

Ah New Riddim

A Marked (Black) Axiological Shift Across Space and Time

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Can the axiologies and stories oscillating the margins mark the discourse of Western logic positioned at the center, and how might this marking register in visual representations of the urban? Focusing on the West Indian community of East Flatbush, this thesis argues for the turn from the universal (uni-versus) towards the multiversal (multus-versus) within discursive urban space. First, this thesis demonstrates the potential of black popular culture within representational practices that shift the axes of power from the center to the margins. Secondly, It examines how frameworks of African temporality and the marked conventions of modern cinema and visual culture bring attention to a plurality of black subjectivity(s) across both dominant and marginal spatialities. Finally, this thesis considers the agency of marked axiological shifts within artistic interventions that foster the persistence of new knowledge formations in relation to a diversity of global perspectives.

Keywords

Marked Axiological Shifts, African temporality, concentric storytelling, subjectivity, place, interactivity, Filmic Encounter

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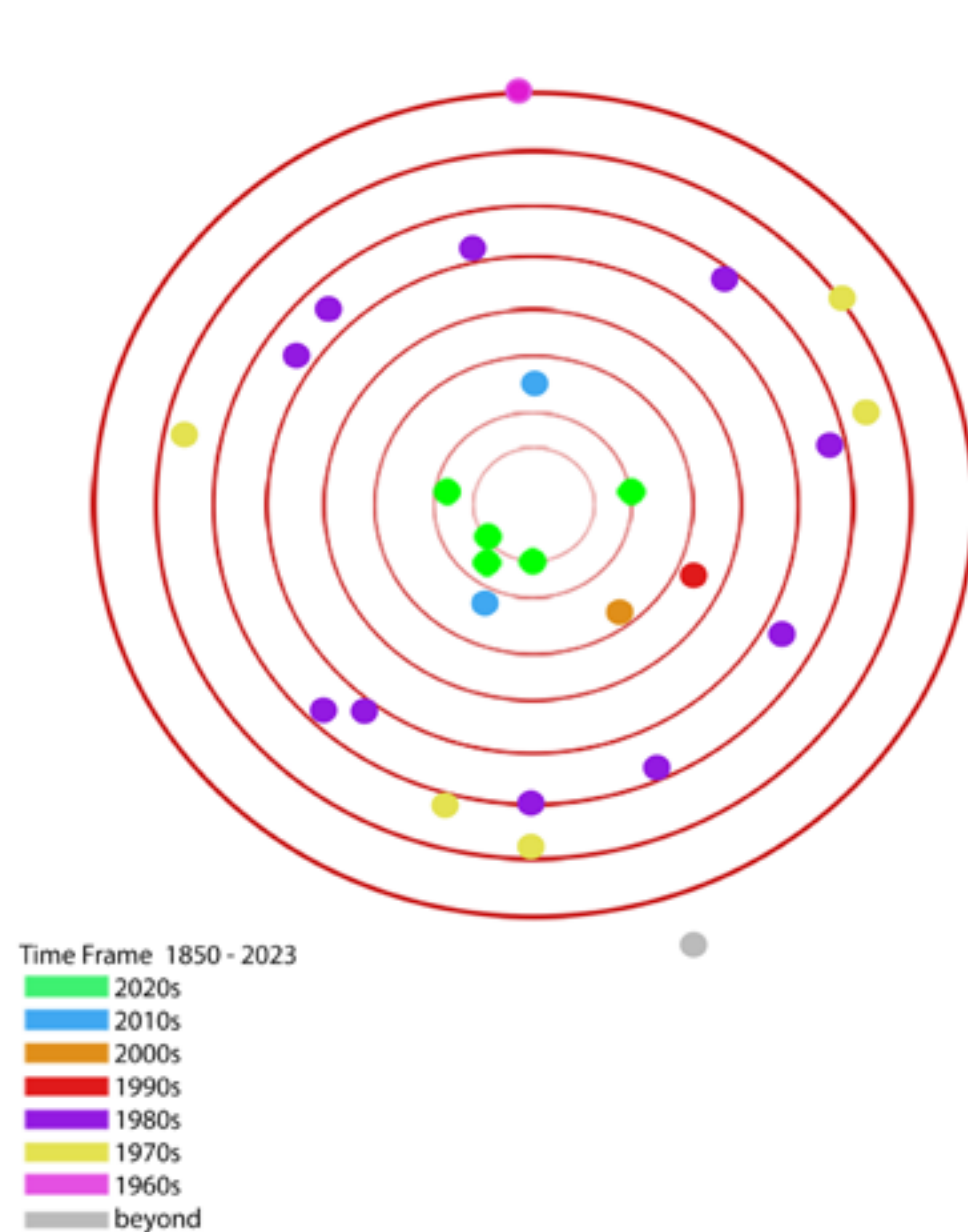
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Concentric Historical Timeline



- 2023 The framework for *Ah New Riddim* is produced in the Art, Culture, and Technology program at MIT. Cambridge, MA.
- 2021 I begin graduate school at MIT. Cambridge, MA.
Constructs and Context Relativity II (2021), premieres at Gagosian New York, NY.
The framework for *Light Years Apart* (2023), is developed and filmed in the Catskill region of New York.
- 2020 *Lovers Rock* (2020), from the anthology series *Small Axe* by Steve McQueen. Britain, UK.
- 2018 *Unpacking Sameness* (2018), Multimedia series is completed. It includes the photograph, "Sitting Like Delia with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand" (2018).
- 2016 Gentrification and displacement begins in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY.
- 2007 The music video for *Ultimate Hustler* by Sizzla Kalonji is filmed in front of my house in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY.
- 1998 *Babymother* (1998), by filmmaker Julian Henriques (Britain, UK).
- 1989 *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989), by Trinh T. Minh-ha. United States.
Fin de Siecle II (1989), by Nam June Paik. United States.
- 1988 A recording is made of my father's performance at a dance-hall house party in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY.
- 1986 *Handsworth Songs* (1986) by John Akomfrah and the Black Audio Film Collective. Britain, UK.
I am born in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY.
- 1984 My Parents, Joseph and Rosamund Neptune meet in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY.
My grandfather purchases a house from my Grand-Uncle Vincent on Raleigh Place.
- 1983 My grandmother, mother and uncles emigrate to America from Guyana.
- 1981 My father emigrates to America from Trinidad and Tobago.
- 1980 East Flatbush becomes a West Indian enclave.
- 1978 My grandfather emigrates to America from Guyana.
- 1975 My great grandmother emigrates to America from Guyana.
- 1971 My Grand Uncle, Vincent, purchases our family's home in East Flatbush from a young white couple, Patrick J. and Anna Cullen.
- 1970 *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1970), by Bruce Nauman. United States.
White flight begins in Central Brooklyn, NY
- 1966 My grand uncle emigrates to America from Guyana.
- 1965 The Hart Cellar immigration reform act is passed.
- 1850 Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz commissions daguerreotype of Delia, daughter of Renty.

Introduction

A sensorial evocation of vernacular landscape is embedded upon the magnetic strip of archival home video documenting a dancehall house party from July 1988 in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY. The footage shows my father, DJ Kul'cha Rankin, 23, an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago, deejaying over a popular dancehall riddim. His vocal delivery is rhythmic, matched by a strong cadence and patois. His style mirrors the fashionable trends of American street wear, and his presence, like chain and hook, exudes a magnetism that enchants the crowd. He moves seamlessly around guests, occasionally standing in place to harangue them about his strengths and talents. The gesture engenders playful banter from attendees enwrapped in sweet nostalgia. In the presence of dancehall, the Caribbean immigrant is made whole, and the topological boundaries separating the West Indies and America collapse. A sweet longing for 'back home' reverberates.

For the Caribbean immigrant, East Flatbush evokes a pathos of belonging grounded in the cultural assemblage of identities, social history(s) and spatial practice. Although “back home” is never made visible on camera, the notion of “back home” translates as a feeling activated through the presence of the body and material objects in relation. My father, a systemic marker of Caribbean identity superimposed across the visible landscape of East Flatbush, performed the “urban.” The urban in this respects constitutes the character and quintessential qualities of New York’s inner city. Amateur home video archives an axiological marking of space, the gestural impressions of Caribbean immigrants in the American urban whose presence transformed the vernacular of place. It highlights unspoken truths woven seamlessly within the nuances of ethnic identity and material culture.

In *Ah New Riddim (2023)*,¹ an immersive multi-channel installation and interactive documentary, I utilize archival footage of my father, the quiet of subjectivity and concentric interactive storytelling to examine the spatial-temporal relations of memory and place embedded within the implosion of dancehall² culture in East Flatbush. In a pivot around my embodied experience as a black Caribbean in the American urban, I consider the potential of popular culture in marking space. Can the axiologies and stories oscillating the margins mark the false universalism of the center and how might this marking register in visual representations of the urban? In this thesis, I examine a lineage of artistic approaches

¹ See Christie Neptune, “Ah New Riddim,” 2023 in *Constructs and Context Relativity*, 6-channel interactive documentary.

² Dancehall is a genre of music in Jamaican popular culture. It originated in the 1970s during the height of political turbulence in post-Independence Jamaica. See Cooper, C. J.. "dancehall music." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 21, 2021.

and methodologies in articulating representational space as a point of departure to discuss and frame an artistic intelligence around *marked axiological shifts*.

In theory, the term *axiology*³ investigates the nature of values, the study of ethics and aesthetics in space. It originates from the Greek word *áxios* which translates to mean *Worth*. The word “axiology” utilized in conjunction with the transitive verbs, “marked” and “shift” suggests rather a persistence of transformation in space through the conceptual and artistic framing of vernacular practices and values in resistance to the universal. I introduce this phrase to define a new language—grounded in African worldmaking cosmologies—that decentralizes the embeddedness of grand narratives in space. Marked axiological shifts by definition are nonlinear and interactive artistic approaches that register a perpetual reimagining of black futures across space and time. It marks the decorum of modern cinema and visual culture with the conventions of African temporality to foster multiple planes of perspectives and fields of movement within concentric progress narratives mapped across moving image, sculpture, performance art, and print. As an artistic intervention, this approach superimposes a wide aperture of black subjectivity(s) upon the narrow orifice of the American and European urban within sensorial evocations of place. Like *axiographics*, a term coined by film critic Bill Nichols, marked axiological shifts considers the ethical and aesthetic implications of the camera's gaze in documentary filmmaking. In the judgment of values, Nichols asks the spectator, what writer Joel J. Kupperman asks in *Axiological Realism*: what politics inform the degree of value?

Axiographics is an interrogation of cinematic codes (the camera's gaze, tonality, subjectivity, narration and edit) that frames the filmmaker's relation to framed subjects and objects. Such codes utilized in conventional filmmaking register a particular gaze, an ethics of representation that communicates a degree of value to the viewer. In *Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film*, Nichols writes:

How do the visual representations of the camera place the filmmaker in relation to the historical world? The world we see is the historical world of which the filmmaker is a tangible part. The presence (and absence) of the filmmaker in the image, in off-screen space, in the acoustics folds of voice-on and voice-off, in titles and graphics constitute an ethics, and a politics, of considerable importance to the viewer. Axiographics extends those classic tropes of ethical debate—the nature of consent; proprietary rights to the recorded images; the right to know versus the right to privacy; the responsibilities of the filmmaker to his or her subject as well as audience, or employer; codes of conduct and

³ The term was first introduced in an essay by French philosopher, Paul Lapie entitled “Logique de la Volante,” in 1902 and again in 1908 by German scholar and philosopher, Eduard Von Hartmann in “Grundriss de Axiology.” For the definition and etymology of the term Axiology, See Merriam Webster Dictionary. See also the Oxford English Dictionary.

the complexities of legal recourse—to include the ethical implications conveyed by the representations of time and space itself.⁴

In this modality, the filmmaker, as the sole architect of representation, frames perception and guides the value of judgements. The epistemic within this framework is unidirectional and it is the responsibility of the spectator, a passive participant within the cinematic discourse, to think critically about the ethics of politics inscribed within the film's chronological structure. But, can the axiographics of documentary filmmaking uphold and maintain universal hierarchies of power imbued in space?

Nichols' framework highlights stylistic devices pertinent to the camera's gaze. However, the camera's gaze as an extension of the "human" point of view can not dismantle the embeddedness of unidirectional language in relation to the universal unless point of view is utilized as a conscious intervention of resistance. The language inscribed in each anthropomorphic category⁵ speaks either from a position of marginality or dominance. The 'or' in this instance is crucial, as meaning is relative to whose politics frames the gaze? If axiographics is a system of codes that frames the filmmaker's relation to the observed in linear narratives, then it is very much possible to frame an ethics of space in alignment with the universal (Western logic) as representation is a matter of politics and power. However, this approach neither defines the politics articulated within the framed schema nor does it function as a mode of resistance. It simply challenges the spectator to think critically about the varied dimensions of ethics and aesthetics inscribed within cinematic language. Axiographics in documentaries performs comparably to axiological novels. In axiological novels, the writer frames an experience through the stylistic devices of literature which guide the reader's value of judgements. Both modalities provide the reader and spectator a gaze from which to ascertain a degree of value and can shift accordingly to politics inscribed, operating from either the inside or outside of universalism. Politics, an unfixed factor in both instances shapes the context of meaning. But, how would the judgment of values shift in bidirectional dialogues where the spectator is an active participant in the film's chronological structure? More importantly, how would the marked conventions of modern cinema reimagine the filmmaker's relation to framed subjects and objects?

⁴ See Bill Nichols, "Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film" in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press (1991). Pg 77.

⁵ There are six anthropomorphic categories that dictate the camera's gaze. They include: the accidental gaze, the helpless gaze, the endangered gaze, the interventional gaze, the humane gaze, and the clinical or professional gaze. See Bill Nichols, "Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film" in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press (1991). Pg 76-103.

