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A HIP-HOP JOINT: THINKING ARCHITECTURALLY ABOUT BLACKNESS

by

LAUREN M. CRAMER

Under the Direction of Alessandra Raengo, PhD

ABSTRACT

"A Hip-hop Joint: Thinking Architecturally About Blackness" beings by recognizing that hip-hop visual culture's rapid global expansion over the last four decades complicates its lasting connection to blackness. Instead of arguing that blackness is the content of contemporary hip-hop, this project considers blackness as the aesthetic that coheres the diffuse genre. Thus, blackness serves a distinctly architectural function in hip-hop visual culture—it is the architectonic logic of the genre. Therefore, this project illustrates the value of alternative definitions of blackness; specifically, this dissertation approaches blackness as a distinct set of spatial relations that can be observed in the many places and spaces hip-hop is produced and consumed. "A Hip-hop Joint" argues blackness and hip-hop exist in a recursive loop: blackness generates the spatial organization of hip-hop and hip-hop is so racially charged that it produces

blackness. As a result, hip-hop images can serve as the site for unexpected encounters with blackness—specifically, visualizing blackness in spaces that are not occupied by actual black bodies. Because visual culture organizes space through the positioning of the black body, this dissertation argues hip-hop images that defy the presumed appearance and visibility of blackness are not only capable of reconfiguring image relations, but also the aesthetics of anti-blackness. This project relies on black studies, visual culture studies, and architectural theory. The visual objects analyzed include: music videos directed by Hype Williams, Beyoncé's "Formation," WorldStarHipHop.com, William Pope.L's "Claim," the trailer for Apollo Brown's *Thirty Eight* album, and "Until the Quiet Comes" directed by Kahlil Joseph.

INDEX WORDS: Blackness, Visual Culture, Hip-hop, Architecture, Space, Place, Hype Williams, Kahlil Joseph, Beyoncé, William Pope.L, Modernism, Anti-blackness

A HIP-HOP JOINT: THINKING ARCHITECTURALLY ABOUT BLACKNESS

by

LAUREN M. CRAMER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

A HIP-HOP JOINT: THINKING ARCHITECTURALLY ABOUT BLACKNESS

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DEDICATION

For Mummy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"One of the things I find troubling in debates about rap is that I don't think anyone knows what the totality of its hypercreativity looks like [...] I can't keep up with the volume of hip-hop product anymore. I don't know if anyone can. There is simply too much of it to be assimilated, and the kinds of judgments we make have to take that volume into account. It's a flood—it's not a flow, it's a flood actually—and bobbing up and down in the water is not enough."[1]

"To locate the ground is necessarily to construct an edifice."[2]

Hip-hop's visual culture is a space where the public can interface with racial difference. In the wake of a crisis in urban policing and intensifying political divisiveness across racial lines, attempts to make clear sense of the black American experience often turn to hip-hop lyrics and visual culture—including using hip-hop lyrics as evidence in criminal trials of young African American men.[3] As a result, the genre has become *the* contemporary expression of blackness in popular culture even though hip-hop's rapid global expansion over the last four decades and the staggering number of cultural objects associated with hip-hop mean actual black bodies can no longer be the authenticator of the genre. This dissertation explores blackness not as the content of contemporary hip-hop, but the as an aesthetic that coheres it.

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[1] Paul Gilroy, "It's a Family Affair," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (The New Press, 1998), 309.
[2] Mark Wigley, "The Translation of Architecture, the Production of Babel," *Assemblage*, no. 8 (February 1, 1989): 10.
[3] Erik Nielson and Michael Render, "Poetic (In)justice," *USA Today*, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2014/11/28/poetic-injustice-rap-supreme-court-lyrics-violence-trial-column/19537391/.

In hip-hop lyrics, popular discourse, and academic writing, there is a collapse between blackness and urbanity that has become an essential part of defining hip-hop. Hip-hop refers to both rap music and a vast cultural aesthetic and the genre's diversity has allowed scholars to ask questions about race, black cultural production, intellectual property, youth culture, gender and pedagogy.[4] Central to virtually all of these approaches are questions of place and space—both real and imagined (i.e. New York City and the "ghetto" or "mainstream"); the space of racial marginalization; and the diasporic routes through which hip-hop and its accompanying objects and visual markers travel the globe. Linking hip-hop with space and place is not only a part of the scholarly analysis of hip-hop; it is an explicit part of hip-hop lyrics, which become the basis for the genre's rich vocabulary and visual culture. For example, there are hip-hop subgenres defined by regional origin (East Coast or West Coast rap); music that addresses the experience of a certain kind of space or place (Trap music); and there are cultural terms like "ghetto pass" that connect hip-hop to the larger discussion of subcultures that are formed in charged spaces of confinement.

In the existing hip-hop literature, racial authenticity is often associated with specific places and, consequently, the apparent blackness of contemporary hip-hop's many diverse sites remains unexplained. In the 1990s, Tricia Rose defined hip-hop as "a black cultural expression

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[4] Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Derrick P. Alridge, "From Civil Rights to Hip Hop: Toward a Nexus of Ideas," *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 226–52; Dipannita Basu and Sidney J Lemelle, *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture* (London: Pluto, 2006); H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook, *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, And the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2009); J. E. Brunson, "Showing, Seeing: Hip-Hop, Visual Culture, and the Show-and-Tell Performance," *Black History Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (2011): 6–12, http://asalh.metapress.com/index/W488277721188713.pdf.

that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America."[5] Rose's definition is flexible enough to accommodate the various sub-genres of hip-hop, but it does not seem prepared for the central role hip-hop now plays in American popular culture. Like Murray Foreman, who argues the music industry's marginalization of hip-hop is a parallel to the production of urban ghettos, these literatures present the constellations of race, space, and hip-hop as geographically linked.[6] As a result, this work literally forecloses the movement of hip-hop and the possible spaces where blackness can be visualized. This dissertation argues blackness is so powerfully connected to the space of hip-hop that hip-hop visual culture appears black regardless of the specific locations where these images are produced or consumed or the racial identity of the bodies in the images. Therefore, when hip-hop expresses its race in spatial terms it is more precisely evoking a set of black spatial arrangements, not geographic locations.

Studies of rap's production culture provide meaningful historical accounts of the genre, but they do not recognize the formal qualities of the discursive link between hip-hop, space, and race. In other words, the aesthetics of blackness are not being used as a theoretical leverage for interpreting or opening hip-hop's aesthetics in the contemporary moment. A formal approach to hip-hop visual culture will identify the distinct racial logic of this space instead of merely tracking its stylistic variation. This approach gives greater insight into blackness, its existence in space and its materiality, because it recognizes the genre's variation as evidence of the ability of blackness to move and organize space. Without this flexible language to discuss hip-hop and its relationship to blackness and black expressive culture, scholarship on the genre has been forced

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[5] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2.
[6] Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

to establish complicated subgenres (i.e. conscious rap, gangsta rap, etc.).[7] The endless segmentation adds confusion without seriously considering what these different stylistic traditions have in common and what coheres this diverse set of objects. More importantly, underlying these subgenres is often the condemnation or praise of certain kinds of hip-hop. These evaluative approaches rely on assumptions about what black art is and what it should do and therefore reveal an essentialist logic.[8] Hip-hop studies needs a contemporary lens that does not negate its relationship to African American life, or condemn it, because of its mainstream popularity.

A forward-looking approach, put forth by this project, argues blackness can be understood through its spatiality; specifically by providing a spatial structure for hip-hop that is stable yet flexible enough to exist even when hip-hop enters or visualizes spaces that are not occupied by actual black bodies. Indeed, abandoning prescriptive debates about hip-hop helps this project take a more critical position on the issue of representation in black popular culture by addressing that term in its fullest sense.[9] That means acknowledging the boundless possible ways blackness can be represented in popular culture and the visual field and the tension that exists between that multiplicity and the almost normative role hip-hop takes in representing the black

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[7] E.K. Watts, “An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption: Gangsta Rap as Cultural Commodity,” *Communication Studies* 48, no. 1 (1997): 42–58; Craig S Watkins, “Black Is Back, and It’s Bound to Sell!" Nationalist Desire and the Production of Black Popular Culture,” in *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, by Eddie S. Glaude (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 189–214; Mickey Hess, “Metal Faces, Rap Masks: Identity and Resistance in Hip Hop’s Persona Artist,” *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 3 (July 2005): 297–311.

[8] These debates are summarized in Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008).

[9] Darby English similarly addresses this burden of representation, which he calls “the black representational space” in the fine art context in *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010).

community.[10] Hip-hop often claims to speak for blackness in the public sphere. For example, Chuck D, a member of the rap group Public Enemy, has repeatedly described hip-hop as "the CNN" of black America. This quote has circulated through popular and scholarly discourse for nearly two decades and has been adopted by a younger generation of hip-hop producers, which reveals the real world implications of hip-hop's well-known claims to authenticity and documentary truth.[11] Embedded in hip-hop's form is this double move that carefully balances forms of difference (i.e. race) with a sense of coherence and sameness. Thus, popular forms of black representation become fully crystallized not as mirrors of black culture, but rather as the space that produces blackness. This space is generative and in need of a critical approach to representation because, as Stuart Hall explains, "it is an arena that is profoundly mythic. It is a theater of popular desires, a theater of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined."[12]

Perhaps ironically, avoiding these foreclosures makes it possible to recognize the tautology at the core of hip-hop's racial identity: blackness generates the spatial organization of hip-hop and hip-hop is so racially charged that it produces blackness. As one of the preeminent

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[10] The contradictions in black expressive culture are central to Stuart Hall's canonical essay "What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?' Hall argues all popular cultures are contradictory. Moreover, blackness, the expression of racial difference, itself becomes essentialized so that reference to *specific* black experiences become the measure for inclusion and exclusion that reinforces the claims of (im)purity that already define black bodies. Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1998), 21–33.

[11] Chuck D, *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1998), 256; Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Ben Detrick, "WorldStarHipHop EXPOSED: The Truth Behind The Controversial Site," *Vibe*, March 28, 2011, http://www.vibe.com/article/worldstarhiphop-exposed-truth-behind-controversial-site. Carol Vernallis points out the similarity between hip-hop music videos, with their spoken lyrics, and the documentary voiceover

[12] Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," 32.

scholars of hip-hop, and the writer of a canonical book on the topic, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Rose's definition has become a standard in hip-hop scholarship. The two central elements of Rose's definition ("black cultural expression" and "margins of urban America") are claims about not only the identity of hip-hop, but also the essence of blackness as it is represented in art. Yet, what about hip-hop makes it a black art? Furthermore, is this label indelible, even when hip-hop is not produced in urban America? Now, the challenge of defining hip-hop is complicated by the equally complex terrain of blackness. If hip-hop is made recognizable as an expression of blackness, how then do we recognize blackness? To summarize, this project identifies three issues of identity and categorization that are intertwined and need resolution: 1) hip-hop's identity based on the qualities of blackness; 2) blackness as it is expressed through hip-hop spaces rather than bodies; and 3) more broadly, the strange possibility of racialized/racializing art, with hip-hop as the example of popular black art *par excellence*.

In a six-part editorial on *Vulture.com*, the influential hip-hop drummer and producer Questlove complained about the diffuse nature of contemporary hip-hop and the tendency to add the label to any cultural object with an even tangential relationship to black culture. He laments, "there's even hip-hop architecture. What the hell is that? A house you build with a Hammer?"[13] Questlove's sarcasm is justified in a field that has paid considerably less attention to rap music's attendant cultural objects, like hip-hop visual culture. These images are so vital in a discussion of hip-hop's racial identity because the apparent resemblance between space, race and hip-hop is a

[13] Questlove, "When the People Cheer: How Hip-Hop Failed Black America," *Vulture.com*, July 6, 2014, http://www.vulture.com/2014/04/questlove-on-how-hip-hop-failed-black-america.html.

visual concern.[14] Due to the dearth of this kind of analysis, we lack a framework for understanding what coheres these disparate objects. Fortunately, the term "architecture" appropriately describes the spatial functions of blackness, its ability to bring together all of hip-hop's content, along with the cultural fantasies and fears that coalesce around it.

This project takes Questlove's joke seriously, by presenting the concept of "hip-hop architecture" as the expression of black spatiality in the architectural organization of hip-hop. Hip-hop architecture argues blackness is the aesthetic that coheres hip-hop's vast visual culture while the movement and reproduction of hip-hop images in turn construct blackness. Even though these structures cannot be geographically located, hip-hop architecture is a complex assemblage of formal techniques and performance codes that create the space for expressions of blackness. Hip-hop architecture continues the discourse that links hip-hop and space but instead of identifying the various places hip-hop is produced and consumed, this project argues hip-hop is a space. In fact, because of hip-hop's black architectural organization, the genre's visual culture has become an incredibly important site of interracial exchange, where unexpected encounters with blackness can occur. Because this project is oriented around its object of study and allows it to dictate the methodological approach, hip-hop architecture is both a claim about blackness producing space, the evident flexibility of black spatiality, and an argument about the need for an architectural reading of hip-hop visual culture that is capable of mapping blackness across styles, genres, and bodies. The reading strategy hip-hop architecture necessarily demands

[14] For contemporary writing on blackness and rap music, particularly in relation to developing sound technologies, see: R. Shusterman, "The Fine Art of Rap," *New Literary History* 22, no. 3 (1991): 613–32, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/469207; Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (Quartet Books, 1998); Alexander G. Weheliye, "' Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 21–47, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/soc/summary/v020/20.2weheliye.html; Alexander G Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

is the analysis of the *joints*, the points of articulation, where change and rearrangements may occur in this feedback loop.

When this project argues that blackness is the architectonic logic of hip-hop, that blackness generates and organizes space, it implies black spatiality has a function in other architectures too—specifically, the architectures of whiteness and the Human. WJT Mitchell explains "the model of race as a symbolic-imaginary, verbal-visual complex is thus not merely a psychological matter, but a public and palpable feature of the material world, of the epistemological and historical field in which knowledge is constructed."[15] Thus, blackness does not just organize the space in and around hip-hop images, but it is part of the organization and intelligibility of all images. Despite the inability to represent the complexity of blackness, even in hip-hop images, the function of blackness in the fields of knowledge Mitchell describes is apparent. In other words, there is a productive distinction between what blackness *is* and what it *does*. Furthermore, the only way to make claims about the shape or materiality of blackness (i.e. to describe it as flexible) is to first consider how blackness must work and move in space.

In the brash and defiant space of hip-hop visual culture, the rules of legibility are pushed to their conceptual limit. Therefore, in these images it is possible to see blackness functioning in unexpected ways. By mapping the architectural topology of black representation, the process of forming and deforming blackness, through the genre's changing appearance, this project identifies movements that may shift the way we understand hip-hop and the epistemologies of race. Indeed, building the concept of hip-hop architecture may erect structures that black bodies can step outside of. Thus, this project makes two interrelated claims: first, the spatiality of blackness can be observed working across different kinds of hip-hop images and second, the

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[15] W. J. T Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 20.

aesthetic agency of this disembodied blackness allows it to racialize hip-hop spaces and has the potential to realign the ways we know "the World."[16]

In this Introduction, I would like to explain how hip-hop architecture presents the possibility of seeing blackness where black bodies are not present in order to address the racial encounters that occur in and around hip-hop architecture. Before addressing hip-hop images in each chapter, this Introduction describes "black space," or blackness as distinct architectural conditions. This project defines blackness as a set of spatial relations so that blackness creates black space and black space creates blackness. As I mentioned, this project rejects the linearity of previous approaches and accepts the tautological relationship between the forms of black space and its function in the racial order of the World and visual culture. For clarity, this recursive loop will be segmented into the most pertinent questions about the form and function of black space—"what is black space?" and "what happens in black space?"

First, I will explain what black space is and where it is located. That means starting from the most recognizable black space, the body, and moving outward. This section argues the seamless incorporation of blackness into the formation of knowledge about Humans makes it hard to observe, but black space is no less present. Therefore, hip-hop architecture is a reading strategy that aims to render visible what Katherine McKittrick describes as the "absented

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[16] Denise Ferreira Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (June 2014): 81–97, doi:10.1080/00064246.2014.11413690. I rely on this phrase "the World," and will capitalize it the same way, throughout this dissertation to refer to Da Silva's argument that the "Category of Blackness" is central and essential to the scientific and historical ways of knowing that shape the World as we know it. Although this capitalization will provide clarity, I would like to acknowledge that it is against Da Silva's claim to distinguish "the World" from "the world" because her argument is that blackness is always fundamental to knowledge in all categories, not just in discourses of race or racial representation.

presence" of blackness in the World.[17] An important part of defining black space and its function as a *joint* in the architecture of race and knowledge is explaining its oppositional relationship to whiteness. Indeed, defining and locating black space necessarily requires a discussion of these wider architectures. Thus, the question "why is black space where it is?" is unavoidable. Next, I explain what happens in black space. These events are the racial encounters visualized in hip-hop architecture that have implications far beyond the genre. As a result of the mutuality between the function of black space and its forms, visible in hip-hop architecture, these questions will necessarily and productively overlap. Throughout this discussion, I will clarify the considerable amount of architectural terminology this project uses for theoretical framing and thick description. Finally, I will summarize the chapters that follow in this dissertation that will each address structural forms—the surface, the grid, and the diagram—where blackness exists architecturally and serves as the *joint* between race and representation.

1.1 Hip-Hop Architecture: A Multidisciplinary Approach

As a methodology, hip-hop architecture aims to find a nexus between three broad sets of literature: 1) black studies and scholarship that focuses on the aesthetics of blackness; 2) visual culture theory; and 3) architectural theory. These disciplines treat their objects of study—the body, the image, and the structure—as formal expressions of sensuous and intangible entities like subjectivity or experience. Each subject takes a critical approach to epistemologies by bringing greater attention to processes of knowledge production: racialization, image making and world building. Foregrounding these processes introduces fluidity in cultural formations that

[17] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxv. McKittrick uses this phrase specifically to discuss black womanhood as the ground of human geographies.

otherwise appear self-evident. In other words, these literatures perform the critical work of ungrounding black space in the image and hip-hop architecture to understand how blackness moves across mediums (specifically, from the body to hip-hop image).

There are two sets of literatures devoted to the study of blackness that help frame this project and take for granted that blackness can exist in space separately from the body: black studies, a scholarly tradition that emerged from black revolutionary politics that made its entry into academia in the 1960s, and scholarship that focuses on the aesthetics of blackness, which is a less formal category that addresses expressions of blackness in public culture including fine arts and literature. Black studies "investigates processes of racialization with a particular emphasis on the shifting configurations of black life."[18] In "Hip-Hop Studies in Black," P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods argue black studies helps articulate "the magnitude of what is at stake" in hip-hop studies.[19] One of their primary critiques of the current approaches to hip-hop music and visual culture is the discussion of race, racism, and resistance exclusively within the context of performance. Without incorporating hip-hop and hip-hop performances into broader discussions of capital and systems of devaluation that determine access to the status of the Human, hip-hop studies repeatedly falls into the conservative logic of multiculturalism that can only perform superficial gestures toward "social justice."[20]

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[18] Alexander G. Weheliye, "Introduction: Black Studies and Black Life," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 6, doi:10.1080/00064246.2014.11413682.
[19] P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 26, no. 2–3 (2014): 274, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jpms.12077/full.
[20] Ibid., 275.

One important contribution made by black studies scholarship is articulating the ontology of blackness through the idea of the "afterlife of slavery."[21] This work recognizes the interminable violence of blackness that manifests in every aspect of cultural, judicial, economic, and civic life. Projects like "A Hip Hop Joint," that deal with slavery's afterlife in the arts, need object-oriented approaches that are informed by this writing and attuned to the particular formal techniques in expressions of blackness. For that reason, "A Hip-hop Joint" relies on the second kind of scholarship that connects blackness and aesthetics. This literature adds to the claim that blackness is excluded from the realm of the Human by contributing an accounting of the aesthetics, the processes of perception and sensation, through which the exclusion of blackness

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[21] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64, doi:10.2307/464747; Sylvia Wynter, "'No Humans Involved': An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century*, Knowledge on Trial, 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 42–73; Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183–201, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686156; Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition*, 1st ed. (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003); Fred Moten, "Black Op," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1743–47; Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218, doi:10.1353/crt.0.0062; Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Macmillan, 2008); Frank B. III Wilderson, "Grammar & Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," *Theatre Survey* 50, no. 01 (April 22, 2009): 119–25, doi:10.1017/S004055740900009X; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28, no. 2 103 (June 20, 2010): 31–56, doi:10.1215/01642472-2009-066; Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions*, no. 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 1–47; Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). This is a small sample of black studies scholarship, but it includes the significant writers and works that were essential to developing the implications of "hip-hop architecture."

in the visual field is made sensible, legible, and even beautiful.[22] As a result, these works are capable of providing thick descriptions of the boundaries around blackness that are flexible enough to accommodate the cultural proliferation Questlove describes, but contained enough to keep hip-hop architecture intact.

As a result of combining both black studies and scholarship on the aesthetics of blackness, this image-based project is capable of maintaining a commitment to the politics that are an indispensible part of black studies—even in an examination of contemporary popular culture. The latter body of work that inspires this project, whether it discusses space or not, provides maps of interracial interaction and exchange that make it possible to see the operations of blackness in new places like contemporary hip-hop. For example, the cycle of rejection and incorporation in Anne Anlin Cheng's psychoanalytic study, *The Melancholy of Race* points to an intimacy (nearness) between national identity and race. Thus, she is able to map the contours of race that are shaped by psychic forces and materialized in popular art and literature.[23] This kind of work approaches well-known objects of visual culture whose historical or sociological significance, like hip-hop, has often foreclosed aesthetic analysis. The reluctance to consider the

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[22] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 338; Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3; Alessandra Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), 142. My definition of aesthetics, particularly in relation to blackness, is a summary of the scholarship by these writers. Both Mirzeoff and Raengo reference Jacques Rancière in their discussion of racialized aesthetics, while Mitchell historicizes aesthetics in order to foreground the central position colonial discourse plays in our understanding of the art object. In each case, aesthetics or "aestheticizing" contributes a way to understand the process that makes race, understood as the categorization of humans, "seem right."

[23] Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

formal qualities of these cultural objects results in a "liberal universalism" that Saucier and Woods warn is, at best, uncritical and, at its worst, blatantly racist.[24]

As a methodology, hip-hop architecture also incorporates visual culture theory because, like the aesthetics of blackness, this body of literature understands social relations as decidedly visual.[25] Visual culture, which can refer to an object of study or a sub-discipline, combines aesthetics' concern with the visual experience and art history's emphasis on artistic practices and institutions to organize the study of visualities, in order to understand the ways these issues construct "the social" by distributing power along lines of sight.[26] Mitchell explains, "as an imperial practice, aesthetics enlists all of the rhetorics of religion, morality, and progressive modernity to pass judgment on the 'bad objects' that inevitably come into view in a colonial encounter."[27] For that reason, this project follows the materialist-oriented segment of visual studies, most influentially framed by Nicholas Mirzoeff and WJT Mitchell, that intentionally (and provocatively) rejects this tendency to diminish the image by recognizing its agency.

Visual culture studies, as a discipline or methodology, therefore addresses this project's primary concerns by explaining how the concepts described by black studies scholars can be expressed in a set of racialized looking relations that are reproduced across media.[28] The influence of this approach on this project is apparent in several ways. Visual culture studies has expanded the possible range of objects of study approached through a traditionally art-historical lens to include popular culture objects like hip-hop. Similarly, visual culture studies seriously

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[24] Saucier and Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 272.
[25] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader* (Psychology Press, 2002).
[26] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 338; N. Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2006): 53–79, doi:10.1177/1470412906062285.
[27] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 147.
[28] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Psychology Press, 2002), 20; Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race*.

addresses the spectacle—including the distinctly visual aspects of black subjection that are incorporated into scenes of pleasure.[29] Therefore, this approach understands the exclusion of black expressive culture from certain spaces and the invisibility of violence against the black body as implications of an image discourse that is inextricably linked to colonial discourse. When this project attempts to let the images "speak for themselves," distinctly outside of the intentions of the artists who produced the images discussed in each chapter, it is replicating the alignment of politics and method modeled by visual culture studies.[30] To summarize, through the lens of visual culture studies, this project can argue that the visualization of black spatial arrangements are capable of doing more that representing the redress of racial antagonisms; they can trouble the ground of the World expressed in the image that relies on enacting, but not necessarily *seeing*, racial violence.

Finally, to manage the "hip-hop flood" Paul Gilroy alerts us to, hip-hop architecture adopts a model with a corresponding scale. Like black studies and visual culture, architectural theory is a broad category of research produced by scholars from various fields including practitioners and philosophers. This project takes a contemporary architectural perspective, so it considers the recent changes to architectural theory and practice, particularly when and where they coincide with hip-hop and media studies. Since the 1990s, digital technology has ignited an interest in topological or virtual architecture that has changed the field and is visible in the works of architect/theorists like Stephen Perella, Peter Eisenman, and Greg Lynn.[31] Digital architecture is an extension of the postmodern architectural critiques initiated by scholars like Robert Venturi

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[29] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.
[30] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 6.
[31] Giuseppa Di Cristina, ed., *Architecture and Science* (Chichester: Academy Press, 2001); Ben Milbourne, "Reflections of the Virtual: The Virtual in Architecture and the Potential of Animate Form," *Architectural Theory Review* 7, no. 2 (2002): 71–83, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13264820209478458.

and Denise Scott Brown.[32] With or without the aid of sophisticated rendering tools these scholars have introduced movement, contradiction, and complexity to the built environment in light of the ascendency of modern architecture. Modern architecture insisted on transparency and the absolute alignment of form and function while its critics foreground the distinction between architectural concepts and the completed structure, or what Brian Massumi has described as "the art of the leap."[33]

The architectural theory addressed in this dissertation is oriented around what I call "modern architectural values," i.e. the rigid, circumscribed approach to the built environment that uses material transparency to claim ideological neutrality and objectivity.[34] Because modern architecture is an outgrowth of the Enlightenment and modernism, it is another expression of "the World" that reifies anti-blackness.[35] In response to these values, postmodern architectural practice establishes spaces inside and around modern architecture's standardized designs that are

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[32] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2d ed, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture (New York : Boston: Museum of Modern Art ; distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1977); Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas - Revised Edition: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1977).
[33] Brian Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," in *Architecture and Science*, ed. Giuseppa Di Cristina (Chichester: Academy Press, 2001), 200.
[34] Hasan-Uddin Khan, *International Style: Modernist Architecture from 1925 to 1965* (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 1998); Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 4th ed, World of Art (London ; New York, N.Y: Thames & Hudson, 2007).
[35] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

ambiguous and fluid.[36] Postmodern theorists argue architectural structures cannot regulate all the potential meanings that can emerge in space; in fact, the construction of architectural planes can create more corners for unregulated movement and illegibility. As a result, these contradictory spaces become models for black space, the absented presence in architectural practice. By articulating these modern and postmodern values and the forms of their expression in space, architectural theory provides the descriptive tools to perform close readings of hip-hop architecture.

