

"UNTIL THE QUIET COMES" (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.



Icons of Catastrophe:

Diagramming Blackness in *Until the Quiet Comes*

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Kahlil Joseph's "Until the Quiet Comes" is a short film about a series of miraculous and catastrophic events. The camera moves gracefully through a dreamy Los Angeles sunset as black children play and, as if it were predestined, die. Then, without warning, bodies begin to move gracefully in reverse while the world around them continues to move forward. Finally, in the dramatic conclusion of the film, a man bleeding from bullet wounds on the ground miraculously rises and begins to dance. He removes his bloodstained shirt and, evidently, the finality of death. Then, he enters a car and drives off into the night. The film moves effortlessly between different settings and times, without giving viewers a sense of direction, but this stunning possibility for change (and even reanimation) does not feel like a traditional happy ending. In fact, as the dancer rides away in a lowrider playfully

leaning to the right, the camera pans to an ambulance parked on the street. It is possible the emergency vehicle arrived in response to the dancer's wounds, but now its red flashing lights illuminate the entire neighborhood with a warning signal. Even as the film fades to black—the editing transition and color that has become cinema's definitive last word—this discontinuous narrative about black bodies remains incomplete and in suspension.

The central conceit of "Until the Quiet Comes" is contradiction. The film subjects viewers to violence that is horrific yet beautifully surreal and to an unending cycle of death and vibrancy. Similarly, we see blackness through the contradictory forces that shape it, boundless possibility and crushing confinement. Instead of coming apart at these formal and thematic fault lines, Joseph's film finds balance between

its oppositional spatiotemporal organizations. As a result, it visualizes the aesthetic possibilities of “holding blackness in suspension.” Suspension presents a provocative set of aesthetic possibilities because allowing blackness to float means unmooring it from the histories, policies, and technologies that cohere the notion of blackness, most notably in the realm of representation. Thus, seeing suspension is admittedly complicated. Perhaps fitting of its contradictory style and content, the way “Until the Quiet Comes” renders a seemingly weightless image of blackness is by becoming denser, diagramming blackness’s many forms of expression simultaneously and consequently redistributing the forms of knowledge that rely on blackness to establish the humanity, freedom, and value of others. As a result, the suspended aesthetics of Joseph’s film not only critique the specious task of representing



FIGURE 1. “UNTIL THE QUIET COMES” (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.

WE SEE BLACKNESS THROUGH THE CONTRADICTIONARY FORCES THAT SHAPE IT: BOUNDLESS POSSIBILITY AND CRUSHING CONFINEMENT

blackness, they disrupt the cultural logics that are sustained—literally grounded—by blackness.

The idea of suspension is evoked in “Until the Quiet Comes” in multiple ways; the term aptly describes Matthew J. Lloyd’s gliding cinematography and literally refers to the motif of water and floating that provides a thematic connection to the discontinuous narrative. These two kinds of suspension are not contradictory, but they explicate the complexity of suspension when its

colloquial and technical definitions are placed side by side. For example, the film opens underwater with shots of bubbles effortlessly gliding to the surface. Like the film’s cinematography, the shots of bubbles are dreamy, ethereal, boundless, and almost immaterial. However, in the next shot red fabric swirls underwater and slowly it becomes clear that it is clothing that belongs to a submerged body. Despite the possibility that the person has drowned, the shot still *feels* quiet

and serene and this small addition to the frame is a reminder that the only reason a body feels weightless underwater is because, technically, suspension occurs when a mass is disbursed through the bulk of a fluid. There is actually nothing weightless or immaterial about suspension; in fact, water and gravity are exerting pressure against each other and the position of the body is a result of being caught in the middle of this tension. This distinction is important because it signals the difference

between the visual effect of suspension (hovering and lightness) and the process that creates suspension (force and pressure). Thus, seeing blackness being held in suspension in “Until the Quiet Comes” begins with identifying the points of tension within the whole, including the places where blackness, which will always exceed the frame, and the representational image, which aspires to absolute visibility, come together.

Fortunately, hip-hop provides a vocabulary for these potential places for suspension because it has been referring to oppositional points as “joints” for decades. Used to describe a good song (which likely includes sampling), a popular place, prison, or a marijuana cigarette, joints refer to the sites where varied things and people come together. Similarly, Spike Lee refers to his films as “joints,” which is an accurate description of the tension between

his film style and the established meanings of blackness in visual culture. In each case, regardless of the appropriateness of their combination, joints are the points of articulation that bring together black bodies and “black cultural traffic” that sustains race relations in the image.¹ For instance, the editing and narrative in Joseph’s film is not traditionally continuous; instead of utilizing traditional cinematic techniques to mask its style or even the cut, the film actually draws attention to transitions between shots and settings using expressive cinematography, semi-diegetic inserts, and jump cuts. Yet, “Until the Quiet Comes” still manages a kind of connectedness by drawing parallels between the film’s real spaces and times and those created by the film’s style. The story takes place in the Nickerson Gardens housing projects in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and the film translates

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the spatial concerns of the heavily surveilled housing project that limits black bodies' options for mobility aesthetically through the use of formal techniques like tight framing and discontinuous editing that similarly deny characters space. The result is a story about blackness as a particular (restricted) spatial arrangement. The fact that a close-up or a change in screen directions cannot be exclusively linked to blackness affirms the value of attending to the joints, especially those that are already overdetermined like the mediated history of Watts, as the key to understanding the apparent blackness that is the sum of these parts.