The marking of axiology frames a particular politics in space to highlight the varied dimensions of black subjectivity. It builds upon the theoretical frameworks of axiographics, which interrogates the nature of values inscribed in the camera's gaze, and axiological futurism, a concept coined by John Danaher, which studies the future of values across space and time. As a departure, marked axiological shifts employ the conventions of African temporality and spectator engagement to foster a persistence of transformation across space and time. The language is bidirectional and always "in relation to" a diversity of black perspectives. As an intervention of resistance, this framework speaks neither from a position of marginality nor dominance, but utilizes the values and semiotics of black culture to speak across space.

In Chapter 2, this thesis argues the turn from the universal (uni-versus)⁶ towards the multiversal (multus-versus)⁷ within visual representations of discursive urban space. First, examining the ontology of Caribbean popular culture, I take a closer look at the history and genealogy of the medium to draw a more profound understanding of the dichotomy between the globalization of reggae⁸ and the emergence of dancehall. Reggae, the music of the provincial class, catapulted onto commercial markets at the helm of reggae icon Bob Marley's global success. The genre's integration into mainstream culture fostered a cultural hegemonic shift in Jamaica's social politics. For the first time in Jamaican history, popular culture wielded social influence across both dominant and peripheral spatialities in space. This shift tilted the axis of representational control from the center to the margins and fostered the emergence of the reggae icon. But what happens when popular culture aligns itself with the values and ideologies of Western logic? The integration of Western values in mainstream reggae homogenized the genre. Dancehall emerged as a subversion. In its burgeoning beginnings, it challenged universal systems of value mapped across representational space. As a marked axiological system, dancehall contests and transforms the temporal politics of locality. In the turn towards the multiversal, it registers a plurality of perspectives and knowledge formations in visual articulations of the urban. To investigate this framework within visual form, this chapter will explore how the multi-screen display and African multi-metric visuality⁹ employed in *Ah New Riddim* produces multiple fields of movement and spatialities across space in contest to Western logic.

⁶ I use this word to mean the turn towards "one." The word combines the Latin root words *uni-* for whole and *versus* for turn towards. See *Merriam Webster Dictionary and Encyclopedia*.

⁷ I use this word to mean the turn towards "many." The word combines the Latin root words *multus*, for many and *versus* for turn towards.

⁸ Reggae is a genre of Jamaican popular culture. See, *Merriam Webster Dictionary and Encyclopedia*.

⁹ Multi-metric visuality is an artistic temporal idea. This framework introduced by Joshua Cohen collides the temporal intervals of African music with visual form. See Joshua Cohen, "Seeing Multiple: A Study Through African Artistic Temporality" in *Chicago Art Journal* 19 (Fall 2009): 3–25.

In Chapter 3, I explore how the collision of African temporality and marked conventions of modern cinema engenders axiological shifts across time. Black interiority in *Ah New Riddim* moves the viewer beyond the dominant frameworks of reading black culture. In this chapter, the archives, contemporary footage of the urban, and my subjective experience establish a sense of “place.” Immigration policies of the 60s,¹⁰ segregated housing patterns of the 70s,¹¹ and the collapse of Brooklyn's industry throughout the 70s and 80s fostered new spatial configurations of vernacular spaces in Central Brooklyn during the mid-20th century. My story begins at the height of spatial reorganization and moves horizontally¹² across epiphenomenal time¹³ to expound the varied dimensions of black Caribbean life in East Flatbush. Epiphenomenal time, a concept introduced by black cultural theorist Michelle M. Wright, is grounded in the African belief of “now,”¹⁴ a temporal moment that collapses the past, present, and future planes of spacetime. From the African perspective, time is cyclic and always becoming. Wright writes:

While the linear progress narrative is an invaluable tool for locating Blackness, when used alone its very spatiotemporal properties preclude a wholly *inclusive* definition of Blackness, yielding one that is necessarily inaccurate. By contrast, Epiphenomenal time enables a wholly inclusive definition (appropriate to any moment at which one is defining Blackness).¹⁵

Concentric storytelling and interactive spectator engagement employed in *Ah New Riddim* foster a perpetual reimagining of black subjectivity(s) for this purpose. The concentric timeline moves the camera's gaze beyond temporal boundaries, spatial dimensions and singular point of view. This chapter explores the potential of concentric progress narratives and spectator engagement as artistic interventions.

Marked axiological shifts disrupt the singular narrative of Western logic. This thesis examines a lineage of artistic works and theoretical frameworks that have explored the relationship between black

¹⁰ 1966 marked the largest wave of West Indian immigrants migrating to the US following changes to US immigration policy. Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the politics of race*, Cornell University Press, 1992.

¹¹ See Ronald Smothers. “Housing Segregation: New Twists and Old Results.” *New York Times*. April 1, 1987.

¹² Horizontality within epiphenomenal spacetime takes into account the interrelations and interactions of all spatialities fitted within African diasporic identity. See Michell J. Wright “Axes of Symmetry” in *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. My (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), Pgs 141-172. See also Doreen Massey, “Politics and Space/Time” in *The New Left Review*, 1992.

¹³ See Michell J. Wright “Axes of Symmetry” in *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. My (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015),Pg 4.

¹⁴ See Prita Meier, Raymond Silverman, and Andrew Gurstelle. “African Art and the Shape of Time.” *African Arts* 46, no. 1 (2013): 72–81.

¹⁵ See Michell J. Wright “Axes of Symmetry” in *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. My (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), Pg 4.

globality, place and identity in the American and European urban. It expands the conversation to consider the potential of popular culture within the axiological marking of space and time, a provocation that shifts the axes of power in the multimedia installation and interactive documentary, *Ah New Riddim*.

The Shift From The Universal Towards The Multiversal

*Until the philosophy which hold one race
 Superior and another Inferior
 Is finally
 And permanently
 Discredited
 And abandoned
 Everywhere is war
 Me say war
 That until there are no longer
 First-class and second-class citizens of any nation
 Until the color of a man's skin
 Is of no more significance than the color of his eyes
 Me say war
 That until the basic human rights
 Are equally guaranteed to all
 Without regard to race
 Dis a war*

-“War” by Bob Marley

The globalization of reggae at the helm of Bob Marley’s international success marked the first act of a hegemonic shift in Jamaica’s social politics, the circulation of power from high to low culture. No other event in post-independence Jamaica embodied this notion more than the 1978 *One Love, One Peace*¹⁶ concert organized by rival gang leaders, Bucky Marshall and Claude Massop.¹⁷ In an effort to end years of rebel insurgency, political conflict¹⁸ and unbridled violence, Marshall and Massop organized an outdoor reggae concert at National Stadium featuring the most celebrated reggae artists of the day. Foreign press and over thirty thousand people attended the highly broadcasted event, including rival political leaders, Michael Manley of the People’s National Party (PNP) and Edward Seaga of Jamaica’s Labor Party (JLP). Although unorthodox, this event was historic, as a unified image of Jamaica during a time of tumultuous economic decline¹⁹ and social unrest was delivered at the helm of popular culture. Following the famed event, reggae metamorphosed into a durable symbol of the nation-state.

April 22, 1978: Thousands clamored for Marley, the headliner of the night, dancing and chanting “Peace,” as he entered the stage. Drunk in spirit, he paced the floor singing the grounded ballads of

¹⁶ The *One Love, One Peace* concert was held on April 22, 1978 at National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica. The concert ranked 36 in *The Guardian’s* 50 key events in the “History of World and Folk Music.” See Denselow, “Bob Marley Presides Over the Peace Concert” in *The Guardian*, 2011.

¹⁷ See Denselow, “Bob Marley presides over the peace concert” in *The Guardian*, 2011.

¹⁸ See Karen DeYoung. “Jamaica’s Political War.” *The Washington Post*. September 05, 1980.

¹⁹ By 1976 Jamaica had lost over \$300 million in disinvestment and industry collapse. See, D.A. Dunkley, “Hegemony in Post-Independence Jamaica” in *Caribbean Quarterly*, June 2011, Vol. 57. No. 2 (Jule 2011).

liberation. “Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another Inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war,” sang Marley with his head cocked, entranced by the tenor of revolution. The song, an adaptation of the 1963 speech delivered by Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Salassie,²⁰ to the United Nations, was charged with anti-colonial requisitions. One can argue that “War” was a prelude to the iconic photograph of Marley, Manley and Seaga on stage considering what follows. During an improvised performance of “Jammin,” Marley summoned both leaders to join hands in a symbolic act of unity. This gesture was profound for a number of reasons. However, what sets precedence is the cultural production of the black global icon, the moment where Marley is isolated from his environment and becomes a signifier of the universal.

The iconic photograph brings to fore the temporal links of conceived space, historical cultural memory and North Atlantic Universals.²¹ The image of Marley ending a civil war between two notable political rivals on stage transformed the cultural politics of representation in Jamaica. The image, entitled *Peace Concert* by British photojournalist Adrien Boot performs comparably to most indexical images. It posits a plastic visual representation of space, its inhabitants and social-historical context. However, unlike conventional photographs, the iconic photograph muddies the boundaries of social knowledge and photographic seeing²² to signify an immutable universal subject within the cultural discursive. Take for example the disembodiment of the event’s organizers (Marshall and Massop) and affiliates within a framed image that animates Marley as the sole mediator of peace and face of reggae. The global circulation of *Peace Concert* within historical record and the proliferation of Marley within foreign press reinforces this notion. “For American audience, particularly white,” writes music critic Stuart Cosgrove, “Marley is the body of reggae, the figure at the center, the ghost haunting the beat” (Stephens 142). The six-hour, eighteen-act Peace Concert was up-ended by Bob Marley, the global icon. Although *One Love, One Peace* confirms the potential of popular culture in the struggle for representation, how might reggae iconography produced during this period uphold and contest relations of power embedded within visual

²⁰ See Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, “The War” in *The Words of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I*, Speech. 1995. *The Beat*.

²¹ North Atlantic Universals evoke rather than define five centuries of world history that encompasses the rise of Western powers in the North Atlantic. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “North Atlantic Fictions: Global Transformations, 1492-1945” in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and The Modern World*, pgs 29-47 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2003).

²² Referenced “the photographic icon effect” commonly employed in modernist photographs of Paul Strand. The approach utilizes the agency of photographic seeing to construct an image beyond the stretches of time. See Blair, “What Becomes an Icon? Photography and the Poverty of Modernism,” in *How the Other Half Lives*. Princeton University Press, pgs 93-117.

representations of the urban? More importantly, how does one's proximity to whiteness inform the cultural production of the global icon?



Figure 02. *Peace Concert* (1978), by British photojournalist, Adrien Boot. An iconic photograph of Bob Marley joining the hands of political rivals, Michael Manley (left) and Edward Seaga (right) on stage at the *One Love, One People Concert* in Kingston, Jamaica ca. 1978. The disembodied forms of the event's organizers, Bucky Marshall and Claude Massop are obscured in the background. © Adrian Boot, Urbanimage. Source: <https://adrianboot.co.uk/>

Let us take a moment to consider the varied registers of the widely disseminated iconic image. How does the plasticity, and affective qualities of the image inform its status as iconic? In Jamaica, class throughout the 19th and 20th centuries was predicated upon one's proximity to whiteness. Within the black and white binary, one's social status as colored²³ gave one the affordance of freedom and upward mobility. Although Marley's music embodied the ethos of Jamaica's provincial class, like Manley and Seaga, his distinction as colored, gave him the affordance of "light-skin upper middle class" privilege. Governance in post-independence Jamaica upheld and maintained the supremacies of empire rooted in colonialism. For instance:

The manumission process through which a number of slaves gained freedom before emancipation benefited coloureds more frequently than it did dark-skinned enslaved

²³ 'Colored' was a racial distinction in colonial Jamaica. It implied that one was light-skin and of European and African ancestry. See D.A. Dunkley, "Hegemony in Post-Independence Jamaica," in *Caribbean Quarterly*, June 2011, Vol. 57. No. 2

people. Barry Higman records that the frequency of manumission increased the closer the slaves were to white. Among the political leaders of the nationalist period from the 1930s to benefit from the colour distinctions were Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante, both light-skinned and the founders of the island's two major political parties. Both were succeeded as party leaders by light-skinned heirs.²⁴

Marley's proximity to this legacy sustained a universal palatable to white audiences. *Peace Concert* is an atavistic vestige of empire and hierarchical systems of power in the North Atlantic that privileges lighter skin. The image is familiar and to a great degree affirms Julia Kristeva's theory of inter-iconicity²⁵ as the visual footprints of colonial governance persist within a revamped image of post-independence Jamaica. Reggae and nation-state intertwine and connect, in the image of Marley, Manley and Seaga, to produce a hybrid cultural representation that collides western values and aesthetics with Jamaican popular culture. The gesture re-shifts representational control from the periphery back to the center and converges regional politics with North Atlantic Universals. The global icon oscillates within a temporal discourse of dichotomies. "It is constituted through a series of juxtapositions to the national."²⁶ On the inside are politics, ethics, identity and progress; on the outside are power, war, difference and repetition" (Hensen 273). However, suppose we leave out of consideration the embeddedness of universal language in the cultural production of the iconic *Peace Concert*. Does the plastic organization of the image read the same way?

In the disembodiment of key figures *Peace Concert* reconfigures social-historical context to canonize a universal. It demonstrates the limitations of photographic seeing within the sutured process of establishing meaning. As photographs are structured visual language, one must consider how the grammatical syntax of photographic arrest imparts knowledge. "To perceive a visual image implies the beholder's participation in a process of organization. The experience of an image is thus a creative act of integration. Its essential characteristic is that by plastic power an experience is formed into an organic whole" (Kupes 13). Compositional balance focuses the viewer's field of attention upon three forms: the optical organization of Marley, an emblematic figure of popular culture, centered between two national figures, Manley and Seaga. The disembodied forms of darker skin are obscured in the background. Neither the event's organizers nor affiliates are registered within the interpretive frameworks of the

²⁴ See D.A. Dunkley, "Hegemony in Post-Independence Jamaica" in *Caribbean Quarterly*, June 2011, Vol. 57. No. 2 June 2011, pgs 5-6.

