966, Senegal and France), a subversion of the child's dog-mask in Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, and, simultaneously, a forged mask designed to con and mislead in marketplace contexts. Scholars may thus connect local, national, and continental aspects of the African continent to features of the new areas where members of the diaspora in Joseph's work find themselves (dis)placed.

Traversing the Land of Sheep Killers: Resisting the Slaughter in *Belhaven Meridian*

Belhaven Meridian is one of Joseph's first projects as director. It is a fictional audiovisual text exploring an unnamed local resident's negotiation of urban gang culture in Watts. The young African American strolls through his neighborhood before encountering a gang; however, rather than joining their ranks or instigating violence, the young man summons an African mask

for assistance, evading the rabble by finding nonviolent means to overcome the harsh environment that threatens to consume its inhabitants.

The strain of inner city life in Watts stems from the Second Great Migration of the 1940s, wherein emancipated African American slaves flocked to burgeoning industrial cities in the North, Midwest, and West seeking employment opportunities at newly-formed companies.[24] As a result of this large-scale migration, Los Angeles's Black population increased from 63,700 in 1940 to approximately 350,000 in 1965.[25] However, the state struggled to cope with the mass influx of people, refusing to release federal antipoverty funds to counteract the ensuing economic stagnation.[26] Each geographical section of America has experienced "its own unique race problems;"[27] and in the case of Watts, a toxic concoction of "unemployment . . . overcrowding . . . [and] decaying housing" caused by "the neighbourhood's social isolation and de facto segregation"[28] was worsened by a system of authority that, for Black communities, was "inaccessible and unsympathetic towards grievances."[29] Having endured two large-scale riots, in 1965 and 1992—moments of violence and civil disobedience—the frustration and restlessness of Watts residents struggling to live in an impoverished area dominated by partisan law enforcement is clear.[30] Watts's condition in the twenty-first century remains similarly precarious for *Belhaven Meridian*'s main character and indeed other local citizens due to a lack of investment, placing the area in one of Los Angeles's highest percentiles for criminality.[31]

Reimaging the African mask from *La Noire De . . .* and remediating *Killer of Sheep*'s doorstep scene, *Belhaven Meridian* combines African and African American film cultures as a means of communicating the protagonist's paradoxical existence "both inside and outside the West" as a member of the African diaspora living in America.[32] Publicized across YouTube and Vimeo, the digital screen text also amalgamates film, music video, and advertisement properties by accompanying three alternative hip-hop tracks written and performed by rap duo Shabazz Palaces. In this way the text becomes a cultural artifact whose structural parameters shift and fluctuate without settling on a single media form. The "horizontal and multisited" consciousness of Africa's diasporic community living in America[33] is thus engendered by the contesting flows or crossroads of *Belhaven Meridian*'s Black cultural traffic, or circulations between film cultures and divergent media forms which compete, contradict, and congest, struggling to reach a state of equilibrium and never grinding to a halt (figs. 1 and 2).

Reflecting the complexity of the main character's double consciousness,[34] *Belhaven Meridian*'s "unruly" formal elements resist simplistic categorization.[35] Shot in one long take, *Belhaven Meridian*'s measured treatment of Watts's gang dynamics eschews the "zaniness"[36] and "pulse and reiteration"[37] that characterize YouTube's intensified audiovisual aesthetics. Similarly, by

Figure 1. Stan's wife confronts the gangsters. Screen grab by the author.

Figure 2. Joseph remediates the doorstep scene, capturing a fictional production crew in 'action'. Screen grab by the author.

indicating that the protagonist turns to his African heritage for spiritual guidance when resisting gang culture pressures, *Belhaven Meridian* rejects "hypersexed, spoonfed, commercialized" clichés[38] which threaten to misrepresent hip-hop music video culture.[39] The text, instead, remediates aspects of Burnett's independent *Killer of Sheep*.[40] David Bolter, Richard A. Grusin, and Carol Vernallis identify "remediation" as an aesthetic quality of modern screen culture writ large, encapsulating twenty-first-century music videos, postclassical cinema, and clips on YouTube.[41] However, as Nicholas Cook and Philip Tagg elaborate, audiovisual interpretations of musical forms may develop "sticky" properties by inviting multiple cultural associations both intentionally *and* inadvertently.[42] For example, while Joseph intentionally references a scene from *Killer of Sheep* in *Belhaven Meridian*—and goes as far as to signpost this influence in the music video through a nondiegetic textual superimposition of the film's title—the text's representation of an African mask forgery echoes aspects of Sembène's film *La Noire De . . .* in an inviting yet inconclusive manner. *La Noire De . . .* is the first feature-length film from sub-Saharan Africa as well as "the first African film to gain critical recognition in the Western world;"[43] therefore, allusions to the film in *Belhaven Meridian* raise a series of poignant questions relating to the roots and influences that shape a media form's genesis across cultural and historical spheres.

At the conclusion of *La Noire De . . .* a young boy wears the fake African mask and grips a fence's wire mesh, before removing the item to reveal his solemn face. In *Killer of Sheep*, Stan's daughter Angie wears a rubber dog mask and stands against the backyard's barbed wire fencing as a young boy stares into empty space and then turns to peer at the mask in a blank manner. Aboubakar Sanogo reasons that the film's "quasi-restaging of the Sembènian shots . . . evokes the implacable entrapment Stan and his family find themselves in, not unlike Diouana in Antibes."[44] Alessandra Raengo develops Sanogo's thoughts further, arguing that Joseph's *Belhaven Meridian* depicts Diouana's mask in a manner that is "reinterpreted but still connected" to Sembène's original source material, drawing from both an "Afrocentric" *and* "cinematic" past.[45]