Architectural theory can be comfortably incorporated into the study of blackness and visual culture because it is already deeply invested in philosophical questions. The translation of Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* had a profound influence on architectural theory.[37] This work provided architects with the theoretical language to describe intensive masses that, unlike the Deconstructivist impulse, can sustain difference without breaking apart.[38] Like film theorists, architects found Deleuze, and his writing with Félix Guattari, infinitely productive because of the philosophers' expansive vocabulary. Jean-François Lyotard once called Deleuze a "Library of Babel" and elsewhere I have referenced the same short story by

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[36] Greg Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs: Collected Essays*, Books-by-Architects (Bruxelles: La Lettre volée, 1998); Cristina, *Architecture and Science*; Harry Francis Mallgrave, *An Introduction to Architectural Theory 1968 to the Present* (West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012); Anastasia Karandinou, *No Matter: Theories and Practices of the Ephemeral in Architecture* (Burlington: Ashgate Pub Co, 2013). This is a small sample of postmodern or anti-modern approaches to architecture. While this note is not exhaustive, in these works there is a noteworthy emphasis on non-traditional and unexpected building materials (like blackness) that are part of the material practice of an anti-modern architectural approach.
[37] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Athlone, 1993).
[38] Mallgrave, *An Introduction to Architectural Theory 1968 to the Present*, 171.

Jorge Luis Borges to describe blackness. [39] Yet, I would like to briefly describe why I do not find this abundance helpful in this project, meaning despite his influence on the discipline, there is a distinction between an architectural and a Deleuzian approach to hip-hop and blackness.

It may seem intuitive, but the difference between architecture's and Deleuze's approach to substance and space lies in the weight of architecture. Peter Eisenman defines the architectural condition as "the metaphysics of presence," which describes the impossibility of disarticulating the architectural sign/form from its signified/function because it would destroy a structure.[40] Deleuze's philosophical writing is similarly concerned with the possibility of escaping the constraints of form and matter.[41] Deleuze argues the image can become pure form through extraction or abstraction.[42] However, these routes are not available for the architectural form, which cannot escape its literal burden or be removed from other interlocking architectural forms that erect a structure. As I have described, this project has two important commitments: to the methodology demanded by the visual object and to understanding the structural position of blackness in the World. To the first issue, the best way to understand the spatiality of blackness and the architectural structure it provides is to study actual architectural forms, which includes their philosophical entanglements and material practices. Thus, the weight Eisenman describes cannot be dismissed without turning this project's architectural framework into an elaborate metaphor. Second, black studies makes it clear that blackness cannot easily transcend what

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[39] Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy* (U of Minnesota Press, 2012), 10; Lauren Cramer, "The Black (Universal) Archive and the Architecture of Black Cinema," *Black Camera* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2016) *Forthcoming*.

[40] Peter Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing," in *Diagram Diaries* (New York, NY: Universe, 1999), 27–35.

[41] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon the Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003).

[42] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon the Logic of Sensation*, 2.

Deleuze calls "figurative givens" because racial distinction is essential to defining the Human.[43] As McKittrick explains, the geography of the auction block informs other spaces so that the end of forced labor does not alter the condition of blackness, it simply turns blackness into "an ideological currency that moves beyond the moment of sale."[44]

Chapter three of this dissertation will expand on this distinction and my decision to not include Deleuze's architectural concepts, but in this review of literature I can provide one additional meta-disciplinary example that may clarify the issue of "weight" in hip-hop architecture. There are many cogent books and articles that use Deleuze's writing to address blackness, including works by Jeffrey Nealon, Kara Keeling, Amit S. Rai, Arun Saldanha, and Jason Michael Adams.[45] However, in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye argues black feminist theorists, writing from the perspective of the black subject and its formation, provide meaningful correctives to major theoretical concepts from European thinkers like Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, and Michel Foucault. Weheilye's project attempts to fill in the theoretical gaps of minority discourse. He also argues that although black feminist scholars address many of the same questions as these famous philosophers, they have been overshadowed by white thinkers

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[43] Ibid., 103.
[44] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 79.
[45] Jeffrey T. (Jeffrey Thomas) Nealon, "Refraining, Becoming-Black: Repetition and Difference in Amiri Baraka's Blues People," *Symploke* 6, no. 1 (1998): 83–95, doi:10.1353/sym.2005.0085; Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Amit S. Rai, "Race Racing: Four Theses on Race and Intensity," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2012): 64–75, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wsq/v040/40.1-2.rai.html; Arun Saldanha and Jason Michael Adams, *Deleuze and Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1126585.

and marginalized in the academy.[46] By discussing these very real political and institutional implications of segregating, not just black feminist scholarship, but black feminist scholars, Weheilye's project is an example of theoretical practice that does not disregard the real material conditions or "weight" of black intellectual life in the (academic) World.

1.2 What is Black Space?

Visual culture organizes space through the positioning of the black body so, whether it is present or not, the black body establishes the spatial logic of hip-hop.[47] Therefore, the first step in mapping black space is considering the ways blackness extends outward beyond the body, which has perhaps most famously been described by Frantz Fanon in his primal scene of racial sight.[48] Beginning with the body, this discussion of black space describes how space becomes racially charged so that it has the ability to assemble and racialize its contents. This reversible relationship exists at both the scale of hip-hop architecture and the World. In both arrangements the articulation of blackness in space is self-affirming. For that reason, disarticulating a black architectural form from its function destroys the structures it supports. This deterministic loop consumes and devalues black bodies and objects at the same time the presence of black space is essential to the World. Thus, the aim of describing black spatial configurations is transforming this space of negation into a generative space that is open to new purposes and configurations.

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[46] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 6.
[47] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2011); C. Jackson, *Violence, Visual Culture, and the Black Male Body*, vol. 27 (Taylor & Francis US, 2011). These two books on blackness and visual culture make this argument about blackness structuring the field of vision using multiple examples from hip-hop visual culture including fashion magazines, music videos, fine art, and album covers.
[48] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008).

The racial encounter described in *Black Skins, White Masks* uses a phenomenological approach, later employed by Sara Ahmed and Charles Johnson, to describe the space around the raced body. [49] In their descriptions of the lived experience of blackness and whiteness in space, these scholars define race as a series of different spatial positions. For example, Ahmed argues whiteness "could be understood as 'the *behind*. White bodies are habitual insofar as they '*trail behind'* actions: they do not get 'stressed' in their encounters with objects or others as their whiteness 'goes unnoticed,'" while Fanon is confronted face-on by the child who yells "Look! A Negro!,"[50] Fanon describes his interpellation in spatial terms: his body is "collapsed," the white man "imprisons" him, and in the process of being objectified he is "transported" away from his body.[51] Thus, it is clear that black space is not just difficult to navigate; rather, its configurations affect the integrity of the body. Fanon is left "spread-eagled, disjointed" because his body is the stage for the white child's fear, disgust, and self-affirmation.[52]

When Fanon explains that he cannot lay claim to his own body, he announces the black subject and blackness as not simply displaced or out of place, but as a space of dispossession. But to be clear, the condition of statelessness is not the same as not existing in space.[53] McKittrick describes this space as "ungeographic" while Moten calls it "unmappable" and "subprime;" yet, the deferral that always positions blackness as *elsewhere* does not mean black

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[49] Ibid.; Charles Johnson, "A Phenomenology of the Black Body," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 32, no. 4 (1993): 603; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006); Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68, http://fty.sagepub.com/content/8/2/149.short.
[50] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 156; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91. (My emphasis)
[51] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92.
[52] Ibid., 90.
[53] Fred Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful," *African Identities* 11, no. 2 (May 2013): 237–45, doi:10.1080/14725843.2013.797289. Moten uses the term "stateless" almost interchangeably with "dispossession." However, this term also reveals the greater emphasis on the exclusion of blackness from civic, as opposed to social, space in his writing.

space is empty or inactive.[54] Instead, the dispossession of blackness describes the paradox of being radically outside of the architecture of the Human, while being structurally essential to its coherence. Consequently, Fanon's internal rupture, when he has to cede his space on the street and even his own body, is not a surreal fantasy—*knowing* himself in a World built on anti-black epistemologies, is *to know* the necessity of his negation and dispossession.[55]

For that reason it is important to understand that the space of dispossession does not occur naturally, it is built. Consider the circular logic that comes together to form the nonexistent place of "the Orient;" Ahmed explains, "while 'the other side of the world' is associated with 'racial otherness,' racial others become associated with the 'other side of the world.'"[56] Her argument reiterates the reversibility of race and space that is affirmed and naturalized by habit. Whether it is the joining of imagined spaces like "the Orient," bodies, or objects, racialized assemblages are black spaces that "require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, language, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of the nonwhite subject from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west."[57]

The racializing/racialized assemblage brings together the multiple modes in which human difference is organized; the concept of black space builds on this theory by considering the specific spatial configurations of these assemblages. For example, the construction of the racialized assemblage is complex and contradictory; it requires the rigorous simultaneous management of cultural, judicial, and economic realms that express the fungibility of black

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[54] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x; F. Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2013): 740, doi:10.1215/00382876-2345261; Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful."
[55] Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics," 87.
[56] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 121.
[57] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 3.

bodies, "the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity."[58] Thus, the racialized assemblage is a suspended structure. In architecture, suspension lends greater stability to a structure by distributing its mass across multiple points so that disturbances in the structure can occur with a minimal effect to the architectural whole. For example, ending slavery, *de jure* segregation, or the practice of excluding black figures from governmental positions will not topple the architecture of anti-blackness. Rather, suspension literally bridges the gaps between the ambiguities and ambivalent meanings in black space so that it can be self-affirming in its support of the epistemologies of race.

Architectural concepts like suspension help to explain how blackness and black space achieve stability, but these spatial ideas are most productive when used to describe the appearance of black spaces; specifically, the way they bend, fold, and braid difference into legible wholes that do not register that "complexity" on their surfaces.[59] Lynn defines complexity through the root "plexus;" he explains, "a plexus is a multi-linear network of interweavings, intertwinings and intrications; for instance, of nerves or blood vessels. The complications of a plexus—what could best be called complexity—arise from its irreducibility to any single organization. A plexus describes a multiplicity of local connections within a single continuous system that remains open to new motions and fluctuations."[60] And despite all of this, when black architectures unambiguously register their racial identity, they appear unaffected by the magnitude of their inherent contradictions, or the *gravity* of the materiality of race. As a result,

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[58] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.
[59] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*; Venturi, Izenour, and Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas - Revised Edition*; Francesco Proto, "That Old Thing Called Flexibility: An Interview with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown," *Architectural Design* 79, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 70–75, doi:10.1002/ad.816. The architect/theorist Robert Venturi argues complexity in architecture is the distinction between the built environment's visible forms and its hidden, interior functions.
[60] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 121.

black architectures like the racialized assemblage seem to float effortlessly in space. To distinguish the practice of suspending structures from the illusion of anti-gravitational, floating structures, Lynn offers the term “lightness.” Light structures are not weightless, instead they use the oppositional tension of suspension to create this visual effect. Thus, lightness describes the apparent simplicity of a structure that actually includes multiple grounds or stabilizing forms of difference.

Lightness is not an architectural practice, it is a way to describe architectural images; therefore, the lightness of black space, the apparently natural process of accumulating bodies to initiate their systematic de-humanization, has a specific relationship to the frame of Human life. Slavery is *the* racializing assemblage. For Hortense Spillers existing in the hole of the slave ship is the architectural condition that transforms bodies into “flesh” and it is important to recognize that this horrifying space is always out of view.[61] Literally, black flesh as cargo is in the “hole” of the ship and as an image, this violence against a body and the ontological ambiguity it engenders cannot be represented in the context of the Human. Returning to Fanon, the sudden experience of witnessing his overdetermined and overembodied body is what leaves him bloodied and exposed and yet, by the logic of the World that uses Fanon’s violation for the purpose of affirming those around him, that painful encounter cannot be classified as such. If the function of the black body and the space around it is to stage “scenes of subjection,” violence against the black body is unrepresentable.[62] Lightness is a term to describe the obscured aesthetics of the racialized assemblage that accumulates bodies, spaces, and justifications of violence into the singular fact of blackness. Identifying the hole/hold of the ship as a light

[61] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.
[62] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

architecture ensures the repetition and reiteration of lightness in black architectures, built in any time period, always signals the same underlying "seared, divided, ripped-apartness."[63]

Naming black architectures and their aesthetics is an attempt to dismantle their lightness and reveal their functions. For example, Saidiya Hartman introduces terms that are indispensible to understanding how slavery creates a complex affective order that comes to define blackness. This project attempts to extend these terms into space so they become accessible as formal techniques deployed in visual culture. For example, the logic of fungibility requires building a complicated racial assemblage that renders all black bodies as commensurable and, through violence and forced labor, it conveys the absolute "brute materiality of existence."[64] The contradiction between black bodies as abstract, empty vessels for the wish fulfillment of slave owners and overembodied property should seem too complex to sustain. Yet, the ability for blackness to occupy these two positions, what Hartman calls "the figurative capacities of blackness," are the oppositional tensions that suspend black space and make it appear light so that the violence of fungibility actually justifies itself.[65] The very literal work of architectural suspension can therefore explain how multiplicity and complexity in black architectures only helps them achieve a lighter appearance. For a contemporary example, in visual culture this capacity for change makes black bodies and black expressive culture ideal vessels of an inexhaustible commodity culture that never seems to be harmed by culture industries that

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[63] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67; Marc Auge, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, 2nd Edition (London ; New York: Verso, 2009); Charles Linscott, "The Ghosts of John Akomfrah," *Liquid Blackness* 1, no. 4 (November 2014): 14–27; Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, First Edition, 25th Anniversary Edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008). These structuring voids that haunt the surface of modern life are a point where theories of space, the image, and blackness come together in terms like "non-place," "coffin," "cenotaph."
[64] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.
[65] Ibid., 7.

expropriate black productions. Positioning exploitation and violence at the center of the commodity cultures that reproduce blackness and its image is an attempt to disassemble black forms from their function in the World so that their potential to uphold dehumanizing contradictions can be transformed into the potential to have different meanings and occupy different spatial configurations.

In architectural theory, liberating a form from its structural function, serving the whole, presents the same challenge as removing the black body from its function. When an architectural form, like a wall or column, is part of a structure it is impossible to rearrange these parts to consider the other possible functions that wall or column can perform because everything would fall apart. As a result, the architectural sign, unlike the arbitrary linguistic sign, is motivated from the inside.[66] Even if these walls or columns were isolated from the rest of the built environment, they have an architectural/ art historical significance that still informs their possible rearticulations. The unrepresentable gap between form and function that reveals the transformational possibilities of a structure is called its "interiority."[67] Interiority is the flexibility and the potentiality to defy the "metaphysics of presence" and be something else. All architectural forms and structures have interiority, but the concept is threatening to the ideal stability and fixity of the built environment. When Hartman and the other scholars cited in this project name the ambivalent desires of anti-blackness they are naming the interiority of anti-blackness that demystifies and denaturalizes its racial order. For instance, Fanon is denied the

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[66] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing."
[67] Peter Eisenman, "Diagrams of Interiority," in *Diagram Diaries* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 44–93.

ability to retreat into his own interiority once his body is incorporated into the primal scene.[68] Thus, interiority is both the core of what a set of architectural forms are and, given the possibility of being disassembled from their larger structures, everything that they *could* be.[69]

It is possible to see the foreclosure of interiority and the collapse between form and function in black space and architecture in their mutual tendency toward surfacism. [70] Modern architecture in the United States and Europe takes many forms, but there are some consistent ideologies that are the foundation of this design tradition regardless of the style of the resulting structure. Modern architecture's characteristic minimalist appearance is the product of its insistence that architectural forms are directly linked to their function. The result is a rejection of decoration and symbolism in favor of transparency, although this term is complicated in Chapter 2. Simply, modern transparency refers to a visible *fidelity to function* so that the epistemology of the surface is a point of translation between race, visual culture and architecture. Critical approaches to all of three of these objects of study therefore need to reintroduce depth to these

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[68] The concept of interiority is one place we can see Fanon adjusting the work of Merleau-Ponty in order to construct his racialized body schema. Merleau-Ponty's describes the body as an access point to the world; he writes, "The body is the measurement of the world. I am open to the world because I am *within* my body […] How does this have a reference to something other than itself? […] It sees itself; it touches itself. The hand that I touch, I sense, could touch that which touches it. […] The block of my body thus has an "interior" which is its application to self." His bodily/architectural interiority is the open circuit that touches and is touched, but Fanon makes it clear that all bodies do not move through space or touch the same way. Simply, while Merleau-Ponty's self-possession locates him *within*, Fanon (in an earlier translation) writes, "I am overdetermined from *without*" (My emphasis). Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Dominique Séglard, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* (Northwestern University Press, 2003), 217; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

[69] Eisenman, "Diagrams of Interiority."

[70] Mary Flanagan, *Re:Skin*, ed. Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009); Shawn Michelle Smith, "Race and Reproduction in Camera Lucida," in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, ed. J. Jonathan James Long (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 98–111; K. Thompson, "The Sound of Light: Reflections on Art History in the Visual Culture of Hip-Hop," *The Art Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (2009): 481; Elizabeth Abel, "Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2012): 35–69, https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/qui_parle/v020/20.2.abel.html.

planes so that there is an acknowledgement of the "avisual" design elements that exist in every architecture.[71]

The supposed transparency and legibility of black skin and the modern architectural surface deny the possibility that these structures could have multiple conflicting meanings. In fact, modern architecture conceives of itself as such an obvious expression of space that it reveals nature to its inhabitants.[72] For example, modern architects prescribed materials like glass that create a sense of openness and transparency. They reasoned these standardized design choices make construction more economical and, in the process, eliminated ambiguity for the structure's inhabitants. The legibility of a glass structure therefore foreclosed the possible interpretations of architecture by suggesting that a design's interiority, all of its possible articulations, already appeared unmediated on the surface. Again, the stakes of denying interiority are intensified in the context of blackness where there are clear "genealogical connections between dispossession, transparent space and black subjectivity."[73] In other words, the hold of the slave ship that so clearly aligns form and function is a violent intensification of modern architectural values. In both the architectural and racial context, hermetically sealed surfaces deny access to interiority and the space for a generative theory of transformative (black) spaces.

This project discusses black space at radically different scales, from hip-hop architecture to the World, in order to argue that even the coherence of the image is an expression of knowledge production and the World becoming sensible; therefore, it is an expression of anti-

[71] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2005); Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*. Although Lippit's book is not an architectural study, it makes frequent references to the architecture of the body and through the planes of the visible, invisible and avisual he creates three-dimensional theory of visuality.
[72] Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*; Frampton, *Modern Architecture*; Khan, *International Style*.
[73] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi.

blackness. Each chapter in this project identifies a space where the interiority of anti-black architecture can be named and accessed in order to destabilize this architecture, even if it is just through the counter-reading of the image. The first step in that process, like this review of literature, is identifying the ways black space is folded into the image and the subjection of violence is justified. For this purpose, Chapter 1 addresses the fundamental distinction between the subject and object that is articulated through the ontological ambiguity of blackness and the linearity of time. Chapter 2 discusses the aesthetics of dispossession that serve as the ground of white subjectivity. Finally, Chapter 3 directly considers violence against the black body as the interior space between the visible and the visual. Thus, even on a considerably smaller scale than the World, this project's formal approach to hip-hop images interrogates modern (surface) politics.

1.3 What Happens in Black Space?

Black space, its organizing logic and its appearance, are expressions of its function. Thus far, I have described black space as it interlocks with the architecture of the Human so that the perspective I emphasized has largely been from the outside. In this way, the previous section has explained why Fanon's internal rupture must occur in public space. However, to avoid simplistic binary distinctions that describe white space is "in" and black space is "out," this project considers the events that occur inside of black space. As I have already described, the process of constructing black space and making it particularly durable against difference and incoherence, charge black space so that objects and bodies that inhabit black architecture are racialized. I argue this occurs most spectacularly in hip-hop visual culture because the imaginative, unruly, and explicit images that are a part of contemporary hip-hop are the spaces where the architectural conditions of blackness are spectacularized on the image surface. Consequently, these images

perform the "re-membering" of blackness, creating architectural joints that reveal the violent interiority of anti-black architecture.[74] Each chapter in this dissertation is therefore building the pressure that will eventually lead to an architectural catastrophe, a sudden shift in equilibrium that causes a ripple in the architecture of anti-blackness.

This project emphasizes hip-hop architecture's joints because, even when they connect hip-hop to the devalued space of dispossession, the joint is a generative space. Fred Moten writes, "statelessness is our terrible beautiful open secret, the unnatural habitat, and *habitus* of analytic engines with synthetic capacities."[75] This project identifies two of these synthetic capacities in the hip-hop joint. First, the joint is a "residual space" because it fails to neatly fit into the aseptic architecture of anti-blackness, consequently, the joint makes room for activity that is not regulated by the governing functions of modern architecture—including forms of relationality with and among black objects.[76] Second, and related to the first issue, the joint is a surplus of anti-blackness and its visibility is an articulation of the profoundly irrational logics that shape black space. Close readings of the joint therefore bring these "troubling" juxtapositions to the surface of the image where they can activate rearticulations of black space.[77]

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[74] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 76. Hartman describes re-membering as "the recognition and articulation of devastation, captivity and enslavement. The re-membering of the violated body must be considered in relation to the dis-membered body of the slave."
[75] Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful," 239.
[76] Foregrounding and expanding misbehaving residual spaces is a central part of post-modern architecture's rejection of modern architecture so it is not surprising that these concepts repeat in the theoretical literature using different terminology and slightly different theoretical emphasis. For example, Brian Massumi's take on "residual space" is the "accident zone," which describes the partial-perception of an actual structure's virtuality. (Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," 202)
[77] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*. I am borrowing the term "troubling" from Fleetwood's book which argues blackness is troubling to the field of vision defined in Western discourse.

A joint, also known as an "event" in architecture, is a formal relationship that occurs at meeting points in the built environment, between the inside and outside and within the delineation of space within the structure.[78] The many joints in hip-hop architecture are the places and times where blackness connects with the World. However, as I mentioned before, black architectures often exhibit the triumph of surface over substance so that the process of supporting anti-black epistemologies visually mimics the slick modern architectural surface. In black space and modern architecture the appearance of continuity is a formalization of the ideologies that claim the organization of space and race are timeless and unmediated. Modern architectural values therefore deny the existence of the joint or the architectural event.[79] Furthermore, the same stylistic continuity in modern architecture that protects these configurations from criticism is an expression of the absolute visibility of black images and the permeability of black bodies.

The World produces black space as its oppositional ground and by mapping the joints of hip-hop architecture the absented presence of blackness is not only made visible, but also made to show how the articulation of black space generates reconfigurations of blackness in the form of residual, leftover, and ambiguous spaces. Whether it is as small as the point between two rooms or as large as the boundary of a city, the joint is an ambiguous space that is neither inside nor outside of the architecture. As a result, it does not adhere to the transparent logic of modern architecture or race. For example, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,* Robert Venturi offers the example of the servants' space in a home. This room is where the labor and tools to sustain a home are located; thus, this room is vital to the home and central to the

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[78] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 86.

[79] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1. Mirzeoff describes the contested space of visuality by referring to the policeman who insists, "there is nothing to see here." This denial strikes me as the equivalent of the architectural surface that threatens the safety of the black body by first, claiming racial difference is natural and second, suggesting black bodies are entirely accessible through vision.

functioning of the interior. Yet, this space is often hidden from public view and would certainly disrupt the appearance and atmosphere of the home.[80] In the process of simply mapping the servants' space it becomes clear that this hypothetical home has more than one function and that the servants' space is both inside and outside of the architecture. This revelation would certainly not topple a home; however, in the small gesture of creating this room, a residual space that challenges the core of modern architectural values is built. Once these residual spaces have been identified, they can become the sites for unsanctioned architectural events.

Residual space has particular racial resonance because, like blackness, residual space has been constructed for the purpose of serving multiple functions that are ultimately (visually) denied. Residual spaces are a part of every structure, but they gain significance when they are rendered visible, which means architectural alcoves are not the only places residual space exists. Instead, a shift in perspective can identify spaces that were previously unseen. Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky developed the concept of "phenomenal transparency" that emphasizes the experiential component of architecture as a point of ambivalence that complicates the concept of transparency. Informed by Cubist painting, phenomenal transparency describes the overlapping shapes in modern architecture that can produce a temporary double-vision between foreground and background.[81] For example, modern architecture's fascination with transparency lauds structures that have no impediments to vision (i.e. obtrusive decoration). However, if the same architecture is viewed once from a regular perspective and again from a point that foreshortens the structure, the architecture has not changed and it is still transparent, but it has two different appearances. Like residual spaces, phenomenal transparency suggests that there is more than

[80] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 80.
[81] Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 45, doi:10.2307/1566901; Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal...Part II," *Perspecta* 13 (1971): 287, doi:10.2307/1566988.

meets the eye in modern architecture so that these joints actually distinguish and create space between the visible and the visual. Again, identifying the residual space between one perspective and another is not difficult; yet, these concepts and reading strategies become models of reconfiguring black architectures, so they can be multivalent and ambiguous without even moving.