²⁵ "Inter-iconicity refers to the way in which an icon supports its claim to iconic status through referencing older icons. Importantly through this process of icon quoting, the iconic status of the older image is also reproduced." See Lene Hansen, "How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 2015), (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pg 29.

²⁶ Lene Hansen references R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

image. In an instance Marshall and Massop are removed from historical discourse and through the varied conditions of proximity and continuance, the viewer is pulled into a discursive that registers only the relational qualities (objective and non-objective) of Marley, Manley and Seaga. This is crucial as it works to evoke the affect of empire and nationhood within an image that converges the social spheres of popular culture and governance. The syntax of language (visual, verbal and written) has the capacity to both structure and re-imagine social historical context. For this reason, the intent of *Peace Concert* is unquestionable. The language of vision runs tantamount to the cultural production of the global icon. It articulates a universality rooted within the politics of difference, an anthropological war²⁷ of sorts against a plurality of black subjectivities. The iconic photograph does not register a bi-directional²⁸ flow of information that makes whole the voices of both peripheral and dominant social groups. The language is unidirectional and always “in relation to” the universal. Therefore, the notion of a black universal icon will always be political, as universal language does not express multidimensional blackness.

If reggae is grounded within the black radical tradition of resistance, then an image that speaks to the ethos of the genre and transgresses the limits of time would register not as iconic, but as a marked axiological shift. Marked axiological shifts expound a diversity of black subjectivities, vernacular practices and ideologies against racial domination. An alternative image including embodied forms of the events organizers and affiliates, who by no coincidence are of darker complexion, proffers a counter narrative in contrary fashion to the widely celebrated image of Marley, Manley and Seaga. It suggests rather that reconciliation was a joint enterprise between the local and state, reflecting a plurality of color and class distinctions. This perspective reflects the true radicalism of the moment, a cultural hegemonic shift that transferred the power of representation from the ruling elite to the provincial class. In this manner, a marked axiological shift marks the supremacist legacy of empire with the local actions of black power²⁹ in visual representations of the urban. It de-centers the universal. However, the plastic organization of the iconic photograph which animates Marley as the lone face of reggae reinforces

²⁷See Jaquess Derrida, “The Violence of The Letter From Levi-Strauss to Rousseau” in *Of Grammatology*, pgs 101-337. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

²⁸ For dialogical images see also, Roland Bleiker and Amy Kay “Representing HIV/AIDS in Africa: Pluralist Photography and Local Empowerment” in *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:1 (2007), pp. 139-63, 157. Referenced in Lene Hansen, “How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 2015), (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pg 29.

²⁹ This concept references Karilyn Crockett’s notion of black power and local organizing as a means of representational control in the urban. See “Groundwork: Imagining a Highwayless Future” in *People Before Highways: Boston Activist, Urban Planners and a New Movement for City Making*, (Amherst: UMass Press, 2018), 72-104.

hegemonic systems of colonialism rather than contest them. This leads to the question: can a genre fixed within a capitalist global market disavow the epistemological frameworks of colonialism and modernity?



Figure 03. *Untitled* (1978) by British photojournalist, Adrien Boot. From left to right: Bob Marley on stage with Micheal Manley, Bucky Marshall, Edward Seaga, Claude Massop and affiliates. © Adrian Boot, Urbanimage. Source: <https://adrianboot.co.uk/>

The answer it seems is found within the very question. Colonialism and modernity are the material productions of a capitalist framework fitted by global flows and systems of production. Globalization, a construct of capitalism, advances the dominant narratives of world history. It is at best, a violent marking of space seeded in western world making cosmologies. It censors and overwrites a plurality of world perspectives, tilting the axis of representational control in its favor. Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Global Transformations* describes this particularity as “a massive silencing of the past on a world scale, the systematic erasure of continuous and deep-felt encounters that have marked human history throughout the globe” (34). Hence, a genre fixed within a capitalist global market will only affirm a universal. For the voice of the colonized is but a murmur to the raw howl of the imperialist at the center.

The integrationist model of mainstream reggae—the merger of national politics and agenda with popular culture—demonstrated the threat posed by capitalism to social movements grounded in the

seeded tradition of resistance. Black culture positioned at the center of market capitalism will dim in the shade of universalism. The socially engineered image of post-independence Jamaica—a democratic social enterprise aimed at countering stereotypical tropes of the urban—belied the social reality of Jamaica’s urban locale, the black majority. Although the nation capitalized on increased tourism and monetary flow wrought from the integration of popular culture with cultural policy, mainstream reggae fostered "the reestablishment of the same colonial dynamic: eager servants, albeit dreadlocked and reggae loving; native gaiety in the service of the European or American tourist" (Edmonson 127). More critically, the social conditions of Jamaica's black majority worsened during this period. Perhaps representational politics is a double-edged sword, when wielded from the center. English Darby, in his analysis of Frantz Fanon’s essay “The Fact of Blackness,” describes this paradox as the “fundamental instability of the kind of blackness that is imagined to provide a visual gift to its perceiver and stable habitus to its inhabitant.”³⁰ Therefore, black representational politics that pivots the center pits phenomenological blackness against the white gaze which ‘others,’ ‘silences,’ and ‘erases.’ It conforms to universal standards of representation rather than depict multidimensional blackness. Within this context, the varied spatialities of black representational space are missed.

Black culture is marked explicitly by public expressions of resistance to racial dominance within the public sphere.³¹ For this reason, the cultural appropriation of black popular culture or its integration into mainstream culture will always render new social formations in opposition. Dancehall, a progeny of reggae, emerged as an aversion to governance. The genre, which sprang from the margins of global capitalism, challenged the values and aesthetics of the ruling elite. Its coarse lyrics and licentious ontology encapsulated the spatial practices, semiotics and grammar of Jamaica’s urban black locale, a marked axiological system that transformed and contested representational space.

The crude lyrics tended to be mainly about gun culture and sexuality, 'slackness' and were expressed in a thick Jamaican patois which is extremely difficult for an American audience, White or Black, to decipher. This was also a more threatening form of reggae music for White audiences because it could not be removed from the very live black bodies who produced, consumed and enjoyed it in the ritual spaces of the dance-hall.³²

Marked axiological systems utilize the varied shades of black subjectivity and hybrid processes in analogue and digital to dismantle infrastructural networks of power imbued in space and time. It is a

³⁰ See English Darby, “Beyond Black Representational Space” in *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, pg 27-70 (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007).

³¹ See Kevin Quashie, “Publicness, Silences and Sovereignty of The Interior ” in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, (Rutgers University Press, 2012), pg 11-26.

³² See Michelle A. Stephens, *Babylons ‘Natural Mystic: The North American Music Industry, The Legend of Bob Marley, and The Incorporation of Transnationalism, Cultural Studies*, 1998, 12:2, 139-167, DOI. pg 162.

bold marking of black cultural values upon the fixed gaze of whiteness. Dancehall as a marked axiological system, shifts, self-defines and holds space. "This space broke down the categories and personality-cults that were central features of the corporate organization and control of black music" (Stephens 162). The crude and unpolished countenance of the genre disavowed homogeneous representations of black space in post-independence Jamaica. It portrayed a counter perspective, one commensurate with the social reality of Jamaica's black majority. Rather than acquiesce, dancehall defied the Arnoldian model of high culture³³ which centered Western values and aesthetics in the representational framing of society. This, of course, ran antithetical to the nationalist agenda. But, what was crucial to this moment was the "whole" embodiment of the lived black experience across space and time in post-colonial Jamaica. Popular culture encapsulates the voice of the urban locale. As an embodied whole, it depicts a cacophony of difference in opposition to white male patriarchal knowledge.

Encoded within the musical genealogy of dancehall are the social histories of reggae, ska, calypso, and West African songs of derision. Music of the Caribbean diaspora has historically challenged the hierarchical structures of colonialism. Enslaved West Africans made praise songs that explored the interiority of black life, rebellion, and hope to the rhythmic beat of drum and chant. For example, "in Barbados in 1649, when there was a revolt of the indentured servants and African slaves against the plantocracy, it was said that live African music roused the slaves and servants to battle" (Boxill 39). To disarm the rebellion, slave owners enacted the Barbados slave code of 1675 prohibiting African music and drums.³⁴ However the tradition of resistance through the cultural production of music continued in the social configuration of new form and cadence, despite opposition from the aristocratic class. As expressed earlier in this chapter, music of the Caribbean diaspora is grounded within an ethos of resistance that critiques the social politics of its time to reimagine new futures. It is a technology that disintegrates, reconfigures and evolves in opposition to racial dominance.

The riddim, the musical line traversed across dancehall, reggae, ska, calypso, and African derision is integral to the activation and preservation of social history(s). It persists un-eclipsed by the center. The core of marked axiological systems are rooted within a shared history of resistance. However, when placed in context to the center, marked axiological systems disrupt the singular narrative. Unlike its

³³ In "Culture and Anarchy" (1869), cultural critic Matthew Arnold proposed state control of culture in order to protect the ideals of the European aristocratic male. See Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pgs 19-36.

³⁴ Marshall, Trevor. 1986. "The History and Evolution of Calypso in Barbados", in *Seminar on Calypso*. (Trinidad and Tobago: ISER, University of the West Indies.) Included in Boxill, Ian. "The Two Faces of Caribbean Music." pg. 40.

progenitors, produced through a synthesis of analogue, dancehall is a hybrid production³⁵ of digital and analogue processes. The digital quality of the genre broke down the hierarchy of accessibility embedded within the corporate organization of music. Dancehall could be edited, appropriated, reconfigured and disseminated across spatial terrains by a number of everyday citizens. The production and distribution of the genre held interactive qualities that perpetually transformed the role of its users. For example:

*Aided by digitization, the market and the rise and proliferation of new media, dancehall deejays were able to articulate their narrative discourse and project their images and representation across and beyond the inner cities of Kingston and St. Andrews into the national spaces of Jamaica outwards to the global spaces of Jamaican and African Diaspora.*³⁶

This dynamic gave users the affordance of authorship, collaboration and the ability to occupy a number of roles: music producer, deejay, music selector and music listener. The digitization of dancehall shifted relations of power and values ingrained in the corporate organization of music. In addition, the culture of the genre ran concurrent with the social realities of Jamaica's provincial class. Not only did it reflect the instability of the black image heralded by mainstream reggae, but it illustrated the socio-political hardships experienced by the dark majority in post-independence Jamaica. Black life articulated through dancehall reflects what most integrationists ignore in discourses centered around representation: in order to wholly depict the varied dimensions of phenomenal blackness, one must first shift the basis of politics, from the universal to the multiversal. If dancehall is the basis of politics, how will the articulation of dancehall in the European and American urban, mark the cultural values, grammar and symbols of space?

Dancehall in The American and European Urban

The articulation of dancehall in urban visual culture fosters new spatialities of knowing and seeing across space in contest to the universal. In *Ah New Riddim*, the spatial practice of dancehall brings to the fore a diversity of black perspectives across the narrowed index of the American urban. The camera's consciousness, framed through the marked conventions of modern cinema, does three things: It foregrounds the subjectivity(s) of black Caribbeans, articulates my gaze as a filmmaker, and provides

³⁵ Wayne Smith's 1985 hit "Under Mi Sleng Teng" marked a significant shift in dancehall musical production. The song's digital riddim was produced on a Casio Rhythm Box. This process forms the basis for dancehall production. See Borthwick and Moy, "Reggae: The Aesthetic Logic of a Diasporan Culture." In *Popular Music Genres: An Introduction*, 98–118. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

³⁶ See Sonjahj Stanley Niaah and Donna P. Hope, "Canvasses of Representation: Stuart Hall, the Body and Dancehall Performance." In *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall*. Kingston. ed. Brian., and Stuart Hall et al (Ian Randle Publishers, 2007), pg 232.

the viewer with a profound understanding of “place.” Dancehall is the nexus from which all devices and stories pivot. Constructed shots center the resonance of Caribbean life beyond the stereotypical tropes of poverty and crime most commonly found in visual representations of East Flatbush.³⁷ My intervention as a ‘filmmaker’ and ‘subject’ within this discursive centers my point of view and my community members’. The gesture dismantles what film theorist, Laura Mulvey, regards as the scopophilic pleasure of looking,³⁸ a controlled gaze of white male patriarchal logic that “fetishizes,” “others,” and “objectifies” marginal subjects within the constructed frame. In the foreground of marginal experiences, *Ah New Riddim* levels relations of power embedded within the hierarchy of looking to foster new formations of knowledge. My story becomes political,³⁹ a gradation within a diversity of subjectivities nested within the Black American experience. In this model, the agency of popular culture shifts representational control from the center to the margins. In narrative fiction, this is best exemplified in the films of British-Jamaican filmmaker, Julian Henriques and British-Grenadian filmmaker, Steve McQueen. Both artists explore the implosion of dancehall culture in the British urban from two distinct vantage points: the animated club scene of dancehall fitted with bright and colorful outfits in Henriques’ *Babymother* (1998), verses the domestic interior of a dancehall house party in McQueen’s *Lovers Rock* (2020). In both films, public and private representations of dancehall crystalize on film to provide the viewer a glimpse into the mundane of black life distanced from the gaze of white male patriarchal logic.

The social stratum of color and class distinctions within visual representations of the urban, a particularity of colonial and post-independence Caribbean states, are disavowed in *Babymother* and *Lovers Rock*. Although both racial and color distinctions are grounded in the legacy of white supremacy, black identity in America and Britain is fundamentally different from what it means to be “black” in the Caribbean. In the European and American urban, the distinction of “black” is monolithic. The politics of difference, the amartures of ethnicity, color, and class, are homogenized into a single representation. In the Caribbean, however, it is quite the opposite. The embodied representation of “black” is rather heterogeneous, a composite of multiple ethnicities that is further complicated through the politicization of color and class. For example, the distinction of “Black” means that one is of African descent, of darker skin and provincial, whereas “Colored” implies that one is of both African and European ancestry, lighter

³⁷ See Stephen Groves, “Despite Historically Low Crime Across New York, East Flatbush Still Plagued By Violence” in *Bklyner*, February 22, 2018. <https://bklyner.com/east-flatbush-violence/>

³⁸ See Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, (Grin Verlag, Open Publishing GmbH, 2006), pg 57-68.