The approach this essay is offering to understand blackness being suspended across the film's diegetic and non-diegetic spaces through close reading of the joints mirrors

an architectural practice called diagramming. The film briefly tells the story of two black people, a child and a man, who face the restraining forces of both literal and figurative racialized architectures and the question of suspension asks how these characters, their blackness, and the blackness of the film can float between the meanings that attempt to fix them. Architectural diagrams are similarly seeking detachment and other modes of existence; diagrams are renderings that visualize all of the possible arrangements of a structure, considering how its joints could be alternatively arranged. Of course, borrowing from architectural theory and practice means acknowledging its unique terminology and that includes the architectural definition of suspension, which is the technique of distributing a mass across multiple grounding points. As I have already suggested about holding blackness in suspension, architectural suspension

not only affects the floating object, but also the laws of the world around it. Because mass is actually a measure of an object's gravitational force, when a weighty architecture is suspended it can become "light" because it is technically not subject to the singular pull of gravity. Architecture is therefore offering suspension as a way to defy gravity. Something similar happens when suspension is introduced in the image because our world, that is made knowable through the image and is fundamentally ordered around anti-blackness, would be radically—even catastrophically—reorganized by images of blackness that float.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to speak directly to this essay's methodological intentions. There is a clear disciplinary divide between visual culture studies and architectural theory that I hope to bridge for the specific reason of

shifting attention away from the beautiful and violent imagery in “Until the Quiet Comes” to the beauty and violence in its construction. The former, a representational reading of the film’s transgressive moments, like the dancer’s reanimation, returns us to familiar concerns about imaging black life on screen (Is this film too violent? Does it represent the black experience?). For example, the dancer’s “survival” affirms the value of black lives and is a welcome respite from images of black death; on the other, as we have seen in other films about black strength and resilience, the conclusion could be used to reinforce racist claims about the black body’s ability to endure pain or to attest to the strength of white bodies. Suspension disrupts the existing order (racial violence), but the joints formed in its wake can be liberating (pro-black) or devastating (anti-blackness); it should be noted that the results are *unsettling* in



FIGURE 2. THE SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART (LINA BO BARDI, 1968).

SHIFTING ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE BEAUTIFUL AND VIOLENT IMAGERY IN “UNTIL THE QUIET COMES” TO THE BEAUTY AND VIOLENCE IN ITS CONSTRUCTION

more than one way. Diagramming is a kind of close reading not unlike the methodologies used in visual culture, but because the diagram is an abstract expression of a structure's internal relations and clears space for alternative possibilities, it does the non-representational and speculative work of suspension while anticipating all of the other (liberating or dangerous) ways the joints could be formed. This essay will begin by exploring the joints in Joseph's film, particularly the visual

articulations that the filmmaker borrows from other racialized architectures; then it will consider what it means to use diagrammatic analysis to open up these joints and find alternative pressure points to initiate suspension; finally, it will conclude with a close reading that considers the potentially catastrophic results of placing blackness in suspension, or creating an image of anti-gravitational blackness.

Kahlil Joseph is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker whose surreal imagery, rich

textures, and moody cinematography have appeared in vastly different cultural spaces: on concert stages for thousands of fans at Kendrick Lamar/Kanye West concerts, in advertisements for the designer fashion label Kenzo, at both the Sundance and Toronto International Film festivals, Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, and on MTV. These varied outlets are examples of the way the filmmaker and his work move between filmic genres and use unexpected influences

from fine art and popular culture to make meaningful alterations to familiar forms. For example, his stylized documentary *Wildcat* (2013) is an all-black Western. Often, he creates these juxtapositions by combining under-theorized genres with iconic imagery. The same is true of “Until the Quiet Comes,” which is a critically acclaimed work and the Special Jury Award for Short Film from the prestigious Sundance Film Festival at the same time it is a music video for an album of the same title by Flying Lotus that features the familiar iconography of hip-hop videos including dancing, inner-city streets, and violence.