In an interview about *Killer of Sheep* with National Public Radio, Howie Movshotiz claims: "Burnett says his eyes were really opened when he saw the work of the celebrated director from Senegal, Ousmane Sembène, which showed African people filmed from an African perspective. Burnett says he'd never seen black people on screen presented as human beings. The experience made him see the possibilities for his own movies."[46] While Clyde Taylor suggests that "[t]he basic palette of [Charles Burnett's] indigenous Afroscreen is closer to that of Italian Neo-realism and third world cinema than that of Southern California,"[47] James Naremore de-emphasizes the connections to Italy by arguing that Burnett's "distinctive style of black neorealism

. . . owes less to the Italians than to the Brazilian 'cinema of poverty' and the films of Ousmane Sembène, which Burnett had seen as a student," thereby capturing how the uneven crossroads of cultural traffic manifest across continents in oftentimes messy and complicated patterns, engendering a range of reactions.[48]

Although the visual and thematic similarities of the shots in Sembène's and Burnett's films imply that a conscious decision was made by the latter to channel the ideas and styles of a colleague whom he openly admired, the task of determining *La Noire De . . .* 's influence on *Belhaven Meridian* is complicated by Joseph's decision to visibly signpost *Killer of Sheep* as source material. While Joseph's signposting technique communicates very clearly that Burnett's film plays an important role in shaping and nuancing the music video's encoded meanings, the lack of clarification relating to the forged African mask's appearance in *Belhaven Meridian* suggests that no direct links to other filmic sources are intended.

The chained fences that separate Watts's properties and backyards in *Killer of Sheep* act as a metaphor for the claustrophobic neighbourhood's simmering tensions, the lack of opportunities to overcome or "escape" cycles of poverty and violence in the environment's cage-like, repressive atmosphere. In *La Noire De . . .* , however, the chained fence appears on a bridge as the masked boy follows Diouana's former employer, Monsieur, effectively chasing the intruder away from Dakar while remaining stuck on the bridge himself. These underlying themes of attempting to access certain areas or cross difficult bridges with varying degrees of success could simultaneously create a case for *and* against drawing connections between Sembène's film and Joseph's music video, using the transparent reference to *Killer of Sheep* as both a blockade and a stepping stone for the respective strands of interpretation.

Reading the music video through the lens of media semiotics, the presence of the "uncited" forged mask still creates a complicated network of overlapping signs and symbols, thereby allowing contradictory interpretations of the music video's past and present meanings to coexist in states of constant tension and fluctuation.[49] Whether by design or chance, all emergent significations in *Belhaven Meridian* therefore qualify as valid interpretations and, one may develop grounds for following Raengo's line of argument by reasoning that the music video's direct reference to *Killer of Sheep* acts as an indirect bridge from Joseph's music video to Sembène's film. The various debates and "associative chains" instigated by Joseph's remediation of the *Killer of Sheep* scene here expose the structural complexity of *Belhaven Meridian*'s short film and music video hybridization—the formal and ideological sophistication of Joseph's work.[50] While the precise meanings of any audiovisual artifact are never finished or absolute, messages encoded within a medium "must be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded."[51] Thus,

Belhaven Meridian's entangled crossroads remain a paradox for each percipient to unravel using their subjective experiences and positionalities. As long as each interpretation is heard, understood, scrutinized, and—perhaps most importantly—respected, then *Belhaven Meridian*'s complex concoctions of signs and symbols are not forged in vain.

Released across What Matters Most's YouTube and Vimeo accounts as, in their own terms, an "allegorical short film/music video," the media platform's marketing strategy articulates the video's chameleonic characteristics. The decision to complicate *Belhaven Meridian*'s blurred structural parameters by categorizing the screen text as two distinguishable media forms is compounded by the collective's use of the word "allegorical." The principal character's journey through the Watts area may act as a metaphor for a variety of poignant messages and experiences for African diasporas—negotiating difficult situations, overcoming violence, traversing cultural boundaries, or experimenting with new artistic forms—yet the specific allegorical message of the screen text is not clearly defined by the collective. The malleability of the various metaphorical meanings imbued within the video thus captures the sophistication of *Belhaven Meridian*'s content which, in turn, is mirrored by its complex formal structure.

The digital screen text amalgamates film, music video, and advertisement properties to promote three songs written and performed by musical performers Shabazz Palaces. The group is comprised of two members: multi-instrumentalist Tendai "Baba" Maraire is son of the *mbira* master, Duminsani Maraire, recognized for "introducing the music of his native Zimbabwe to the United States;"[52] and rapper Ishmael Butler, who previously worked with the band Digable Planets, specializing in infusing elements of jazz and rap. Inspired by "a desire to protect and exalt our culture," Baba and Butler incorporate Africa's musical heritage into their collaborations. *Belhaven Meridian*, for example, culminates with gentle *mbira* sounds extracted from the song "Blastit" (2010).[53] While Baba's father is an obvious source for the Afrocentric dimensions of Baba's work, Butler similarly claims that his family's musical preferences have nuanced the African drumbeats and jazz elements of his works.[54] By using electronically-recorded samples that feel "as much about beads and wicker . . . [as] about plastic and circuitry,"[55] Shabazz Palaces attempts to "redefine culture and notions of blackness for today *and* the future."[56] Their aim thereby echoes the screen text's reconfiguration of fixed and linear spatiotemporal boundaries.