³⁹ Vanley’s Burkes photographic documentation of Black Handsworth advanced the belief that “capturing Handsworth everyday stories was a political act.” See Connell “Visualizing Handsworth: The Politics of Representation” in *Black Handsworth*, pg 53-90. For Stuart Hall’s reflection on Burke’s photographic series, see Hall “Vanley Burke and the Desire For Blackness,” pg 13.

skinned and upper class. As expressed earlier in this chapter, one's proximity to whiteness provided one the affordance of privilege, a value critical to representation. On account of this distinction, the black Caribbean experience, as expressed in the films of Henriques and McQueen, centers a plurality of perspectives, ethnicities, colors, and class distinctions distanced from whiteness. But how exactly does this new cultural politics, articulated in *A New Riddim*, *Lovers Rock*, and *Babymother*, mark space? More importantly, how does each film expound the nuanced relationship between its framed subjects and objects?



Figure 04. “Untitled” (1998), video still from *Babymother* by Julian Henriques. In this scene Anita performs dancehall at a local club in Harlesden, Britain, UK. Credit: Colin Patterson, photographer. Source: Skin Deep Magazine.



Figure 05. “Untitled” (2020), video still from “Lovers Rock” in *The Small Axe anthology series* by Steve McQueen. In this scene two young lovers dance at a Dancehall house party located in East London. Credit: Parisa Taghizadeh, Amazon Prime Video. Source: Indiewire.com

Let us take a moment and consider the implications of the films’ formal praxis⁴⁰ in what is made visible to the viewer within the framed schema and what is not. The black Caribbean experience in the American and European urban traverses both local and state spatialities. However, in *Babymother* and *Lovers Rock* the films’ protagonists are placed in contest to the state, the obscured background of Harlesden and East London. This divide is critical to the films’ understanding. As a signifier in the sutured process of meaning, the relational system of vis-a-vis⁴¹ in both *Lovers Rock* and *Babymother* pits Black Caribbean identity against British nationality. This schism is best explained in *Where Film Meets Philosophy: Godard, Resnais and Experiments in Cinematic Thinking*. Film theorist Hunter Vaughan writes:

⁴⁰ Formal praxis are the structured components that make up the constructed shot. See Hunter Vaughan, “Phenomenology and The Viewing Subject” in *Where Film Meets Philosophy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), pg 39.

⁴¹ The relationship between object and subject within the framed image. See Hunter Vaughan, “Phenomenology and The Viewing Subject” in *Where Film Meets Philosophy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), pg 40.

All elements of the shot–movement, depth-of-field, mise-en-scene, etc.—refer back to the frame as the center or source of this necessary act of organization, designations that assume a vis-a-vis of subject and world. This vis-a-vis is a relational system, an inherent rupture between viewing subject and visible objects that implies a condition for the spectator as being part of a division between perceiving subject and perceived world.⁴²

The spectator within the filmic discourse, perceives the subjects in both films as separate from the world around them. *Babymother* and *Lovers Rock* foreground a wide aperture of the black Caribbean experience in the British urban. However, greater London is blurred within a shallow depth of field. The perceived subject and perceived world framed through a relational system of vis-a-vis in cinematic space communicates what Stuart Hall most powerfully describes as the “essentializing of difference.” Difference registers “as ‘their traditions versus ours,’ not in a positional way, but in a mutually exclusive, autonomous and self-sufficient one” (Hall 1996, 472). This concept reinforces the black and white binary which pits phenomenal blackness against British identity. The disavowal of this coupling in Henriques’ 1998 film *Babymother*, obscures the vibrant British Caribbean community of Harlesden, the film’s setting. Although the film is centered around Anita, the protagonist, it fails to register the relationship between Harlesden, Anita’s lived experience and her burgeoning career as a dancehall artist.⁴³

The essentializing of difference in *Babymother* obscures Anita’s embodied experience in the urban. What makes the environment ideal for her aspiration of being a popular dancehall artist and how does the politics of space inform her pursuit? Although both films successfully challenge the scopophilic gaze of white male patriarchal logic through the foreground of black subjectivity, the blended whole of one’s experience across local and state spatialities does not register within the frame. Perhaps one would have to watch another episode from McQueen’s anthology or another installment of “Babymother” to grasp the whole affect of what it means to be Black, Caribbean and British. However, both films operate in the style of *Peace Concert* albeit poles apart. *Peace Concert* speaks from the center of market capitalism to highlight a nationalist agenda, whereas *Lovers Rock* and *Babymother* speak from the margins of market capitalism to amplify local representation. At both ends of the spectrum, each work: *Peace Concert*, *Lovers Rock* and *Babymother* frames a grammatical schism between the local and state. If marking is the embodiment of presence, what would a marked axiological shift that speaks across both spatialities look like in visual form?

⁴² See Hunter Vaughan, “Phenomenology And The Viewing Subject,” in *Where Film Meets Philosophy: Godard, Resnais and Experiments in Cinematic Thinking*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), pg 42.

⁴³ See Stuart Hall, “A Rage in Harlesden: Stuart Hall on Babymother, Britain’s First Dancehall Drama.” *Sight and Sound*, September 1998.



Figure 06. “Untitled” (2023) in *Ah New Riddim* by Christie Neptune. This still features archival photographs of my family and I in the neighborhood of East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY. ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios

The black Caribbean experience in the American and European urban on film should register the fragmented whole of lived experience across both local and state spatialities. Marked axiologic shifts, like paradoxical space navigated in black feminist geographies, articulates new spatialities of knowing and seeing across space. However, as a mode of departure, this framework considers the potential of black popular culture and African world-making cosmologies in the axiologic marking of space, a provocation that fosters a cultural hegemonic shift across multiple spatialities. In *Ah New Riddim*, it superimposes a wide aperture of my embodied experience upon the narrowed index of East Flatbush, a visible marking that expounds the blended relationship between local and state in visual representations of the American urban. The language articulated conceptually and across the screen registers multiple perspectives and fields of movement that disavows framed binaries in space. “That is the logic of coupling rather than the logic of a binary opposition” (Hall 1996, 472). Within this context, my framework speaks across the spatialities of racial dominance and marginalization to articulate a gradation of the “black and American” experience. As an intervention it forges new sites of resistance that disrupts the dominant discourse positioned at the center.

Speaking Across Marginal and Dominant Spatialities in the Constructed Frame

Feminist theorists have long sought to define the contour of the marginal space, and articulate grounded modes of resistance when speaking from a position of marginalization. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to the Center* by American author, theorist and educator Bell Hooks, the margins function simultaneously as a site of repression and resistance. As a mode of analogical reasoning, Hooks uses her subjectivity and social geography as a black woman living in rural Kentucky to provide the reader with a cartographic understanding of the margins in relation to the center. The railroad tracks in Hooks analogy represents the borders of exclusion and points towards a place that she could not inhabit, mark or speak from. The center, a symbolic representation of this space, encapsulates the cultural productions and values of hegemony, a space Hooks can occupy publicly, but only in service to her oppressors. Private life, along the margins provides agency, “a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in the habits of being and the way one lives” (Hooks 341).

From this vantage point, the margins can be reimagined as counter-space in resistance to racial dominance. For marginal groups, this posits the opportunity to develop new modes of seeing and being beyond the gaze of their oppressors. However, if my lived experience in the American urban, particularly East Flatbush, is traversed across both the margins and the center, then this framework does not articulate my ‘whole’ representation of self within conceived space. Although the margins ripen the possibility of articulating new frameworks of understanding within counter hegemonic discourse, it reinforces a binary that uncouples my identity as a Black Caribbean American. I can speak only from the margins, a position of repression and resistance. To speak from this position, I must ignore certain spatialities within my fragmented whole, the ‘other.’ Hooks writes:

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the “other,” to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the other is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there was silence, if we were there. ⁴⁴

In Feminist theory, this notion is described as separatism.⁴⁵ It posits a paradox in the intellectual framing of countespace. But, how does Hooks' intervention of resistance expound the tension embodied within the occupancy of both spaces?

⁴⁴ See Bell Hooks, “Marginality as Site of Resistance,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press in association with the New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), Pg 343.

⁴⁵ A concept coined by Barbara Smith. See Gillian Rose, “A Politics of Paradoxical Space” in *Feminism and Geography*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pg 153.

My position as marginal is always in relation to the dominant discourse at the center. Hence it is imperative that I discuss the intersections or rather the tensions found between power, the politics of representation, intersectionality, subjectivity and language when articulating my 'whole' lived experience within the moving image. *Ah New Riddim* must conceptually and visually move beyond the binary in discursive space and consider the paradox of inhabiting and speaking from multiple spatialities. British philosopher and writer, Gillian Rose describes this up to a point within her concept, "*Paradoxical Space*," in *Feminism & Geography*. Paradoxical space "is space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculism" (Rose 159). Unlike Hooks, who positions marginality both as a site of repression and resistance, Rose's paradoxical space traverses the margins and the center to speak both from the inside and outside of hegemonic discourses of masculism. The paradox of this space, the vantage point of occupying both spatialities as the oppressed and resistor, should, in theory, embody the fragmented 'whole' of my lived experience as a black Caribbean American middle-class female in East Flatbush. However, there are limits to Rose's geography, spatialities that are neglected. Paradoxical space perpetuates representational binaries that pivots the cultural power, ideology and economy of white male patriarchal logic. There is no room to discuss the varied dimensions of my identity across paradoxical space if both marginal and dominant spatialities address only the "troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculism." In cinema, this framework reinforces the eroticization of the gaze.⁴⁶ I am viewed only in relation to the limiting gaze of white male patriarchal logic that 'others.' Paradoxical space neither registers the embeddedness of intersectionality, in this case social politics, within space nor offers a framework for the complete disavow of white male patriarchal logic. Rose's framework, in practice, does not encompass my fragmented whole within the constructed frame. In this regard, I am unseen by the camera's lens. In a review for the *Ecumene*, a peer reviewed academic journal, American geographer and women's studies professor Cindi Katz, brings this matter to the fore in her review of *Feminism & Geography*. Katz writes:

But to build an emancipatory geography that works towards new relationships between power, knowledge, space and social action, feminists also have to engage with the oppositional practices of those whose standpoints include class, race, sexuality or nation. While Rose says this, her book works at cross purpose. Rather than finding means to produce spatialities 'that can encompass multiplicity and difference,' the book rekindles and stokes old binaries in ways that hobble rather than sustain the production of oppositional geographies. This chronic tendency in *Feminism and Geography* closes off rather than opens up possibilities.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, (Grin Verlag, Open Publishing Gmbh, 2006), pg 57-68.

⁴⁷ See Cindi Katz, "Feminism and Geography: The limits of Geographical Knowledge by G. Rose" in *Ecumene*, April 1997, Vol.4, No.2, page 230.

This leads to the question: how would the intellectual and artistic framing of paradoxical space work in conjunction with oppositional practices of resistance in modern cinema and visual culture? More importantly, how would the convergence of these practices mark space in *Ah New Riddim*? Katherine McKittrick explores this question to some degree within her notion of *Garreting*, a paradoxical space which proffers new ways of seeing and understanding black feminist geographies.

McKittrick places special emphasis on the ways in which black women have navigated spaces of oppression. McKittrick's theory draws reference from the memoir and autobiography of Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), an abolitionist and writer who hid for seven years in her grandmother's 9' x 7' x 3' garret in North Carolina to escape the violence of slavery, "the last place they thought of." Brent, who eventually flees to New York, is the cornerstone for McKittrick's framework. *Garreting*, in this respect, is framed as an intervention of resistance that blends "black female oppression and captivity with glimpses of individual control and agency," (McKittrick 39). But, let us take a moment and consider the implications of "the last place they thought of." Brent's body is positioned across what Rose terms 'paradoxical space,' operating both from inside and outside the confines of slavery. This geography collides Rose's theory of paradoxical space with Katz's provocation of oppositional practice. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, McKittrick writes:

Yet Brent's position in the garret—above ground level, unseen while being able to see within and across the plantation—quietly critiques and undoes traditional geographies. While she is in the garret, Brent undermines the patriarchal logic of visualization by erasing herself from the immediate landscape and *knowing* what she terms "a different story." The combination of seeing and knowing the self and the irrational workings of bondage from "the last place they thought of," in part, privileges Brent's geographic perspective.⁴⁸

McKittrick argues that Brent's erasure from the visible landscape of white logic while in the garrets fosters new spatialities of knowing and seeing in opposition to hegemonic discourse. This presents the reader with a cartographic understanding of black femininity and its relation to "place." However this theory in practice does not foster a shift in hegemony or the production of new values at the center. *Garreting* as an intervention simply contours new spatialities of understanding the paradoxical space of black femininity. But how can one move beyond the limits of geographical knowledge in articulations of representational space and visibly mark the center of hegemonic discourse within an oppositional practice?

⁴⁸ See Katherine McKittrick, "The Last Place They Thought Of," in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (University of Minnesota Press: 2006), pg 43.

Marking Space: African Multi-Metric Visuality and the Multi-Screen

Marked axiological shifts in *Ah New Riddim* move beyond contouring the margins. It utilizes an African-centered world-making cosmology to mark the ethics and aesthetics of representation in space. This approach is most visible within the project's sculptural forms, screen practice and installation. It integrates the theory of African multi-metric visuality into the schema and affective qualities of the installation—six channels of video interface with scaffolded speakers made of mirror, LED monitors, and wood. The speakers, a re-articulation of the Caribbean Sound System tradition,⁴⁹ add further nuance to the filmic encounter in space. As material, screen, haptic surface, and sculptural unit, the sound system transmits information that doubles the spectator's sense of perception. Upon contact, the spectator experiences disjuncture caused by the collapse of their point of view, embodied form, and video upon the unit's reflective surface. Each side of the speaker's enclosed surface transforms into a screen. This fosters multiple fields of viewing within a single form, an element integral to African frameworks of temporality and the multi-metric aesthetic. Art historian Joshua Cohen, describes this effect in *Seeing Multiple: A Study through African Artistic Temporality*. This aesthetic weaves the aural features of African music into sculptural form. By way of explanation, Western popular music is distinguished by four temporal beats within one sound interval. The rhythmic structure within Western context “constructs a single unequivocal sense of time” (Cohen 7). African music, in contrast, fits two to three beats between every four-beat cycle of Western popular music. Its rhythmic structure interlocks two distinct frameworks of time within a single temporal interval. In visual form, this framework produces the same effect.