Joseph’s genre-play is important, because invoking familiar imagery is one way “Until the Quiet Comes” builds a distinctly black architecture. The film brings black bodies together in a historically dangerous place and dictates their ability to move

around in these structures; thus, “Until the Quiet Comes” expresses the logic of racializing assemblages, which Alexander Weheliye explains “represent, among other things, the visual modalities in which dehumanization is practiced and lived.”² Like the repeated deployment of certain cinematic forms, the racializing assemblage is responsible for making events appear natural, commonsensical, and even lovely. Watts is not only a geographical location, it is a visual culture of striking images of broken windows and black bodies silhouetted in front of a backdrop of flames. As a result, a shot of a streetlight illuminating the edges of the dancer’s bloodied body in “Until the Quiet Comes” fits perfectly and logically into an image repertoire that precedes it by a half century and is inextricable from the history of American photojournalism and television. However, these joints, where familiar formal markers come

together to make the new appear old, are not always stable. These joints can be disarticulated so that the representational weight of Joseph’s stylistic and thematic allusions can be rearranged into a black structure that is not brutalizing to black bodies.

Suspension is not an effect of a change in material or social conditions but in methodology, so when “Until the Quiet Comes” utilizes the same technologies and visual styles as other short films and videos, those that have traditionally grounded blackness in the visual realm, it is an example of the effect of the film’s diagrammatic process. The diagram is a tool that maps a structure’s joints, identifying and superimposing all of the places it could be alternatively oriented while remaining intact. Architect and theorist Peter Eisenman, who has likely contributed more to the theorization of the diagram

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than any other architect, explains the function of the diagram is synthesizing the structure's past, present, and possible future to reveal its "interiority," which explains the design's fundamental consistencies, its capacity to change, and its material limitations. At any singular point in time and space it would be impossible to see all of these things and appreciate their common denominator; thus, interiority is necessarily unrepresentable.³ "Until the Quiet Comes" mimics these processes using Lloyd's fluid cinematography to alternatively map the diegetic space while the nonlinear editing creates the diagram's complicated temporality that flattens many times into one image.

As a diagrammatic film, "Until the Quiet Comes" is a combination of hip-hop's adaptive style and an architectural practice. The notion of a hip-hop diagram is particularly

interesting for two reasons: first, it is an image of what blackness has yet to build and second, because revealing the anti-black forces that operate as the interiority of our world could cause irreparable harm to a structure that is (externally) ordered around principles like universal freedom and equality. Blackness is the "absented presence" in the world, meaning it is not simply excluded, it serves its function in the world by being radically outside of it.⁴ As a result, censoring images of black exclusion, absence, and pain is not a radical or even counter-visual strategy because dispossessed blackness is the status quo. Diagramming, like black studies, makes a commitment to the absent figure.⁵ In lieu of traditional techniques that resist visibility or legibility, the diagrammatic film confronts the representational image by demanding it shows more, suggesting the possible

disarticulation of blackness in the world that devalues it must be initiated from the inside. For example, the film's diagrammatic nonlinear chronology shows us black people enjoying life after we have seen their deaths; unfortunately, that reorientation is incapable of ending the debate about whether or not black lives matter because diagrams do not destroy the structures they analyze, but that diagram does reveal the interior fraudulence of the response "all lives matter" to a culture that presumes to be built on that promise.

The chaos caused by the diagram is an example of suspension because, as Eisenman explains, the diagram hovers in the space between figure/ground, form/function, and sign/signified.⁶ Unlike linguistic signs that have an arbitrary relationship to their signified, making it easier to imagine remixing language, architectural signs

are internally "motivated" because they have a material and structural relationship to their signified.⁷ For example, a column is an architectural form that is aligned with its function, so it must literally bear the weight of a building.⁸ The diagram needs to be the catalyst for un-motivating the sign. Of course, the diagram cannot eliminate the column, as the structure will topple over. Instead, the diagram need to perform the somewhat contradictory work of *un-building*, by allowing architects to rework existing designs and establish spatial relationships that remain vague and open to change.⁹ Thus, a diagrammatic methodology is clearing a path to suspending the historically overdetermined image of blackness by rendering all possible iterations of blackness across space and time. Thus, it aids the challenge of conceiving, let alone visualizing, the ontology of blackness outside of the conditions of slavery. As Frank

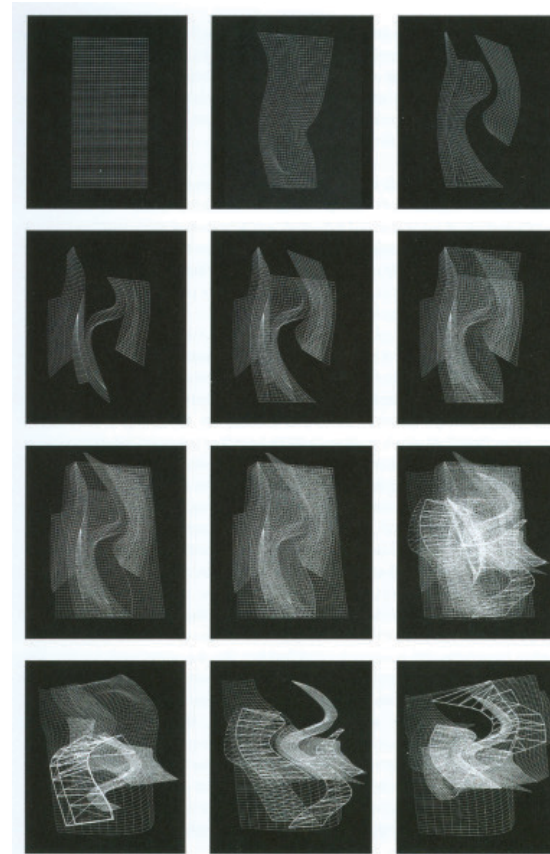


Figure 3. Diagram Concept Images of Staten Island Institute for Arts and Sciences (Peter Eisenman, 1997-98).