Belhaven Meridian's title reflects double consciousness's convergence of disparate cultural spaces by situating the screen text in multiple locations near the Watts neighborhood simultaneously, challenging the determinacy of any precise setting. Two separate roads and a small drive sharing the name "Belhaven Street" run parallel to the border of Watts, technically positioning

the text beyond the neighborhood despite close geographical proximity between Watts and the Los Angeles streets. "Meridian" means "the highest stage of development;"[57] thus the protagonist achieves the status of Belhaven Street's meridian by sagaciously resisting a gang culture that seduces so many. However, the word also signifies "a circle passing through a given place on the earth's surface and the terrestrial poles."[58] Ato Quayson argues that one must consider the sophisticated relationships "between ephemera, process and structure in the construction of the African urban,"[59] which, in turn, characterizes how Joseph generates transcultural and intercontinental connections between the Belhaven Street(s) and Africa. The video's main character, therefore, traverses an imaginary line that connects a variety of locations simultaneously, negotiating divergent cultural settings across islands and hemispheres, moving from different Belhaven Streets to the African continent.

Belhaven Meridian subverts the Western framing of the world—for example, the colonial logic that dictated that Greenwich in London would be the Prime Meridian, the reference point or standard from which to understand the rest of the world—by positioning a small part of Watts in L.A. as an alternative Prime Meridian, a new point from which to evaluate the world.[60] *Belhaven Meridian*'s title thus situates the Belhaven Street(s) as the focal point(s) of the music video's universe. Imbuing two roads and a small drive on the borders of Watts with the significance of global pathways through a meridian's circumference, Joseph saturates the L.A. streets with elements of mock grandeur, emphasizing that the main character's environment is his reference point for understanding the world. However, by charging these settings with indeterminacy—elevating the streets to global significance yet destabilizing a cohesive understanding of the screen text's exact location—the sophistication of the text's content echoes its structural complexity as it oscillates at the boundaries between distinguishable media forms.

While negotiating the crossroads of geographical settings and media structures, *Belhaven Meridian* also operates on the boundaries between African and African American cinemas' respective conceptual frameworks. The main character approaches a menacing gang skulking the streets of Watts when, suddenly, the scene delves into supernatural territory as a digitally-animated African mask, translucent and glowing, hovers over his head. The young man turns and snatches the object. The mask develops an opaque, material structure, and the young African American charges into the heart of the raging gang, fearlessly fending off physical blows while clutching the mask to his chest. Ernest Waddell, the actor who plays the unnamed protagonist, starred as Dante in Season two and three of the television series *The Wire*;[61] and the music video's hero undergoes a metaphorical journey of spiritual enlightenment echoing the soul's allegorical journey to God in Dante's *Divina Commedia* (1320). However, in response to the threat of gang

violence in the contemporary Watts area, the video's main character channels the African spirit world for inspiration and strength, turning to African iconography for guidance.

While certain aspects of the mask—the narrow eye-slits and high, bulging brow—depict the *deangle* spirit from the Dan cultures of Liberia and the Ivory Coast, the cross motif on the mask's forehead represents the *Mwana Po* figure from the Chokwe societies in Angola, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.[62] It is highly likely that the mask is a forgery, a hybrid of distinctive cultural markers manufactured in West Africa and exported to the rest of the world for commercial gain.[63] At once a composition of divergent African cultures and a rootless, itinerant forgery, the ruptured identity of the main character's African mask acts as a metaphor for the "confusion and doubt" of the African diaspora's double consciousness, the "peculiar sensation"[64] produced by the symbiosis between contradictory ways of thinking, being, and seeing.[65] However, both the *deangle* and *Mwana Pwo* figures are also vital feminine forces within their respective societies.[66] The African mask's dislocation from the continent echoes the problematic repositioning of the forged Wolof mask in the film *La Noire De . . .* , thereby channeling the artistic sensibilities and "feminist strategies" of Senegalese director Sembène, whether inadvertently or by design.[67]

In French, the title of Sembène's film means both "the black girl from . . . " and "the black girl of . . . ," establishing the protagonist's ambiguous status as a native from Senegal and a dweller in France, a nanny supporting her Senegalese family and a de facto slave in the French middle-class couple's possession. The film's narrative articulates the danger of losing one's roots while seeking new life in a foreign land, and the mask is reimagined as a trophy of cultural conquest—hung in the couple's apartment, alone on an empty white wall—becoming a vivid visual representation of Diouana's social alienation. The protagonist's suicide at the film's denouement is a challenging spectacle, complicating the film's focus on race-related gender issues. Jude Akudinobi describes the "self-referential feminism" of Sembène's later works as "a mode of agency and subjectivity deriving from culturally specific life experiences, social institutions, personal challenges and collective tribulations rather than reductive categories."[68] Thus, Diouana's suicide may be interpreted as a drastic means of reclaiming autonomy over her trapped, disempowered body. However, by circumventing the "aggressive masculinities" of certain American gang and underground hip-hop cultures,[69] *Belhaven Meridian*'s African mask channels elements of these feminist energies in *La Noire De . . .* without, crucially, warranting bloodshed and allowing the protagonist to emerge from the altercation unscathed by summoning the wisdom and strength of an African cultural heritage that Diouana—tragically, fatally—ignores for too long (figs. 3 and 4).

Figure 3. The mask in *Belhaven Meridian*. Screen grab by the author.

Figure 4. The mask in *La Noire De . . .* Screen grab by the author.

Voice-overs communicate the sadness, frustration, and fear that Diouana cannot verbalize aloud; therefore, a large part of *La Noire De . . .* takes place in silence. Losing her voice and with it, her agency, Diouana becomes increasingly quiet the longer she stays in the apartment, gradually transforming into a noiseless object controlled by the whim of her French employers until suicide, controversially, silences the young woman forever. By contrast, in *Belhaven Meridian*, Shabazz Palace's meditative style of music evokes sensations of calm and equanimity without employing the stillness of silence. The songs' tranquility, however, is subtly subverted by the forthright, almost confrontational, messages of front man Ishmael Butler, who delivers passionate, uncompromising "lesson[s] to the weak" for members of American society who "use guns to write [their] poems" with such finesse that their antagonistic energy may pass undetected.