At stake in identifying residual spaces in black space is visualizing the capacity of blackness to change, to be either inside or outside, which is problematic for the anti-black architectures that rely on the confinement, or absented presence, of black space. Indeed, residual space and phenomenal transparency are examples of visible interactions occurring among architectural forms where the intended design has been ignored. The design of the World does not position black bodies and objects as the binary opposite to white bodies and objects; black space is more radically unmappable than that. As a result, there are no relations or exchanges between the inside and outside of anti-black architecture. If they appeared in black space, the interactions that occur in residual space or phenomenal transparency would therefore defy the function of black space which leaves no options for interactivity, relationality, or sociality with or among blackness. [82] Therefore, the aesthetic transformations that occur at the joint and in residual space are examples of exchange and activity occurring within an architecture that generates new spaces with new meanings. Specifically, black residual space or black phenomenal transparency creates the possibility of transforming the figurative capacities of

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[82] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism"; Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)." Afro-pessimists and Black Optimists debate this point as proof of black "social death," the metaphysical negation of blackness that denies blackness access to the relations of freedom/captivity and even life/death, or "political death," which is the exclusion from civil society.

blackness into the possibility for an unrestrained black social life.[83] Observing this kind of agency and disregard for architectural order in black space would go beyond simply rendering the complexity of blackness visible; rather, these architectural exchanges in black space would perform aesthetic activity that would reconfigure the ontology of blackness and, more broadly, the fundamental distinction between animate and inanimate entities.

The joints that create residual space are the catalysts for different spatial perspectives within the same architecture; however, there are also hip-hop joints that bring together radically different building materials. This project is interested in two such joints: one is from black studies and called a pornotrope, and the other I borrow from contemporary architectural theory, the hypersurface. Pornotroping describes the joining of images of black terror and erotic enjoyment as an expression of the social and sexual domination that is borne in slavery. [84] A hypersurface is a theoretical concept and a digital architectural practice that overlaps cultural binaries on the surface of architectures through the use of digital technologies. As a result of the overlap, hypersurfaces produce visual excess.[85] The architect and theorist Stephen Perrella coined the term hypersurface to describe architectural features, but his theoretical writing is clearly intended to extend beyond the built environment to discuss the possible value of joining incommensurable entities in space and observing the affective surplus they produce; in this way, the image of the pornotrope is an architectural hypersurface.[86]

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[83] Moten, "The Case of Blackness."
[84] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Alexander G. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 65–81, doi:10.1177/1470412907087202.
[85] Stephen Perrella, ed., *Hypersurface Architecture*, vol. 68, Architectural Design Profile 133 (London: Academy Press, 1998).
[86] Stephen Perrella, "Hypersurface Theory: Architecture ><Culture," in *Hypersurface Architecture*, ed. Stephen Perrella, Architectural Design Profile 133 (London: Academy Press, 1998), 6–15.

Pornotropes and hypersurfaces are spectacularized joints between oppositions like violence/sexuality, form/function, movement/fixity, organic/inorganic that simultaneously support and deform these distinctions. For example, the history of cinematic images that combine violence against the slave body while creating opportunities for viewers to enjoy erotic pleasure is no less violent or erotic because the two are aligned. Instead, the pornotrope visualizes the sexuality of violence and the violence of sexuality.[87] The purpose of hypersurfaces, like the pornotrope, is not to perfectly combine dualities; rather, these architectures produce a third option that exists in excess of the original configuration. That surplus is the uncomfortable realization that fundamental distinctions, those that are central to our understanding of the World and space, are false. Architectural hypersurfaces render that confusion in the aesthetics of the image, specifically, through glitching, flickering, shine, and other surreal visual effects that seem to visualize the actual system failure of architectural order. As I mentioned earlier, black space is defined by its function in the World, which is unambiguous. Thus, black hypersurfaces of any form are events that begin to dissolve the racial order that creates black space while generating entirely new systems of organization.

The most important joint in hip-hop architecture is the one between blackness and the World and the architectural events that I have reviewed provide possible ways to disarticulate black space from its function. Residual space, phenomenal space, pronotropes, and hypersurfaces are all kinds of architectural joints that are not granted their own space or access to movement, but they still exhibit the synthetic capacities Moten described by making room for illicit activity, differing points of view, and generating uncanny surpluses. The fact that these architectural events can occur in stillness and in tightly overlapping planes is particularly important because it

[87] Weheliye, "Pornotropes."

illustrates the possibility for these events to happen *within* the current architectural conditions of black space. The design of black space was intended to withstand disruptions and remain unaffected or to use these disruptions to achieve even greater stability. Therefore architectural events that challenge the coherence of the image, which is an expression of the joint between black space and the production of knowledge, does not destroy black space. Rather, these disturbances allow black space's effective and indestructible design to exceed its singular function.

1.4 Project Overview

1.4.1 Hip-Hop Hypersurfaces: Exploring Racial Time Through Space

The first chapter begins at a period of transition in hip-hop history that is the starting point for theorizing about a hip-hop visual culture in need of a new, non-representational approach—like architecture. Hip-hop fans and scholars have deemed the late 1980s and early 1990s as the "Golden Age" of hip-hop. The period is praised for its artistic innovation and its clear political engagement. The political substance of this period is especially lauded in comparison to the hip-hop's glossy output over the next decade, which I call the Bling Age. During the latter period there was an increase in the quantity and diversity of hip-hop products and a dramatic shift in hip-hop visual culture's representational relationship to blackness. Hype Williams, hip-hop visual culture's most famous auteur whose work initiated the Bling Age, altered hip-hop aesthetics by abandoning the prevailing documentary style for a 'bling' and high-shine aesthetic. This moment of transition, between hip-hop's brash origins and its current ubiquity is an architectural event, where two forms of the expression of blackness occupy the same frame without reconciliation. This chapter asks what happens when images of black bodies and blackness, reflected off of the glare of conspicuous consumption, occupy the same space.

Furthermore, how does the self-reflexivity of this slippery transition constitute and rearrange the space and time of hip-hop historiography?

This chapter argues the Bling Age videos are examples of hypersurface architecture where Williams' high shine aesthetics visualize the ambivalence of black representation at this period and, more radically creates surreal expressions of time that allow the images to complicate both the space and time of blackness. In these videos, consumers were re-introduced to blackness absent the nostalgia of previous periods in black expressive culture. Before performing a close analysis of three Bling videos ("What's it Gonna Be?" by Busta Rhymes featuring Janet Jackson, "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fy)" by Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot, and "Mo Money, Mo Problems" by Notorious s BI.G and Ma$e) this chapter performs a discourse analysis of the trade and academic discourse from the Bling Age to argue the hesitancy about hip-hop's mainstreaming reveals hip-hop nostalgia to be a spatial-temporal concern that essentializes black space by removing the dimension of time.

Framing these videos as hypersurfaces makes it possible to read their superficiality as a radical act that creates fluidity between the fixed, overdetermined images of blackness from the Golden Age and the shifting, phenomenal blackness of more contemporary hip-hop. Indeed, like any other hypersurface the movement between images occurs seemingly spontaneously and can flow in any direction. Thus, the spatial arrangement of the hip-hop hypersurface is the catalyst for the historical reframing described in this chapter. Bling videos use the uncontrollable forces of light and shine to render black images that do adhere to the linear temporality of anti-blackness. As a result, this chapter argues these superficial images are examples of Hartman's temporary, spectacular practices of redress that re-member the fungibility and commoditization of blackness to design scenes of improbable black fun and pleasure.

1.4.2 "Now Let's Get in Formation," or Blackness in Revision

The fluid and folding architecture that inspires this dissertation presents a challenge to the rigidity of modern architectural design and although hip-hop visual culture often uses the same visual effects as contemporary architectural designers to exhibit their free-flowing movement, the gridded organization of modern design still appears in hip-hop visual culture. The second chapter in this project considers three modernist hip-hop architectures: from popular culture, the music video for Beyoncé's "Formation;" from digital space, the online video aggregating website WorldStarHipHop.com; and from the realm of fine art, William Pope.L's contribution to the hip-hop art show Ruffneck Constructivists, "Claim." Because these works feature modern architectural values, they formalize the (il)logic categorization of race. Thus, these works constitute yet another architectural event. However, unlike the previous chapter that initiated an event within blackness in order to express its internal capacity for change, these architectures visualize the meeting between the inside and the outside of blackness, which is where a body *becomes* black. Putting blackness into formation, by clearly designating black spaces, conflicts with the radically empty spatiality of blackness. This chapter asks what happens when the absented presence of blackness is put into place by modern hip-hop architectures.

This chapter argues the complex, two-sided transparency of blackness initiates a revision of the organization of modern architectural shapes. This chapter begins by describing the modern architectural values that inform these minimalist designs, specifically the preoccupation with transparency and functionalism. The ideological position of modern architecture that uses architectural forms to classify spaces while disavowing their construction has clear commonalities with the logic of race. As a result, architectural theory's response to modern architecture provides counter-reading strategies, like residual space, for modern hip-hop

architectures. Locating the residual space in the rigid organization of modern hip-hop architectures helps explain the illicit exchange that seems to occur within these images. For example, one of the hip-hop architectures discussed in this chapter is Beyoncé's "Formation" video, which is a song ostensibly about black female empowerment. Surprisingly, one outcome of the popularity of "Formation" was the incredible number of amateur white male singers who uploaded videos of themselves covering Beyoncé's song and singing lyrics about *their* blackness. Not surprisingly, writers and online commenters were confounded by this trend of white men intentionally entering black space.

Instead of reading the white fan's participation as a form of cultural appropriation, this chapter uses architectural theory to address the more fundamental issue that arises in the modern hip-hop architectures—black sociality. In other words, this chapter answers questions about the architecture of black interaction that specifically occurs within hip-hop architecture. Residual space and phenomenal transparency create movement in architectural forms, which occurs against the will of the architect. Thus, these theories describe interactions among objects, which is a distinctly black social aesthetic activity.[88] Surprisingly, the rigid design of the grid becomes the architecture of black interaction. The "Formation" covers, in which white men are theoretically racialized by black space, are therefore only one example of the unsanctioned activity that occurs in the residual space of hip-hop architecture. The (im)possibility of unsanctioned black relationality defies modern architectural values so it is only one expression of the fundamental reversal that occurs when black objects are perceived not through social death, but social life instead.

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[88] Moten, "The Case of Blackness."

1.4.3 An Architectural Joint: Diagramming Blackness

After removing blackness from the constraints of history and objectivity, the final chapter in this dissertation considers new configurations hip-hop architecture can take. The chapter analyzes two different hip-hop films: a promotional trailer for a hip-hop album *Thirty Eight* by Apollo Brown, which is a montage of clips from Blaxploitation films, and a surreal music video for Flying Lotus's song "Until the Quiet Comes," directed by Kahlil Joseph. Both of the films include familiar images, i.e. the Blaxploitation films edited into the trailer and the references to actual black neighborhoods and history in Joseph's film, and both works use these references to construct entirely new architectures. These films express the architectonic logic of the racialized/racializing assemblage, they pull different materials into their space and use a combination of formal techniques to create the appearance of smooth, seamless black architectures. While they share the organizing structure of blackness and are both self-contained and legible works, "Until the Quiet Comes" features one distinct difference. Joseph's film includes a sudden shift in the equilibrium that is expressed through changes in setting, tone, and temporality. Yet, at the end of "Until the Quiet Comes" the film returns to stability and this black space remains in tact. Inspired by the "sampling" that appears in both films, although leading to very different results, this chapter addresses the joints in each film and asks what *else* a black architecture can be.

In order to understand how "Until the Quiet Comes" uses the same black spatial organization to create such a radically different film, this chapter begins by addressing the joints in hip-hop architecture. Specifically it employs what architectural theory calls a "diagrammatic approach" that considers the possible reconfigurations available at architectural joints that are based on the specific qualities of the building materials that meet at these points of articulation.

The *Thirty Eight* trailer is particularly helpful in understanding the flexibility of black architectural joints, how they actually use forms of difference to achieve greater stability and legibility. In its most traditional iteration, diagrammatic analysis explains how architecture works. Even this straightforward function is important because diagramming the *Thirty Eight* trailer illustrates the joints between blackness and the World that are repeated throughout visual culture. Thus, it is possible to see the joints that are parsed in the trailer employed in the disruptive architecture of "Until the Quiet Comes" with a very different end.

The disruption that occurs in Joseph's film expresses the possibility of an insurgent black architecture. The film visualizes black joints, specifically the pornotrope, which is a pervasive and pernicious anti-black architecture that has existed in visual culture since slavery. Therefore, the film is working *inside* of the racialized assemblage. Instead of attempting to dismantle the pornotrope, "Until the Quiet Comes" allows the conflicting impulse of visual pleasure and violence in the joint to reach its own catastrophic point. Although this point does not create a rupture in the film, it does briefly visualize the reartiuclation of blackness in space so that it is possible to observe the circumstances within which a black body might not be inextricably linked to its structural function as the oppositional ground of whiteness. Consequently, some of the implications of the catastrophe may be unexpetected—removing blackness from its structural position in the World is more than just a racial problem. Throughout this Introduction I have argued hip-hop architecture is an argument about the spatiality of blackness providing an architectural organization for hip-hop visual culture and this final chapter attempts to show how hip-hop architecture samples all of the figurative qualities of black space, even those that render blackness as dispossessed, atemporal, fungibile, unsociable, and available for fantasies of white flights of fantasy, to the stage racial catastrophes.

2 HIP-HOP HYPERSURFACES: EXPLORING RACIAL TIME THROUGH SPACE

"Look only at the movements—and they will bring you to matter"

-Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*[1]

This dissertation follows objects from hip-hop's visual culture. Hip-hop does not just respond to black culture, it is often the catalyst of racial and cultural conversations. For example, beyond identifying racism, rappers and the hip-hop community have often been responsible for distinguishing the politics of black power from liberal post-racial rhetoric.[2] The production and consumption of hip-hop objects similarly apply pressure to cultural concepts like the definition of art, ownership, appropriation, and authenticity.[3] The genre initiates discursive change and its visual culture does the same by altering the traditional ways blackness is imaged. To truly *follow* hip-hop means more than documenting hip-hop events; it means appreciating its movement and the way it generates and opens space by shifting positions. This chapter follows hip-hop's movement through space and time to consider how movement, as opposed to content, comes to define hip-hop and blackness and how the particular direction of that movement affects the space and time of anti-blackness.

This chapter begins with a hip-hop music video, Busta Rhymes's "What it Gonna Be?" featuring Janet Jackson, that is pure movement. The video is an effect-driven short directed by Hype Williams and released in 1999. Busta Rhymes and Janet Jackson appear in an entirely imagined world made of a shiny metallic liquid that flows and ripples throughout the entire video

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[1] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 1st ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 206.

[2] Maxwell Strachan, "The Definitive History of 'George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People'," *The Huffington Post*, September 9, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kanye-west-george-bush-black-people_us_55d67c12e4b020c386de2f5e?uqflayvi=.

[3] Forman and Neal, *That's the Joint!* This anthology has been a seminal text in hip-hop studies for over a decade because of its builds a particularly useful nexus of hip-hop topics to organize approaches to the genre.

so that the performance space is in constant motion. The stars themselves become part of this uninhibited liquid motion by magically morphing in and from the fluid, so that they come from the liquid and will become the liquid. As a result, the artists are seemingly made of the same thing as the walls, the ground, and the ceiling, creating an interconnectedness that actually includes the black body in the architecture. The body becomes an architectural form or detail that is commensurable with any other part of the space. Moreover, the sexually explicit song and video erotically charges the entire scene. As a result, the video becomes a poignant expression of hip-hop architecture, the entanglement of race and hip-hop that constitutes the genre and its visual culture. "What's it Gonna Be?" visualizes blackness and hip-hop as linked, but not static. As Brian Massumi's quote in the epigraph suggests, the video's movement is observable and with that motion comes the video's implicit claim about the vibrant matter of blackness that is capable of constant transformation.

The "What's it Gonna Be?" video visualizes blackness as changing, which is in direct opposition to a racist logic that needs to solidify blackness in order to subjugate it. At the same time, it is also an expression of change in hip-hop visual culture. "What's it Gonna Be?" is part of an aesthetic shift in hip-hop videos, largely initiated by the work of film and music video director Hype Williams in the late 1990s. Along with a stylistic change, "What's It Gonna Be?" and Williams's other productions present a radical break in the theorization of hip-hop visual culture. In her seminal work on the genre that was written in 1994, just before this stylistic change, Tricia Rose writes, "rap video themes have repeatedly converged around the depiction of the local neighborhood and the local posse, crew, or support system. Nothing is more central to rap's music video narratives than situating the rapper in his or her milieu and among one's crew

or posse."[4] Rose is referring to videos produced in the time period that is now often called hip-hop's Golden Age (Figure 1.1). This time period, loosely defined from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, is recognized as a period of sonic innovation and "theatrical black nationalism."[5] The seemingly non-existent setting and shiny artifice in Williams's videos clearly dispense with this maxim of regional specificity and its attendant claims about the appearance and function of genuine black space. Instead, the director's work after the Golden Age is consumed with spectacle, high shine, and the polished surfaces of a cultural project just entering the space of mainstream popular music.

Figure 2.1 Public Enemy

Williams's videos, as a marker of the end of the Golden Era's visual logic, leave us in a new and unnamed moment in hip-hop that is the focus of this chapter. The Golden Age did not end abruptly; in the mid-1990s hip-hop experienced a period of steady but uneven entry into the

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[4] Rose, *Black Noise*, 10.
[5] David Samuels, "The Rap on Rap: The 'Black Music' That Isn't Either," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 150.

mainstream.[6] The new millennium is a fitting end to this brief time of transition and the beginning of hip-hop's current era—that was the year Eminem, a white rapper, broke hip-hop and pop music records with the release of *The Marshall Mathers LP* and literally changed the face of hip-hop.

I am calling this brief period after the Golden Age and before the genre's current global domination, "The Age of Hip-Hop Bling." Bling refers to the part of hip-hop's visual culture that is "deeply invested in the appearance of material wealth […] based on luminous effect—on the intangible and ephemeral visual qualities of commodities."[7] This period begins my dissertation because William's videos initiate significant changes in hip-hop's relationship to both blackness and space, particularly by moving away from depth. Artists in Bling Age videos appear in entirely computer-animated settings or in tightly enclosed artificial worlds. Even when the videos do not feature these settings, artists appear out of context. Moreover, by adopting the charged surfaces of bling, videos like "What's it Gonna Be?" are bringing hip-hop's past and future into alignment through the way they express the figurative capacities of blackness.[8] Thus, these architectures dislodge blackness from the rigid and essentialized positioned imagined by the Golden Age to restage racial history in the space of fluidity, eroticism, and even fun.

An architectural event is a point of change in a structure, which may occur at a corner or at the meeting point of inside and outside; thus, the meeting of past and future in the Bling Age,

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[6] For example, the "Hot R&B Singles" Billboard chart included songs by hip-hop artists, but did not change the name to "Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Singles and Tracks" until 1999. The title was shorted to "Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs" in 2005. For a popular history of Billboard's shifting relationship to black popular music see, Chris Molanphy and 2014, "I Know You Got Soul: The Trouble With Billboard's R&B/Hip-Hop Chart," *Pitchfork*, accessed November 30, 2015, http://pitchfork.com/features/articles/9378-i-know-you-got-soul-the-trouble-with-billboards-rbhip-hop-chart/.

[7] Krista A. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Duke University Press, 2015), 25.

[8] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 22.

is a distinctly architectural occurrence.[9] Thinking architecturally about blackness is about identifying these moments; specifically, the places and times where blackness appears most recognizable, where it is possible to observe the *process* of (de)forming blackness in the visual field—like the flowing liquid in "What's it Gonna Be?" Williams's videos are rich objects for this approach because they have a fraught relationship with black iconicity. On one hand, the videos are a stylistic detour from well-known hip-hop imagery, primarily because they make no claims to represent back life. Yet, because the videos played such an important role in hip-hop's crossover appeal, Williams's self-aware artifice demands that those trying to orient themselves in black space adapt to its new configuration. Thus, these videos illustrate the flexible link between hip-hop and blackness that allows the genre to change while remaining an expression of blackness.

The fluid movement in "What's it Gonna Be?" visualizes the liminality of the architectural event, which is the focus of a digital and theoretical design practice called hypersurface architecture. Hypersurface architecture is a branch of topological architecture, so it is interested in the process of (de)formation within a structure, specifically aided by hi-tech design tools. The concept of architectural hypersurfaces gained popularity at the same time Williams videos were produced, and like Williams's videos, the theory emerged to cope with a set of cultural changes that brought architectural design closer to consumer culture: first, the encroachment of commercial culture in avant-garde architectural design and second, the introduction of digital technologies that made sophisticated renderings of morphologies possible.[10] The theory of hypersurfaces refers to the convergence of any "cultural instituted

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[9] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 86.
[10] Perrella, *Hypersurface Architecture*; Stephen Perrella, ed., *Hypersurface Architecture II*, vol. 69, Architectural Design Profile 141 (London: Academy Press, 1999).

dualities" within the same space that facilitate the breakdown of traditional binaries. [11] For example, architectural surfaces were often described as envelopes, which are static entities; however, when constantly transforming media images are superimposed on these architectural forms, theorization of the surface in the built environment must account for this surface surplus. Hypersurfaces often render that surplus using the same kinds of shiny, flickering visual effects found in Williams's videos. As a result, hypersurface architecture can take many different forms that express the excess of an architectural event or the excess that emerges when architecture self-reflexively considers its own forms. It is a theory that is invested in the appearance of the charged surfaces that delineate cultural spaces, like the generic boundary around hip-hop that is racially motivated.

This chapter will read the shiny glitching and flickering effects in Bling videos, which not coincidentally are also features of hypersurface architecture, as evidence of the videos' reflexive rendering of the shifting appearance of blackness in hip-hop visual culture and will ask what this shallow action does to the epistemological frameworks of anti-blackness. Following hip-hop aesthetics supports the fundamental claim that blackness, like hip-hop style, takes different forms and occupies different spaces at different times. Yet, like the Möbius Strip, the archetypal example of topological architecture, hip-hop and blackness manage this change while maintaining the same spatial relationship, meaning blackness can change while remaining a signifier of difference. In William's videos, blackness seems to cross over multiple spatial boundaries, most notably into the space of mainstream popular culture. This chapter asks what happens when black bodies and images of blackness, reflected off the glare of conspicuous consumption, occupy the same space? Furthermore, what does this architectural event, where

[11] Perrella, "Hypersurface Theory: Architecture ><Culture," 7.

past and future meet, reveal about the history and periodization of black visual culture? The Golden Age establishes a fixed black epicenter, Rose suggested it was a rapper's community, and temporal and spatial nearness to that center legitimizes the blackness of hip-hop; yet, it is evident that Bling Age videos move away from that center while remaining black. How does this movement constitute a rearrangement of black space and time?

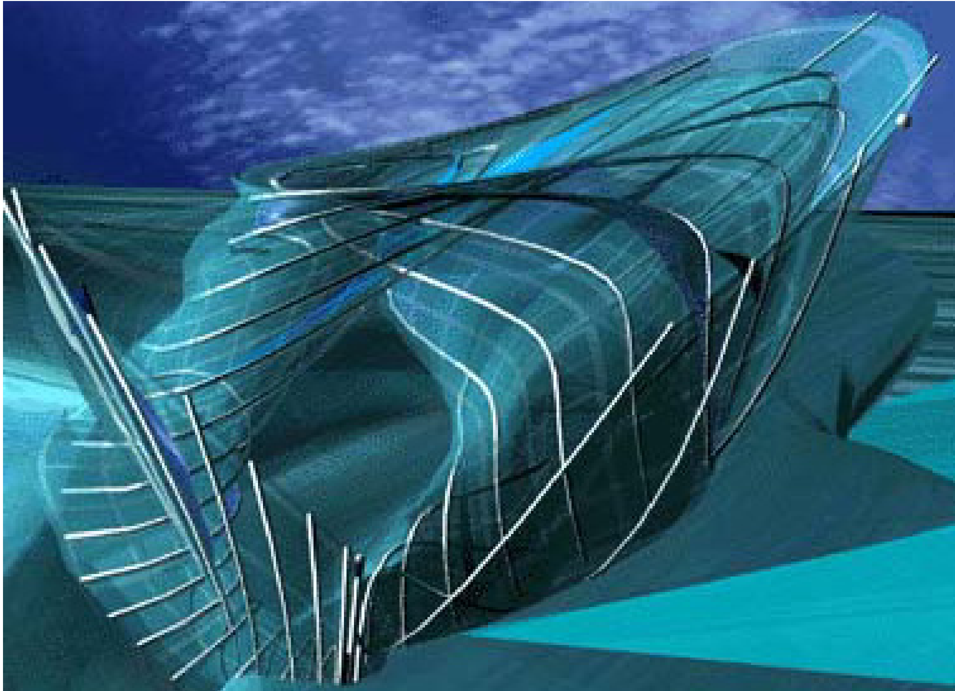

Figure 2.2 The Möbius House Study, 1997-1998 by Stephen Perrella and Rebecca Carpenter

I argue Williams's videos are hypersurfaces that stage an encounter between two incommensurable expressions of blackness. The first expression is *fixed blackness*, which freezes blackness in the moment of vision and clearly coincides with the Golden Age's fetishization of authentic blackness. The second is *phenomenal blackness*, an interpretation of blackness that is attuned to the "*when* and *where* it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal."[12] The confrontation of these iterations of blackness does

[12] Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.

more than simply prove blackness is not frozen in time: a cursory survey of black popular culture confirms that blackness appears differently at different times and in different spaces.[13] Instead, this chapter is interested in the aesthetics of the architectural overlap that initiates a black (architectural) event—an encounter with the complexity of blackness. The tension between *fixed* and *phenomenal* blackness is what creates the vibrating, liquid appearance in "What's It Gonna Be?" In the Bling Age music videos, in fact, blackness is allowed to confront its own digital image. The expressions of blackness that correspond to the Golden and Bling periods are fundamentally different; yet, in the hypersurface videos multiple expressions of blackness occupy the same frame at the same time and are allowed to glide past each other along the video's slick surface. As a result, there is no measurable duration between these iterations of blackness.[14] In other words, *fixed* blackness does not occur before *phenomenal* blackness, and to suggest otherwise would be a troubling essentialist claim. Instead, the hip-hop hypersurface is a reorientation of black space and black time that is non-linear and therefore oppositional to the configuration of anti-black racial discourse.