BLACKNESS IS THE “ABSENTED PRESENCE” IN THE WORLD, MEANING IT NOT SIMPLY EXCLUDED, IT SERVES ITS FUNCTION IN THE WORLD BY BEING RADICALLY OUTSIDE OF IT

Wilderson III explains, “the onus is not on the one who posits the Master/Slave dichotomy, but on the one who argues there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness. How, when, and where did such a split occur?”¹⁰ The diagram makes that split visible. Moreover, in the process of rendering a mobile and flexible image of blackness, the diagram un-motivates blackness from every structure it supports. The structure may remain erect, but the joints are changed.

Diagramming is a repeating cycle of generation and degeneration because every un-motivated architectural joint will produce another point of articulation; as a result, diagrams exist in a feedback loop with themselves, paradoxically instigating their own destruction.¹¹ Simply, the diagram is “an icon of catastrophe.”¹² Yet, as the column example explains, a diagrammatic catastrophe that *un-motivates* and *un-builds* the architectural form is not actually destructive. Indeed,

mathematician René Thom developed catastrophe theory to predict and interpret the places where mounting pressure results in overturnings and the beginning of new systems. If suspension is catastrophic to the existing structure, catastrophe theory helps us identify the point when enough equal pressure is created for flotation. For instance, how much can a dead man dance before the meaning of death must change? At any scale, catastrophes “represent abrupt transformation across a

continuous surface,” meaning holding a paper with two hands and gently applying pressure towards the center constitutes a (mini) catastrophe.¹³ Eventually, the paper will create a ripple, a “cusp,” but it will not tear. Diagramming proliferates potential architectural joints that are like the mounting pressure applied a piece of paper that represents a spatiotemporal plane; thus, the process of diagramming is inherently catastrophic and, not surprisingly, catastrophes are visualized via diagrams.

To summarize: a diagrammatic process brings a joint’s many spatiotemporal organizations onto the same page and attempts to maintain this catastrophic chaos as long as possible before conditions return to equilibrium; in this case, the result is disbursing blackness’s mass across these different joints and suspending it above the things that

burden it. The imagination of black visual culture seems available for a methodology that seeks catastrophe because, as James Baldwin explains, black people can consider these possibilities because they “never had anything to lose.”¹⁴ At every scale, anti-black architectures pull apart the structural joints that value and support black bodies, from the family to diasporic identity. Yet, the violence does not stop there; it is formalized in the new dehumanizing structures. This is no different from the diagrammatic practice being offered in this essay, but Joseph’s film attempts to orient that same violence toward those anti-black architectures and suspend it by refusing to be subsumed by a new rule of law. Specifically, diagramming performs its disruptive function by creating a spatiotemporal crisis. Diagramming produces an excess of forms from alternative times and spaces and allows them to exist at once. As a

result, maintaining the current order becomes untenable and the results are catastrophic until there is a return to the status quo. For example, consider the distress and the struggle to regain power/order in historical moments when the *de jure* and *de facto* definitions of blackness were momentarily held in suspension like during Reconstruction in the U.S. The function of diagramming structures like “Until the Quiet Comes” is to stop making the subjugation of black bodies feel familiar by making it clear that violence is not an unintended side-effect, but a structural necessity in the formation and deformation of anti-black architectures. Yet, the return to equilibrium always threatens to reveal what Saidiya Hartman soberly refers to as “the limits of emancipation.”¹⁵

The loosely constructed narrative in “Until the Quiet Comes” addresses catastrophic violence against black



FIGURE 4. "UNTIL THE QUIET COMES" (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.

bodies in very clear terms, but the film's form is responsible for un-motivating that violence. It is certainly feasible that diagrammatic analysis could be performed on any film by identifying the joints and superimposing the alternative configurations, but Joseph's film is interesting because a case can be made that the film does this work itself by both representing and annotating. In other words, this essay's close reading is simply following along. It is easy to observe the sudden shift in the equilibrium in Joseph's film, in which a miraculous reversal from the constraints of time and space allows a dead man and bodies in an infamous ghetto to move freely forward and backward in time. Catastrophes are rarely subtle. However, the film's diagrammatic analysis of its own joints, which are primarily performed by the gliding cinematography, indicate the tipping point that creates this upheaval

comes about a minute earlier. These moments are like plots on a graph that correspond to the catastrophic fold—before, during, and after—and each of these segments presents its own formal possibilities.