Silence reflects Diouana's loss of selfhood, whereas passionately delivered lyrics juxtaposed against cosmic sounds in *Belhaven Meridian* communicate the young man's determination to challenge the external forces shaping his environment. Sound thus articulates autonomy in *Belhaven Meridian*. The young man's freedom to resist and overpower America's imbalanced social infrastructures is represented by a sophisticated palette of lyrical musings and combative proclamations set to Shabazz Palace's heterogenous blend of introspective, calming, and hazy experimental music. Sometimes known as "avant rap" or "Afro-celestial hip hop," Shabazz Palace's music in the text draws directly from African sources, such as the stringed *mbira* instrument from the *Shona* music of Zimbabwe.[70] The soft and playful *mbira* sounds emerge at the music video's denouement wherein a convoy of motorcyclists in possession of the forged African mask ride into the distance without a fixed destination. Words on the screen respond to a vague question posed during *Belhaven Meridian*'s opening "Where are we going?" with the unspecific yet liberating answer: "Wherever we want." Arthur Jafa calls for Black filmmakers to reimagine African American cinema by exploring the visual equivalences of "samba beats, reggae beats, all kinds of things;"[71] and so, Joseph's visual articulations of the *mbira*'s simple, sweet tones captures the playfulness with which the motorcyclists and Shabazz Palaces reconfigure African sources (the mask and the instrument) in new and exciting ways, controlling the future's destination through styles of their choosing (figs. 5 and 6).

Kodwo Eshun's development of an audio-centric Afrofuturist theory termed "Sonic Fiction" similarly offers a fruitful pathway for understanding how audial modes of expression may maintain concurrent affiliations to divergent cultural contexts. According to Eshun, the processes taking place during the formation of his 'Sonic Fiction' concept open a "new plane [for] the discontinuum of Afrodiasporic Futurism," moving Afrodiasporic arts beyond an exclusively audial realm into new territories within and between

Figure 5. The opening sequence of *Belhaven Meridian*. Screen grab by the author.

Figure 6. The closing sequence of *Belhaven Meridian*. Screen grab by the author.

sonic and visual spaces.[72] Eshun's aesthetical "discontinuum" concept thus encapsulates a "digital diaspora" of humans through "computerhythms, machine mythology and conceptechnics . . . connecting the UK to the United States, the Caribbean to Europe to Africa."[73] Rejecting articulations of a digitised, networked utopia which accounts for and simplistically unites all forms of Afrodiasporic cultures in harmony, the "discontinuum" signifies that there are no aesthetic requirements or universalising logics under-pinning Afrodiasporic art, save for the stipulations that the artist descends from this particular geographical area, and that digital technologies feature

in or contribute to the artwork's formation in some format. Although many artists may choose to imbue their works with political messages or didactic functions explicitly, Eshun maintains that "here sound is unglued from such obligations, until it eludes all social responsibility,"[74] setting sound free from an implicit need to adhere to any particular criteria.[75]

While the Sonic Fiction of Shabazz Palace's music opens up a range of countercultural possibilities and interpretations for its consumers, Diouana's imprisonment is conversely represented by a silent void broken only by her internal thoughts and simmering fury. Although Dalia Rodriquez recognizes that silence may serve as form of empowerment by helping feminists of color "gain clarity as to making sense of racism" so that one may develop the self into "a catalyst for social change," she also warns that silence in the face of such unjust social frameworks possesses certain dangers and risks.[76] Diouana constantly assesses her situation introspectively—roiling at the injustice of her predicament, resisting the colonization of her mind—yet the character only converts these thoughts and ideas into decisive action when she makes the irreversible choice to take her own life. Rodriguez declares that "breaking our silence is critical as marginalized people, leading to changing our social conditions," but at the same time she cautions, "If we remain silent, accept our subordinate position and accept white supremacist notions of being less than, [we] will only contribute to our victimisation."[77] Although one might reason that the protagonist in *La Noire De . . .* liberates herself by deciding to become a martyr, another could counterargue that Diouana's eternal silence in death is a tragic instance of self-erasure. The latter may argue that the character's decision to end her own life fails to challenge the social systems that forced her to such drastic action in the first place.

Whether by accident or design, the music video's ambiguous usage of the forged African mask echoes aspects of *La Noire De . . .* 's focus on gender and race, as well as the complicated, morally ambiguous manner in which Diouana chooses to liberate herself through suicide. Crucially, Black cultural traffic's "capacity to move within black communities"[78] is exemplified by the way *Belhaven Meridian* details a production crew reenacting an impassioned scene from *Killer of Sheep*. In contrast to the ambiguity of the forged African mask's appearance and *Belhaven Meridian*'s possible, yet inconclusive, relationship to *La Noire De . . .*, Burnett's influence in the music video is articulated in univocal terms through inclusion of the film's name as a nondiegetic text-based title. As a result, the music video's scene channels in blatant terms the emotional energy and political significance of *Killer of Sheep's* infamous doorstep scene, a heated altercation between Stan's wife and two criminals.

In *Killer of Sheep*, disillusioned slaughterhouse worker Stan butchers animals for a living while struggling to support his family. During the doorstep scene at the start of "Chapter Four: Be a Man If You Can," two local gang

members knock on the door to Stan's house, seeking a weapon. Stan's wife, however, overhears their doorstep conversation and confronts the gangsters. One gangster responds: "That's the way nature is. An animal has its teeth, and a man has his fists. . . . You be a man if you can, Stan." Stan's wife, incensed, argues: "There's more to it than just rich fists. . . . You use your brain, that's what you use." Her rejection of the neighborhood's gang culture is mirrored by the main character's refusal to succumb to the institutional and localized social structures which, through the prospect of conflict, threaten to endanger his safety. Stan's wife recognizes the tempestuousness of life in Watts yet also emphasizes the sagacity of rejecting gang culture's "idealized notions of hegemonic masculinity."[79] This is in the same vein as the protagonist (in)advertently channeling *La Noire De . . .* 's feminist strategies to resist the cycles of violence that these notions perpetuate.

Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens argue that the "masculine-dominated nature of the music industry is notorious" because "dominant ideologies of gender" have developed and sustained an imbalanced and sexist hegemony in broad societal terms.[80] These gender-based imbalances likewise codify behaviors and actions within the film business. Joan Mellen observes "the fabrication in American films of a male superior to women, defiant, assertive and utterly fearless."[81] Indeed, Joseph's tendency to collaborate is similarly marked by an implicit bias towards the patriarchy, whereby his collaborations with women (Alice Smith, Beyoncé, Kelsey Lu, and FKA Twigs) are dwarfed by his number of partnerships with men (Aloe Blacc, Jafa, Jesse Williams, Kendrick Lamar, Flying Lotus, Sampha, Seu Jorge, Shabazz Palaces, and Storyboard P).[82] While the content of such works as *Belhaven Meridian* mirrors the biases of Joseph's operational procedures and tend to privilege Black men's experiences, Jared Sexton argues that certain examples of contemporary Black independent films offer "a promising counter-cinema wherein a critical appraisal of black masculinity [hitherto neglected and underrepresented] can be more fully developed."[83] Sexton focuses on groundbreaking representations of masculinity in Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight* (2016) and Stephen Dest's *I Am Shakespeare: The Henry Green Story* (2017), which challenge the traditional hegemonies that compartmentalize and thereby deny the merging of masculine and feminine traits in Black men's behavioral patterns. However, in light of Sexton's observations, one must acknowledge that Joseph's *Belhaven Meridian* similarly offers an important filmic representation of Black masculinity that, in the same vein as Jenkins's and Dest's works, defies stereotypes and misassumptions surrounding contemporary constructions of gender and race.

Rather than positioning *Belhaven Meridian* within a Western framework exclusively, it is vital to recognize the work's transmedia *and* transcultural properties. Indeed, by exemplifying "the transnational and transcontinental

cinema that African cinema has become today," [84] the screen text oscillates on the boundaries of African American *and* African filmmaking. In this way the film echoes the ways that *Killer of Sheep* and *La Noire De . . .* overcome "aggressive masculinities" while mimicking the complexity of the unnamed figure's double consciousness. Although "force . . . violence and segregation" often generate or affect the flow of Black cultural traffic, Elam Jr. and Jackson note that "those vicious flows have rarely had the final say in the outcomes of traffic."[85] Lindiwe Dovey's assertion that African film directors promote "the implicit message that making films about violence can help exorcize and explain violence in a way that either the taking up of arms or solely rational, disembodied discussion cannot"[86] is thus supported by *Belhaven Meridian*'s use of African spiritual guidance and the wisdom of an African American housewife to negotiate gang culture's masculinized mentalities. Using an artistic creation rather than "solely rational, disembodied discussion" to consolidate African heritage with contemporary life in Watts, Joseph adopts Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambéty's mantra of "stylistic research [over] the mere recording of facts"[87] and Sembène's theorization of film as "a political instrument of action."[88] Thus, through art's profound ability to oscillate on the boundaries between didacticism and entertainment, one can create a lineage of African and Afro-American filmmakers—in the vein of Sembène, Mambéty, Burnett, and now Joseph—who share "as their cinematic project" the wish to "increase the intensity of the presence" of Africans and African Americans throughout the globe.[89] Vitally, these artists use film to "capture and extend one's imagination"[90] in the hope of forming new realities in the empirical realm which, especially in the case of *Belhaven Meridian*, circumvent cycles of violence fueled by American ghetto culture's toxic masculinity.

Media convergence offers remunerative opportunities for shrewd music industry entrepreneurs because combining film, music video, and digital television properties augments audience sizes and develops new markets. *Belhaven Meridian* thus exemplifies the tensions between art and neoliberal capitalism. The video's amalgamation of media structures commits the cardinal sin of "high art" theory by embracing the commodification of cultural forms as means of promoting Shabazz Palace's music.[91] However, by blurring the boundaries between commercial and "serious" art and, in turn, increasing profit margins for the various stakeholders who are affected by *Belhaven Meridian*'s popularity, Joseph offers a form of Black resistance to the contemporary world order, exploiting an economic framework rooted in colonial capitalism for financial (re)gain. Using Adesokan's crossroads of culture metaphor to illustrate how Joseph's works are "conflicting impulses within a particular system,"[92] I argue that Joseph embraces his position within the framework of neoliberal economics in order to subvert systemic

social configurations and systematic categorizations of film, music video, and advertisement forms. Offering new ways of seeing and thinking as a source of inspiration within the neoliberal order, Joseph converts "weakness into strength" in response to "an increasingly precarious and demanding world" characterized by globalization, commercial competition, and interconnected networks.[93] While Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams seek radical methods of overthrowing capitalism and lambast "building bunkers to resist the encroachments of global neoliberalism,"[94] Jen Harvie supports artistic practices that model "alternative ways of being [and] preserve principles of social collaboration and interdependence."[95] These principles are exemplified by the collaborative and interconnected aspects of Joseph's oeuvre, the crossroads of his Black cultural traffic within market contexts.