African sculptural aesthetics allow the beholder's two primary angles—the frontal view and the back view—to be incorporated into one another within the sculpture itself. In this way, two or more aspects, and correspondingly two or more moments in viewing time, are consolidated into a single, immediately expressive form.⁵⁰

African sculpture, like African rhythm, employs a complex multi-metric framework that reorients the spectator's spatiotemporal perception (see figure 07). In *Ah New Riddim*, this approach produces a shift in semantics that enhances the dual fascinations of the filmic encounter.⁵¹ Multiple screens, reflective

⁴⁹ A sound system of large stacked speakers, amplifiers and records managed at parties and public events by the Deejay and music selector in sound clashes. The tradition originated in Jamaica in the mid 1950. See Chris Salewicz and Adrian Boot, *Reggae Explosion: The Story of Jamaican Music*, (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 2001), pg 28-29.

⁵⁰ See Joshua Cohen, “Seeing Multiple: A Study Through African Artistic Temporality” in *Chicago Art Journal* 19 (Fall 2009), pg 19.

⁵¹ See Catherine Elwes, *Installation and Moving Image*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), pg 146

surfaces, sound, the spectator's movement in space, and point of view simulate a feeling of synesthesia, an intersensory experience that renders unique spatial perceptions upon each encounter.

As an intervention, *Ah New Riddim* amplifies a plurality of black voices across the visible landscape and cinematic screen(s) of white logic. This semantic shift constructed on-screen, in space, and within the spectator's interaction fosters multiple perspectives and fields of movement that render a persistence of transformation. The spectator's initial contact with the multi-screen, a network of animated projections, light emitting diode (LED) monitors, and reflective surfaces positioned across the gallery, disrupts the linear progress of seeing and moving in space. Each screen registers a distinct angle of viewing time that transports the viewer elsewhere. "As Vilem Flusser has remarked, screens also have some characteristics of the door—they let us 'enter' the realm they depict" (Huhtamo 34). For example, one sees my father's performance from varied perspectives on screen: the space he inhabits, the expression of his onlookers, and the neighborhood of East Flatbush. Temporal fragments produced through this approach posit multiple entry points for the spectator to see, experience, and engage a narrative that speaks across multiple spatialities. The multi-screen, in this respect, functions as doors. It manipulates the spectator's spatial perspective and grants access to the inner life of East Flatbush. I have applied this technique to a similar degree in past projects. In *Constructs and Context Relativity II* (2021), an earlier iteration of *Ah New Riddim*, the screen's surface shifts semantics and context. Three CRT monitors placed side by side in the gallery transmits a distinct viewpoint that disrupts the linear process of reading media. The scene's disintegration across three channels disorients the spectator's spatial awareness to foster new dimensions of understanding in space. This disjuncture is integral to the film's premise as it provides space for the viewer to dissect material and immaterial systems in space that inform their perceptual and subjective reality.

Various artists have also used the multi-screen to explore disintegration that subverts and reimagines time and space. In *Live Taped Video Corridor* (1969-1970), Bruce Nauman's experiments with the multi-screen and performance produces temporal disintegration within space that alters the spectator's spatial experience. The installation features two stacked video monitors positioned at the far end of a narrowed corridor of painted wallboard. Each monitor interfaces with a camera mounted at the corridor's entrance. The top monitor displays live feed while the bottom monitor plays pre-recorded footage of the empty passageway. Upon first encounter, the spectator sees an image of themselves in context to Nauman's spatial construction. The dissonance between the spectator's point of view, their recorded image, and the empty corridor induce a temporal collapse that manipulates their spatial

awareness. Nam June Paik's 1989 piece, *Fin de Siecle II*,⁵² follows this pattern. A scaffold of 207 monitors displaying a sequence of pre-recorded broadcasted programs and video art across seven channels disintegrates the spectator's linear process of seeing and knowing. Using computer-generated processing effects, Paik produces a collaged pattern of video art that destabilizes time and meaning. As a result, the screen registers as a "material phenomenon and an 'other' reality"⁵³ within the gallery. The scaffold monitors are reimagined as a sculptural unit that transports the spectator to contemplative terrains of new sensibilities. However, in *Ah New Riddim*, this approach and methodology uses the conventions of African temporality and the marked decorum of visual culture to explore a plurality of black subjectivities across space. It is an intervention that disavows the hierarchy of looking to foster new formations of knowledge in contest to the universal.

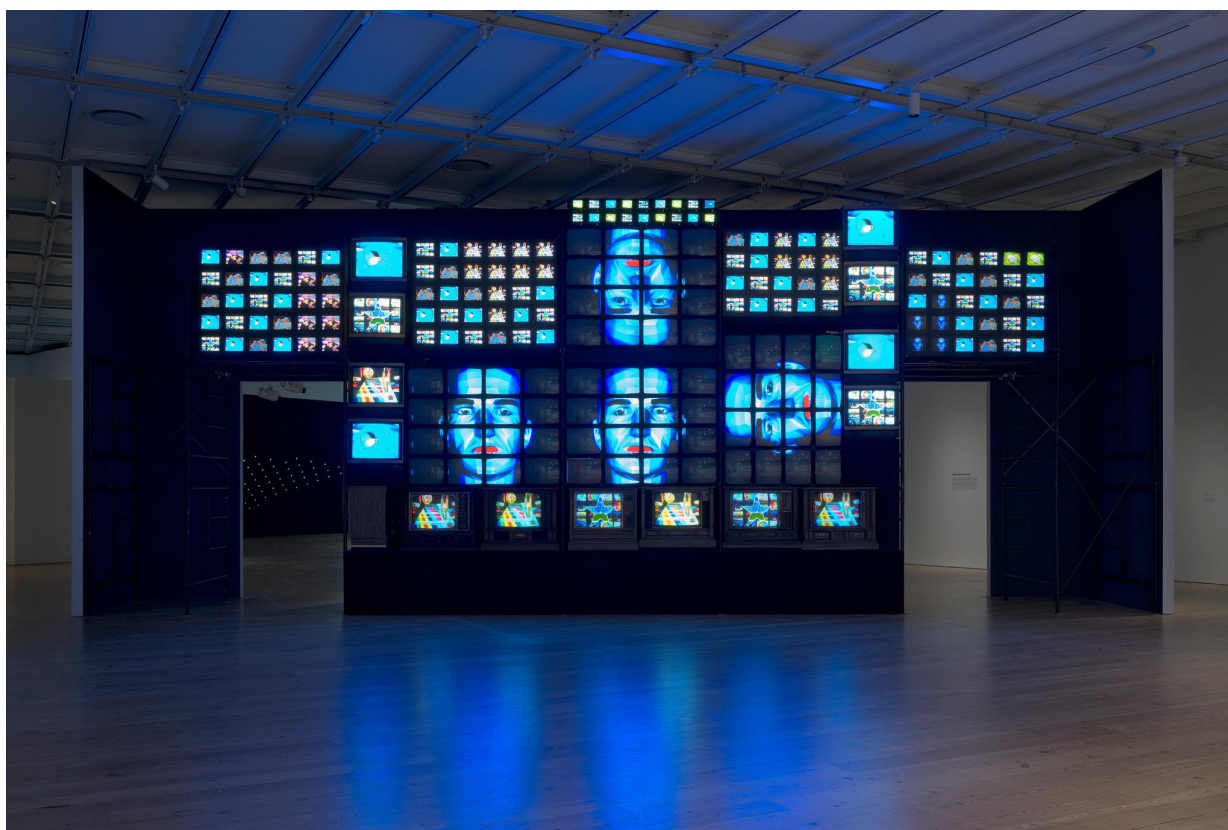


Figure 07. Nam June Paik's 1989 "Fin de Siècle II" at the Whitney Museum. More than 200 television monitors display images taken from broadcast television and video art. Image source: NY Times.

⁵² See Nam June Paik, *Fin de Siecle II*, 1989. Video installation and sculpture, 207 television sets with seven video channels, overall dimensions: 186 x 480 x 60 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Laila and Thurston Twigg-Smith.

⁵³ See Catherine Elwes, *Installation and Moving Image*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), pg 146



Figure 08. Live-Taped Video Corridor (1970), by Bruce Nauman at the Guggenheim Museum. Painted wallboard, video camera, two video monitors, video recording, and video playback device. Image source: Guggenheim Museum.



Figure 09. Constructs and Context Relativity II (2021), by Christie Neptune at the Gagosian (New York, NY). 3-Channel HD Video and Super 8mm Transfer. TRT 12:30 mins. Image source: Gagosian.



Figure 10. Chockwe, Angola, Late 19th century or 20th century. Wood. Height 16 ½. This sculpture employs the tenets of multi-metric visuality. It combines four viewing angles within a single form. The figure's head bulges from the sides and its arms and legs are bent providing the spectator with a mirrored view on the front, back and sides. Reprinted from Carl Einstein, *Negerplastick*, 1915. Source: *Seeing Multiple: A study through African Temporality* by Joshua Cohen, pg 17.



Figure 11. This image depicts a traditional Caribbean sound system used in a sound clash. Featured in the image are the Earth Rocker sound system crew within the workspace in Venn Street in the late 1970s. Image credit: Stephen Burke. Image source: The Independent (UK).

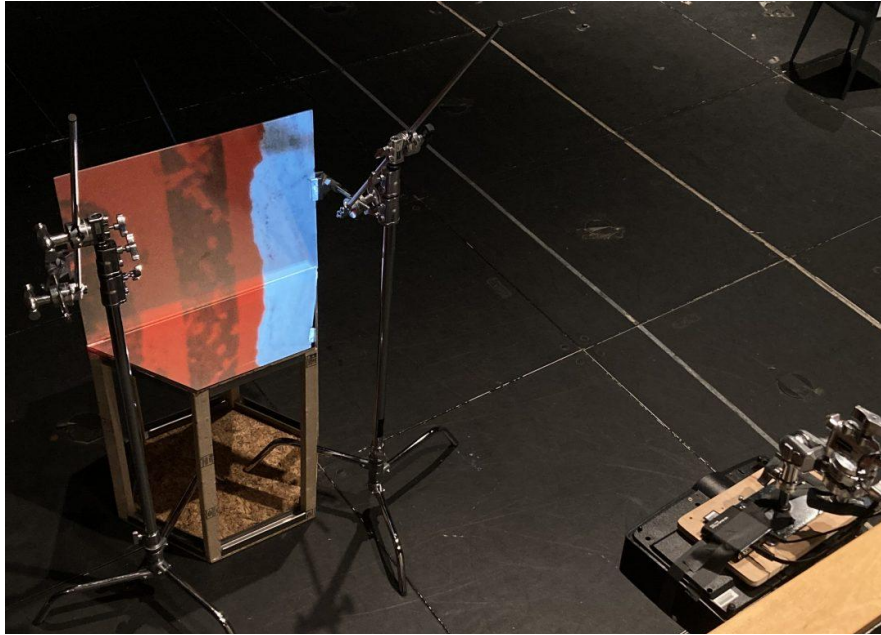


Figure 12. The image features a display of research materials presented in the Art, Culture, and Technology Spring 2022 final at MIT. For this presentation, I displayed my intended materials and aesthetic effect for my speakers, the sculptural component of *Ah New Riddim*. ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios



Figure 13. A computer aided design of my sound system made of mirror, LED monitors, and wood, *Ah New Riddim* (2023). ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios

A Perpetual Reimagining of Black Futures

In the poetics of struggle and lived experience, the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born.

-Freedom Dreams by Robin D.G. Kelley

I grew up watching my father give toast over the digital line of the riddim. Words flowed autonomously from his mouth in the living room of our house as friends and family cheered on. Although the riddim remained constant, the song shifted temporally along the ebb and flow of new lyrics. And my father's song gained new context and meaning upon each encounter with an object, person, or memory. In the background, a camcorder documenting the night's happening⁵⁴ circulated amongst attendees, momentarily shifting their role from "guest" to "filmmaker." As a child, I would squeeze my way through a crowd of towering bodies just to watch with awe as he enchanted them. Upon seeing me, he would insert my name within the next stanza of lyrics, enlacing my whole identity within the song's poetic structure. I grew up believing that I was the dancehall that crept from his mouth into the readied ears of moving bodies, a bridge between the past and the present that collapsed the spatial-temporal boundaries of Caribbean life in East Flatbush.

Ah New Riddim moves beyond the analogical in narrative filmmaking and amplifies real Caribbean stories of migration and belonging. Archival footage convey the resonance of Caribbean life beyond stereotypical tropes of poverty and crime. To contest the official record, the film employs what Nichols terms as the "interventional gaze." The filmmaker whose role oscillates between "cameraman" and "guest" is positioned along the same field of perspective as my father. Within this context, the "camera becomes more than an anthropomorphic symbol and locus. It becomes the physical embodiment of the human being behind it" (Nichols 85). The necessary distance between "filmmaker" and "subject" is collapsed. The filmmaker, as a witness, participant, and archivist, registers to the viewer as complicit in the articulation of dancehall, and my father's performance of the urban is legitimized within a gaze mapped across multiple spatialities of seeing and knowing. The archives as an extension of point of view reimagines the mundane of Caribbean life. This is important as it draws one's attention to axiologic markings across space wielded through local organizing and ethnic solidarity exercised during the height of spatial reorganization in Central Brooklyn.

⁵⁴ In performance art, "happenings were a form of collaboration without object." See Johanna Drucker, "Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings" in *Art Journal* 52, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.