The first section of “Until the Quiet Comes” is about “diagrammatic inevitability,” the parameters established by an architecture’s interiority that determine its potential for change. In the case of the film, a world that relies on (aestheticized) violence against black bodies limits the possibilities for black life.¹⁶ The film opens underwater with disorienting shots of floating bubbles and a tangle of red fabric, so not until the first scene where viewers have some sense of time and space does the film begin to make note of the alternatives. The first scene in the film begins with a long shot of an empty concrete pool surrounded by palm trees. The camera tracks

forward to reveal a child standing in the pool, staring off into the distance. Then the camera cuts to a low angle shot of the boy and the camera slowly rises as if to prepare for his next move, slowly raising his hand in the shape of a gun and firing his imaginary weapon. The camera cuts to the reverse shot and, inexplicably, an imaginary bullet ricochets off of the curved sides of the pool, hitting four walls before hitting the child. The scene ends with a shot of the boy lying on the concrete as a massive amount of blood pours in a graphic curve out of his body and stains the ground.

The architecture of this early scene requires the boy’s death. Not until this scene does the film incorporate continuity editing, like the way the trigger of the gun triggers the reverse shots of the pool’s walls surrounding the child. Thus, the death of the black child is a motivated sign in

this (cinematic) world-building and, like the column example, removing his death would pull the film apart. Similarly, what appeared to be a non-diegetic insert of floating red fabric in the opening now makes visual sense through its graphic similarity to the bloody, wet red curve. Visually, the death justifies the film’s prelude so that, even retroactively, this film’s discontinuities gain coherence via the death of the child. The opening section maps the deterministic architecture of the racialized assemblage where violence against a black body can be anticipated. The irony is that the child cannot participate entirely in this world—he does not even have a real gun. Yet, any violence visualized in the process of building this world always lands on the black body, so that he becomes its (literal) ground.

The beginning of “Until the Quiet Comes” is distinctly “graphic;”

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seeing a child die alone on the hard and barren concrete of an empty man-made pool that is slowly being surrounded by red blood in saturated color is boundary pushing even in hip-hop visual culture.¹⁷ The only elided event in the opening is the actual force of the bullet penetrating the black “flesh.” Thus, this part of the filmic diagram makes it clear that even the possible ways black death can be imagined are constrained and determined by the architectures that death supports. Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson explain the impossibility of rendering violence against the black body in the architecture of the Human as “the position of the unthought.”¹⁸ To be clear, this moment of bloodshed is not impossible to visualize because it is too horrific, rather it cannot be expressed as violence because “blackness disarticulates the notion of consent.”¹⁹ A body that is defined as violable cannot be a victim and

violence that is constitutive cannot be considered damage. The purpose of un-motivating the black body is removing it from the architectural function that requires its subjection.

True to Joseph’s referential style, the specific way the horror of the child’s death and the beauty of the setting are combined to disavow the brutality of the moment is a well-worn racial trope that has existed in visual culture since slavery called the pornotrope. Borne out of the physical and sexual domination of slavery, the pornotrope is an anti-black architectural joint that uses erotic imagery to modulate violence against the black body. Consider the aesthetics of the plantation film that incorporates slaves into the architecture of grand homes and their lush landscapes. Sofia Coppola’s recent decision to remake the Southern gothic *The Beguiled* (Siegel, 1971) without any slaves is

a striking example of the pernicious nature of this architectural joint because, as perhaps Coppola failed to realize, the suffering of slaves is the backdrop of the erotics of the genre regardless of their absence on screen. Sexual pleasure creates the space for rapture away from the actual cruelty of transforming a black body into flesh.²⁰ The pornotrope is therefore the perfect example of an architectural joint. Diagramming this hinge visualizes the spatial relationship between blackness's form (violation) and function (white delight and affirmation). Moreover, the pornotrope is part of the process of constituting the boundary between bodies and flesh; thus, the pornotrope has a "motivated" relationship to Human architecture. However, a diagram that superimposes the pornotrope's contradictory impulses reveals its precarious arrangement.



FIGURE 5. "UNTIL THE QUIET COMES" (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/ PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.