While *Belhaven Meridian* does, to an extent, "decline[s] neoliberalism's *celebration* of commodity, market and product,"[96] Joseph's work is inextricably woven into this economic framework. Thus the filmmaker's status as a radical artist[97] is undermined by his dependence on—and, therefore, promotion of—capitalistic structures of production, distribution, and circulation. It is, however, imperative to remember that the tensions wrought by globalized neoliberalism are "both contradictory and complementary;"[98] and so the manner in which Joseph accepts and exploits capitalism's profiteering framework while, simultaneously, subverting conventionalized marketing forms illustrates the crossroads of Black cultural traffic within our contemporaneous economic framework. Although Joseph's new media work does not offer alternative means of existence within the neoliberal order, *Belhaven Meridian* "explore[s] process and craft" rather than entirely focusing on the promulgation of profit-making strategies.[99] The visual text attempts to make sense of the paradoxical, often frustrating world order in which we are bound, articulating the complexities of diasporic double consciousness—from myriad perspectives—by synthesizing distinct media forms across diverse spatiotemporal boundaries.

Film in an Age of Media Convergence: Future Pathways for Africa's Diasporic Cinema

Fears that the music video's "avowedly commercial agenda . . . [as] an advertisement for another cultural form"[100] might symbolize the "eradication of [music's] human element altogether"[101] are quashed by the high standard of recent online releases set by exemplars of contemporary Black Excellence, like Joseph and his brand of visual text hybridizations.

The music video has undergone rapid transformations since MTV's collapse as the mode's primary broadcasting platform. At the turn of the

century—as MTV audience numbers were starting to decline—television, which had replaced cinema as the "cultural dominant" of the era,[102] was, in turn, challenged by the rising popularity of the internet. In 2020, the internet's prevalence permits digital access to music videos and other forms of new media through mobile phones, laptop computers, virtual worlds, and interactive installations. This leads Steven Shaviro to define this historical moment as a "post-cinematic" epoch wherein small screens supersede "the big screen."[103]

In this post-cinematic era, however, one must not consign filmmaking practices to oblivion by falsely assuming that "cinema is dead."[104] Chuck Tyron, addressing the ambivalent status of cinema in our age of media convergence, notes the "very definition of what constitutes a film text is subject to reinterpretation;"[105] and Philippe Dubois argues cinema is "more alive, more multi-faceted, more abundant than ever" as a result of the "increasingly boundless diversity of its forms and practices."[106] Film and new media both use moving images to "represent human experience imaginatively,"[107] fictionalizing experiences by drawing the universe into a "circumscribed artificial, yet human, space"[108] so that we, the viewers, may better understand the world, our neighbors, and ourselves. As well as answering Bogle's call for a "new black cinema" for Afro-America,[109] Joseph's audiovisual work can be situated within frameworks for African filmmaking practices because, as Martin N. Ndlela acknowledges, "flows and patterns of flows in social media are constantly shaping and reshaping contemporary African film cultures."[110]

Amalgamating distinct media qualities in order to articulate the complexity of double consciousness in our digitalized, neoliberal era, *Belhaven Meridian* operates as an item of Black cultural traffic "reconstituting and reenergizing" cultural forms,[111] and exemplifying how African cinema "deconstructs single identity discourses in both the North and South."[112] While the lens of African film theory is a valuable paradigm through which to process and negotiate the text, it is important for future Joseph scholars to position his audiovisual works in relation to key African *and* African American film concepts, thereby enriching cinema's *respective* and, simultaneously, *entwined* theoretical branches.[113] This article thus concludes that Joseph's new media works, fluctuating at the crossroads between film, music video, and advertisement theories and structures, teach important lessons about the experiential dynamics of cultural pluralism. The "revolutionary" nature of blackness in myriad forms inspires millions globally irrespective of the color of their skin,[114] and humanity will together share a diverse, networked world "that is at last recognized in all its complexity"[115] once we embrace the multiplicity of human experiences from Africa, America, Britain, and beyond. We take valuable steps towards liberation by recognizing the intricacies of diasporic consciousness(es), expanding our perspectives, and decolonizing our minds.

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Notes

1. See Lauren McLeod Cramer, "Holding Blackness in Suspension: A Study," Curator's Note, *In Media Res*, October 10, 2016, http://mediacommons.org/imr/2016/10/10/holding-blackness-suspension-study.

2. Lauren McLeod Cramer, "Icons of Catastrophe: Diagramming Blackness in Until the Quiet Comes," *liquid blackness* 4, no. 7 (2017).

3. Charles P. Linscott, "Secret Histories and Visual Riffs, or, Miles Davis, Alice Coltrane, and Flying Lotus Go to the Movies," IN FOCUS: Modes of Black Liquidity: Music Video as Black Art, special issue, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 2 (Winter 2020).

4. James Tobias, "The Music Film as Essay: Montage as Argument in Kahlil Joseph's Fly Paper and Process," IN FOCUS: Modes of Black Liquidity: Music Video as Black Art, special issue, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 2 (Winter 2020).

5. See Johanna Hartmann, "Sound, Vision, and Embodied Performativity in Beyoncé Knowles' Visual Album Lemonade (2016)," *European Journal of American Studies* 12 no. 4 (2017); Zeffie Gaines, "A Black Girl's Song Misogynoir, Love, and Beyoncé's Lemonade," *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 16 no. 2 (2018); Phoebe Macrossan, "Intimacy, Authenticity and 'Worlding' in Beyoncé's Star Project," in *Popular Music, Stars and Stardom*, ed. Stephen Loy, Julie Rickwood, and Samantha Bennett (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018); and *The Lemonade Reader: Beyoncé, Black Feminism and Spirituality*, ed. Kinitra D. Brooks and Kameelah L. Martin (New York: Routledge, 2019).

6. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 477.

7. See Olivier Barlet, *Contemporary African Cinema* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016); *African Film Cultures: Contexts of Creation and Circulation*, ed. Winston Mano, Barbara Knorpp, and Añulika Agina (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); and Valérie K. Orlando, *New African Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

8. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, Bucks*, 477.

9. See Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (London: Duke University Press, 2016); and Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, Bucks*.