The transitional period of the Bling Age is a distinct moment in hip-hop historiography; for that reason I will begin with a brief review of this moment as it is discussed in scholarly, popular, and industrial discourse. Instead of rehearsing a well-known history, my goal is to illustrate the way blackness, space, and time become inextricably linked in this discourse through the use of spatial metaphors and geographic reference points that are actually intended to describe the passing of time in hip-hop. Then, I will illustrate the convergence of the

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[13] Harry Justin Elam and Kennell A. Jackson, *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
[14] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 185.

hypersurface, hip-hop surfacism, and movement to understand how, despite their lack of depth, hip-hop's surfaces provides insight into the animation of black matter.

2.1 A (Very Brief) Hip-Hop History Through Space

Mapping the boundary between black popular culture and mainstream popular culture reveals a deeply embedded fascination with *fixed blackness* that shapes hip-hop's relationship to race and capital. In the academic and industrial discourse around hip-hop there is a strong resistance to change, often because it seemed unclear what hip-hop would become once it crossed the boundary of the mainstream. This moment in hip-hop history is important because the genre's stylistic changes were an essential part of hip-hop's movement into a larger and more diverse range of cultural spaces. More importantly, the journalists and academics trying to make sense of two radically different images of blackness articulate the ontology of blackness in distinctly spatial terms—before the spatial-temporal line of the mainstream. As a result, the self-reflexivity of this discursive moment expresses the uncanny mirroring of the hypersurface.

The publication of David Toop's *Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip-Hop* in 1984 is considered to be hip-hop's official ingress into the academy in the 1980s; since then, major interdisciplinary work on the genre has been published by Todd Boyd, Murray Forman, Mark Anthony Neal, Imani Perry, and Tricia Rose.[15] The canonization of these works has helped formalize a vocabulary to attend to hip-hop style, history, and politics. These concerns coalesce in the discussion of hip-hop's Golden Age. Hip-hop's Golden Age refers to the late 1980s until the early 1990s. During this period, hip-hop achieved recognizable levels of success, like the first

[15] Todd Boyd, *Am I Black Enough for You?: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First*; Mark Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Rose, *Black Noise*.

gold rap record by Run DMC in 1984 and the production of the iconic television show *Yo! MTV Raps* in 1989. That recognition came largely from the clear political ethos of the genre, specifically from artists like Public Enemy and KRS-One, and the innovative use of musical sampling that helped define the hip-hop sound.[16] However, like any other Golden Age/Era, this period in hip-hop history is problematically idealized.

One of the reasons the Golden Age is valorized is its ability to be easily contextualized within the history of black political movements. For example, Reiland Rabaka has published three books that explicitly connect "the hip-hop movement" to the Civil Rights Movement in relation to both politics and aesthetics.[17] Creating or complicating these historical lineages has in fact become a major point of disagreement in hip-hop scholarship and the impulse for a significant segment of hip-hop research.[18] For instance, in the mid-1990s this debate took place in the writing of two public intellectuals, Cornell West and Michael Eric Dyson. In "Nihilism in Black America," West critiques conservative and liberal approaches to explaining the plight of black Americans. He argues both camps are too fearful to address the central problem of nihilism, the "lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness."[19] Although black people arrived in the New World under these conditions, he argues contemporary black culture's focus on the culture industries, as

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[16] Samuels, "The Rap on Rap: The 'Black Music' That Isn't Either," 150.
[17] Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop's Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011); Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop's Amnesia: From Blues and the Black Women's Club Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Movement* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012); Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2013).
[18] For a more thorough review of this academic debate see Bryan J. McCann, "Affect, Black Rage, and False Alternatives in the Hip-Hop Nation," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 5 (October 1, 2013): 408–18, doi:10.1177/1532708613496392.
[19] Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," in *Race Matters* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1993), 14.

opposed to the religious and civic institutions that previously protected the black community from the threat of nihilism, has undermined morality and made the black community vulnerable to negative influences.[20] In response, Dyson wrote "We Were Never What We Used to Be: Black Youth, Pop Culture, and the Politics of Nostalgia."[21] Dyson's chapter suggests West's critiques are primarily aimed toward the "Hip Hop Generation" and argues that the failure to recognize the similarities between Sam Cooke and Snoop Doggy Dogg is a misguided nostalgia. Their exchange indicates there is a problematic tension that arises when arguments are made about the origin point of black expressive culture, the object of West's nostalgia, from which hip-hop either emerges or departs.

Even in his strident defense of hip-hop, Dyson is forced to scapegoat certain aspects of the genre in order for to argue for its political productivity. The article is primarily interested in rejecting the tendency to idealize particular black art historical moments by ignoring the changing tastes of generations, and the process of retroactively canonizing certain works. However, it is interesting that even briefly Dyson relies on geographical boundaries to create a distinction between the kinds of hip-hop worth defending. He links respectable early hip-hop with the East Coast and hip-hop's problematic latter works to the West Coast. As a result, Dyson recreates the same spatial/temporal critique of hip-hop he identifies in West's writing by charging West Coast rap with *moving away* from the origin space of visionary (East Coast) hip-hop. Dyson argues West Coast 'gangsta rap' would not have supplanted the politically conscious

[20] Cornel West, *Race Matters*, 1st ed. (Beacon Press, 2000), 26.
[21] Michael Eric Dyson, "We Were Never What We Used to Be: Black Youth, Pop Culture, and the Politics of Nostalgia," in *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

hip-hop produced in New York if there was more commercial support of positive messages.[22] If "Nihilism in America" reveals West's misguided nostalgia, Dyson's response is homesick.

The idealization of the Golden Age is a product of an imagined proximity to not just black culture or black political roots, but also to distinct economic conditions. Although it is impossible to predict how trends in hip-hop would have changed if some of the esoteric acts from the genre's early years had greater commercial success, Dyson was right that economic factors did have dramatic effects on the end of the Golden Age. For example, the 1991 decision in *Grant Upright Music Ltd. v. Warner Bros Records* ordered the sale of a Biz Markie recording be discontinued after it was deemed a copyright infringement.[23] As a result, hip-hop's characteristic recycling of previously recorded music became an expensive liability.[24] At the same time, major record labels were absorbing the small, often black-owned labels that produced most rap music. In 1996, EMI-Capitol Music purchased 50% of Profile Records, the label that signed N.W.A, Ice-T, and Ice Cube. The merger was an important deal for Capitol because it guaranteed the label would have a strong presence in the distribution of West coast hip-hop and was part of the trend of major labels taking a significant stake in hip-hop production and distribution.[25] In a 1991 interview with *Billboard* magazine Public Enemy's Chuck D. explained his concerns about the record industry's growing role in hip-hop production,

> I think rap is heading all the way up. But I think it's a record company type of game that's being played. If they can get 100 artists combined to sell 10 million records, it does

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[22] Ibid., 421.
[23] Richard Schumacher, "'This Is a Sampling Sport': Digital Sampling, Rap Music, and the Law in Cultural Production," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 446.
[24] Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999).
[25] Melinda Newman, "EMI-Capitol Purchases 50% of Rap, Hip-Hop Label Priority," *Billboard* 108, no. 47 (November 23, 1996): 10, 101.

> the company more good than if they had two artists selling 10 million records. The reason for that is, I think the record companies want to keep this a disposable music without the artists having any power.[26]

It is true that these corporate takeovers moved hip-hop away from the producers who previously cultivated artists and regional sounds. However, it is more interesting to consider how these responses reveal early hip-hop's investment with the problems of dilution or displacement, reinforcing the existence of *fixed blackness* as unadulterated, unprocessed, and threatened by change.

Even in their reporting on hip-hop's transition, journalists and industry executives reinforced the boundaries surrounding black and white space not unlike those imagined by West, Dyson, and Chuck D. To describe a major corporation's decision to include hip-hop in their marketing strategies, one journalist wrote,

> The powers-that-be have seen fit to take the cap off of rap, opening their doors, arms, and checkbooks […] Yes, rap is officially 'mainstream,' which, to most corporate and media decision-makers, means that its appeal has "crossed over" from one racial, ethnic, or cultural group to another. In this case, it has widened from blacks to include whites - it's the classic checkerboard effect that is so often the minimal prerequisite for high-stakes commercial enterprises.[27]

Despite the article's emphasis on white capital's welcoming of black cultural products, the chromatic distinctions between checkerboard squares remain in tact. The overly embellished writing reveals the reified racial lines that go beyond identifying musical trends and actually

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[26] "Where Is Rap Heading?," *Billboard* 103, no. 47 (November 23, 1991): R3.
[27] Dany Biederman, "Rap's Hip-Hop into Kid's: The Children's Industry Has Tuned into Rap, as Everything from Kids' Tv to Toys and Apparel Pick up the Rhythm," *Children's Business*, September 1990, Business Insights: Essentials.

define early hip-hop as different sets of racialized market appeals. In this way, the trade discourse confirms hip-hop artists' and critics' fears that mainstreaming hip-hop would require the genre be distanced from a black aesthetic or politics that would fundamentally change hip-hop.

In reality, hip-hop's ability to become a viable commercial product is secured by its blackness, not challenged by it. For example, the same article that so clearly delineated the encroachment of hip-hop into white space includes an interview with Benny Medina, the vice president of A&R for Warner Brothers. In the interview, the executive explains the marketing potential of various hip-hop products,

> A nice upper-middle-class black kid's interpretation, concept or delivery of a rap record is probably going to be different than that of a gangster from south central Los Angeles [...] How someone might relate to Ice Cube as opposed to KRS-1 and their potential to be merchandised as a result of it is decidedly different. An Ice Cube gangster doll isn't a particularly attractive concept. On the other hand, a Biz Markie human bee-bop doll with a drawstring that you can pull that makes `bee-bop' sounds might be hilarious to a kid.[28]

Medina suggests the ease in which these artists can enter middle-class homes is based on their position in a spectrum of 'gangster-ness,' which feels like a thinly veiled racial displacement. Rather than identifying points on the arbitrary gangster spectrum, blackness is clearly the continuity between all of the rappers Medina mentions and it would be illogical to suggest that there is a quantitative or qualitative difference in the blackness of these men. Instead, the common denominator in consumer desire is precisely this blackness, and what the executive is expressing is the vast open space for blackness to be reconfigured to suit the needs of "the

[28] Ibid.

powers-that-be." Blackness is the interchangeability that determines each artist's potential to become a doll or any other object of sale. *Gangster-ness* and *doll-ness* are markers that emerge *from* blackness's potential for movement and transformation.

In *Scenes of Subjection* Hartman argues there is an almost imperceptible line that separated slaves' forced performances for white masters and the dances and acts that were performed for the slave's pleasure and possible resistance.[29] That line is replicated in this discourse of mainstreaming hip-hop. It would be overly simplistic to suggest that remaining outside of the suburban home provides access to black agency while entry does the opposite. Medina's quote represents this simplified reading by suggesting the ability to enter the suburban household is impeded by the kind of political awareness that distinguishes Biz Markie from activist rappers like KRS-1 and gangster rappers who made music that was explicitly about racism and violence against black bodies like Ice-Cube. It is true that an Ice-Cube doll that makes explicit reference to the West Coast's threats of gang violence or police brutality would certainly not be "hilarious." And there is potential significance in the fact that Ice Cube's witness accounts about victimized black bodies would be entirely unintelligible to whiteness. However, as Hartman explains, Blackness is "a contested figure at the very center of a social struggle," so it embodies these structures of subjection and has the capacity to express this violence as an act of resistance that challenges the "givenness" of black dispossession.[30] Thus, her cautious assessment of oppositional black performance works inside of the "scene of subjection" by putting a mirror to it.

Hartman suggests the black body is already a site of objectification, before it is transformed into a doll, so it is futile to distinguish between Biz Markie's blackness and Ice

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[29] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 50.
[30] Ibid., 57.

Cube's blackness to imagine an oppositional moment in this marketplace. Instead, the most provocative act would be embracing the superficiality of a hip-hop doll, and by extension the glittering images of conspicuous consumption in the Bling Age. Imagine the actual artist accompanied each hip-hop doll delivered to a suburban home. In that utterly surreal moment, the technological and ideological structures that de-humanize the body become a part of the spectacle because they would take the form of the resemblance between the two figures. Sianne Ngai describes this moment as a "scene of boomeranged animation" where the human does not enliven the doll, as Medina would imagine but, rather, the doll animates the human.[31] In this scenario blackness would still offer the potentiality for exchange, but the relationality between human and doll would occur on the same plane and that capacity for objecthood could no longer appear immanent or to be a bodily "given." In his diagnosis of Black nihilism, West argues relentless pleasure seeking has isolated the hip-hop generation from the past and encouraged them to disregard their futures in favor of a "hedonistically driven present."[32] The imagined doll scenario would certainly be an example of a "market morality [that] stigmatizes others as objects for personal pleasure or bodily stimulation" that is all surface. However, like the "What's it Gonna Be?" video, this superficiality is formally productive precisely because it brings the black past and future into alignment in the present.[33]

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[31] Sianne Ngai, "' A Foul Lump Started Making Promises in My Voice': Race, Affect, and the Animated Subject," *American Literature* 74, no. 3 (2002): 588, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/al/summary/v074/74.3ngai.html.
[32] West, "Nihilism in Black America," 17.
[33] Ibid.

Figure 2.3 Snoop Dog and Wax Figure at Madam Tussauds

I end this (very) brief history of hip-hop in transition with this example of opposing black materialities, flesh and plastic, to suggest transformation, translation, and desire have been significant parts of the hip-hop conversation even outside of academic discourse. It is also important to note the way hip-hop history has been placed on a linear timeline that travels away from *fixed* blackness, which is a clear part of the writers' and artists' hesitancy toward change. Commitment to this timeline essentializes blackness and hip-hop and fails to recognize the mutability of blackness that Hartman describes in a context two centuries earlier. The doll example, with its strange confrontations between images of black artists with altered versions of themselves, presents a kind of spatial self-reflexivity with ontological implications that are certainly strange, but not unique. The same architectural event, joining *fixed* and *phenomenal* blackness occurred in the past and will appear after the Medina interview in the Bling videos. In Williams's videos, shiny surfaces become the transformational threshold of the mainstream that allows the artists and the videos to be reflected and refracted in their own alluring glare. My

close reading of these videos considers the desire of black images within a specific historical context; in the case of Bling videos, it is apparent that having crossed the threshold of mainstream popularity, these videos want to look at themselves.[34]

Figure 2.4 "Mo Money, Mo Problems"

2.2 Architecture's Hyped Surfaces

Architecture and theories of the moving image meet in the digital. Contemporary segments of these disciplines converge at this point because the flexibility of digital imaging technologies is a helpful expression of alternative modes of production and consumption in any context. For example, hypersurface theory is only one example of architecture influenced by phenomenology. Since the early 1990s the built environment has used these tools to respond to modern architectural values, most notably the determinism of transparency and the genius of the architect.[35] Design movements like folding, collective intelligence, and parametricism have all moved away from standardization and toward the possibility of animating the built environment

[34] I am borrowing this language about the wants, needs, and desires of images from Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*
[35] Modern architectural values and their relationship to racialization will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

so that is responsive and dynamic.[36] On the other side of this disciplinary boundary, media theory uses architectural theories and metaphors to understand how we move through virtual spaces. For example, Anne Friedberg deploys the metaphor of the window and the work of famous architects Le Corbusier and Peter Eisenman to address the many embedded frames in contemporary visual culture and Lev Manovich's continued work on the database is an architectural study of virtual space.[37] Thus, in the late 1990s the same visual effects and sophisticated morphologies that appear in "What's it Gonna Be?" were equally significant to visual culture and the field of architectural design.

In 1997, architect and theorist Stephen Perrella, who is credited with coining the term hypersurface, sent an email to Brian Massumi that begins by describing his frustrations with modern architecture. After observing the frequent use of digital screens in architectural designs, Perrella argues modern architecture's purity and characteristic minimalism, which is an ideological critique of excess, fails to account for the ways consumer technologies have begun to merge with our everyday lives, particularly by shaping our organization of time and space. For example, to successfully drive a car, a person and machine must be unified toward that goal. The body contorts to fit the shape of a car seat and the car's mechanisms, the gearshift and pedals, should ergonomically fit the dimensions of the body. More than just using the car, good drivers incorporate the size and weight of the car into their bodily senses.[38] This description of "cyborg" hybridity is not unique to architectural theory; instead, it presents another meeting point between

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[36] Mario Carpo, *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012: AD Reader* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
[37] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2009); Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky, *Soft Cinema: Navigating the Database*, DVD (MIT Press, 2005).
[38] Lars Spuybroek, "Motor Geometry," in *Hypersurface Architecture*, ed. Stephen Perrella, Architectural Design Profile 133 (London: Academy Press, 1998), 49.

architecture, philosophy, and media studies. Architecture imagines this hybridity in interactive architectures that merge structure and body, while visual culture scholars consider the ways people are creating increasingly intimate relationships between media and their bodies.[39] Furthermore, as Donna Harway has famously explained, this amalgamation conceives of technology and machines broadly to include the structures of social reality, like racist institutions, merging with fiction.[40] When technology becomes a part of our daily lives, reshaping our sense of time and space, it complicates the most seemingly fundamental differences between bodily interiority and exteriority as carefully outlined by the determinism of modern science.[41]

The hypersurface is both a theory and a design practice that advocates for hybrid architectural surfaces that become points of exchange between seemingly incommensurable entities including culture/commerce and form/function. A hypersurface is specifically the materialization of excess that emerges when two opposing materialities cross (imagined) thresholds and occupy the same space. Thus, the hypersurface is particularly attuned to the visual byproduct of the hybridity described in contemporary media and visual culture studies. The intertwining of body and technology or any other false binary creates “middle-out conditions,”

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[39] Mirzoeff, “The Subject of Visual Culture,” 11; Mark B. N. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Derrick de Kerckhove and Antonio Tursi, “The Life of Space,” *Architectural Design* 79, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 48–53, doi:10.1002/ad.810.

[40] Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socalist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century,” in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. Barbara M. Kennedy and David Bell (London :New York: Routledge, 2000), 291.

[41] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

which describes the reversible movement between stable positions and the conditions for self-generated production or autopoiesis.[42]

Perrella explicitly states, “our bodies are hypersurfaces” so it is helpful to continue defining this architectural term in relation to the hip-hop history provided above.[43] First, hypersurface theory aims to see beyond the nihilistic interpretation of a world absent of meaningful distinctions.[44] For example, West argues black America is in a nihilistic position because it is vulnerable on all sides, from structural racism and self-inflicted violence. But, as Hartman may suggest, only from this strained middle position can black performance make anti-blackness perform a self-critique. The hypersurface is the visual effect of a self-generating productivity that emerges from interacting forms. As a result, it is also a rejection of the esteemed position modern architecture reserves for architects and engineers as the sole producers in the architectural field. Thus, a black hypersurface, like the slaves’ pleasurable/painful performances, does not require permission or authorization from an outside (white) ally because the generation in middle-out condition is something that occurs among objects.

The architectural surface is ideal for locating this kind of ambiguity because it always presents the problem of categorization. Is the surface a boundary? Is it part of the structure? Does it have depth? These questions become more pressing in the contemporary moment when technology allows architectural surfaces to gain greater representational complexity and to behave much more like responsive skins.[45] These moments of overlap are examples of topological architecture because at the point of intersection, an architectural surface is deformed

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[42] Perrella, “Hypersurface Theory: Architecture ><Culture,” 7.
[43] Ibid., 15.
[44] Ibid., 13.
[45] Alicia Imperiale, “Seminal Space: Getting under the Digital Skin,” in *Re: Skin*, ed. Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

as it takes the form of an interactive screen, and a screen is deformed as it forms a surface. The continuity between overlapping objects, which easily change forms, produces the flickering and glitching visual effect that troubles the boundary between the two.

Figure 2.5 Times Square, New York City

One of the most fully realized examples of hypersurface architecture is the FreshH2O eXPO, also known as the Fresh Water Pavilion, built by the NOX architectural office. Not surprisingly, these theoretical design experiments are primarily bounded to virtual space, which is not subject to the same governing logics of space or time. The NOX firm run by Lars Spuybroek, which has specialized in digital design since the early 1990s, conceived and actually constructed the now famous structure in the Netherlands.[46] The structure takes its aesthetic cues from the natural states and movement of water. As a result, it is able to produce forms of instability for visitors and therefore includes the fundamental characteristics and functions of

[46] Spuybroek, “Motor Geometry.”

hypersurface architecture—overlapping between opposing entities that produces indeterminacy through non-linear movement and spontaneous transformation.

Figure 2.6 Exterior of FreshH2O eXPO

Movement is not a quality of the pavilion, rather, the pavilion *is* movement because its transformation cannot be mapped in relation to any moment of stillness—the FreshH2O eXPO is never still. The hypersurface exhibits a complex temporality because of its constant flickering between opposing forms. The shape of the FreshH2O eXPO visualizes this fluid and multi-directional movement. The tubular structure was built on top of slopes of various gradients, so the building is not horizontal. The pavilion also does not have windows, meaning the curved ground and walls are seamlessly connected. The lack of a ground, which is typically where function is located in an architectural structure, is therefore indistinguishable from the form and neither is privileged. The Pavilion also features several interactive features, including digital screens lining the interior walls and a series of "splines" that connect the curved ellipses that create the tube shape. Changes in the screens or the splines transform the shape and appearance of the pavilion so it has a responsiveness that means the structure is capable of constant (de)formation that is entirely unattributed to the NOX designers. As part of the hypersurface's

critique of modernism, the hypersurface's movement is not initiated by a "creative genius" and has no discernable origin point.[47] Instead of being defined by the authority of its designer or the logics of design practice, the water pavilion, like all other hypersurfaces, "derives its coherence from movement."[48]

Figure 2.7 Interior of the FreshH2O eXPO

The Fresh Water Pavilion cannot achieve its spontaneous movement without employing building materials that exhibit the same flexibility that exists in virtual design spaces. For example, the spline is a continuous curved line that is variable within certain limits set by a designer and its technology was part of the software developments in architectural design in the early 1990s.[49] The value of digital rendering tools is the ability to create intermediary images

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[47] Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," 200.
[48] Spuybroek, "Motor Geometry," 50.
[49] Mario Carpo, "Introduction: Twenty Years of Digital Design," in *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012: AD Reader* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 9.

between different design points so that transformations appear smooth and fluid.[50] Thus, perhaps one of the most impressive parts of the translation from virtual design to real space in the NOX construction is its ability to maintain plasticity. The structure includes soft material like rubber and fabric, but more importantly, it does not distinguish between these solid elements and the immaterial components of the structure including software, sound, and light. Thus, flexibility in the Fresh Water Pavilion describes the stretch of certain building materials and the way the built environment frames itself and its boundaries.

Hypersurface architecture can consist of a wide range of immaterial components including dust, oil, or even silence; thus, unlike modern architecture that made its building materials clear and legible, understanding the matter of hypersurface architecture requires moving backwards from its observable pliability to materiality.[51] Greg Lynn, a major figure in digital architecture, developed this concept in his famous "blob architecture" by manipulating design tools to create amorphous shapes that are simultaneously multiple and singular.[52] These designs feature the same indeterminancy of the hypersurface by specifically using curvilinear shapes that have no clear corners or lines of delineation. Despite the visual simplicity of many blob designs, Lynn argues the folding and incorporation of difference in blob architecture requires supple materials that are deceptively complex.[53] Like Perrella and other hypersurface theorists, Lynn is interested in the appearance and materiality of theoretical designs and he provides a long list of descriptive terms to describe the matter required for blob architecture: liquid, gelatinous, viscous, adhesive, near-solid, cohesive, and wet.[54] Lynn finds a productive

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[50] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 123.
[51] Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*.
[52] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 162.
[53] Ibid., 120.
[54] Ibid., 146.

point of comparison in the science fiction B-movies produced first in the late 1950s like *The Thing* (Nyby, 1951) that create liquid monsters with no actual depth—they are all surface.[55] These horror films, along with Lynn's descriptive terms, refer back to Perrella's notion of "middle-out" conditions by suggesting hypersurface effects can only animate matter that is ontologically confusing.

Expanding our frame of reference for architectural materials is important because hypersurface matter is not just flexible, it is also vibrant. Hypersurface architecture superimposes different materials and it expresses the resulting excess of this merger. Although this excess visually takes the form of shine and glitch effects, it is actually the "stuff" of cultural and ideological rationality that are eroded in the architectural event. For example, Lynn also provides a more contemporary example of his topological, blob architecture in James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). In the film a futuristic robot made of an indestructible and regenerating liquid metal, T-1000, hunts the story's heroes. For most of the film, the shape shifting T-1000 appears as a clean-cut, white police officer that presumably conflicts with his other form, a monstrous metallic blob. Lynn compares T-1000, who often emerges or morphs into other bodies or objects, to Frank Gehry's flowing metal architecture that, while static, seems to allow new forms to emerge and disappear in the structure.[56] Both the T-1000 and Gehry's designs express profound formal ambivalence specifically because they do not privilege any of their multiple forms. Instead of a rational modernist hierarchy that would elevate T-1000's human form over his object body, they exist in equal measure.[57] By rejecting the ideals that

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[55] Ibid., 170.
[56] Ibid., 123.
[57] Larson, "Machine as Messiah: Cyborgs, Moprhs and the American Body Politic," in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 196, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1634864.

traditionally separate body and object and allowing them to overlap, the T-1000 becomes a hypersurface. Donna Larson reads T-1000 as a horrifying representation of commodity culture at its limit point, where market research and the legal structures that protect property have eliminated individuals to create bodies that have no interiority. Consumer culture's "nightmarish impatience" for newer, shiner objects is thus rendered by the constant regeneration of T-1000.[58] The pliability and liquidity of the hypersurface is the erupting or bubbling over that brings these kinds of conflicts of desire to the fore.