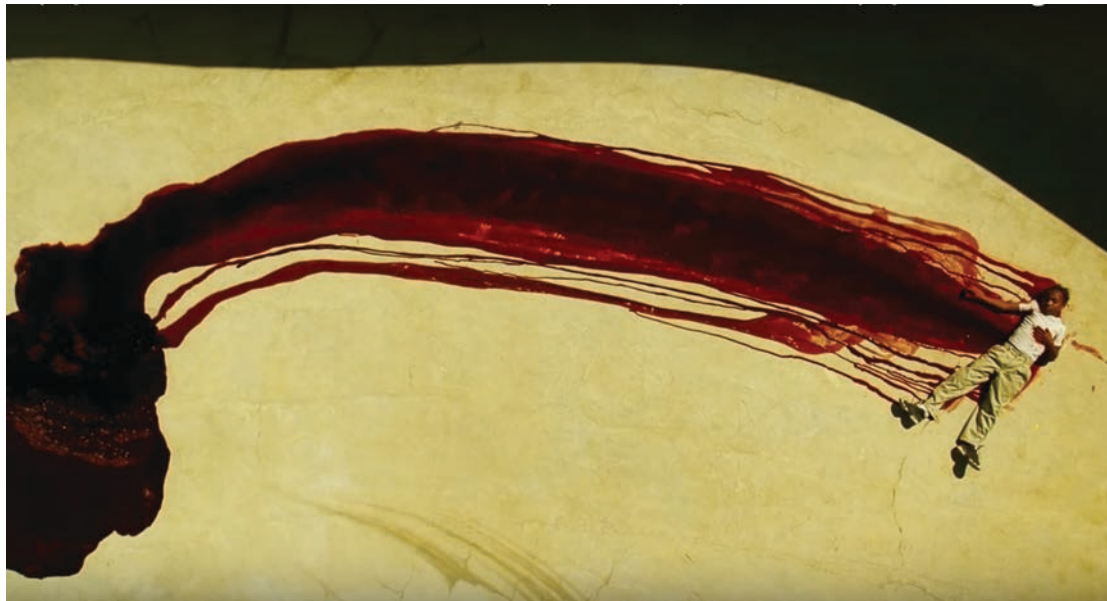


FIGURE 6. "UNTIL THE QUIET COMES" (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.

The aerial shot of the boy and the deep-red curve around him is a pivotal point in the film that begins the cusp section because it is an avowed image of the pornotroping joint, a spectacular flattened image of black pain and white pleasure.²¹ Typically, the pornotrope operates like a cinematic cutaway, containing the horror of black dehumanization in the narrow space between shots, but Lloyd opts to let the camera linger and slowly glide past the action.²² Unlike other avant-garde techniques that self-consciously interrupt, glitch, and otherwise trouble form, he uses the camera to lay the joint bare and give equal attention to the horror and beauty. Articulating this point creates an unmanageable affective surplus because this violent eroticism exceeds the boundaries of "normal" sexuality. The shot's rich, painterly appearance makes visible the folding of black pain into the aestheticization of the image and, ultimately, the

impossible amount of blood functions as a taboo sexual climax. There is simply no rapture or available space to travel away from that unnatural conflation. Like the example of the pressure applied to a sheet of paper, at any point that flatness that is moving in two different directions will succumb to a catastrophic ripple. Yet, the paper will not tear.

As if to purposely emphasize the durability of racializing architecture, the final section of the film following the cusp reveals a cinematic space that feels largely intact as the film continues to reference real life spaces captured on 35mm film. Ultimately, the history of black visual culture will not be jettisoned so easily. The appearance of a curve painted in the blood of a black child visualizes the joint where the violent interiority of anti-black architecture pushed against the seamless surface of the racialized

assemblage and the latter finally gave way. This *détournement* expresses the need for an insurgent black architecture working on the inside. When blackness is suspended at the joint between form (eroticization) and function (dehumanization), other architectural configurations becomes conceivable—specifically, a world where black bodies are not inextricably linked to the structural function of being whiteness’s oppositional ground. More simply, the unspeakable catastrophe in the film is not (exclusively) the repeating image of black death. Instead, the film stages a catastrophe by removing blackness from the anti-black architectures that order the world and allowing blackness to emphatically exist on the other side of the catastrophic cusp.

The cusp of “Until the Quiet Comes” visualizes a space that black artists and thinkers often muse about, where

black “is” and “ain’t,” what this essay has called suspension.²³ The first shot after the cusp, follows a police helicopter flying overhead while the words “Nickerson Gardens, Los Angeles” appear across the bottom of the screen. After the catastrophe, the boy who died in the opening of the film is alive. Thus, the first evidence of the upended world of the film not only brings the child back to life, it positions the police as the beginning of violence, not as a response to it. Consequently, surveillance and housing projects are un-motivated, meaning they are no longer framed as essential, unchangeable support structures. They could in fact operate differently. In the next shot, two children, including the boy, are playing on a football field. Then the camera tracks past more lighthearted moments: a man cleaning a car; another young man offering the previously dead child a snack; and, poignantly, a

group of boys with boards strapped to their backs pretending to fly. The seemingly uneventful moments in the middle of the film are clearly distinct from the deterministic violence that appears normal in the opening. Thus, the mundane events, when black bodies are safe, are tragically evidence of suspension.