An Axiological Marking in East Flatbush

Marked axiological shifts frame structured language that designedly marks and reimagines space. Archival home video as a device within this framework lays bare the humanness of its subjects. It highlights a critical shift within the social landscape of East Flatbush from an Italian and Jewish middle-class community to a West Indian enclave of similar fashion towards the end of the 20th century. In New York City, the decline of industry, immigration policy reform and shift in demographics fostered an exodus among young working class whites and generated new housing patterns among young professionals of color. “By the mid-1970’s Central Brooklyn and Southeastern Queens offered a large stock of relatively inexpensive small one and two-family houses to black home buyers” (Kasinitz 58). Although blacks still maintained limited purchasing power within the greater New York City area, spatial reorganization in Central Brooklyn provided many Caribbean immigrants the affordance of homeownership in areas vacated by whites. My family was among the first wave of Caribbean immigrants to integrate the neighborhood of East Flatbush.

Caribbean American writer, Paule Marshall, articulates this development within her narrative fiction, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Homeownership in Marshall’s novel functions as a symbol of upward mobility. The main character, Salina Boyce grapples with this ideal and the politics of assimilation while negotiating space as a first-generation Caribbean American. The point of view in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* shifts intermittently between Selina, her mother, father and older sister. It provides the reader a glimpse into the varied dimensions of Caribbean life and perspectives centered around homeownership, race and acculturation. Marshall writes:

“When we first came here in 1920 we was all living in those cold-water dumps in South Brooklyn with cockroaches lifting us up?” He gave a high wheezing laugh but his eyes burned with outrage. “The white people thought they was gon keep us there but they din know what a Bajan does give. We here now and when they run we gon be right behind them. That’s why, mahn you got to start buying. Go to the Loan shark if you ain got the money.”⁵⁵

In Marshall's novel, the spatial practices, semiotics, and real estate conventions employed by Caribbean immigrants produced culturally distinct spatialities across Central Brooklyn. One can argue that these practices were seeded interventions of resistance that registered marked shifts in axiology across the visible landscape as the impulse behind Caribbean homeownership in Central Brooklyn during the mid-20th century was grounded by an ethos of community organizing, black power and ethnic solidarity.

⁵⁵ See Paule Marshall, “Book 1: A Long Day and a Long Night” in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1959), pg 38.

In *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and The Politics of Race*, American sociologist, Philip Kasinitz writes:

West Indian homeowners were starting a pattern of capital accumulation for themselves and their children. This pattern was facilitated by the establishment of several real estate agencies that dealt with predominantly West Indian clientele and by a “sell-to-your-own-kind” ethos that became effective once there were enough of one’s own kind to guarantee home sellers a fair price.⁵⁶

Caribbean landowners wittingly shaped the ethics of representation and aesthetics inscribed across the social landscape of Central Brooklyn. Hence, East Flatbush as an ethnic enclave is no happenstance. It is the byproduct of conscious interventions in economy, urban planning, and real estate practice by Caribbean immigrants. In many ways, my story in the American urban is concurrent with Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, and Kasinitz’s analysis of Caribbean New York.

My family’s three-story row house along the narrowed street of Raleigh Place possesses a myriad of stories that converge the spatial-temporal constellations of the past and present. Etched upon the surface of drywall, wooden floors and tiled countertops are a technology of memory marking the temporal shifts of the neighborhood. On June 9, 1971, my granduncle (Uncle Vincent), a Guyanese immigrant and pharmacist, purchased our house from a young white couple, Patrick J. and Anna Cullen in East Flatbush. Under the Hart-Cellar Immigration reform Act of 1965 my great-grandmother, grandparents, uncles, aunts and mother emigrated to the United States. And, in a pattern of capital accumulation my Uncle Vincent sold the property on Raleigh Place to my grandfather in 1984.⁵⁷ My father grew up four blocks away from my mother’s family home in East Flatbush. He was a part of the third and largest wave of Caribbean immigrants to migrate to the United States between 1965 and 1984. He met my mother while walking home from the grocery store and I was born two years later. I grew up with my parents, siblings and extended family in my grandfather’s two-family house along the narrowed street of Raleigh Place.

The gestural marking of my subjective experience as a Black Caribbean across East Flatbush begins here. And, it is at this juncture, I shape the countenance of my narrative. Black interiority in *Ah New Riddim* moves the spectator beyond the dominant frameworks of reading black culture. Through first person accounts of dancehall, the quotidian: the cultural practices, fears, joys, desires and relationships of Caribbean immigrants in East Flatbush, are brought to fore. It frames phenomenal

⁵⁶ See Kasinitz, “Ethnicity From the Ground Up” in *Caribbean New York: Black immigrants and the Politics of Race*, (Cornell University Press, 1992), pg 58-59

⁵⁷ On January 30, 1984, My Grand-Uncle Vincent Griffith transferred the deed of the house to my grandfather. The house was purchased for \$50,000. See New York state Indenture reel 1475, pg 779.

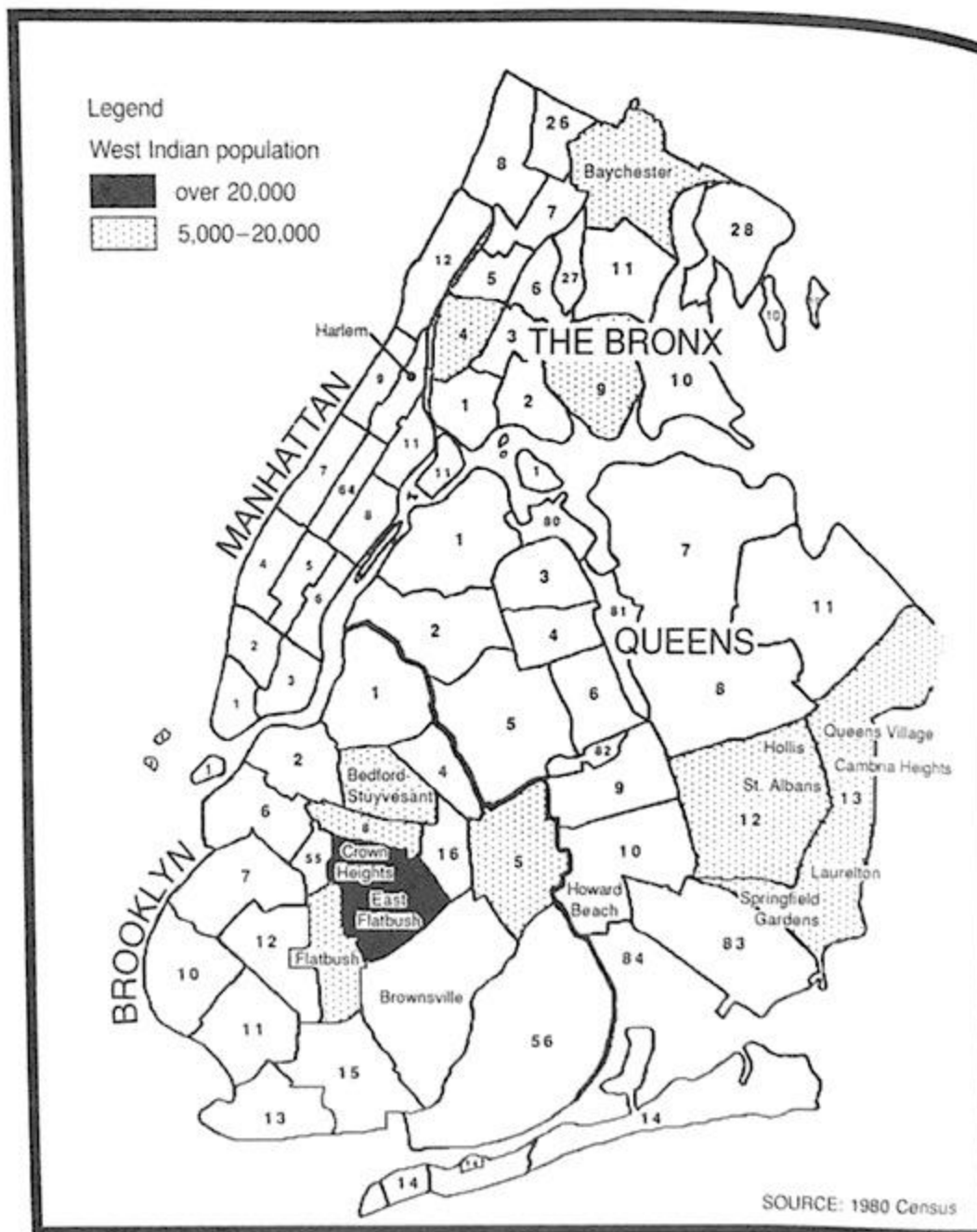
blackness, the intricate and wide-ranging dimensions of black subjectivity. This discursive is unassuming. It is what American author and educator, Kevin Quashie terms as *quiet*.⁵⁸ “Quiet compels us to ‘explore the beauty of the quality of being human,’ not only our ‘lives weighed down by the supposition of identity,’” (Quashi 26). As an embodied visual representation of the urban, the notion of quiet marks the supremacist legacy of white power with the mundane of black life. On camera this registers as “watcherless,”⁵⁹ the subject’s subjective embodiment of “presence” and the “here.”



Figure 14. “Untitled” (2023) in *Ah New Riddim*, by Christie Neptune. Pictured above is a linear presentation of the film for the Art, Culture, and Technology Fall 2022 Final Presentation at MIT. ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios

⁵⁸ See Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, (Rutgers University Press, 2012)

⁵⁹ The aesthetic of quiet is watcherless in expressions of inwardness. See Kevin Quashie, “Publicness, Silences and Sovereignty of The Interior ” in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*,(Rutgers University Press, 2012), pg 22



West Indian Population by Community District New York City: 1980

Figure 15. A diagram of West Indian population by community district in New York City. Central Brooklyn shows the highest concentration of West Indians. Credit: 1980 Census. Sourced from Kasinitz, "Ethnicity From the Ground Up" in *Caribbean New York: Black immigrants and the Politics of Race*, (Cornell University Press, 1992), pg 60.

The Invisibility and Visibility of The Screen

Archival footage frames candid expressions of being within an uninterrupted shot of dancehall, a mimesis of cinematic verite in documentary filmmaking that collapses the screen. "Cinema verite is an attempt to strip away the accumulated conventions of traditional cinema in the hope of rediscovering a reality that eludes other forms of filmmaking" (J. Hall 25). For the spectator, this blurs the framed boundary between "viewer" and "subject," rendering the screen invisible. In the history of screen practice, "screens" were initially defined as protective ornamental devices that framed, partitioned, shielded or concealed.⁶⁰ In contemporary media practices "the word screen gained meanings that anticipated its uses as a means of displaying and transmitting information" (Huhtamo 36). The "screen" as a cinematic device communicates to the viewer that the information displayed upon its 2-dimensional surface is a virtual representation of a possible reality elsewhere, a window into new experiences beyond one's subjective reality. The collapse of framed boundaries between "viewer" and "subject," and "filmmaker" and "observed" within archival home video gives the screen necessary invisibility to enhance the filmic encounter. This technique has its roots in the early happenings of public entertainment. In phantasmagoria shows held at the turn of the 19th century in Western Europe, screens hid the mechanics of the partitioner, providing a seamless collapse between reality and virtual effects. Finnish media archeologist and educator Von Erkki Huhtamo, outlines this history in *Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archeology of The Screen*. Huhtamo writes:

In the phantasmagoria show that originated in the 1790s and remained popular for decades, the audience was presented images, many of them depicting monsters, ghosts and apparitions, projected on a semi-transparent screen. The figures seemed to grow or diminish dynamically. The trick was realized by using wheel-mounted magic lanterns ('fantascopes') that were pushed forward or pulled backwards along rails behind the screen. The apparitions dashed upon the audience that was kept in the dark and either ignored the presence of the screen or pretended not being aware of it. The invisibility of the screen, which was often achieved by making it wet, was meant to dissolve the boundary between the reality of the auditorium space and the world of fantasy and occult penetrating into it. The screen served as a veil, hiding the secret tricks and the machinery used to conjure them up.⁶¹

As the phantasmagoria shows, the screen's invisibility within the archives evokes a pathos of realism. Archival footage manipulates the viewer's sensibilities and provides the illusion of shared space. One

⁶⁰ See Merriam-Webster dictionary and encyclopedia entry for "Screen." See also Von Erkki Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archeology of The Screen" in *ICONICS: International Studies of The Modern Image* (Tokyo), Vol. 7 (2004), 31-82.

⁶¹ See also Von Erkki Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archeology of The Screen" in *ICONICS: International Studies of The Modern Image* (Tokyo), Vol. 7 (2004), pg 36.

feels as if they are a part of the happening as opposed to watching it. This affective quality is lost, to some degree, in contemporary footage.

Contemporary footage in *Ah New Riddim* reinforces the screen. It frames the formal praxis of filmmaking. In interview shots, my subjects are centered within the constructed boundaries of the frame. The background is dressed with the armatures of production: seamless pull, neutral lighting, and grip. Diegetic sound, the subject's personal reflections, memories, and story, heard on screen, structures context. And slow-moving tracking shots of East Flatbush—the bustling markets, vibrant signage, lined row houses, and corner happenings—in super 8mm and High Definition (HD) frames the film's milieu. My presence within the constructed shot registers only as non-diegetic commentary, a hierarchical structure of point of view that guides the narrative and filmic encounter. Non-diegetic commentary highlights a divide in what is seen and not seen by the camera's lens. It indicates a screen. As a filmmaker, I am wittingly transmitting information to disrupt, counter and recontextualize the discourse positioned at the center. In this respect, the screen functions as a visible information apparatus. The same effect registers within a contemporary performance between my father and I. Although I am framed within the constructed shot, another screen positioned within the gallery shows the inverse of that imagery: the cameramen, equipment, lighting, and sound mixer. The gesture brings into conversation the camera's consciousness, my relationship to space, and the politics of the frame. The archives, and contemporary footage, work in tandem to enhance the viewer's understanding of “place.” This filmic approach to intervention within linear progress narratives has been explored by a number of artists.