Figure *2.8* Terminator 2: Judgment Day *(Cameron, 1991)*

Before proceeding to a discussion of hypersurfaces in hip-hop, it is important to consider the racial implications of structures that have the "plasmatic possibility" of animated matter.[59] Sergei Eisenstein praised the "plasmatic" elasticity of Disney cartoons as freedom from form.[60] Yet, as Lynn's discussion of blob architecture indicates, the pliability of these architectural materials is another way to describe their defenselessness to outside forces. Similarly, the

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[58] Ibid., 198.
[59] Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit*, 2012, 205, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=881933.
[60] The issue of animation's elasticity, not to be confused with formlessness, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

figurative capacities of blackness imagined for exploitation or emancipation can only animate blackness if it is presumed to be inert matter.[61] As I described in the introduction to this chapter, exalting blackness's ability to change over time is, at best, obvious and, at its worst, can be used to support the liberation stories of others and the justification of violence against black bodies.[62] For example, Lynn also cites Michael Jackson's "Black and White" music video as an example of the liquid smoothness of blob and topological architecture.[63] In the "race machine" section of the video, Jackson's body morphs into a continuous stream of other bodies of different genders and races. The continuity of the visual effects claim the insignificance of these physical distinctions to support the song's thesis, "it don't matter if you're black or white."[64] But of course it does matter, because the only body capable of the transformation that occurs in the video is the black body. The video's attempt to elevate stereotypical or negative associations with blackness by visualizing its easy transition to whiteness is therefore haunted by the blackness of its morphology. All of this action occurring along the video's smooth surface, unwittingly, produces a hypersurface. In the video, celebrities and models perform simple choreography that is continued while each body transforms into the next. Momentarily during each transition there is a strange moment where parts of both bodies are still on the screen. For example, a woman's ponytail from the previous model still appears on the man who is now on screen. These moments are certainly not flaws in the video, but they can be a somewhat off-putting excess of the transition that momentarily emphasizes the artificiality and forced nature of the transformation that is in direct opposition to the "natural" seamlessness of racial indifference the video presents. As a result, in complete opposition to its architect, the video renders its own

[61] Ngai, " A Foul Lump Started Making Promises in My Voice," 575.
[62] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 22.
[63] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 123.
[64] Michael Jackson, *Black or White*, vol. Dangerous, 1991.

counter-movement, another boomeranged animation, that moves Jackson and his fellow performers against their will.[65]

2.3 Hypersurfaces & Hip-Hop Flow

Surfaces are significant in contemporary architecture because they reflect the discipline's orientation towards screens and because the surface is where modern architecture claimed its transparency and insisted on architectural facts; thus, bringing contradictions to bear on the surface is a formal and historical challenge to architectural objectivity. Similarly, bling and surfacism in hip-hop visual culture uses "the site of racial inscription and commoditization, the black body, to disaggregate the equation between seeing and knowing."[66] Thus, the performativity of the hypersurface and bling are examples of Hartman's practices of redress, where slave performers used public space to stage resistant acts. Hartman's work has been associated with Afro-pessimism insofar as it offers no grand schemes for escape in the practices of redress. Instead, her argument is largely architectural to the extent that it is about remaining in the architecture of anti-blackness while forcing its momentary rearrangement. Hartman's argument resembles hypersurface theory because it is about a space for self-reflexivity. More specifically, that space is the black body, which is itself public space and the prototypical inescapable architecture. First, redress re-members the dis-membered black body; thus, it reconstructs the black body by recalling, instead of forgetting, its availability for violation. Second, redress temporarily provides relief to the body through these alternate configurations. Third, redress articulates the desires of the slave body. Finally, redress performs these acts again

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[65] Ngai, "A Foul Lump Started Making Promises in My Voice." This reading of "Black and White" was largely influence by Ngai's deft study of the animated sitcom *The PJs* about a black family.
[66] Thompson, *Shine*, 235.

and again because redress is catalyzed by its own failure.[67] Bling brings racial history and spectacular fun together so it is a form of redress, which is why the critique of hip-hop materialism that argues these images fail to uplift the black community consistently seems to miss the point.

The hypersurface is a visualization of the practices of redress—it reorganizes space through superimpositions, its excesses are rendered as glitches because they are temporary, and its surfaces are expressions of consumer desire and eroticism. In the previous section I provided examples of hypersurfaces that have very different appearances: the space between a human and a doll, the Fresh Water Pavilion, blob architecture, and slave performances. Similarly, the hip-hop hypersurfaces this chapter considers do not all resemble the "What's it Gonna Be?" video. Two additional Williams-directed Bling era videos, the Notorious B.I.G.'s lavish "Mo Money, Mo Problems" and Missy Elliot's entirely surreal video for "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)" feature hypersurface effects that display the same flow but not necessarily the same liquidity as the Busta Rhymes video. I would like to suggest that transformations that occurred in the Bling Age altered hip-hop visual culture by creating the conditions for many different architectural events that merge *fixed* and *phenomenal* blackness that makes the aesthetic significance of this moment extend beyond its brief popularity. To counter the Bling Age's reputation for meaningless superficiality, I will first bring hypersurfaces and hip-hop into alignment using the two most *blingy* videos, "What's it Gonna Be?" and "Mo Money, Mo Problems."

The music video for rapper Notorious B.I.G.'s "Mo Money, Mo Problems," directed by Hype Williams, begins *in media res*. The camera slowly moves around two bodies on a golf course as warm, late afternoon sunlight shines through trees in the distance. Before the

[67] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 77.

production of the video, Notorious B.I.G. was murdered so the posthumously produced video stars Puff Daddy, the founder of The Notorious B.I.G.'s music label Bad Boy Entertainment, and another Bad Boy artist who is featured on the song, Ma$e. Puff Daddy is the star golfer preparing his last putt and Ma$e plays the role of a sports announcer commenting on the significance of Puff Daddy's impending championship win.[68] Puff Daddy wears a golf shirt and gloves and Ma$e wears a colored blazer that resembles those awarded at major golf tournaments. Yet, like the green grass on the golf course that is lovely, but almost *too* green, the rappers' style is not quite right. Both of the men opt to wear this traditional clothing in extra large sizes that are more representative of hip-hop than golf fashion. Wealth and notoriety have clearly granted the artists access to this rarified space; yet, they have not been smoothly incorporated. The discord of rappers playing golf is part of the video's humorous opening and as the track title attests, success does not guarantee an ease of living. Yet, these unexpected guests are not unwanted—the conservatively dressed white fans who surround the green cheer for Puff Daddy as he lines up final putt and his large diamond earring catches the light.

The rest of the "Mo Money, Mo Problems" video abandons the opening's thin narrative and, in adopting a more abstract organization, is able to more clearly work through the notion of displacement or decontextualization that is the object of the opening joke. After the golf scene, the video has five other set pieces. In all but one location, Puffy and Ma$e wear shiny clothing and dance in futuristic settings that are entirely covered in reflective surfaces. Later in the video, Ma$e and Puff Daddy dance in front of the Unisphere, a sculpture of the Earth that is located in Queens, New York. Yet, the image of the artists dancing in front of the Earth creates the

[68] Puff Daddy has performed using several monikers including P. Diddy, Diddy, and Puffy. He used the name Puffy Daddy at the time of the release of "Mo Money, Mo Problems," and is currently using the same name.

unmistakable sense that these videos take place outside of any familiar, terrestrial setting. The video uses the visual motif of shine and glare to cohere the its performance spaces which include a wind tunnel, a mirrored hallway full of fiery explosions, a round mirrored stage in front of the Unisphere, and a room full of florescent lights. “Mo Money, Mo Problems” is a party video and thus, it is not interested in developing a complex story or message. However, the lack of narrative does not make the video empty, reflections in the video allow images of the artists and dancers to proliferate across the screen.

Figure 2.9 Unisphere in “Mo Money, Mo Problems”

“What’s It Gonna Be?” was released two years after “Mo Money, Mo Problem” and the two million dollar production is the most surreal and stylized of the three examples discussed in this chapter.[69] While other Bling Age videos move images of black artists out of familiar milieus for dramatic or humorous effect, in this video black bodies morph constantly and easily move through space—it is all *phenomenal blackness.* The video begins with the entire frame covered in a wall of pulsing purple liquid. The title of the song, in a matching color and shine, pushes

[69] Jake Coyle, “Videos Embrace No-Budget Revolution; Pricey Productions Increasingly Dropped in Favour of Quirky Content for the YouTube Era: [ONT Edition],” *Toronto Star*, September 7, 2007, sec. Entertainment.

through the liquid. This transformation from liquid to solid is a reoccurring motif in the video as objects and bodies solidify and melt back into the purple mass. The video opens in a futuristic silver room with silver furniture that is the same material as the floor and ceiling, making the room appear seamless. A glass of water on a table crashes to the floor, and the spilled liquid transforms into Busta Rhymes. Once the rapper takes shape, he is also wearing silver and appears to be made of the same metal that covers the rest of the room. The other location in the video is a tunnel, where there is no distinction between the floor and the ceiling and every surface is covered with the rippling purple liquid. Like the previous sequence, Janet Jackson emerges from this liquid. The video repeatedly connects the performers to the surrounding space as they magically emerge from liquids, return to liquid to join the video space, and then reappear in other forms throughout the different fantasy spaces in the video.

In each video the bodily integrity of the artists and performers are playfully violated to visualize the instability of *fixed blackness.* The ontological dilemma, or the state of being middle-out, that Perrella tries to formally design allows the hypersurface to visualizes the strange fact of blackness, as a category that once defined objects of sale *and* bodies. Perrella is offering the middle-out as the preferred direction of movement or reading or making sense of a structure. Instead of starting at the beginning of a structure/concept or the final product, the middle-out is the movement between these two points that can be oriented in any direction. For example, the *in media res* opening of “Mo Money, Mo Problems” and certainly the multiple liquid states in “What’s it Gonna Be?” are examples of operating from the middle out. By activating the space between any two points, the hypersurface exhibits a “pervasive connectedness” that, I argue, it shares with blackness.[70] For example, in the case of selling hip-hop dolls in middle-class

[70] Perrella, “Hypersurface Theory: Architecture ><Culture,” 13.

households, Medina's comments seem strange because they draw a casual equivalency between Biz Markie's human and doll bodies instead of suggesting the latter is a reproduction of the former. The fluid movement in Medina's logic works from the middle, out. The purpose of reading this moment from the middle is recognizing the possibility of reverse movement that imagines the black body as a reproduction of the doll, which is a striking image of the de-humanization of black bodies. In other words, the counter-directionality of middle-out conditions is the re-membering of redress. This reading/performance strategy occurs on sleek, modernist architectural surfaces because these are the places where middle out connectedness is disavowed and traditional architectural surfaces have served as proxies for binaries at the core of Western epistemologies. [71]

Digital images like Bling Age videos can visualize the speculative work of hypersurface theory without the complicated construction of the Fresh Water pavilion. For example, there is a clear similarity between the liquid architecture, which features excess and spontaneous transformation, in the Fresh Water pavilion and the "What's it Gonna Be?" video. In the video, Busta Rhymes and Janet Jackson emerge from, and are transformed into, a metallic purple liquid, but the viscosity of that substance keeps their bodies from being entirely incorporated into the surrounding mass. If this purple liquid is a new and novel expression of black matter, it is nevertheless a kind of liquid difference. However, as the blob of liquid moves up and down the video space it clearly changes shape to accommodate the setting. Both the morphing artists and the viscous blob are hypersurfaces. The figural representations of the artists and the congealed texture of the liquid are examples of *fixed blackness* while the periods of plasticity when the blob shape shifts in exchange with its surrounding are examples of *phenomenal blackness*. When

[71] Ibid., 8.

these images appear simultaneously a hypersurface is formed. Early in the video Busta Rhymes's body is recognizable, but he is still entirely made of liquid metal. The glare on top of all of this transformation is a hypersurface effect, but the uncanny appearance of the liquid man is the clearest expression of the accumulation of this surplus, which, in this case, has created an entirely new figure.

Figure 2.10 "What's It Gonna Be?"

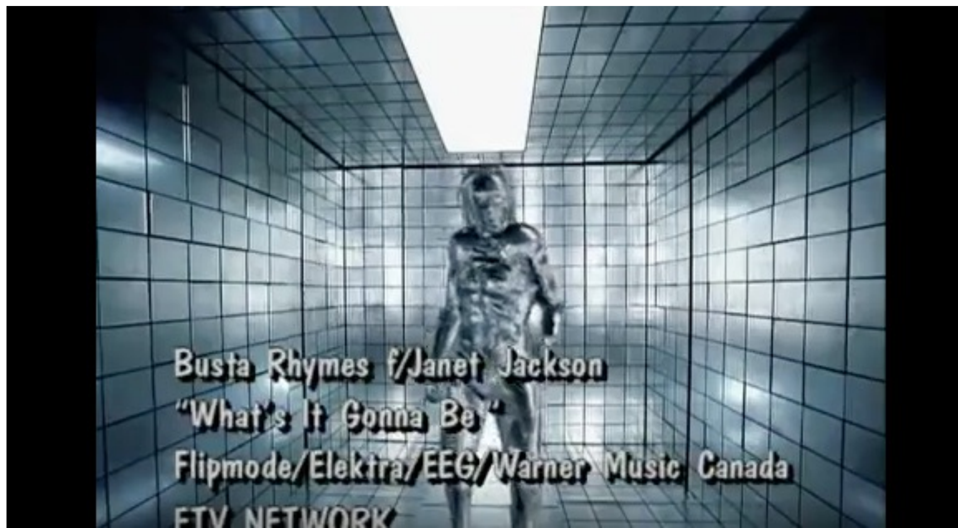

Figure 2.11 Middle-Out Busta Rhymes

The hypersurfaces in the Bling Age videos picture blackness as *the* middle-out condition. In the middle, the subjective experience of blackness and its material conditions co-exist in equal measure. The 'middle' brings us closer to language to describe the flexibility of black matter, not by suggesting the appearance of blackness has changed, but because blackness does not operate from a fixed point—not the Golden Age or even phenotypical blackness. In "Mo Money, Mo Problems" there is a dance club where Puffy and Ma$e do not appear, but stylish performers of different races dressed in all white dance to the track. On the three visible walls in the dance space there are screens displaying the Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie) rapping at concerts on three different occasions. The camera films the party at a high angle so despite Biggie's absence from the scene, he is featured prominently in the video frame. The ability to preserve and view Biggie's posthumous performance on screen and then dance to it is a clear example of technology influencing everyday life or a hypersurface layering of surface technology and body.

The overlap in the dance club occurs between Biggie's body on screen, frozen from change due to recording and his death, and the gyrating dancers in the foreground. The background is an example of *fixed blackness*. The frame contains Biggie and, stylistically, his performance more closely resembles Golden Era hip-hop. As his moniker suggests The Notorious B.I.G.'s subject matter emphasized death, violence, drugs, and the particularities of life in Brooklyn, New York. In fact, Biggie's attachment to this space and antagonism with West Coast rappers is considered to play a major role in his murder and "Mo Money, Mo Problems" is a song about the artist's sense of containment even after achieving fame and success. However, laid atop this image of *fixed blackness* are the inhibited bodies of glamorous dancers. They are *phenomenal blackness*, evidence of blackness's diverging appearance at different times.

Figure 2.12 Dancing in "Mo Money, Mo Problems"

The layering that occurs in a hypersurface does not privilege one layer over another because that would reinscribe the ideologies of purity and authenticity that the hypersurface critiques. In "Mo Money, Mo Problems," the unencumbered dancers do not negate Biggie's narrative. Instead, their co-presence pictures two aesthetics existing simultaneously without conflict. The dancers' bodies respond to Biggie and his performance responds to them. Dancing in particular is an ideal visualization of the merging of body and technology as the performers twist their bodies to accommodate the recording. Thus, the shared frame and interaction on screen produces a middle-out relationship that does not rely on figural black bodies to visualize blackness; indeed, the dancers are not all black. Instead, the ambivalent *relationship* between the foreground and background is where blackness resides in this space, in the same way the identity of the Fresh Water pavilion is found in its movement instead of stable positions. These promotional images for the artists and their music label cannot easily escape the discourse of commoditization, but if fungibility is about the "replaceability" and "interchangeability" of black

bodies, then it is significant that the video leaves all of these expressions of blackness on the screen at the same time.[72] Even after Biggie's death, he is not replaced in the video as much as he is joined with others. More than just relocating black bodies and cultural objects, Bling Age videos perform their most radical theorization of blackness by allowing it to occupy and fill the spaces in the middle.

Conceptually, the productivity of the hypersurface is a challenge to false dichotomies; formally, the hypersurface produces visual excess. In the case of Bling Age videos, that excess renders blackness as an "experiential overfill."[73] As Krista Thompson argues, this glare manages to overwhelm the visual field, taking the notion of hypervisibility to its furthest conceptual limit by allowing artists to become entirely obscured by their overwhelming visibility.[74] Simply, bling troubles the distinction between the visible and the invisible. The performance of this contradiction is what allows hypersurfaces in hip-hop videos to re-member racialized spaces even in the absence of actual black bodies and thus, cohere hip-hop architecture. In the midst of the hypersurface's structural changes, infinite spatial relations are implied and the difference between *fixed* and *phenomenal* blackness is allowed to take a shape of its own. In a truly dramatic example of this excess, at one point in "What's It Gonna Be?" the liquid tunnel becomes oversaturated and purple droplets of liquid fall from the top of the frame and suddenly transform into a robotic, metallic marching band. Without a beginning or end to the looping effects, this bizarre moment in the video transforms the hypervisibility and commonsense familiarity of blackness into an experience of disorientation.

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[72] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.
[73] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 190.
[74] Thompson, "The Sound of Light."

In these stylized videos, it becomes impossible to identify a hip-hop aesthetic that neatly fits into a familiar history of black expressive culture. Each image of an artist or space is only one moment in an expansive multitude of possible images and shapes. Like the bizarre logic of *doll-ness,* or the potential to be a doll, these videos render blackness with a kind of plasticity. Thus, the middle-out brings us closer to addressing the materiality of blackness, a substance capable of this constant transformation between fixed image and motion. By defining hip-hop matter based on its potential for spontaneous movement, these hip-hop hypersurfaces necessarily take on their own temporality that describes the time and order of that movement. Thus, this black time is equally transformational. The architectural definition of nonlinearity claims, "sometimes nature 'jumps' from one state to another in sudden and unpredictable ways, which modern science can neither anticipate nor account for."[75] Like their disruption of rational space, Bling Age videos visualize temporalities that are non-linear and the result is an implicit critique of the rational construction of blackness.

2.4 Hip-hop Hypersurfaces & Time

The same year Williams directed "Mo Money, Mo Problems," he also directed a music video for an up and coming artist, Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot. Elektra Records charged Williams to transform Missy, who is described as "stocky" and not "your typical Top 40 sex siren," into a household name. [76] The result, the video for "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)," is Missy's breakthrough video and another relatively early example of Williams's "delightfully wacked out" style.[77] "The Rain" is a dreamlike short that presents a cartoonish version of Missy's body in several production settings that align with the song's lyrics. In one set piece,

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[75] Carpo, "Introduction: Twenty Years of Digital Design," 10.
[76] Farley, Christopher Joh, and Patrick E. Cole. "The new video wizards."
[77] Linden, Amy. "Screen savers." *Billboard* 109, no. 47

Missy wears a now-infamous giant, glossy inflated latex suit. In another part of the video, dancers perform choreography that is both robotic and sensual inside of a large industrial space where it is miraculously raining. In both settings, harsh lighting reflects off of the video's many surfaces, particularly the wet skin of the female dancers and the latex suit.

Figure 2.13 The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)

"The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)" makes the most explicit reference to the hypersurface's broadly construed technological logic. The video has an industrial, mechanical aesthetic that embeds Missy's body into the space and the process of image production until she becomes a visualization of the cyborg hybridity of the hypersurface. For example, one of Williams's signature techniques in the Bling videos is the wide angle lens, which he makes more frequent use of in "The Rain." Because of it, Missy alters her dance style to accommodate the video's exaggerated sense of depth by moving near and far from the camera to create the impression that her body is quickly moving through a vast space. When combined with a round frame, the wide-angle lens points to the boundary of the video surface that contains the performances. The video looks as if Missy has entered a camera's mechanism and there are even gears that fly past her head in one performance sequence. These are the technologies that *fix* blackness and yet her

stylized and tactile appearance emphasizes the *phenomenal* dimension. Steven Shaviro describes the video as "wholly simulacral" so that the same paradox of superficiality in the "Mo Money, Mo Problems" video is repeated—Missy and the many hip-hop and R&B artists who make cameos in the video are encased in a shiny surreal world that manages to be exceedingly superficial yet deep.[78] Missy's video visualizes "the process of becoming-cyborg from the inside," so it is not future-oriented; instead, it is an example of the hypersurface's complex temporality that, like the space it evokes, starts in the middle.[79]

Claims about the inherent (negative) qualities of blackness are imagined to justify and precede anti-blackness, but the only thing inherent about the blackness visualized in the videos is its potential to change entirely. Objects and images of black popular culture are overdetermined; as a result, they have the strange status of being expressions of racial alterity at the same time they are undeniably recognizable. While this observation is not new and is fundamental to the study of black representation, it is less often described in relation to time. Racial discourse defines black bodies and objects from the outside. While anti-blackness vehemently disavows this order, racism precedes race. As a result, this dominating logic is what fixes blackness in this space of permanent difference.[80] However, the Bling Age videos use foreign locales and bodily transformations to reject any sense of familiarity, meaning they do not refer to a prior moment governed by racist logic. Instead, in their whimsical reproach of hip-hop music video aesthetics, these videos allow black matter to be self-generative and under its own control.

The hypersurface frames the issue of design control as a temporal concern because it rejects the notion of the designer as a structure's beginning point. One reason the emergence of

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[78] Steven Shaviro, "Supa Dupa Fly: Black Women As Cyborgs in Hiphop Videos," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22, no. 2 (March 9, 2005): 174, doi:10.1080/10509200590921962.
[79] Ibid., 171.
[80] Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race*.

the hypersurface coincides with the introduction of digital technologies in design practice is because in digital environments, architects can build structures that are "rigorously anexact and not prefigured."[81] For example, in the NOX Pavilion each visitor's body interacting with the structure rebuilds the space. Bling Age videos create the same unprogrammed effects. All three videos visualize the embodied hypersurface and its potential for rendering the black body as temporarily out of control. First, all of the performers are actual people so they are unique and changing individuals and in the videos when they appear in different scenes they clearly interact with the various set pieces. In all of these instances flexibility and accommodating the space of are examples of *phenomenal blackness*. The artists have also clearly been styled to be part of the spectacle of a hip-hop image so that they are part of the basic attempts at maintaining visual continuity in the videos. These examples of visualizing blackness for the image are examples of *fixed blackness*. The confrontation between two different images of blackness on the body is akin to referring to a rapper by both his or her birth name and stage name, which even temporarily can be confusing. Who is Trevor George Smith, Jr.? (Answer: Busta Rhymes). At the moments of overlap, the body is not easily discernable as emerging from 'now' or 'then,' so that it can occupy a temporality that does not coincide with anti-blackness, which relies on blackness being fixed in time and space. The Bling videos use their visual effects to render this autonomy. For example in "The Rain" Missy's face spontaneously changes shapes as her eyes or lips enlarge. The figurative capacities of blackness are the forces that animate contemporary expressions of blackness to take these unpredictable and expansive forms—perhaps it is then logical that the video that turned Missy Elliot into a star would transform her body into an autonomous entity.

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[81] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 191.

The shine that coheres the visual style of the Bling Age videos similarly removes control, even from the videos' famous auteur. In all of the videos the artists wear highly reflective clothing, jewelry and sunglasses while performing inside of mirrored sets. Although Williams directed these videos and constructed their complicated *mise-en-scène*, the artists' bodies become perfect, slick surfaces for light to produce unplanned effects. The sets also allow reflections of the performers to fill the screen. For example, in "Mo Money, Mo Problems" the camera films Ma$e and Puff Daddy walking down a mirrored hallway and reflections of both artists appear to the left and right of the screen. By constructing this architecture Williams's direction produces the conditions for the reflections, which resemble but are distinct from the artists, to perform. It is therefore arguable that these figures are not under Williams's direction.

Figure 2.14 Horizontality in "Mo Money, Mo Problems"

The potential for infinite outward movement visualized in the Bling Age videos allows blackness to be rendered as ontologically and temporally unstable, by picturing blackness as simultaneously fixed, dynamic, solid, liquid, choreographed, and out of control. Furthermore, this play of meanings and matter occurring on the same surface allows this encounter between multiple iterations of blackness to take center stage. As the side-by-side images of Ma$e and

Puffy illustrate, topological design does not visualize time linearly, moving forward from the past into the future. Instead, time moves out to the sides and it is impossible to identify a starting or ending point. In fact, the entire music video format seems predisposed to this horizontal configuration of time because music videos rarely feature narrative arcs and if they do, the linear narrative is often interrupted by shots of non-diegetic performance spaces. For example, the strange opening of "Mo Money, Mo Problems" would make as much sense if it appeared at the end of the video. Similarly, with the exception of one continuity shot from the outside to the inside of a car, it is impossible to follow the editing logic of "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)." Missy appears in each disconnected space, which features a different color scheme and dramatically different costumes; yet, when the video returns to one of Missy's performance spaces, she is gone and is replaced by different artists dancing to the song. Like a hypersurface, the video facilitates multiple points of intersection across time and space. The video creates the effect of multiple expressions of blackness, which cannot be entirely incorporated or made to appear similar, occupying the same space at the same time.

Ironically, this fluid construction of time or cause/effect often takes forms that resemble nature, like the liquidity of the Fresh Water Pavilion and "What's it Gonna Be?" The states of matter become ideal models for an object's potential for transformation. However, in their surreal renderings of nature, the Bling Age videos make meaningful alterations to the natural order. Not surprisingly, "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)" does feature rain; however, it miraculously falls inside of a building onto the bodies of dancers performing robotic choreography. In "Mo Money, Mo Problems" Ma$e and Puff Daddy lip synch inside of a wind tunnel where there is zero gravity. Finally, in "What's It Gonna Be?" the artists' bodies repeatedly shift from solid to liquid and back again. In these examples, the videos use computer graphics and carefully

constructed sets to merge the organic and inorganic and the results are images of nature that are not absolute. The videos create a continuity between inside and outside and discard the governing logics of space and time to feature black bodies as in control of—as opposed to subject to—nature.