Using frequent images of water and floating and its fluid cinematography, the final portion of “Until the Quiet Comes” uses thematic and aesthetic suspension to express the malleability of blackness once it is suspended across the film’s complex spatiotemporal organization. The last time we see the boy he is alive, proudly walking home after playing, but after this point the film quickly accumulates more dead bodies. It is important that the film ends this way because all catastrophic diagrams return to equilibrium. There is a man wearing a red jacket

who we see lying on the ground in the housing projects’ courtyard and later submerged in the water. Then there is a different body lying in the courtyard, performed by the dancer Storyboard P. He wears a black shirt and, like the man in red, we have seen him before giving the young boy a snack and mingling with neighbors. In fact, his prone body appeared even earlier in the film in a very quick graphic match after the boy was struck by the imaginary bullet. At this point the film has included three bodies and folded them into multiple temporal ripples as if the film momentarily folded in on itself. As a result, the reoccurring images are like diagrammatic superimpositions that bring a form’s past and future into close proximity.

Storyboard P’s character performs the most dramatic visualization of the new black architecture formed in the wake of catastrophe and its

formal potentialities. The sequence begins with the dancer’s character lying on the ground. Suddenly, the body slowly begins to move to the beat of the music. He rises from the ground and starts to dance in a style that combines fluid, balletic motion and the inhuman postures of a dance style known as “animation.” Animation, both a hip-hop dance style and the work of cartoonists, are examples of diagramming. The architect and theorist Mark Rakatansky argues American illustrator Chuck Jones, best known for his contributions to the *Looney Tunes*, created diagrammatic characters capable of incredible transformation organized around the character’s specific interiority. For example, even when Bugs Bunny impersonates his adversaries, he does so with his own distinct spatiality.²⁴ This digression is important in the context of Storyboard P’s performance because it is a reminder

that diagramming is still a material concern. The different disciplinary traditions that inform this essay have repeated this point: physics and architecture tell us that suspension does not eliminate an object's mass; Eisenman distinguishes between un-motivating and demolishing; Thom's catastrophic diagrams always return to equilibrium; and, in clearest terms, Hartman warns there are limits to emancipation. Thus, when Storyboard P maintains the bodily posture he had when he was a corpse throughout the dance, by keeping his eyes closed and leading with his chest so that his limbs follow but his body appears only loosely connected, he is transforming while expressing his character's interiority. The effect of Storyboard P's performance is actually of a dead man dancing, not a man coming back to life. In the final moments of Joseph's film, the dead man dances away from the courtyard, where he laid dying, to the parking

lot, and finally contorts his body to fit through the window of a waiting car that rides off into the night. Again, viewers should be reluctant to read the end of the film as an escape. Instead, segmenting the film as this close reading has done shows that even with a catastrophe in the middle, the death of the child and the death of the dancer are mirror images. Thus, the car waiting to give an un-dead friend a ride is a vehicle for the film's circularity.

The restraint of the film's conclusion does not mitigate its significance. The dancer may not be alive, but he can dance after death and those implications are far reaching. First, the postmortem performance occurs without the help of any cinematographic tricks or digital tools. As a result, operating beyond the diegesis, the dance reorganizes the analog film's claims to indexicality. Second, at stake in

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AND BEAUTY**



FIGURE 7. "UNTIL THE QUIET COMES" (DIRECTED BY KAHLIL JOSEPH, 2013, WHAT MATTERS MOST/PULSE FILMS), FRAME GRAB.

this pessimistic reading is ensuring that the unrepresentable violence that is the structure's architectural interiority is not recouped to prove the violability of the black body or to buttress "white flights of fantasy," the belief that the dancer's capacity for survival guarantees full-Humans' ability to escape death or any other obstacle.²⁵ In other words, precisely because the dancer is still dead his dance cannot be used to affirm anyone else's life. Finally, because the balletic and tragic dance is yet another example of the pornotrope laid bare, it does not function traditionally. In this case, the dancer is the one who has the opportunity for rapture and by simply leaving he inverts his "impotentiality." As Weheliye explains, "impotentiality, once actualized, kindles the originary potentiality that rests in the slave thing, which is nothing other than 'a potential for pornotroping.'"²⁶ This suggests an important, and ethical,

part of a diagrammatic practice means maintaining suspension, even between negative outcomes. Other objects of black visual culture that proclaim the beauty of black bodies and spaces but fail to reorient the structures that rely on devaluing blackness illustrate the problem of lifting up blackness and forgetting to attend to the joints.

The diagram leads toward abstraction, but before concluding it is impossible to discuss Watts and catastrophe theory without considering the events that occurred almost a half century earlier in the same place Joseph's film takes place. In fact, catastrophe theory has been used to describe the social tensions that lead to upheavals just like the Watts Riots and later the L.A. Riots. A catastrophic diagram could not anticipate when the force of violent encounters between the black community and police would

create a catastrophic joint, which we know now was a mundane traffic stop, but these diagrams visualize the mounting pressure that began as early as the migration of black Americans to the West Coast decades before. The purpose of tracing the diagrammatic analysis of violence in "Until the Quiet Comes" is to consider what it means when the events of that summer are described as catastrophic by asking what that insurgent action was catastrophic to. Guy Debord argues riots occur when people need to distance themselves from their status as commodities. Specifically, "people who destroy commodities show their human superiority over commodities."²⁷ In other words, anti-black architecture pulls black bodies and commodities into the same commensurable plane so that it would be too simplistic to claim the Watt riots were catastrophic because of the destruction of property.