10. Anjali Prabhu, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 1.

11. Orlando, *New African Cinema*, 84.

12. See Barlet, *Contemporary African Cinema* and Orlando, *New African Cinema*.

13. Jean-Godefroy Bidima, *La philosophie negro-africaine* (Paris: PUS, 1995), 115.

14. Ousmane Sembène in conversation with Harold Weaver. "Interview with Ousmane Sembène," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 10, no. 1/2, (1980): 14–20.

15. See Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: Youtube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Steven Shaviro, "The Pinocchio Theory," *The Pinocchio Theory (Shaviro),* January 26 2007, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=547; and *Digital Music Videos* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017); as well as *Music/Video: History, Aesthetics, Media*, ed. Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kristy Fairclough, and Michael Goddard (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

16. See Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Akin Adesokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Naminata Diabate, "Re-Imagining West African Women's Sexuality: Pierre Bekolo's Les Saignantes and the Mevoungou," in *Development, Modernism and Modernity in Africa*, ed. Augustine Agwuele (New York: Routledge, 2011); Prabhu, *Contemporary Cinema of Africa and the Diaspora*; Barlet, *Contemporary African Cinema*; *African Filmmaking: Five Formations*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017); *African Film Cultures: Contexts of Creation and Circulation*; and Orlando, *New African Cinema*.

17. See John Mercer, "Two Basic Functions of Cinema," *Journal of the University Film Producers Association* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1953); Chuck Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

18. See Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, 1949) and Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

19. Tricia Rose, "Foreword," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. Harry J. Elam Jr., Kennell Jackson, and the American Council of Learned Societies (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), viii.

20. Adesokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics*, 10–11. Emphasis mine.

21. Cramer, "Icons of Catastrophe," 143.

22. Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Hutchinson [1973] 1980), 128–38.

23. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? [What is an author?] Lecture 1969," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 113.

24. See Stewart E. Tolnay, "The African American Great Migration and Beyond," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29, California: Annual Reviews, (2003): 209–32; and Thomas Adams Upchurch, *Legislating Racism: The Billion Dollar Congress and the Birth of Jim Crow* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2015).

25. Los Angeles Almanac, *Historical General Population City & County of Los Angeles, 1850 to 2010* (2020), http://www.laalmanac.com/population/po02.php.

26. Jill A. Edy, *Troubled Pasts: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2006), 37–38; and Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A. (Race and Culture in the American West)* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 22–45.

27. Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 186.

28. Edy, *Troubled pasts*, 37–38.

29. Anthony Oberschall, "The Los Angeles Riot of August 1965," *Social Problems* 15, no. 3 (Winter 1968): 322–41.

30. See David O. Sears, "Black Attitudes toward the Political System in the Aftermath of the Watts Insurrection," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 4 (November 1969): 515–44 and A. T. Callinicos, "Meaning of Los Angeles Riots," *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 30, July 25, 1992, 1603–6.

31. Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, Paul M. Ong, Andre Comandon, William A. Darity Jr., and Darrick Hamilton, "Fifty Years after the Kerner Commission Report: Place, Housing, and Racial Wealth Inequality in Los Angeles," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (September 2018): 160–84.

32. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 30.

33. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 14.

34. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A C McClurg, 1903).

35. Vernallis, *Unruly Media*.

36. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 8.

37. Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, 130.

38. Halifu Osumare, "Global Hip Hop and the African Diaspora," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. Harry J. Elam Jr., Kennell Jackson, and American Council of Learned Societies (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 267.

39. See *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes*, directed by Byron Hurt (2006; Media Education Foundation), DVD; and Mireille Miller-Young, "Hip-Hop Honeys and Da Hustlaz: Black Sexualities in the New Hip-Hop Pornography," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8, no. 1 (2008).

40. Charles Burnett—alongside Haile Gerima, Julie Dash, Larry Clark, and several other UCLA graduates from the late 1960s to the late1980s—is associated with the L.A. Rebellion movement, sometimes known as the UCLA Rebellion or the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers. These filmmakers attempted to create quality Black films as an alternative to Hollywood cinema. They found inspiration from Latin American and African films. See Aboubakar Sanogo, "Reconsidering the Sembènian Project: Toward an Aesthetics of Change," in *Critical Approaches to African Cinema Discourse*, ed. Frank Ukadike (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 220.

41. See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and Vernallis, *Unruly Media*.

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43. Vlad Dima, "Ousmane Sembene's *La Noire De . . .* : Melancholia in Photo, Text, and Film," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2014): 56.

44. Sanogo, "Reconsidering the Sembènian Project," 220.

45. Alessandra Raengo, "Suspension, Revisited," *In Media Res: A Media Commons Project*, October 13, 2016, http://mediacommons.org/imr/2016/10/14 /suspension-revisited.

46. Howie Movshovitz, in conversation with Robert Siegel, "Long-Lost Classic 'Killer of Sheep' Hits Theaters," *NPR Transcripts*, March 29, 2007, https://www.npr.org /transcripts/9213673?t=1579783433354.

47. James Naremore, *Charles Burnett: A Cinema of Symbolic Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 100.

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49. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin; ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1973, 1980).

50. Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, 460.

51. Hall, "Encoding/decoding," 18.

52. Jon Kirby, "Ishmael Butler's Shabazz Palaces is heavy yet fleeting Afro-celestial experience," *Wax Poetics*, no. 51 (Summer 2012), https://www.waxpoetics.com/blog/features /articles/ishmael-butlers-shabazz-palaces-heavy-yet-fleeting-afro-celestial-experience/.

53. Ishmael Butler, in conversation with Laura Snoad, "Telepathic Relations: An Interview With Shabazz Palaces," *The Quietus*, September 2, 2014, https://thequietus. com/articles/16120-shabazz-palaces-ishmael-butler-interview.