Troubling the construction, or nature, of time is significant in theorizing about blackness because, as Tavia Nyong'o simply states, "race is a theory of history."[82] He is referring to two ways temporality operates as a part of racial discourse. First, the forward organization of time has been a meaningful way to keep blackness outside, but more specifically *before*, Western modernity.[83] Second, Nyong'o explains, "race as a pseudoscientific ideology proposes to telescope history into biological destiny."[84] In other words, race works backwards to justify social formations that distribute value across peoples moving forward. Thus, when these videos illustrate continuous and unpredictable change and refuse to establish points of origin, like the rippling liquid in "What's it Gonna Be?" they challenge racial time or what Charles Mills calls the "state of nature" that moves from "'natural' man forward to 'civilized/political' man."[85] This image of race, along with gender and sexual orientation, that appears on a timeline moving outward from some original coordinate makes it clear that time is folded into the ontology of blackness. However, as Nyong'o telescope metaphor attests, blackness only masquerades as linear and rational. In actuality, like the Fresh Water pavilion and the Bling Age videos,

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[82] Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009), 11; Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Alexander G. Weheliye, "The Grooves of Temporality," *Public Culture* 17, no. 2 (2005): 319–38; Wright, *Physics of Blackness*. For additional discussions of blackness and temporality see Mills, Weheliye, and Wright.
[83] Mills, *The Racial Contract*.
[84] Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 10.
[85] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 12.

blackness cannot be defined in relation to stillness and is only able to remain intelligible, in spite of its constant movement, if it derives its coherence from movement.

In the *Physics of Blackness* Michelle M. Wright argues the predominant organization of black time is the linear narrative of the black diaspora, which operates as a way of knowing blackness as a singular entity.[86] However, as Wright argues there are several tradeoffs between a complex, multifaceted understanding of blackness and the convenience of a neat spatial-temporal organization. Most notably, in order to maintain the tidy nature of linear time, some bodies and images of blackness that do not share the same narrative and timeline are removed. This erasure is a central concern for black feminist and queer theorists, those whose progress does not coincide with familiar progress narratives like the Civil Rights Movement or Golden Age hip-hop.[87] This issue of exclusion is more complicated than the "burden of representation" that laments the underrepresentation or limited range of representation for people of color. Questioning the underlying organization of bodies in space and time, which is the theoretical work the hypersurface performs, is a way to redress this problem and produce an inclusive definition of blackness because, even temporarily, it opens the space for expressions of blackness and black desire that cannot be extracted and fixed from its flurry of movement. The distinction between the Golden and Bling periods in hip-hop is the former's preoccupation with representation meant freezing black space, or removing the dimension of time. This is evident in the entanglement of nostalgia, a form of spatial-temporal linearity, in the history and criticism of black cultural expression.

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[86] Wright, *Physics of Blackness*.
[87] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

2.5 Conclusion

In 2014, hip-hop artist and producer Questlove wrote a popular series of articles for *New York Magazine's* online publication, *Vulture.com*. In the first article in the series, Questlove begins with the same assumption that initiates this project and chapter, "hip-hop has taken over black music."[88] In fact, later in the article he even uses a liquid metaphor, comparing the genre's spread to the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The viscosity of oil, like blob architecture, means it spreads at the same time it maintains an internal attraction that continues to draw more and more inside itself. Like an actual oil spill that devastates the environment by sticking to nature until animals and plants can no longer survive, blackness is the valuable oil that sticks to bodies and objects without needing to ingest them; it simply takes its form based on its surroundings. Blackness itself spreads outward at the same time contact with it stops everything; in the low-budget horror films Lynn uses to imagine blob architecture, these monstrous blobs often include "partially digested victims suspended within a gelatinous ooze."[89] This comparison smartly joins blackness with attraction, value, and movement in space. It is likely that Questlove intended to use the example of oil to express the slipperiness of blackness that would eventually lead him to a claim about its immateriality, but oil is not immaterial and its presence consumes space. Although I appreciate this metaphor, this is where our arguments diverge. The distinction between our assessments of hip-hop's mainstreaming becomes explicit when he laments, "once hip-hop culture is ubiquitous, it is also invisible. Once it's everywhere, it's nowhere." Like the hip-hop artists and critics editorializing the end of the Golden Era, Questlove's reading of the documented mainstreaming of hip-hop culture is strange because it lacks a historical precedent.

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[88] Questlove, "When the People Cheer: How Hip-Hop Failed Black America."
[89] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 171.

At what previous time did the incorporation of black people or black cultural objects make blackness irrelevant?

While this chapter's approach to historiography is certainly nontraditional, this imagined past and future demands exploration because it has implications for theorizing about the materiality of blackness since "anything that endures varies."[90] In other words, blackness has remained a cultural formation precisely because it has moved across these imagined boundaries and has taken different shapes over time. Even in their loose narratives and their outlandish visual style, Bling Age videos visualize the imaginary conditions that emerge when blackness crosses racial and cultural boundaries and does not dissipate. For a more tangible example we only need to look to postbellum miscegenation anxieties that worked to reify blackness both legally and ideologically when black bodies appeared outside of the context of chattel slavery.[91] If blackness can be described like a liquid, it behaves like the unnatural viscous blob in "What's It Gonna Be?" that does not disperse but instead seems to spread and accumulate at the same time. This movement is a restaging of the most fundamental confusions surrounding race—encountering it after we know it does not exist. In fact, throughout this chapter non-digital hypersurfaces have emerged that flicker between what we do and do not believe about blackness, primarily its ability to take new shapes. Thus, the disjuncture between Questlove's prediction and documented history, the difference between subject and object, or even the difference between a solid and a liquid are not mistakes that need to be corrected, they are middle-out conditions that lead to black materiality and even redress.

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[90] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 206.
[91] Mark Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Revealing the space between blackness and forms of the expression of blackness (black life, black politics, black matter, etc.) is the central question of black studies and although Golden Era hip-hop often reflects the politics of this intellectual tradition, images from this moment allow blackness and black art to become conflated. In the Golden Era of hip-hop, black visuality functioned like a window onto black life. The videos' cinematic spaces, the spaces of production, and the cultural space the videos occupy appeared collapsed, as if these images were unmediated. Ironically, Bling Age videos that refuse to be easily reconciled with hip-hop's prevailing visual style, the history of black popular music, or even the unofficial canon of hip-hop studies present the more radical approach to expressing blackness.

Instead of merely being the backdrop to a racial event, a confrontation with blackness, architectural features like the hypersurface formally constitute the event.[92] Hypersurface architecture challenges the kind of conflation that occurs in the Golden Era and instead troubles these layers to reveal their excessive imperfections. For architectural theorists and design practitioners, this work is significant because it divorces architectural surfaces from the discourse of stillness, closure, and purity that previously defined it. The hypersurface made room for the experience of architecture in design, allowing phenomenal space to exist simultaneously with the built environment. As a result, architectural theory began to define its recognizable forms as mere extractions from a much larger flow of movement. In the same way, a phenomenal definition of blackness allows *fixed* hip-hop images to constitute only one 'now' among many. Surreality, the visual aesthetic that characterizes the hypersurface, is then not a failure of black representation but a way to visualize, and intentionally confuse, the themes that coalesce around

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[92] Rebecca Carpenter, "Force Affect," in *Hypersurface Architecture II*, ed. Stephen Perrella, Architectural Design Profile 141 (West Sussex, 1999), 23.

black aesthetics and black space—most notably, the persistent linking of authenticity and locality.

The ability to theorize about multiple space-times is not required to accept the idea that there are many expressions of blackness, but this alternative approach to black space and time does address one challenge in hip-hop scholarship that these video's embody—the problem of taste and superficiality. A formal look at superficiality troubles the problematic value judgment that states *good* black cultural production works forward from a singular black point. This preoccupation with progress often suggests black cultural expression is only adequate as the byproduct of black oppression.[93] This configuration would suggest that access to social life is contingent on moving *past* and *through* some kind of black trauma.[94] This critique does not negate Golden Era hip-hop's success in exposing the realities of black urban life and its ability to initiate conversations about social change. However, it does recognize that this appeal to recognition, even in its most brash forms, remains problematically linked to oppression and the social, which the fantastical Bling videos so purposefully avoid. Ultimately, the cause and effect structure of linear time and progress narratives deny subjects the agency of self-reflexivity as a productive backward, sideways, and forward looking. Although there is a debate in architectural practice about the specific design elements that allow autopoesis, the reflective glare of these surfaces and Bling Age videos allow these speculative works to self-generate new images and take new shapes, incorporating contemporary hip-hop's racial diversity at the same time it reshapes the boundaries that define the space of blackness.

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[93] Tricia Rose, "Black Texts/Black Contexts," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (New York: The New Press, 1998), 223–27.
[94] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

3 "NOW LET'S GET IN FORMATION"

The previous chapter explores hip-hop architectures that take high-tech, postmodern shapes in order to complicate hip-hop historiography as a function of (white) linear time. Although the genre places considerable emphasis on brash newness, its visual culture does not always take such radical shapes. This chapter explores works that exhibit, "a certain squareness of mass and outline, a criss-cross or 'grid-iron' treatment with an emphasis on the horizontals, an extreme bareness of wall surface, a pervading austerity and economy and a minimum of ornament" that defines the modern architectural style.[1] The grid is a symbol of modernity; it is both ubiquitous and, through its linkages to the window and the interface, an expression of the visual turn.[2] The straightforward design of modern architecture, and the Enlightenment reason that it continues, would certainly seem to reinforce the fixed categorization of peoples that is already understood as race; however, this chapter addresses the possibility that the formal qualities of the grid are less rigid than they seem.[3]

Rosalind Kraus argues the grid in art is inherently dualistic because it can be read in two ways; the grid can be read centrifugally or centripetally. The former understands the gird as an extraction of a much larger organization and the latter emphasizes the surface of the image as self-contained. Placing nature, or the work of art, or the black body in a grid can visualize the continuity that exists between the work and reality or reify the separate and distinct internal logic of the image. In either case, the grid is a, "*re*-presentation of everything that separates the work

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[1] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), xii.
[2] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64, doi:10.2307/778321.
[3] Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Before Man: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 90–105.

of art from the world" because it is the formalization of that tension.[4] Modern organization has been a tool for pseudo-scientific efforts to contain and restrain blackness. However, this chapter emphasizes the potential for multiple, fluid meanings in three contemporary examples that all employ modernist design elements, but span the spectrum of hip-hop visual culture: the website WorldStarHipHop.com; Beyoncé's "Formation" music video (2016), and William Pope.L's art installation "Claim" (2014). These examples of modern hip-hop architecture *re*-introduce us to reality by revising the boundaries between blackness and the world around it.

Mapping hip-hop architecture makes it possible to see the spatial relationship between blackness and hip-hop, and also between hip-hop and itself. All texts that are part of a generic category represent a small piece of that nebulous mass and hip-hop is no different. True to its self-referential style, hip-hop often makes that particular management between a work's singularity and its representativeness a central theme and the grid is an ideal form of this meta-commentary. The hip-hop architectures discussed in this chapter, with varying levels of self-consciousness and critique, manage bodies and images to create a straightforward image of generic and racial cohesion.

WorldStarHipHop.com (WSHH) is an online video aggregator that describes itself as "the premiere online hip hop destination" and a home for "urban media."[5] The website is an expression of hip-hop's global expansion and increasing racial and stylistic diversity as evidenced by the wide variety of professional and user-generated clips. Each day the website adds between 20-30 new videos and this massive collection is organized into four neat columns on the site's stark white front page; thus, a fairly indistinct set of digital design features give the

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[4] Krauss, "Grids," 60.

[5] "About World Star Hip Hop," *Facebook*, accessed December 29, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/worldstarhiphop/info/?tab=page_info.

assorted videos the appearance of cohesion. Beyoncé's video creates a similar effect. The controversial music video "Formation" re-enacts the machine aesthetic of the Tiller Girls and Busby Berkley musicals using black female dancers. The singer and her dancers perform with militaristic precision in a series of Southern scenes: on the steps of a grand home, in an ornate drawing room, and most dramatically, in the middle of a flooded New Orleans city street.[6] The video brings together many black performances and spaces into a rigid structure and, like WSHH's taglines that state the racial identity of the website, "Formation" fashions itself as a call for black female solidarity.

The final example, the fine art installation "Claim" by William Pope.L is another modern hip-hop architecture although it appears in a radically different context than WSHH or "Formation." "Claim" was part of the hip-hop art show "Ruffneck Constructivists," curated by Kara Walker at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. Walker was inspired to curate the show after she could not find a scholarly link between hip-hop and the modernist manifestos written at the turn of the twentieth century.[7] All of the works in the show picture a theory of the production of black space.

For "Claim," Pope.L took black and white photographs of people on the street and affixed them to pieces of lunchmeat that were organized into a rotting, but precise, grid on the wall of in the gallery space. Without any knowledge of the racial or ethnic identity of the people

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[6] Patrick Sisson, "Beyoncé's 'Formation': How a Historic Pasadena Home Went Southern Gothic for This Year's Biggest Video," *Curbed.com*, February 9, 2016, http://www.curbed.com/2016/2/9/10953432/beyonce-formation-music-video-production-design#reader_comments. Although the music video stages the action in New Orleans, none of the footage featuring the R&B star was actually filmed there. Instead, her performances were filmed in the Los Angeles area.
[7] Kara Elizabeth Walker, Craig L. Wilkins, and University of Pennsylvania, eds., *Ruffneck Constructivists* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Brooklyn, NY: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania ; Dancing Foxes Press, 2014), 10.

in the portraits, the artist used the images to display a numerical fraction of Philadelphia's Jewish population. The installation makes explicit references to an ethnoreligious group, but not race or blackness. Yet, by giving all of the people in the portraits the same flesh, the installation evokes the confusion between ethnicity and race as a rotten mess that consumes the piece. The curling meat in "Claim" expresses the tension between the immanent meaning of bodies and images and the meanings acquired through organization and presentation and this tension is a fundamental part of WSHH and "Formation." Thus, "Claim" is an effective visualization of blackness because it builds the "*surpluses* of materialized identity effects."[8] Because Pope.L's work so knowingly positions itself at the nexus of urbanism, hip-hop, and modern design I will rely on this work as a reflexive counterpoint for "Formation" and WSHH.

Beyoncé released the song and music video for "Formation" the day before the 2016 Super Bowl, the biggest day in American sports media, and performed the song the next day at the halftime show for over 100 million viewers.[9] WSHH and "Formation" are both popular images, so the ways both become incorporated into the cultural landscape are significant. Hip-hop studies has traditionally framed these kinds of popular works in two ways: WSHH and "Formation" can be used as evidence of the broadening multiculturalism visualized by contemporary hip-hop; or, these images can be examples of the resiliency of the black cultural tradition that remains racially specific.[10] This chapter is interested in the latter. Almost immediately after the release of "Formation," the video was hailed as a visualization of "the

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[8] English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, 270.
[9] "TV Ratings: Super Bowl 50 Falls Shy of Record With 111.9 Million Viewers," *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed July 16, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/tv-ratings-super-bowl-50-862888.
[10] Saucier and Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 267.

entirety of the black experience in America in 2016."[11] This is a shocking response to a video that includes virtually all of the same elements that comprise most pop music videos like choreographed dancing, glamorous fashion, and beautiful scantily dressed women.

Like "Formation," WSHH is a recognizable part of black expressive culture, it has an been immortalized in hip-hop lyrics, but its infamous reputation obscures the fact that neither the site's design nor content are unique or even clearly related to rap music.[12] It is difficult to discern the blackness of a website that is so redundant in the Internet space. Visitors who wish to upload their own clips on the site must submit the pre-existing URL for the video. Even videos the site tags as "WSHH Exclusives" are available in other places. The WSHH interface does little to distinguish the site from similar video aggregators like YouTube and Vimeo. YouTube already hosts all of the same videos as WSHH and many more. Thus, the site's content does not explain the appeal to view videos on WSHH or upload performances there. However, WSHH's popularity, its mere existence, proves the black musical tradition is still a distinguishing and attractive mark of difference.

WSHH and "Formation" are both legible images, their tidy organization makes no attempts to formally alienate spectators and both exist in digital channels that are defined by their accessibility; yet, the perceived limits of white participation in black expressive culture is a central part of both texts and their critical response. For example, there is a discernable subcategory of WSHH videos about the shock, delight, or horror that comes from seeing white performers appear on the site and this response is echoed in the video comments. Critiques of

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[11] Jon Caramanica Morris Wesley and Jenna Wortham, "Beyoncé in 'Formation': Entertainer, Activist, Both?," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/arts/music/beyonce-formation-super-bowl-video.html.
[12] The rapper Childish Gambino released his album "Because the Internet" that focuses on the intersection of online culture and hip-hop and includes an ode to WSHH, "Worldstar."

cultural appropriation are a significant part of the popular discourse of hip-hop culture, but this critique has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the light of the unstoppable flows of "black cultural traffic."[13]

The enduring discomfort about the process of producing and consuming black images in popular culture seems to be a distinctly spatial issue. WSHH is a space for the initiated, because people searching for the same content can find it elsewhere. That means the intangible *thing* WSHH offers over its competitors is not its content, but its grid. "Formation" is also about the organization of space, specifically black spaces that are hidden from the view of wider audiences. One of the most prominent and often discussed lyrics in the song is "hot sauce in my bag, swag," which efficiently explains the black experience as an interplay between expressions of identity (or flavor) hidden from sight and managed self-representations that appear in plain view. At the same time the video evokes painful sites where black bodies have been neglected, this lyric is about unseen black pleasures. Simply, the video is black but it is also fun. That possibility for pleasure became problematic when presidential nominee Hilary Clinton told a hip-hop radio station that she keeps hot sauce in her bag, when countless covers of the song by white performers appeared on YouTube, and when expensive fitness centers began offering "Formation" dance workout classes.[14] Black cultural critics' impassioned responses to the "Formation" phenomenon and white fans' apparently compelling need to recreate Beyoncé's song and video cannot be explained with the overused complaint of cultural theft. Instead, these

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[13] Elam and Jackson, *Black Cultural Traffic*.
[14] "Hillary Clinton Joins the Breakfast Club to Talk Beyonce, Hot Sauce in Her Bag … Swag," *Washington Post*, accessed July 16, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/04/18/hillary-clinton-joins-the-breakfast-club-to-talk-beyonce-hot-sauce-in-her-bag-swag/; "Why Are White People Trying to Ruin 'Formation'?," *The Cut*, February 26, 2016, http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/02/why-are-white-people-trying-to-ruin-formation.html.

remakes are instances of unsanctioned interracial exchange because they take place within the racial boundaries defined by the video.

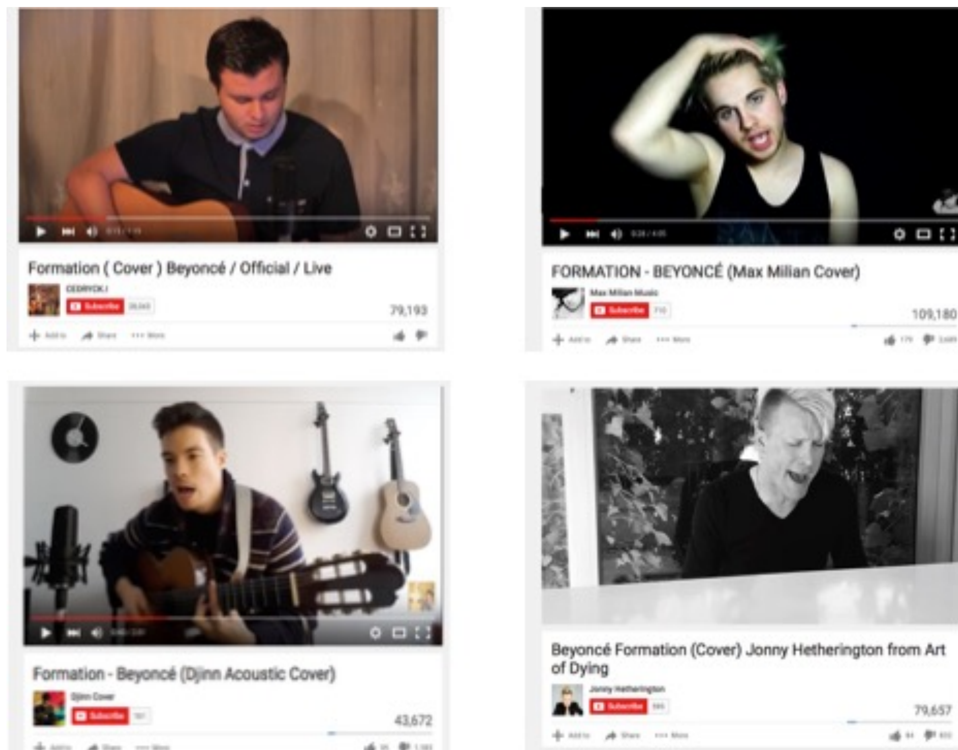

Figure 3.1 YouTube Covers of "Formation" by Beyoncé

At stake in the comingling that occurs in these images are the kinds of empathic identification, or multiculturalism that would negate these works by suggesting WSHH is not necessary and that everyone can relate to the images of dispossession in Beyoncé's video.[15] These examples construct black space in digital space and the fine art realm, contexts that often do not include black bodies. Moreover, they construct black space using in the style of European modernism so, unlike the ornamental 'bling' discussed in Chapter 1, this design tradition is not often associated with hip-hop. Yet, these aesthetic choices are not expression of hip-hop and blackness being assimilated into the broader popular culture landscape. On the contrary, the

[15] Hartman and Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought," 184.

regimented architecture in both works transform individual bodies into powerful collective images that are “unapologetically black.”[16]

White participation in WSHH and “Formation” does not alter the racial identity of either work; more radically, the architecture alters the racial identity of the bodies and images that enter the structure. These works feature the distinct spatial arrangements that allow us to see a racialized architectural event that is typically impossible to see—the *process* of rendering a body (or image) as black. This simple architecture radically shifts the ground beneath racial identity insofar as, “whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not.”[17] Pope.L’s work makes this shift a material, visceral part of “Claim.” By placing unstable materials within a modernist style to critique the architecture of governmentality, he introduces the possibility for change to the racial order (rotting) into the design. Thus, “Claim” is a formal response to popular engagement with hip-hop architecture and the way the grid seems to articulate, and alter, the racial identity of its inhabitants.

WSHH, “Formation,” and “Claim” mirror architectural styles intended to eliminate ambiguity and manage difference through the appearance of objectivity and clarity; yet, like any grid there is the possibility of interpreting these formations from the inside-out or the outside-in. This chapter considers the racial confusion engendered by each piece as a product of the “regulating lines” imposed on space by modern designs.[18] Despite the orderly appearance of these structures, these unregulated interactions suggest these formations are not in control of blackness or the possible events that occur in black space. These architectures engage in the

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[16] “Beyoncé’s ‘Formation’: Young, Gifted, and Black,” *Vulture*, February 7, 2016, http://www.vulture.com/2016/02/roundtable-discussion-beyonce-formation-blackness-feminism.html.
[17] Hartman and Wilderson, “The Position of the Unthought,” 187.
[18] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 3.

broader visual culture by mimicking spatial organizations that historically shaped the relationship between seer and seen. For instance, these images borrow the formal qualities of several earlier visual attractions, like the contained architecture of the peep show or the window displays of a red light district.[19] The claim that these visual relations are not a stable as previously understood is significant for expressions of blackness because it suggests black images and objects are not contained by the grid of black visuality. Instead, they can cross their ordering lines and engage in a black social life—and all of this action would occur at the walls and in the doorways of hip-hop architecture.[20] Only after considering the exchanges that occur within these works, across their internal borders, can we consider their relationship to reality.

In the canonical essay, "The Case of Blackness" Fred Moten explains artist Piet Mondrian's obsessive process of revision. The artist, known for his painted grids, repainted the same works and was not interested in generating new pieces as much as answering questions about color, repetition, and the political consciousness of the process. Moten addresses Mondrian's famous unfinished work *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1942-44) through a debate between jazz artist Cecil Taylor and painter Ad Reinhardt in which the abstract painter insists on interpreting blackness as a limit point of negation and abstraction, a position evinced by his black paintings, while the musician argues for the complexity of blackness by refusing to imagine blackness or his artistic practice outside of the lived experience. Moten argues through the process of reworking his pieces Mondrian's structured chromatic works express Taylor's argument by becoming optically and socially excessive so that his painterly process "actively

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[19] Amy Herzog, "In the Flesh: Space and Embodiment in the Pornographic Peep Show Arcade," *The Velvet Light Trap* 62, no. 1 (2008): 29–43, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/vlt/summary/v062/62.herzog.html; Phil Hubbard, "Red-Light Districts and Toleration Zones: Geographies of Female Street Prostitution in England and Wales," *Area*, 1997, 129–40, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20003779.
[20] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 202.

disrupts the grids by which activities would be known, organized, and apportioned."[21] Thus, Moten identifies the same movement between Krauss's two interpretations of the grid in Mondrian's work, but because this movement within the artwork is an example of "a social life within forms" it has clear racial significance. The potential for relationality among objects, even those confined by the borders of the grid, to spill outward is a distinctly "black socio-aesthetic activity."[22]

This chapter borrows the term Moten used to describe Mondrian's painterly process—*revision*—as a way to describe the process of re-seeing and the process of re-making that is embedded in the grid's dualistic form in racial terms. Revision is a kind of self-generating excess that arises out of distinct spatial conditions of blackness in formation. Although the potential for black social life is a point of contention in black studies scholarship, the divided camps in this debate do agree that blackness takes up space although it cannot be mapped.[23] Blackness is "the position of the unthought," so it is inherently meaningful to put this position of negation and dispossession into formation—specifically for the purposes of achieving clarity and objectivity.[24] I argue the inversion of blackness from 'placeless' to 'in place' and from illegibility to transparency requires the constant work of *revision* that is in fact already embedded in the repetition of gridded architectures. *Revision* is an exchange between forms, like hip-hop's ironic use of a mid-twentieth century architectural style. This interaction between forms will explain the strange happenings in this chapter's examples of hip-hop architecture including the decay in "Claim," WSHH's perplexing redundancy, and the compelling desire to get into "Formation."