Instead, as Debord suggests, they were catastrophic to the racist logic that aligns black bodies and things.

After the riots the joints that previously connected the black community through violence and systematic discrimination became expressions of the creativity of black power.²⁸ Los Angeles's artistic community was vibrant in the decades before the riots and the focus on community action manifested itself in aesthetic practices and forms that emphasized the ensemble. Perhaps the most famous examples of this architectural assemblage are the Watts Towers. The construction of the Watts Towers preceded the riots; they were built between 1921 and 1955 by Simon Rodia, an immigrant from Italy. However, the three towers covered in tiles, glass, and other debris have become an important expression of black Los

OTHER OBJECTS OF BLACK VISUAL CULTURE THAT PROCLAIM THE BEAUTY OF BLACK BODIES AND SPACES BUT FAIL TO REORIENT THE STRUCTURES THAT RELY ON DEVALUING BLACKNESS ILLUSTRATE THE PROBLEM OF LIFTING UP BLACKNESS AND FORGETTING TO ATTEND TO THE JOINTS.

Angeles and the arts movement.²⁹ Chronologically, the towers cannot be a response to the riots, but piled high, the towers superimpose the items' past and future and, through Rodia's improvisational style, the structures are non-deterministic and non-narrative.³⁰ As a result, they do effectively diagram the racial resonance and internal spatial relations of a community likened to junk and thus the catastrophic events that occur when those people demand their value and humanity. It

is therefore not surprising that the Watts Towers can then, retroactively, become a symbol of L.A.'s black expressive culture. The purpose of thinking about the looting of electronics by people who did not have working electricity and the junk art practice emerging in Los Angeles in the years surrounding the riots alongside a hip-hip film like "Until the Quiet Comes" is to note the repeated diagrammatic impulses that reject the inevitability of black subjection through the rearticulation of black joints. By

making direct reference to the Watts Riots, "Until the Quiet Comes" is a mediation on violence that can be "hard to look at," and although that remains true throughout the film, an architectural sleight of hand shifts that unrepresentable violence from black bodies to anti-blackness. ■

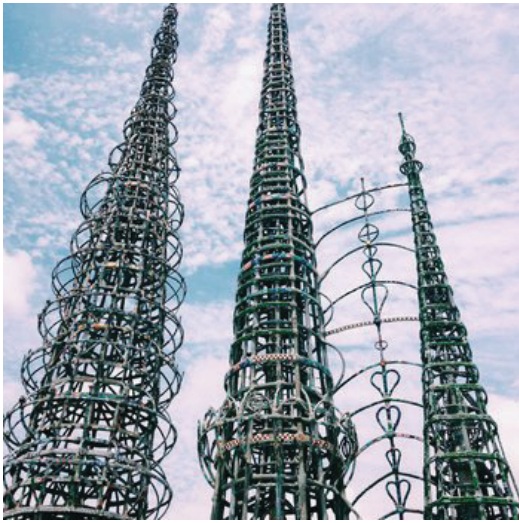


FIGURE 8. THE WATTS TOWERS (SIMON RODIA, 1921-55).



FIGURE 9. THE WATTS TOWERS (SIMON RODIA, 1921-55).

Endnotes

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8. Eisenman, "Diagrams of Interiority," 50.
9. Greg Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs: Collected Essays, Books-by-Architects* (Bruxelles: La Lettre volée, 1998), 41; Anthony Vidler, "Diagrams of Diagrams: Architectural Abstraction and Modern Representation," *Representations*, no. 72 (2000): 11.
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12. Anthony Vidler, "What Is a Diagram Anyway?," in *Peter Eisenman: Feints*, ed. Silvio Cassarà and Peter Eisenman (Milano: Skira, 2006), 26.
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16. Eugenie Brinkema, "Violence and the Diagram; Or, The Human Centipede," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 24, no. 2 (2016): 91.
17. *Ibid.*, 87.
18. Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183-201.
19. *Ibid.*, 186.
20. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64, doi:10.2307/464747; Alexander G. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 65-81, doi:10.1177/1470412907087202.
21. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," 71. Spillers uses this term to describe the sexual component of black dehumanization that she understands in gendered terms, but when Alexander Weheliye adopts the term he argues it is not necessarily erotic. He expands the concept to describe the simultaneous and opposing tension of subjugation and rapture, which describes

pleasure or, in spatial terms, deliverance.

22. Weheliye, "Pornotropes."
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