54. See Miguel Cullen, "Shabazz Palaces—Inside Avant Rap's Soul," *The Independent*, October 22, 2011, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features /shabazz-palaces-inside-avant-raps-soul-2302219.html; and Atoosa Moinzadeh, "Tendai Maraire on Shabazz Palaces, Musical Prophecies and Bridging American and African Cultures," *Paste Magazine*, September 9, 2016, https://www.pastemagazine.com /articles/2016/09/tendai-maraire-on-shabazz-palaces-musical-propheci.html.

55. Jon Burke, "Shabazz Palaces—Quazarz: Born on a Gangster Star / Quazarz VS The Jealous Machines," *Soundblab*, July 18, 2017, https://soundblab.com/reviews /albums/18721-shabazz-palaces-quazarz-born-on-a-gangster-star-quazarz-vs-the-jealous -machines.

56. Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 9. Emphasis mine.

57. "Meridian," Vocabulary.com, 2020, https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary /meridian.

58. Ibid.

59. Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 240.

60. Greenwich Royal Observatory in Britain was originally selected to host the world's Prime Meridian, the point from which every place on Earth is measured in terms of distance east or west, because 72 percent of the world's commerce in the late nineteenth

century depended on sea charts based at this location. Derek Howse, *Greenwich Time and the Longitude* (London: Phillip Wilson Publishers Ltd., 1997).

61. Several amateur music blogs claim that Ernest Waddell's presence in the music video indicates a cameo appearance from *The Wire*'s character Dante. While elements of Dante's character, which are carried over from the original television series, subvert stereotypes associated with hypersexual and hyperaggressive straight Black men, the actions of Dante and his boyfriend Omar complicate this reading because the pair earn money stealing from and threatening drug dealers. Dante's actions throughout the television series contradict the behavioral patterns of *Belhaven Meridian*'s protagonist who, instead, actively attempts to circumvent violence and law breaking by channelling the spirituality of the forged African mask. At the time of writing this article, the music video's character remains officially unnamed by Kahlil Joseph, *Belhaven Meridian*, and the What Matters Most artists' collective.

62. See Robert Bleakley, *African Masks* (New York: St Martins Press, 1978); Eberhard Fischer, and Hans Himmelheber, *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa* (Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1984); and Manuel Jordán, "Chokwe: Art and Initiation among Chokwe and Related Peoples," *African Arts* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1999).

63. See Marie-Denise Shelton, "Fakes, Fakers, and Fakery: Authenticity in African Art," *African Arts* 9, no. 3 (April 1976): 20–31, 48–74, and 92 and Christopher B. Steiner, *African Art in Transit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

64. Du Bois, 215.

65. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 127.

66. See Barbara C. Johnson, , *Four Dan Sculptors: Continuity and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Elisabeth L. Cameron, "Women=Mask: Initiation Arts in North-Western Province, Zambia," *African Arts* 31, no. 2 (1998): 93; and Alisa LaGamma, "Recent Acquisitions, A Selection: 2003–2004," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* n.s. 62, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 46–48.

67. Gorham H. Kindem and Martha Steele, "*Emitai* and *Ceddo*: Women in Sembene's Films," *Jump Cut*, no. 36 (May 1991): 56.

68. Jude G. Akudinobi, "Durable Dreams: Dissent, Critique, and Creativity in Faat Kiné and Moolaadé," *Meridians—Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 6, no. 2 (2006): 181.

69. See James W. Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson, *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia, Volume I* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 30; and *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes.*

70. Cullen, "Shabazz Palaces."

71. Arthur Jafa, "69," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent, Michele Wallace, and Dia Center for the Arts (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 249–54.

72. Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun* (London: Quartet Books [1998]1999): 00[-003]).

73. Ibid., 00[-004].

74. Ibid., 00[-004].

75. While the rejection of "all social responsibility" initially sounds an aloof, imprudent move, Eshun argues that such radical steps are necessary to unlock the experiential potential of "Sonic Fiction." Although Eshun's theorization of an Afrofuturist type of sound adopts, in part, "a cruel, despotic, amoral attitude towards the human species" void

of affections or loyalties (*More Brilliant Than the Sun*, 00[-005]), the critic insists that the most "human" moments of personal experience may be facilitated, even intensified, by the presence of machinery. Therefore, Sonic Fiction in *Belhaven Meridian* is not "sonically speaking . . . one of disembodiment but the exact reverse: it's a *hyperembodiment*" (ibid., 00[-002], his emphasis). Joseph's work uses technological innovation to enhance our understanding of what it means to be human, adopting new sound and image technologies to explore the convergence of African, American and European understandings of the self, the soul.

76. Dalia Rodriquez, "Silent Rage and the Politics of Resistance: Countering Seductions of Whiteness and the Road to Politicization and Empowerment," *Qualitative Inquiry* 17, no.7 (2011): 589–90.

77. Ibid., 590–96.

78. *Black Cultural Traffic*, 6.

79. Messerschmit, *Masculinities and Crime*, 111.

80. Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Oh Boy!: Masculinities and Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3.

81. Joan Mellen, *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in American Film* (1978; reprt. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 3.

82. On the broader level of "unseen" personnel assisting the production of his projects, Joseph frequently collaborates with his wife Onye Anyanwu as producer. Yet his other regular collaborators in terms of production and cinematography—Malik Sayeed, Matthew J. Lloyd, and Omid Fatemi—are predominantly men.

83. Jared Sexton, *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017), xxvii.

84. Orlando, *New African Cinema*, vii..

85. *Black Cultural Traffic*, 17.

86. Dovey, *African Film and Literature,* 277.

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113. Academic discussions of underexplored media, such as *The Model* and *Black Up*, in relation to African film theories would propel Kahlil Joseph scholarship into exciting new territories.

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