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 200.
[23] The issue of blackness operating in the World "in absentia" will be explored in greater detail in Chapter three.
[24] Hartman and Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought."

All of these peculiar events express the possibility of being pulled in and racialized by these modern structures. In other words, blackness is not being incorporated into these modern architectures—it incorporates.

In the wake of architectural modernism's failures, particularly to improve social conditions through a streamlined approach to dwelling, architectural theorists have spent considerable time outlining the contradictions that an are inherent part of modern structures. Le Corbusier, one of the most prominent practitioners of modern architectural style, argued that "the house is a machine for living in" and the disastrous experiment of American housing projects was inspired by this move toward efficiency and order.[25] Le Corbusier failed to recognize how his plans would be revised, how unplanned activities could take place in the seemingly transparent corridors of these structures. [26] In other words, the architect was actually designing machines for *dis*-order. This chapter will begin by explaining the other side of modern architecture, where its simplicity gives way to formal and ideological complexity. Then I will use *revision* as a way to argue the unsanctioned exchanges that occur inside and outside of WSHH, "Formation, and "Claim" are not an unintended consequences, but functions of these tidy architectures.

3.1 Modern Architecture

The driving force of twentieth century modern architecture was a rejection of classicism in favor of functionalism as a universal concern. Modern architecture represents a vast set of

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[25] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 4.

[26] Sekou Cooke, "The Fifth Pillar: A Case for Hip-Hop Architecture," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, 2014, 15–18; Michael Ford, "Hip Hop + Architecture Blog," *BRANDNU DESIGN*, accessed July 17, 2016, http://brandnudesign.com/new-blog/. Ford and Cooke both consider the historical relationship between American housing projects and the development of hip-hop. Both scholars present the idea of "hip-hop architecture" as a more equitable distribution of actual space and a more diverse and inviting disciplinary space for black architectural practitioners.

philosophies and design practices, some of which have dramatically different appearances because modern architecture describes structures that enthusiastically embraced technology, while it simultaneously refers to design practices aimed to protect urban dwellers from the "shocks" of modern life.[27] Writers like Kenneth Frampton, Alan Colquhoun, and Hasan-Uddin Khan have carefully catalogued the many global iterations of modern architecture and its most prominent practitioners: Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Mies van Rohe.[28] These scholars explain modern architectural values as an outcome of the Enlightenment although this loosely organized design tradition is also a distinctly twentieth century phenomenon.[29] Thus, and perhaps fittingly, an architectural style that is insistent on stripping historical references from the built environment produces an enduring historical indeterminacy.[30]

In *The International Style*, the book that accompanied the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition with the same name, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson describe functionalism as being "sufficiently elastic."[31] Of the many mini-modernisms in architecture,

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[27] Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 11.
[28] Frampton, *Modern Architecture*; Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*; Khan, *International Style*.
[29] Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.
[30] It is beyond the purview of this project to exhaustively review the relationship between the Enlightenment, European modernity, and race. Although this connection is inextricably linked to the concept of "modern architectural values," this phrase is an attempt to contain the discussion to the modern ideologies that take shape in architecture. Thus, this project attempts to follow the work of the scholars listed in this note, and this is far from a representative list, who trace the (re)staging of Enlightenment reason in cultural, judicial, and political realms that have material consequences for raced bodies. See Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (Penguin Books, Limited, 2001); Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics"; Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*; Wynter, "'No Humans Involved': An Open Letter to My Colleagues."
[31] Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, Reissue edition (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 51.

Hitchcock and Johnson's writing and curatorial work for MoMA will be a focus of this chapter because it represents the formal arrival of modern architecture, which was initially led by European architects, in the United States. This arrival is a distinct and important historical occasion; yet, as their description of functionalism attests, the goal of conceptualizing and naming the International Style was offering an approach to the built environment that was so universal it avoided identification with even a single nation. According to Hitchcock and Johnson, this non-style has three guiding principles: emphasis on architectural volume instead of mass, a rejection of traditional axial symmetry in favor of designs with an internal logic like regularity and repetition, and an absolute avoidance of applied ornamentation.[32]

Even modern architecture's disciplinary meta-discourse emphasizes this architecture's determination to build cohesive and rational designs. Hitchcock and Johnson boast that the International Style is, "a single body of discipline, fixed enough to integrate contemporary style as a reality and yet elastic enough to permit individual interpretation and to encourage general growth."[33] Although critics of this architecture would eventually argue modern designs never achieved the simplicity or universality they valued, the emphasis on ideological, national, and spatial continuity or "Internationalism" as the potential to be free from the concerns of space and place, is a prevailing theme across modern architecture.[34]

Despite its impersonal appearance, it is important to recognize the aesthetics of the modern structure are expressions of the needs of the body in modern space.[35] Austere architectures remove cultural references from the design space, but the function of this approach is removing spatial boundaries for its inhabitants. In *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier

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[32] Ibid., 36.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Khan, *International Style*, 14.
[35] Ibid., 214.

argues society's fears about an increasingly industrialized world are assuaged when people realize the utility of these machines.[36] For example, although the train divides the countryside and the airplane does the same to the sky, these technologies allow us to experience space as continuous through the ease of travel. Furthermore, Le Corbusier insists Man is naturally drawn to order so these efficient designs will inevitably be found attractive. In other words, the train and airplane may fracture nature at the same time they are a *natural* extensions of our *natural* instincts. Film history's many modernisms and avant-gardes, along with contemporary film theory, have already addressed the relationship between ideology, human subjectivity and the cinematic apparatus.[37] Thus, the way cinema and architecture build around the body to suture the dissonances of modern life can be a way to understand the convergence of art and construction. Both modern structures reveal the profoundly complex, "impulse to rectify the discontinuity of modernity, its traumatic disruption, through the provision of an illusion of continuity (to resist modernity), and the impulse to embody (literally give body to) discontinuity as a fundamental human condition (to embrace modernity)."[38]

The "corporeal envelope" modern architecture builds around the body is transparent.[39] By aligning the body, nature, and functionalism, modern architects attempted to build an objective relationship between the inside and outside of the structure; as Le Corbusier explains, "the Plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of an interior."[40] The Lovell House in Los Angeles designed by Richard Neutra in 1929 is an example of the design values advanced by

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[36] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, vi.
[37] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2000).
[38] Mary Ann Doane, "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer B. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 543.
[39] Ibid., 537.
[40] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 5.

leaders in the field like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. The house is not a solid mass; instead, the structure's volume is bounded and covered by glass screens that expose the house's steel scaffolding. The placement of windows is not symmetrical, but the repeating bands of white stucco and the many points where horizontal and vertical lines intersect creates a grid that give the structure the appearance of order and regularity. The support structure and an inhabitant's path of movement are both visible; thus, the house's design, most importantly, makes it function visible. The transparency Neutra's house achieves is therefore more thorough than the mere use of glass. Transparency describes the unadorned surface of modern architecture and its interior logic.

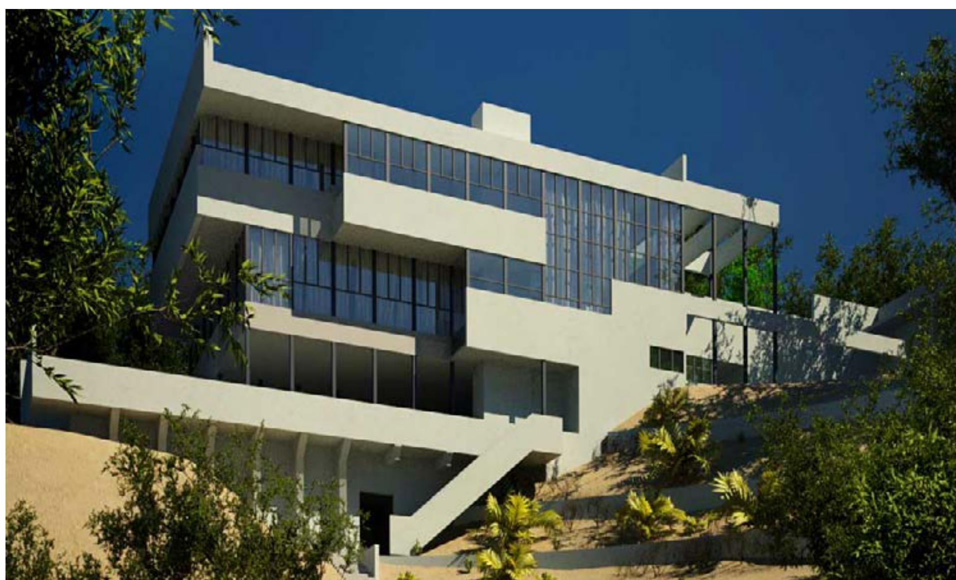

Figure 3.2 Exterior of the Lovell House by Richard Neutra

In their influential two-part essay that combines architecture and visual art, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky highlight the spatial dimension of transparency.[41] The adjective 'transparent' refers to clarity and ease of understanding. However, that physical quality—in architecture, optics, or artwork—always

[41] Rowe and Slutzky, "Transparency," 1963; Rowe and Slutzky, "Transparency," 1971.

implies the presence an overlapping spatial arrangement, which means the discussion of transparency also refers to a configuration that has the potential to block our view. The writers use modern architecture's associations with Cubism, specifically its interlocking planes, to suggest transparency is an ambivalent term that takes two distinct forms. Literal transparency refers to materials that do not obstruct vision, like the glass in the Lovell House. Phenomenal transparency is a perceptual quality or the possibility for multiple perspectives colliding in the same plane, a possibility that the painterly surface can imply but cannot be suppressed in real space.[42] In these designs, structural elements compete for prominence and create tension so that "the transparent ceases to be that which is *perfectly clear* and becomes instead that which is *clearly ambiguous*."[43] For example, a foreshortened view of the Lovell House includes several overlapping interior grids. The angled staircase contradicts the horizontality of the stucco ribbons and the steel vertical beams and a protrusion on the roof creates the appearance of a bisecting line that divides the entire structure. Rowe and Slutzky describe this temporary perceived change in the image as a shift between figure and ground that resembles familiar optical games.

The simplicity of materials and shapes in modern architecture belie complexities like phenomenal transparency and this inconsistency between simple forms and intricate, manifold meanings is a reoccurring critique of modern design. For example, *The International Style* endorses surface materials like glass that reveal the inner workings of the structure at the same time its approves of inexpensive materials like brick that reveal the economic forces at work. There is a clear contradiction here and Robert Venturi is one of the most well known critics of modern architecture who established his career through a healthy skepticism of modern architecture's simplicity. In direct opposition to the austerity of modern architecture, Venturi's

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[42] Rowe and Slutzky, "Transparency," 1963, 49.
[43] Ibid., 45. (My emphasis).

writing insisted on the sophistication of vernacular architecture's, specifically the kitschy commercial designs that line the Las Vegas strip. Despite their best attempts to remove the discussion of style from the design theory, Venturi's analysis suggests modern architects' guidelines on fenestration, building materials, and pattern are actually veiled prescriptions about ornamentation. For example, the captions accompanying most images in *The International Style* are either critiques or justifications of designers' stylistic choices.[44] In their canonical study *Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, establish a vocabulary for these inconsistencies of modern design and theory. The architects describe the absolute unification between form and function within a structure's physiognomy a "duck"—named after a roadside stand shaped like a duck that sold eggs.[45] Knowingly the authors assign this silly structure to modernism's obsessive transparency to suggest a wholesale rejection of applied ornament, becomes a surface fetish that is destined to inadvertently transform all buildings into ducks.

Figure 3.3 Shifting Figure and Ground in Optical Games

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[44] Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*.
[45] Venturi, Izenour, and Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas - Revised Edition*, 87.

One of the complexities of modern design is its non-additive effect, the way it accumulates material in order to reduce these constitutive materials into a stable whole. Modern architects and their critics read this architectural harmony in different ways. Modern architects use modularity as a formal strategy that protects structures from change. If needed, removing or changing one unit in a design is certainly more economical than razing and rebuilding the entire structure. Thus, standardized architectures use difference to be resilient against difference. Venturi would not deny the efficiency of this model; however, he argues in its pursuit of functionality modern architecture often brings together dissimilar materials and shapes. He describes these colliding architectural forms as "superadjacency," the violent juxtapositions that alter the way a structure is perceived, particularly by making familiar forms appear temporarily unfamiliar.[46] Venturi's criticism is not directed toward the inherent value of modern architectural styles. Rather, his concern is modern architecture's tendency to disavow its design and forms of complexity, like superadjacency, only to create works that are profoundly self-reflective and complex. For example, the duck's flamboyant appearance reveals the design's outer motivations and, at the same time, it reflects the structure's inner function. The result it is an uncomfortable bearing of the structure's architectural unconscious. Thus, modularity is complex because it makes the structure indifferent to internal contradictions at the same time those contradictions become a central meaning in the work.

[46] This term is strikingly similar to phenomenal transparency and Venturi also relies on Cubism as an art historical model.

Figure 3.4 Annotation of Lovell House

The complexity of modern modularity is on display in Mauricio Pezo and Sofia von Ellrichshausen's 2015 exhibit "Finite Form." In the installation the architects included two walls of paintings, each wall or set includes 243 individual images. Each painting has the same green or black background and in the center of the frame is a small yellow cubed design, but the orientation of the cubes is slightly different in each image. The architects' work illustrates the power of repetition and standardization to draw attention to the individuality of each unit while simultaneously erasing these differences. Furthermore, the formal exercise proves the meaning of the architecture is a product of the interactions between the individual units and the contradictory visual effect cannot be located in any one painting. Despite its overwhelmingly ordered appearance, the work is ultimately about a messy third meaning, ambivalent mimicry.

In many ways Rowe and Slutsky, Venturi, and Pezo and von Ellrichshausen are revisiting a well-known concept from almost a century earlier. In his vital essay on American popular culture, Siegfried Kracauer combines the capitalist desire of the duck with the scale and mathematic precision of "Finite Form" in his concept of the "mass ornament." In the essay,

Kracauer describes the increasing popularity of the Tiller Girls, showgirls who were famously choreographed into complex patterns for stage and screen performances, as mass ornaments. These women, organized into "distraction factories," divert attention away from the complexity of capitalist production and its effects on the body.[47] Thus, like Venturi, Kracauer rejects the idea that mass ornaments/ducks are formed from the inside or a product of nature. Instead, Kracauer's essay is explicitly about the aesthetics of political forms.

Figure 3.5 Venturi's "Duck" in Flanders, New York

Kracauer claims there is only one vantage point that reveals the mass ornament and this perspective will necessarily consume, along with the bodies that comprise it, all of the spatial depth between the viewer and the surface of the mass ornament. He writes, "it resembles the aerial photographs of landscapes and cities for it does not emerge from the interior of a given reality but rather appears above it. Similarly, actors are not aware of stage setting in its totality;

[47] Siegfried Kracauer, Barbara Correll, and Jack Zipes, "The Mass Ornament," *New German Critique*, no. 5 (1975): 67, doi:10.2307/487920.

yet, they consciously take part in its *formation*."[48] Kracauer's view from the ground is therefore a critical perspective that would resemble Venturi's argument about the internal complexity of modern architecture, Krauss's dualistic reading of the grid, and Rowe and Slutzky's concept of phenomenal transparency. Each argument presents an alternative reading of the modern surface by conceptualizing unintended viewing positions where these architectural spectacles appear complex and/or out of order.

Figure 3.6 Mauricio Pezo and Sofia von Ellrichshausen's "Finite Form"

Identifying the similarities in the art and architectural theorists' writing and Kracauer's famous writing on cultural politics is important because it begins to explain the stakes of modern architecture's functionalism and the alternate on-the-ground views presented by its critics. The interspatial relations in these designs, which are only visible if viewers are able to recognize their shifting depth, create in-between spaces that are not necessarily used for the stated function of

[48] Ibid., 69. (My emphasis)

the structure. Although modern designs claim to be an expression of internal functions, the presence of the surrounding environment cannot be ignored. The wall, where internal and external needs converge, is an architectural event and these events can occur within the structure in a *poché* or at the boundary between the building and the surrounding city. [49] Of course, all architectures have insides and outsides but modern and postmodern architectures differ in their approach to exteriority and interiority.[50] Venturi describes these interior points as "residual space."[51] Regardless of their size, residual spaces are radical sites because they are neither outside the structure nor defined by its internal function. The three tenants of the International Style all concern a structure's exterior because, as the previous chapter attests, it is an inherently imprecise space that needs to be neutralized in order to adhere to the strictures of literal transparency.

The timeless nature of modern architecture attempts to fundamentally reject the idea that there are architectural events because they are indicators of the change from objectivity to ambiguity and regardless of how small, real or implied, vestigial spaces allow the ambivalence of architectural (constructed) purity to take on a depth of its own. The Lovell House was sometimes described as the Lovell "Health" House because it was originally designed for a naturopath and that purpose is visible in the many openings in the structure that create continuity between the interior and exterior intended to create a healthy environment that encourages movement in fresh air. However, each detached plane in the Lovell House creates an enclosure that limits movement and restrains nature, therefore achieving the exact opposite goal. Similarly, the Lovell House's terraces create space that is neither entirely public nor private and even that small contradiction

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[49] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 86.
[50] The significance of architectural interiority and its modes of expression will be discussed in Chapter three.
[51] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 78.

in function does not align with the modern architecture's stated clarity. Again, residual space can exist at any level of spatial design, even in the immaterial shift between images that exhibit phenomenal transparency.

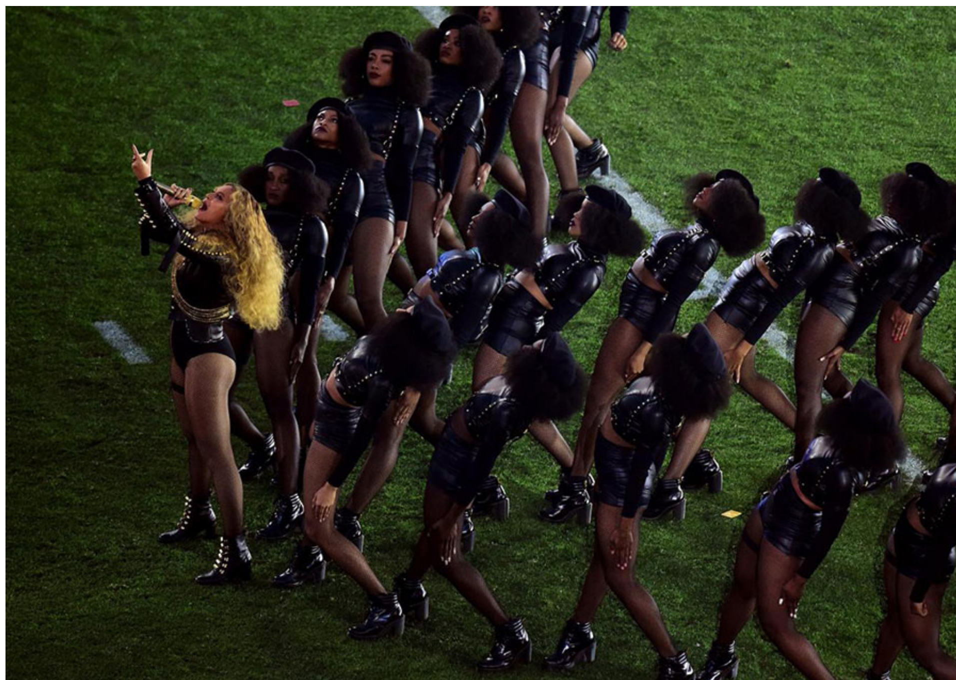

Figure 3.7 "Formation" at the 2016 Super Bowl

The simplicity of modern architecture hinges on the belief that its core is objective and pure, but emphasizing the internal tension across grid lines creates meanings that are isolated from reality and thus expressly unnatural. Without challenging the practicality of modern design, its critics draw attention to the internal intricacies in these structures. Superadjacency, phenomenal transparency, and the autonomy of the work of art are all ways to describe the architectural event where "nothing changes place."[52] Instead, the aesthetic dimensions within the modern, Cubist, or gridded design are flattened into the same plane. Thus, when modern hip-hop architecture adopts a modern style these works do not simply argue that blackness has hidden

[52] Krauss, "Grids," 52.

depths to be plumbed; instead, they use the grid as a central point where the realities of blackness can enter a profoundly unrealistic space and produce an autonomous internal logic.

3.2 Revision and Blackness

At stake in revealing modern architecture's residual spaces—the hidden, autonomous, and nonfunctioning zones—is disrupting the design's ideological and racial purity. These architectures are responses to the "dilemma of reading, of recognition, of identification" that modernity prompts.[53] As a result, modern technologies work to stabilize identity. The sturdy edifice of modern architecture therefore works in tandem with technologies of visual culture like the photograph, particularly a mass of photographs like an archive, to assert an image's external appearance as a manifestation of the spirit or truth of its interior and to reinforce this claim through repetition and volume.[54] These technologies ensure the legibility of the bodies they represent. However, implicitly the threat that they ward against is always to a seamless, white body. Therefore, modern architecture, along with a technology like cinema that embodies the ideal joining of a photographic base and its archival function, are part of the same project of constructing a safe architecture for the (white) spectator/dweller.[55]

To protect the psyche of (white) man from increasing industrialization, modern architects de-emphasized the work of modern technologies and gave prominence to the genius architect who bends nature and science to his will. For example, Le Corbusier shifts attention away from the internal locomotion of the train and airplane to reassures readers that these technologies are incapable of superseding the vitality of the human. Critical concepts like phenomenal transparency or superadjacency claim new meanings are generated exclusively through the

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[53] Doane, "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity," 537.
[54] Smith, *American Archives*; A. Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 3–64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/778312.
[55] Doane, "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity."

spatial interaction of the different units in a structure. As a result, these interactions activate the inert material of modern architecture and suggest it has an internal life capable of change without the direction of an architect. For example, Gerd Arntz's woodcut *Things American* (1924) is a tableau that brings the German artist's conception of American industry onto a flat plane.[56] In the background there is a row of automobiles neatly aligned and in the foreground a lynched black man and a row of white chorus girls appear on an assembly line. The simplicity of the design is undeniable; the image has no depth, texture, or attempts at realism. Unlike Le Corbusier who denies the agency of modernity's building materials, Artnz is explicit about the bodies (living and dead) that comprise the American economy. Viewers are clearly supposed to consider the significance of the interlocking segments of the image, the same process of shifting perspective as phenomenal transparency, in order to consider the multiple meanings in the piece. In *Things American* the juxtaposition reanimates the black body that is supposed to appear naturally or objectively consumed.

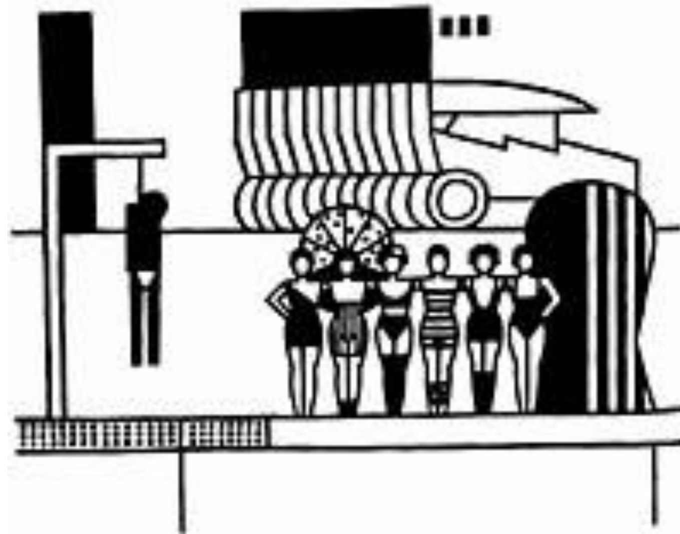

Figure 3.8 "Things American" by Gerd Arntz

[56] Ibid.

Things American illustrates the distinctly different implications of objects in a grid interacting with each other when those objects are black, because it destabilizes the fungibility (functionality) of the black body. Considering the woodcut architecturally means attending to it as a whole. It is explicit that the work is referring to the degradation of the black body; however, when placed within this machine aesthetic the black body has the potential to shift the meaning of the other materials in the image—as if the cars could come alive and the women could speak.[57] In other words, without any adjustment to the scene, the possibility of incorporating blackness is transformed into an image of blackness incorporating.[58] *Things American* performs revision, the distinctly racialized version of modernist architectural critique that re-sees and re-makes blackness without any actual movement. Revision sees fixed planes as actively organizing the world around themselves and turning the modern fetish of the surface into a visible form.