Figure 16. “Untitled film” (2023) in *Ah New Riddim* by Christie Neptune. This still features archival home video footage of dancehall in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY, ca. 1988. ©Christie Neptune.

Source: Christie Neptune Studios



Figure 17. “Untitled film” (2023) in *Ah New Riddim* by Christie Neptune. Video still from a contemporary dancehall performance between my father and self. ©Christie Neptune. Source: Christie Neptune Studios.

The Archival as Intervention

In *Handsworth Songs* (1986), an experimental documentary by British filmmaker, John Akomfrah, the archives and testimonial memory foster a counter-narrative in contest to the race riots of 1985 in the Birmingham Handsworth district of London, a predominantly black Caribbean community. Sourced archival footage manipulated and tinted blue depicts a montage of scenes featuring British industrial production, the arrival of Caribbean immigrants, a community succumbing to urban decay, and the mundane of Caribbean life. The montage frames the myth of post-colonial assimilation and gives the viewer a deeper understanding of motive. Present-day footage registers the testimonial memory of those who survived in addition to arresting scenes of protest and riot. Both devices, the archives, and contemporary footage, within the film's discourse, articulates the imperial legacy of British colonial rule. As an intervention, Akomfrah places himself along the same plane as his subjects and uses the depositions of Handsworth's black locale to establish a counter-hegemonic discourse. The camera's gaze poses a provocation that challenges the spectator to think critically about the British legacy of “empire” embedded within the historical record of the Handsworth Riots. In a similar fashion, filmmaker, and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha excavation of the archives interrogates hierarchical systems of power within documentary practice. *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989), a single-channel feature-length documentary, restages archival interviews from the ethnographic project *Vietnam: un peuple, des voix*

(1983) by Mai Thu Van.⁶² In Van's research, a matrix of Vietnamese women speak out against the injustices of Vietnam's oppressive regime. The filmic gap between Van's interviews and Minh-ha's dramatized reenactments creates new spatialities of understanding that question the ethics and aesthetics of representation. This intervention employed by Minh-ha subverts the formal conventions of documentary to liberate Van's subjects from the historical gaze of ethnography, which "others," "silences," and "erases."

In this sense, the archives as "intervention" in *Handsworth Songs* and *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* challenges the spectator to think critically about structures of power embedded within representational practice. The epistemic value in both narratives are framed through the stylistic devices—albeit unconventional—of documentary. The montage, the superimposition of media, tint, depth of field and framing employed by Akomfrah and Minh-ha subverts archival knowledge. Although the logic of intervention counters the historical, it does not disavow relations of power charged by supremacy. The camera's gaze in both frameworks are still aligned with the 'othered gaze' of Western logic. If one were to apply the logic of Nichols' axiographics to both films, the gaze legitimizes the framed historico-racial-schema. To structure this point, Nichols utilizes an analogy of 'witnessing death' to locate the filmmakers' position within the ethical geography of the interventional gaze. In Nichols' example, the filmmaker's intervention in filming the brutalities wrought by Nazi experimentation places them within the same field of perspective.⁶³ As a result, they become a part of the process, and their intervention perpetuates the injustice. He writes:

Rather than witnessing against the taking of life this ethic conveys a complicity with murder and with the rationale supporting it. Within the framework that legitimates killing, the gaze will appear as responsible as the murder itself, but from outside that frame a sharp reversal occurs.⁶⁴

The axiographics of *Handsworth Songs* and *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* counters, to some degree, the filmmakers' artistic impulse as both films still operate within the schema of hegemonic power. Here, by example, we see that the logic of axiographics does not change the nature of language within the framed organization. Instead, it provides the spectator with an apparatus for understanding the filmmaker's approach. In both films, the authority of Western logic is maintained—albeit stylized and

⁶² See Katherine Racki, "True Lies: Staging the Ethnographic Interview in Trinh T. Minh-Ha's *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989)." *Pacific Coast Philology* 36 (2001): 48–63.

⁶³ See Bill Nichols, "Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film" in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press (1991), pg 86.

⁶⁴ See Bill Nichols, "Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film" in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press (1991), pg 86

rearticulated. This brings me to the question: is it enough to counter the historical within an intervention that recontextualizes archival knowledge, or must we move beyond that to wholly disavow the logic of Western authority within the framed organization? And how might we approach that in the moving and still image?



Figure 18. "Untitled" (1989) video still from *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* by Trinh T. Minh-ha. 35mm. 108 min. In this still Minh-ha utilizes both the archival and contemporary footage to challenge systems of representation. Image source: Institute of Contemporary Art.



Figure 19. “Untitled”(1986), video still from *Handsworth Songs* by John Akomfrah, Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC). In this still archival footage is manipulated and tinted blue. Credit: Channel 4 Archive. Image Source: The Guardian.

To dismantle relations of power imbued within archival knowledge, as an intervention, one would have to remove the context of Western logic, white logic, from the formal praxis of the image. This framework of understanding is best articulated within my multimedia series, *Unpacking Sameness* (2018).⁶⁵ I restage the renowned daguerreotype depicting the enslaved African female, Delia, daughter of Renty (1850). The photograph is one of several daguerreotypes commissioned by Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz to support a theory of black inferiority. The photograph captured by Joseph T. Zealy features Delia’s bare torso within an ethnographic gaze. She is centered within the constructed shot and looks directly at the camera. Her eyes are glazed with tears. The relational system of vis-a-vis within the framed schema pits phenomenological blackness against the camera’s gaze that “others,” “silences,” and “erases.” It communicates to the spectator that Delia is inferior, a subcategory below “human.” One can

⁶⁵ *Unpacking Sameness* is a multimedia series that interrogates the social constructions of race and racial identity. See, Christie Neptune, *Unpacking Sameness*, 2018, <https://www.christieneptune.com/unpacking-sameness>. See also Wendy Vogel “Christie Neptune,” in *Contact Sheet: Light Work Annual*, Vol. 212, 2021, pgs 21-27.

only imagine the narrative that would unfold had Delia possessed the freedom to look away or the agency of self-representation.



Figure 20. J. T. Zealy, Delia, country-born of African parents, daughter of Renty, Congo, March 1850. ©Harvard. Source: Harvard Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

As an act of resistance, I made a conscious decision to exclude the framed organization of abject blackness⁶⁶ within my artistic intervention. In *Sitting Like Delia with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand* (2018),⁶⁷ I place myself along the same field of reference as Delia, daughter of Renty. However, my eyes refuse the camera's gaze, and the shutter gripped within my right-hand captures the image of myself. My work in conversation subverts archival knowledge, and operates across the schema of white logic. The camera's gaze, in this respect, is aligned with my individual act of resistance. The image is a part of a diptych that also converses with the 1863 photograph of Peter, (formally known as

⁶⁶ Abject blackness highlights the white desire to witness black pain and suffering. See Davis, Brandon R. "The Politics of Racial Abjection." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 2022, 1–20.

⁶⁷ See Christie Neptune, *Sitting Like Delia with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand*, 2018. Digital chromogenic print, 20 x 20 inches. *Sitting Like Gordon with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand*, 2018. Digital chromogenic print, 20 x 20 inches. Worcester Art Museum, the estate of Blake Robinson.

Gordon),⁶⁸ the escaped slave from Louisiana captured by the Mathew Brady Studio. Both works move beyond an intervention, to some degree. While each photograph calls attention to racial injustice, it also fosters new spatialities of seeing and knowing across space. In the disavowal of Aggazie, Zealy and Brady within the constructed shot, the image can be read as a reclamation of agency, a feminist act of empowerment, a self portrait or a counternarrative that blurs framed binaries of gender and sex. In either direction, the context of white patriarchal logic is dismantled. But how might marked conventions of modern cinema enhance a gaze of intervention in documentary practice?



Figure 21. Diptych from Left to Right: *“Sitting Like Delia with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand”* (2018); and *“Sitting Like Gordon with Bare-Front, Indigo, and Shutter Release in Hand”* (2018). Digital chromogenic prints, 20 x 20 inches, in *Unpacking Sameness*, at the Worcester Art Museum, the estate of Blake Robinson. Credit: Worcester Museum Archives. Image source: Worcester Museum.

The Concentric Narrative, Collective Authorship and The Multiversal

Marked axiological shifts move the spectator beyond temporal boundaries and ethereal space unbound by the camera's lens. As an intervention, it marks the decorum of modern cinema with the conventions of African temporality in contest to relations of power embedded within visual representations of the urban. Within this context, my story moves horizontally across a concentric timeline that collapses a constellation of past, present, and future black subjectivities. This approach to

⁶⁸ See Smithsonian, National Portrait Gallery, “Peter (formerly identified as “Gordon”).” Assessed April 24, 2023. <https://npg.si.edu/learn/classroom-resource/gordon-lifedates-unknown>

filmmaking builds upon the notion of epiphenomenal time, a term introduced by black cultural theorist Michelle M. Wright in *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. "In Physics of Blackness, 'Epiphenomenal time' denotes the current moment, a moment that is not directly borne out of another (i.e., casually created)" (Wright 4). This moment to which Wright refers is known as the "now." In African cosmology the notion of "now" exists within a perpetual state of becoming. It collapses one's present moment, perceived past and vision of the future upon a single axis. Wright's "epiphenomenal time" expands upon this concept to articulate the varied registers of African diasporic identity. She writes:

Our constructs of Blackness are largely historical and more specifically based in a notion of spacetime that is commonly fitted into a linear progress narrative, while our phenomenological manifestations of Blackness happen in what I term Epiphenomenal time, or the "now" through which the past, present and future are always interpreted.⁶⁹

Epiphenomenal time in video, moves the spectator beyond the linear frameworks of reading black culture. Concentric storytelling, in *Ah New Riddim*, registers a cacophony of black perspectives beyond my own subjectivity. The migration stories of my family and community members, the social history of Brooklyn's shifting urban landscape, and the implosion of dancehall in East Flatbush converge and collapse at the nexus of my subjective experience. The narrative pivots within a succession of circles around dancehall archival home video of my father. It begins with my recollection and expands outwards to include the perspectives of others. I recall watching my father in performance and growing up in East Flatbush. In a wider circle around the main event, my father recalls his celebrated performance, life before migration in Trinidad and Tobago and his current life as an immigrant in East Flatbush. In circles beyond, framed subjects from the archives and current residents in East Flatbush share their migration stories and relationships to dancehall. Although each narrative explored within the concentric timeline does not directly impact the other, the notion of epiphenomenal time allows the spectator to engage with a plurality of perspectives and temporal planes from the vantage point of the present moment. But, how might the conventions of interactive documentary practice nuance the sutured processes of cinematic discourse within the filmic encounter?

In *Ah New Riddim*, the spectator's engagement disrupts the logic of the signifier within cinematic discourse. Suture theory, introduced by French theorist and psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller, "names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse" (25). This process originates from the "mirror

⁶⁹ See Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pg 4.

stage,"⁷⁰ a psychoanalytic theory coined by French theorist Jacques Lacan. Within this framework, the spectator is a signifier within a system of signification that communicates meaning. The film's subject-object relationship is predicated upon the spectator's "identification with the viewing apparatus and identification with the people viewed" (Vaughan 21). Hence, spectatorship, the camera's gaze, and framed subject-object relations are integral to structured language within linear progress narratives. As expressed in the previous chapters, within this modality, the filmmaker is the sole architect of representation who frames perception and guides the value of judgments. The epistemic is unidirectional. Concentric narratives, on the contrary, grants the spectator authorship over the film's chronological structure and dismantles processes of suture within the filmic discourse. The language is bi-directional and relates to a plurality of perspectives. In *Ah New Riddim*, the subversion of suture fosters new spatialities of seeing and knowing across space and time.

As an intervention, concentric storytelling and interactive documentary moves beyond the camera's gaze and considers the agency of marked axiologies and collective world-making in the struggle for representation. The collapse of suture within interactive documentary expands space for "play" and the persistence of new knowledge formations across time. William Uricchio, founder and principal investigator of MIT Open Lab, in *Re-thinking The Social Documentary*, explores the affordances of "play" and co-creation in interactive practices. The notion of "play as narrative" in interactive storytelling enhances moments of affective immersion and discovery within the filmic encounter.

Rather than thinking of narrative as an overarching structure of the entire experience (whether Aristotle's or Freytag's beginning, middle, and end'), it can instead be understood as the building blocks of an experience, each with its own cycle of 'exposition, transformation, and resolution.'⁷¹

Interactivity blurs the framed boundaries between "filmmaker" and "spectator" within the filmic encounter. The affordance of "co-authorship" and "play" establishes a sense of communalism within the gallery and cinema that disavows hierarchies of power within the processes of "viewing." This shift gives the film new context and meaning upon each encounter. However, this process becomes further nuanced when defining the conditions and rules of play, engagement and co-authorship. To what degree

⁷⁰ In psychoanalysis the mirror stage theory introduced by Jacques Lacan explores the belief that one recognizes one's own image through the mirror and other modes of signification. This theory is a grounding principle for suture theory and subject/object relations in film theory. See Jacques Lacan, *ECRITS*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

⁷¹ See Uricchio, William. "Re-Thinking the Social Documentary." In *The Playful Citizen: Civic Engagement in a Mediatized Culture*, edited by René Glas, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Joost Raessens, and Imar de Vries, 1:73–91. (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), pg 81.

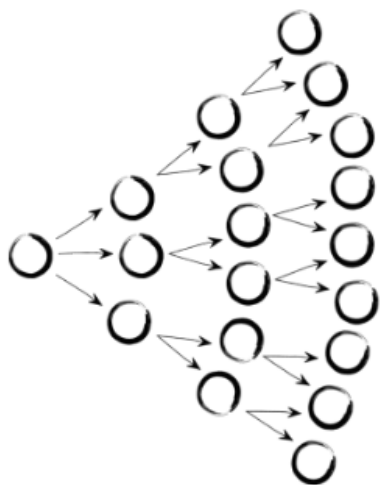
does the spectator engage the narrative? How does the spectator's presence and or interactivity transform the filmic encounter? Finally, and most importantly, what is preserved within the interaction?

The notion of "play" within my interactive-cinematic-explorations registers differently within passive and active spectator engagements. In my narrative short, *Light Years Apart* (2023),⁷² the spectator's engagement is passive. The film investigates hidden biases embedded within the processes of viewing. Utilizing bio-sensory computation and kinesthetic sensing, the film takes the spectator along two distinct trajectories with multiple variations within a branching narrative structure. Passive user engagement fosters seamless real-time perception that manipulates the spectator's spatial awareness. However, what is seen on the screen depends on the spectator's kinesthetic signals, spatial location, and the number of people observed. In one trajectory, the spectators' field of attention and proximity to the screen takes the narrative along a journey of dance, music, and black joy, the inner affect of my protagonist, Fula. The screen becomes a door that grants access to her subjectivity. And non-diegetic commentary, Fula's conscious thoughts, memories and desires, moves the spectators' to temporal planes beyond the screen. Within the alternative trajectory, the film assumes a gaze of eroticization seeded in the scopophilic pleasure of looking. The screen, in this sense, functions as a peephole. It provides a glimpse into the exterior surroundings of my subject's life. The spectators' sees only glimpses of Fula from a distance through the window of her dwelling. And they are barred access to her subjectivity and gaze. In this context, to "see" Fula, the spectator must first foreground her within their field of vision and surrender to her point of view and field of movement across the screen. Passive spectator engagement in *Light Years Apart* muddies the boundaries between conscious interactivity and unwitting participation. In this regard, engagement is an investigative apparatus within my discursive on the racialized gaze.

In *Ah New Riddim*, on the other hand, the spectator's engagement directly enhances the filmic encounter. The film interfaces with an RFID reader, arduino, raspberry pi and sound system to produce multiple entry points to my narrative within a concentric timeline. Dancehall archival footage of my father plays in loops until the spectator engages the schematic and scans a record. The encounter activates a new thread of subjectivity, narration and music. In the spectator's new role as a collaborator, the formal praxis of cinematic discourse disintegrates. They are pulled into a sensorial evocation of place that allows them to engage and experience the stories of East Flatbush across multiple temporal dimensions. Spectator engagement, concentric storytelling, multi-screen and African temporality collapses the affective fields of the past, present and future in space. Although the spectator's

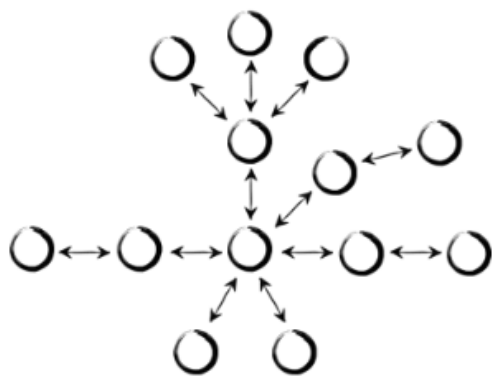
⁷² See Christie Neptune, "Light Years Apart." 2023, United States. Cornell University, Backslash Art.

engagement in *Ah New Riddim* and *Light Years Apart* varies, the notion of “play” and “co-creation” shifts context and meaning in both films to foster a perpetual reimagining of black subjectivity(s) across spacetime.



Branching Narrative

Figure 22. In branching narratives “the viewer is faced with multiple decisions and each choice affects the route they take through the story.”⁷³ In *Lights Years Apart* (2023), bio-sensory computation and kinesthetic sensing (passive user engagement) posits two distinct trajectories with multiple variations within a branching narrative structure. Source: Director’s Note.



Concentric Narrative

Figure 23. In concentric narratives, the story “revolves around one main hub which contains multiple entry points to different threads of the story.”⁷⁴ In *Ah New Riddim* (2023), the film interfaces with an RFID reader, arduino, raspberry pi and sound system to produce multiple entry points to my narrative within a concentric timeline. Source: Director’s Note.

⁷³ Directors Notes. 2016. “A guide to Interactive Documentary: Structure, Tools & Narrative.” Accessed April 24, 2023. <https://directorsnotes.com/2016/08/08/interactive-documentary-guide/>

⁷⁴ Directors Notes. 2016. “A guide to Interactive Documentary: Structure, Tools & Narrative.” Accessed April 24, 2023. <https://directorsnotes.com/2016/08/08/interactive-documentary-guide/>



Figure 24. "Untitled," video still from working demonstration of *Light Years Apart* (2023), produced by Cornell University, Backslash Art. The video on the right is generated from bio-sensory computation, and kinesthetic sensing data (eye gaze and head pose estimation) on the left. In this demonstration, the interaction designer watches the video. Then, bio-sensory and kinesthetic sensing analysis tracks the coordinates of her eye gaze and head position. When the interaction designer's eye gaze and head position aligns with the protagonist's position on screen, the video generates footage within a branching narrative structure of the protagonist's inner life. ©Christie Neptune. Image source: Christie Neptune Studios.

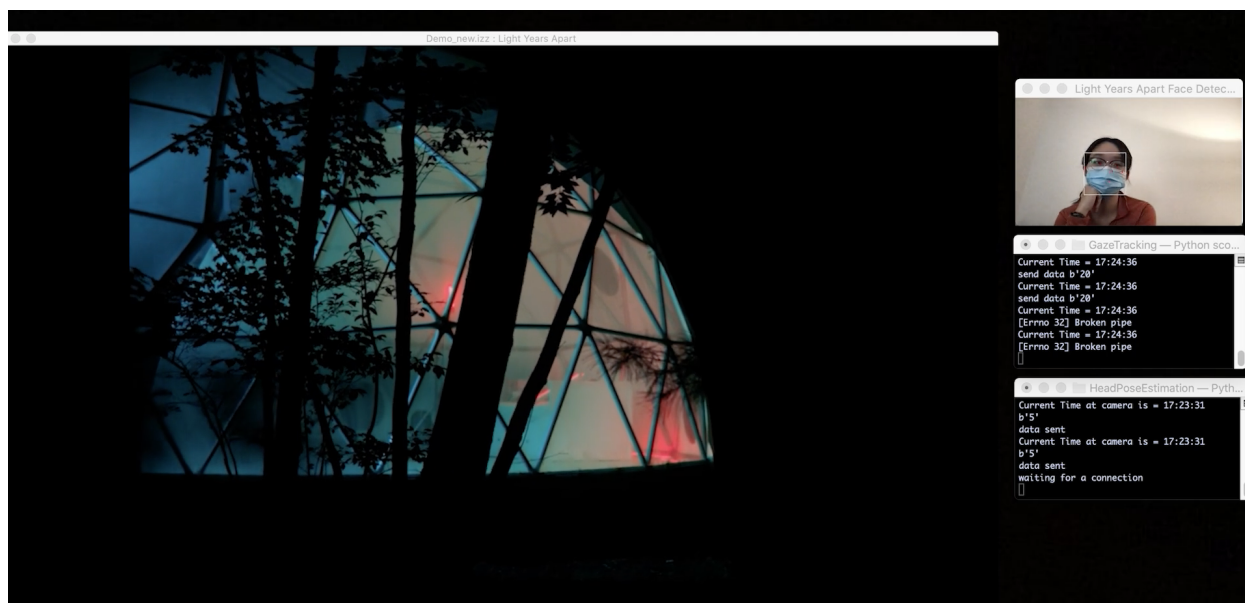


Figure 25. "Untitled," video still from working demonstration of *Light Years Apart* (2023), produced by Cornell University, Backslash Art. The video on the right is generated from bio-sensory computation, and kinesthetic sensing data (eye gaze and head pose estimation) on the left. In this demonstration, the interaction designer watches the video. Then, bio-sensory and kinesthetic sensing analysis tracks the coordinates of her eye gaze and head position. When the interaction designer's eye gaze and head position do not align with the protagonist's screen position, the video generates footage within a branching narrative structure of the protagonist's exterior. Credit: ©Christie Neptune. Image source: Christie Neptune Studios.

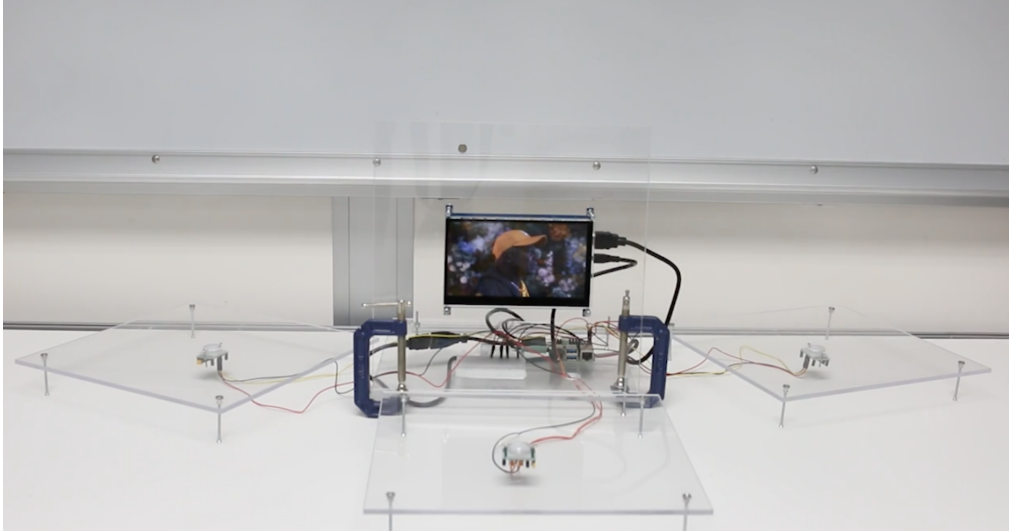


Figure 26. “Untitled” (2021), in *Ah New Riddim*, by Christie Neptune. Displayed above is a concentric presentation of the film for the Fall 2021 Final Presentation in the Art, Culture, and Technology program at MIT. Single Channel HD Video, VHS and Super 8mm Transfer, Acrylic, M3 steel screws, three HC-SR501 passive infrared motion sensors, Raspberry pi 4, PCB solderless breadboard, C-clamp, 7 inch monitor, and jumper wires. In this framework the spectator's direct engagement produces a new thread of video and sound. ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios.



Figure 27. Dancehall Archival home video still of my father in East Flatbush ca. July 10, 1988. The installation and interactive documentary, *Ah New Riddim*, pivots this recording. ©Christie Neptune. Image Source: Christie Neptune Studios.

Conclusion

In the spring of 2007, I accidentally walked into the constructed shot of a dancehall music video for Jamaican artist Sizzla Kalonji. The production for the artist's forthcoming single, *Ultimate Hustler* (2007) was filmed in front of my family's 3-story row house on Raleigh Place. I recall turning the corner one afternoon and walking straight into a sea of moving bodies, production crew, lights, and camera equipment. Confusion from the initial encounter waned and shifted towards excitement upon the realization that my neighborhood was the production site of a popular music video. Watching the production on MTV, a nationally syndicated program, in the days following was sublime. The dissonance between my point of view on-site, watching my neighborhood on screen, and my spatial orientation in East Flatbush, notably Raleigh Place, fostered momentary disjuncture that disoriented my spatial awareness. However, what took precedence at that moment was what the production implied. The video's compositional balance focuses one's attention on the foreground of Kalonji (a popular dancehall artist) centered between residents of East Flatbush—a spectrum of various Caribbean ethnicities, classes, and color distinctions. For the first time, I saw my community fixed within the framed organization of a national program, the gestural marking of my identity across the visible landscape of white logic. Although the video did not conform to universal standards of representation, it was undoubtedly at the center of market capitalism. It defies to some degree, my argument made in the previous Chapters. As I've said in Chapter 1, 'black culture positioned at the center of market capitalism will dim in the shade of universalism.' Was Kalonji's video a marking of axiology across space and time, or does his video function similarly to *Peace Concert*?

The correlations between the archival home video of my father's dancehall performance and Kalonji's dancehall music video in East Flatbush speaks to the potential of popular culture within the marking of space across both local and state spatialities. In the seeded struggle for representation, marked axiological shifts foreground a wide aperture of black subjectivity(s) across the narrow orifice of the urban to reimagine black futures across space and time perpetually. In *Ah New Riddim*, this framework brings attention to the varied shades and hues of Caribbean identity. The foreground of my subjectivity within the organization of the frame dismantles the monolith, a linear construct of Western logic that "others," "silences," and "erases." As an intervention, this framework moves beyond the camera's gaze to mark the conventions of Western world-making productions within visual representation. In the American and European urban, it frames the gestural markings of vernacular spatial practices, semiotics, and values across the visible landscape. Archival home video of my father's dancehall performance reflects the true radicalism of the moment, the social production of a community

fostered through conscious interventions in economy, urban planning, and real estate practice by Caribbean immigrants during the mid-20th century. Dancehall, in this respect, functions as a performance of urbanity. Although Kalonji's video speaks across both dominant and marginal spatialities, it is fixed within one dimension. It highlights a moment in time, whereas *Ah New Riddim* collapses the varied temporal dimensions of spacetime to perpetually reimagine black futures.

The Riddim in this thesis is East Flatbush, a constant beat within a song that shifts temporarily along the ebb and flow of new cultural configurations, fragmented and nuanced through the labored movements and material productions of Caribbean Americans. Today the neighborhood of East Flatbush is beset by overdevelopment, privatization, and displacement, a provocation that counters real estate practices held by West Indian immigrants during the mid-20th century. It is also no surprise that this new development runs concurrently with dancehall's integration into mainstream culture. Perhaps Kalonji's music video signaled the beginning of a new era. However, if dancehall is the basis of politics, the ethos of resistance and local community organizing will continue to render a diversity black perspectives and new knowledge formations in opposition to the discourse of Western logic. This thesis and artistic project attempts to preserve the inner affect and richness of my community in East Flatbush across varied dimensions of space and time.



Figure 28. "Untitled" (2007), in *Ultimate Hustler* by Sizzla Kalonji. Directed by Dale Resteghini, Damon Dash Music Group, 2007. 3 min., 39 secs.

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