Revision is a process evoked by tensions within the frame; as a relationship to the image, revision is fundamentally "antinatural, antimimetic, antireal."[59] Moten describes remaining in this frame as "dwelling on and in minor social life."[60] The possibility of committing and acting from this "nmappable position is the radical act of black social life, and the theoretical hinge between Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism.[61] Both sides of this internal division within black studies contend that blackness has no ontological ground in Western humanism; thus, imagining

[57] Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* I am borrowing Mitchell's provocative language about talking and desiring images that intentionally personifies the image in order to question the value and function of reading an image, much like the architectural critiques of surface readings described in this chapter.
[58] Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*; Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century*, America and the Long 19th Century. (New York University Press, 2012). See these works for additional ways to approach the fantasies of racial incorporation.
[59] Krauss, "Grids," 50.
[60] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 188.
[61] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," 740.

the possibility of bodies that do not live in this world, but underneath it, could somehow enjoy their own terrestrial sociality would mean imagining the end of "the World."[62] Thus, movement across the grid lines that restrain blackness is truly ungovernable.[63]

Because gridded, machine designs abstract blackness, they create space for blackness away from the body and the residual space for interaction within these forms. Phenomenal transparency triggers a shift between figure and ground that cannot be stopped and as a result, the viewer is drawn into the structure's multiple, even contradictory spatial arrangements. It is not a coincidence that Moten identifies the same inward folding and ungrounding in color theory's conceptualizations of blackness. The color black paradoxically shifts from absolute negation to fullness and from monochrome/monotone to impurity.[64] Even when used to describe painting, the interpenetration of spaces, objects, and colors that describes black sociality is a distinctly architectural event. Works like *Things American* or Charles Gaines "gridwork" are not simply ironic uses of modern design; they are systematic approaches to shifting epistemological ground. The stakes of revision and the comingling of blackness is the "the absolute overturning, the absolute turning of this motherfucker out."[65]

3.3 Modern Architecture and the Aesthetics of Blackness

In a passionate roundtable discussion of Beyoncé's "Formation" printed in *The New York Times*, the video was described in plain terms as "really, really black."[66] Bypassing the question of black ontology, the discussants argue the video is objectively and obviously black, but I have tried to argue that the presence of first-order transparency should trigger a second look. There are

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[62] Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics."
[63] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 179.
[64] Ibid., 191.
[65] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," 742.
[66] Morris and Wortham, "Beyoncé in 'Formation.'"

many black women performing in Beyoncé's video and many different spatial configurations and despite attempts to read the video exclusively in terms of racial solidarity, there are differences in these formations. Similarly, WSHH's predominantly black performers placed within the unadorned interface cannot guarantee the site's claims to blackness. These are radical black images because, like the sets of paintings in "Finite Form," they manage to turn the topic that seems most redundant and plain (*really*, *really* black) into the most pressing and perplexing concern. What occurs between these ordering lines? Furthermore, if these gridded designs can visualize the speculative imagination of black sociality, what does the end of the World look like?

William Pope.L is an American visual artist best know for his public performance pieces, painful crawls across New York City streets, that use the particular time and space of performance to express impermanence, movement, and liminality as conditions of blackness. The institutional position and tidy ordering of "Claim" is therefore an intentional and meaningful choice. The precise organization of "Claim" renders a fact of (black) life in space, like modern architecture; yet, as the piece decays, the work visualizes a space that is actively being ungrounded. That ungrounding is of Jewish identity and the census as a tool for categorization. Notably, the space of the installation, and the blackness I argue it expresses, do not disappear. In fact, as the baloney rots and seeps liquid it expands so that the decay in the piece is an example of absence that occurs in space—these are the "aesthetics of dispossession."[67] In the context of his larger body of work, "Claim" is another site where Pope.L sets the stage for a concept (or body) to become exhausted. In "Claim" the formal organization of the piece is where the negotiation between formation and deformation is exhausted, which eventually gives way to

[67] English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, 259.

chaos. The implications of blackness in formation are most clearly visible in Pope.L's work so it helps cue a close reading of "Formation" and WSHH that first, considers how blackness in the images aligns with modern architectural values and, second, considers spaces for their revision.

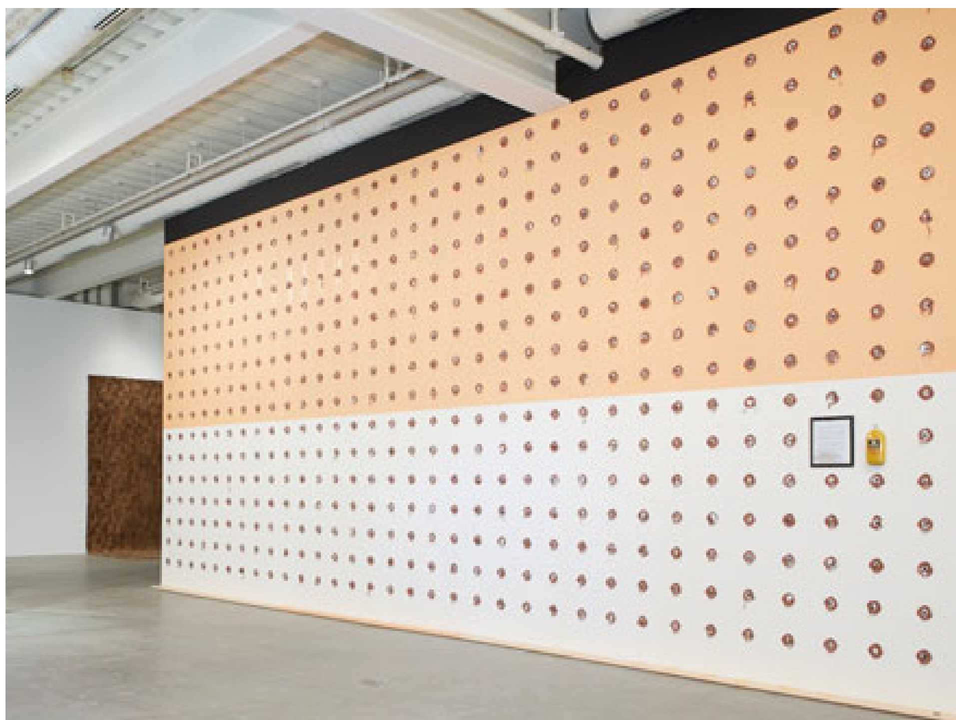

Figure 3.9 "Claim" by William Pope.L

"Formation," is explicitly a video about space and, like "Claim," it frequently shifts between an excess of bodies in orderly rows and an illogical collection of emptiness and debris. "Formation" is poignantly located in New Orleans, a site of racial violence that took the appearance of an objective fact or a "natural" disaster.[68] The video is a series of Southern gothic tableaus that all share a "terribly beautiful vitality."[69] Intercut with these historical scenes are

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[68] Chester W. Hartman, *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2006); H. A. Giroux, "Violence, Katrina, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2007): 305–9, doi:10.1177/02632764070240072510; Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Sea and the Land: Biopower and Visuality from Slavery to Katrina," *Culture, Theory & Critique* 50, no. 2–3 (2009): 289–305, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14735780903240331.
[69] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 188.

performances in more contemporary settings, still all of these settings are the kinds of places that have long been abandoned. For example, one major dance performance takes place in an empty community pool and another in a vacant parking lot. Thus, even when the *mise-en-scène* is ornate and full of dancing women, the video is clearly also about places that are uninhabited. These non-spaces fill the video so that the transgressive act of making space for decay that occurs in "Claim" also happens in the music video. The way these hip-hop architectures render residual spaces is significant because they are full of them.

Figure 3.10 Empty Places in "Formation"

The primary function of all of these hip-hop architectures is managing kinds of abundance, even when that excess is of objects, bodies, or spaces of diminishing significance. When WSHH was created in 2005 by Lee "Q" O'Denat it was a hip-hop music downloading site that provided hip-hop fans with minor record label releases and independently produced mixtapes.[70] WSHH still includes music videos by signed and unsigned artists, but the scope of the site has broadened to reflect hip-hop's cultural expansion. Each day between 20-30 new

[70] Mark Jacobson, "WorldStar, Baby!," *NYMag.com*, accessed July 8, 2013, http://nymag.com/news/features/worldstar-2012-2/.

videos are added to the front page of WSHH. Unlike YouTube or other video sharing sites, WSHH does not organize this material into recommended or thematic categories. Instead, all videos appear on the front page as rectangular thumbnails organized in four tidy columns that are divided by small banner advertisements and the dates of upload. This pattern is repeated on the front and all of the back pages of WSHH and 80-90 videos, only four days worth of content, appears on a single page. The website treats much of its content as disposable so it does not organize the archive in a way that expresses the significance of any one video; the most distinct part of the site is the sheer volume of the video collection.

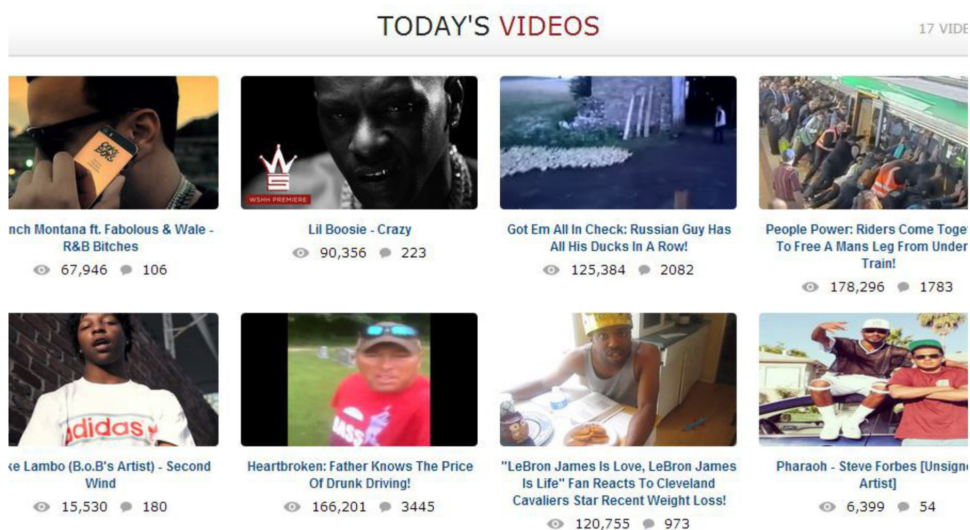

Figure 3.11 WorldStarHipHop.com Homepage

"Claim," "Formation" and WSHH collect bodies and spaces to manufacture an unnatural continuity, like the amalgam that forms lunch meat. Part of blackness's aesthetic function is producing a spectacular racial aggregate that is expressed and normalized in a black visual culture. Of course, this architecture is as complex and improbable as a global architectural style. The appearance of unity in these hip-hop images is not just continuity, but commensurability. The smooth, flat surface of WSHH treats fights filmed on cellphone cameras the same as expensive music videos, allowing them to exist on the same plane. The site produces this

equivalency by literally and figuratively softening the videos' edges by rounding the corners of each thumbnail. "Claim" is more self-conscious in the way it transforms its excesses to create a coherent design because it identifies this forced resemblance as the logic of race. In the artist's note that accompanies the work, Pope.L (inaccurately) identifies the 688 portraits affixed to baloney on the gallery wall as 1% of the 688,000 Jewish citizens counted in the Philadelphia census. Thus, the many individual pieces that comprise the installation are intended to signify a singularity that, contrary to modern architecture's insistence, works from the outside in.

All of the gridded structures encourage centrifugal readings, meaning they position their volumes as extractions of a much larger mass that is intended to help make sense of the expanse of hip-hop and, far less likely, the black and Jewish experience. Each work revolves around size: WSHH's video archive is constantly growing in quantity and varying quality, "Claim" is a representative sample of the Jewish population in Philadelphia, and "Formation" is an explicit black feminist rallying call to the "ladies" who are not in the video. To understand each work means confronting its affective abundances and the attraction of the mass. For example, WSHH first gained mainstream attention when people began chanting "WorldStar!" when filming street fights with their cell phones, illustrating the cultural impact of the website's shocking content outside of the digital grid and WSHH's uncanny ability to reproduce itself.

The sterile design of WSHH means the visualization of excess that needs to be managed often lands on the bodies of uninhibited performers. WSHH's openness to amateur content creates a space for videos starring out of control bodies, passionate bodies, and angry bodies. While these videos do not share narrative similarities, most uploaders are producing simple videos that do not include editing or special effects software and the result is an emphasis on the corporeal as excessive, particularly in comparison to the interface. As a result, identifying the

meaningful architectural events in WSHH occurs everywhere the body and the interface meet, which happens in at least two places: first, at the level of the interface that manages the collection, and second, within the frame of the individual videos.

In a recently uploaded video that has over 200,000 views a woman performs a sexy and athletic dance in a nightclub.[71] The video is a single long take and the camera is static except when the dancer's movements become so wild the camera is forced to adjust to keep her body within the frame. The fame is vertical and narrow, a shape that characterizes cell phone videos. At the beginning of the dance the woman faces the camera, kicks her legs out slightly, and allows the small kick to create a chain reaction of movement up and down her body that is exaggerated by the swaying of her t-shirt and the fringe on her boots. When she seems sufficiently warmed-up, the dancer turns around and in profile it becomes clear that the woman is several months pregnant. With her back facing the camera, she bends over and isolates her body parts so the dance that began easily has become more seductive and vigorous. Then without warning, she slides into a split on the floor and the crowd screams. This is a climactic point. The crowd begins throwing handfuls of money to reward the performer, which seems to encourage her to continue varying and intensifying her choreography. She continues the floor-work and at one point bounces on the ground, and from the camera's low level her pregnant belly is visible under her shirt as it taps the floor. The DJ, who has been commenting on the entire performance, then yells "you are going to be a WorldStar tomorrow!"

WSHH is a space for sharing media, so at every level of its architecture it mediates looking relations and creates legibility for site visitors. In all of the videos on WSHH there are

[71] "What Part Of The Game Is This? Pregnant Woman Starts Twerking For A Twerk-Contest At The Club!," *WorldStarHipHop.com*, December 23, 2015, http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhe6WUxBARnFTI5MYE.

exchanges between the performers and cameras, the cinematographer and WSHH, the online viewer and WSHH, online viewers in the comments section, and WSHH and its advertisers. While materially different, all of these exchanges rely on translating some surplus into value (i.e. advertising dollars) or more simply, creating meaning from like the delight of the viewer whose expectations have been met or exceeded. One way to make these exchanges legible is to rely on the cultural logics that already exist so their familiarity creates the impression of transparency. For example, the anti-black scopic regimes that regularly position the black female body as an abject excess can easily eliminate any illegibility or ambivalence towards the black female body in the video. From there they function to affirm other, more appropriate, bodies. For example, during the video the DJ repeatedly says, "that's how she got pregnant!" and "I'm gonna need you to act like you got a baby in that stomach!" His comments are like another interface between inside and outside, aimed to mediate the shocking performance by implicating another (male) body in the solo sexual acts on the dance floor and reminding the dancer of her bodily constraints.

In both the twerking video and "Formation" these cultural logics that read even a singular black female body as excessive are pulled from outside of the video into the frame. Despite modern architecture's insistence on harmony between interior and exterior, the meanings or valuations of the performances are "points of translation between mediated layers." [72] Simply, this is not a transparent process. In fact, Beyoncé has revisited the description of black female bodies as objects of consumption in several of her songs including "Bootylicious" and "Get Me Bodied." In the "Formation" lyrics, Beyoncé describes black bodies in relation to size, hair and facial features, and even the decadence of Southern soul food and liquor. The video repeats the

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[72] Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 31.

theme with hair extensions that are too long, bodies wearing too much jewelry and shoulder pads that exaggerate the dancers' figures. So in addition to the dancers' precise configurations in the video, Beyoncé performs the organization of black female excess through witty figurative language and stylization. By creating video images that seem to confirm cultural references to the black female body and the history of black female representation, "Formation" frames black women like WSHH and the DJ in the video by creating greater conditions of visibility.

Beyoncé will profit significantly from her videos, still the "arms, thighs, and other segments" gyrating in "Formation," pined to the gallery wall in "Claim," and made clickable on WSHH are examples of Kracauer's writing on modern design that causally inserted body parts into factory production.[73] Human reification is not a likely topic for a music video or novelty website, but in "Claim" the decision to affix the images to pieces of meat, more precisely meat processed for consumption, expresses this limit point of capitalist production.[74] In a less expressive manner, the business of hip-hop visual culture is an explicit part of WSHH. Captions below music videos from lesser-known artists include the title of the song and information about the video's submission, either "label submitted" or "unsigned artist."[75] The interface of the site, the architectural boundary between inside and outside, thus creates a meaningful threshold that runs in-between viewer and media, not between media, to efficiently manage content for consumption.

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[73] Kracauer, Correll, and Zipes, "The Mass Ornament," 69.
[74] B. Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (2006): 180, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/500700.
[75] "Channels with Verified Names," *YouTube*, accessed December 30, 2015. These captions do not make distinctions between the quality of the videos, so they are not the same as YouTube's "verification badges" that distinguish official content produced by celebrities and well-known brands with a small checkmark icon.
https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/3046484?hl=en.

The racially specific way bodies are incorporated into this visual marketplace renders blackness as an aesthetic of fungiblity, "the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity" that is embodied by the black slave.[76] Hartman's term describes the racial significance of both the interface and modern architecture that create equivalencies to produce greater efficiency. If the blackness of WSHH is not attached to the bodies in the videos but the video's capacity to be replaced, then even the most unexpected animal videos on WSHH are as black as the hip-hop videos. In the fantastical geography of hip-hop architecture, anti-black racial discourse is pushed to its conceptual limit and becomes as spectacular as Kracauer's female-powered machines.

The system Hartman describes is the racial equivalent of modern architecture's standardization that uses easily exchangeable parts to remain stable in the face of change.[77] While WSHH and "Formation" are not nearly as expressive as "Claim" in their renderings of consumed bodies, their efficiency creates the same effect as modern architecture with the troubling ideological implication of transforming an individual black body into "an object in the midst of other objects."[78] Thus, this architectural design is the spatial arrangement that produces fungibility. In the rare moments in Beyoncé's video that do not feature the famous singer, the video includes more black people in well-synchronized formations. There are members of a marching band in their matching uniforms, churchgoers jubilantly worshipping, a group of Mardi Gras partiers riding a float in matching costumes, and Beyoncé's dancers who all have the same natural hairstyles. All of these formations have well-known historical ties to black expressive

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[76] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.
[77] Constance Adams and Rod Jones, "Alpha: From the International Style to the International Space Station," *Architectural Design* 84, no. 6 (2014): 47, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ad.1835/abstract.
[78] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89.

culture. Unlike the ornamental shapes that include Beyoncé and carefully style and light her to distinguish her from the rest of the bodies in the video, these other formations are examples of remaining in the frame of minor life Moten describes. Each celebratory configuration achieves the complicated effect of de-individualizing the bodies while making the group more racially distinct.

Figure 3.12 Formations in "Formation"

Part of the horror of fungibility, like the grinding labor of the mass ornament, is its inexhaustible temporality. Kracauer tells us the *Tiller Girls* can never be reassembled as whole persons after they have been placed with the assemblage.[79] When modern designs claim to express nature it also makes the implicit claim that these designs, regardless of the high-tech material they may employ, are somehow interminable. "Formation" creates a seamless continuity between different historical moments that all occur in the same Southern milieu. Beyoncé appears in Victorian-era costumes and when the surface of the image becomes warped like a worn tape, she is styled in a 1980s fashion that matches the VHS aesthetic. Between these specific historical references is documentary footage of New Orleans. Often submerged in water, the city appears suspended in both time and space. The video creates the impression that its

[79] Kracauer, Correll, and Zipes, "The Mass Ornament," 69.

formations are constants that have always been deeply intertwined in the expression of blackness although the historical continuity is so clearly a product of costuming and visual effects and, as Kanye West explained, Hurricane Katrina's destruction was not destined to occur because of nature. The way the video visualizes the disregard of these contradictions becomes an example of how black space becomes reified.

Figure 3.13 Reifying Black Time and Space in "Formation"

"Formation" looks back in time to appear timeless while WSHH, which is constantly updating, does the same by remaining a perpetually future-oriented position. The fact that blackness could appear to be in a permanent state whether it engages with the past or exists in a constant cycle of change illustrates the ambivalence and flexibility of the aesthetics of blackness that seems to always end at the same overdetermined, racialized place. On WSHH new sets of videos appear under the upload date, as opposed to being organized by subject or genre. Thus, viewers are encouraged to move backward in time for more content but, more importantly, through this style of linear navigation they are made aware of the fact that there will be more videos tomorrow. New videos are simply added to the top of the structure so the site accumulates but its appearance remains the same. The organization suggests one pleasure the site offers is the

perpetuity of the visual event, or awareness that certain bodies are always available. Thus, the site repeats the spatial-temporal racial discourse that suggests the black body is, "*always already there,* or perhaps *always there before*, whereas the European is *headed there*, better, *not there yet*."[80] Unlike the rotting in "Claim" that draws attention to the effects of time, the videos on WSHH that have disappeared from the site over time or those that simply will not load in time are of no consequence to the whole. All interfaces that incorporate time are not black, but the visuality of the supposedly race-neutral digital space is clearly taking cues from the temporality of modern architecture and the visual logic of blackness.

The frontality of all of these works, like *Things American*, is one of many techniques modern architectures employs to organize diverse bodies and cultural objects into designs that materialize their pre-existing harmony. The videos on WSHH feature performers who move wildly in and out of the narrow cell phone camera frame. In fact, the people in these videos often hide from being recorded; yet, the design of WSHH makes all of these videos and the people who appear in them line up to perform. In "Formation," everyone in the video boldly faces the camera and the tableaus elide the depth of the space so that the women are aligned as if they are all the same, the spaces appear alike, and the women appear as if they are *of*, and the same as, the space surrounding them. This formal technique is the spatial arrangement that engineers the equivalency between the performers and helps the video express the detached perspective that these modern hip-hop architectures encourage viewers to take, like the aerial view of Beyoncé performing "Formation" at the Super Bowl. The specific ways these architectures mediate space materializes sensuous experiences—like viewing black bodies or even entering black space.

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[80] James A. Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture," *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 4 (1981): 148, doi:10.2307/2904326.

The modern architect is responsible for bringing a structure's harmony to the surface of the structure. Le Corbusier explains, "the architect […] determines the various movements of our hearts and of our understanding; it is then that we experience the sense of beauty."[81] In "Claim," "Formation," and WSHH that inner harmony that is so familiar to our hearts is racial identity. Thus, like all modern architectures, these works attempt to build a better body, one that is more functional as it is extended outward in space. Many black studies theorists would argue there is no context where the black body could be protected, it is violable by definition. The architectural body built around these individuals has a singular (black) racial identity, but that does not make the black body impermeable. Instead, hip-hop architecture is an extension of the logic of blackness that endures across space and time and explains how the black body is always subject to the organizing logic of blackness. Thus, the most important excess in all of these architectures is not quantitative, but qualitative. The harmony in these modern hip-hop architectures is therefore more precisely the management of the appearance of difference.

The straightforward, unadorned surfaces in modern architecture do not indicate an absence of style or intention; instead, they create a strong link between functionality, transparency, and rationality.[82] The white background on WSHH makes its blackness appear transparent by refusing to let interface design visually impede on the objects of exchange, the videos and advertisements. However, WSHH, YouTube, and Vimeo all use a white background and the argument that they are all black architectures is untenable. WSHH and the other sites do not use their white space in the same way. YouTube and Vimeo both allow users to login and create a customized front page with video feeds generated from recommendations and user-selected subscriptions. For example, on the right of their video feed, users who pay for Vimeo

[81] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 13.
[82] Cheng, *Second Skin*; Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*.

Plus accounts can see analytics about their own uploaded videos. They are also encouraged to create personalized "Channels,"[83] Similarly, because YouTube is a Google subsidiary, users with Google accounts will even see a small image of their face in the upper right corner of the page. On these sites, the appearance of emptiness, represented by the white color, invites users to fill in the space with their preferences. YouTube and Vimeo are personal architectures, so despite their similar appearances they ideologically run counter to architectural modernism.

WSHH does not employ the individualized aesthetics associated with "Web 2.0." With the exception of the WSHH online store, another point of exchange that has an entirely different web design, visitors cannot log into the hip-hop site and are unable to customize the front page. As a result, this white space is not room for the visitor, it is the indicator that visitors have arrived somewhere else—the interface *others* the space.[84] If a person is reflected in WSHH's white surface it is not the individual user but the identity of modern man, who is universally identified by his uniform pressed white shirt and is the intended audience for these kinds of visual spectacles.[85] The understated approach to WSHH's identity should not be surprising; the rationality of blackness, like modern architecture, is reliant on the appearance of transparency because it is the formalization of disavowal.

The minimalist designs in "Formation," "Claim" and WSHH conceal the complexity of each work, even the care and precision required to create such orderly lines. From a distance "Claim" is striking because of its perfect alignment, but up close the pencil lines used to carefully measure each square in the grid are visible. The pencil lines are a clever reveal because

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[83] "Channels on Vimeo," *Vimeo*, accessed December 30, 2015, https://vimeo.com/channels.
[84] I am intentionally using the verb form of "other" to emphasize the process, as opposed to the fact, of racialization.
[85] Patrik Schumacher, "Parametric Patterns," in *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012*, ed. Mario Carpo (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 32.

baring the work's scaffolding aligns with modern architecture's sense of material transparency at the same time the lines negate the natural order of the piece's racial identity. The beauty of the piece's organization does not emerge from an inner harmony; rather it is a result of regulating lines and careful measurement. Similarly, although the overall appearance of the installation is orderly and closely adhered to the gallery wall, the layers between the piece's nontraditional materials are easy to see. Each "meat frame" includes the baloney, a sloppy dab of white glue, the portrait, and a regular push-pin. The aim of material transparency in modern architectural design is to create the effect that the layers between a structure's program (function) and its outer appearance are inconsequential. The installation reveals "the material conditions of meaning production" so that viewers can see the blueprint for the work and, more importantly, the effect that placing these bodies within a racialized structure has on the individual portrait.[86]

The simple pencil lines in "Claim" are a rejection of the objectivity established by modern architects who attempted to build environments that were so well suited to the needs of their inhabitants that the structure and its different layers would effectively disappear.[87] WSHH attempts to create a distinct site identity that uses a redundant web design to control the meanings of videos that are uninhibited, incoherent, unoriginal, and improvised. Neither the videos not the interface design have obvious meanings, so at every place these parts of the site are supposed to align with blackness, the complexity of the architecture is revealed. For example, virtually all news and social media sites include space for commenting below featured content and site administrators establish rules and features to dissuade commenters from using this space for harassment. WSHH has a comment section too; however, in the aim of constructing a black space, the site predetermines its racial identity by including the words, "No Spamming or

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[86] English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, 257.
[87] Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 235.

racism" above user comments. This heading applies meaning to all of the videos from the outside, effectively racializing the site without indicating how this process occurred—particularly because it is unclear how uploads even enter this racial context. Although WSHH is a space full of user generated content, users are not privy to the site's 'back end.' Those interested in contributing content to the site are asked to complete a form and wait to see if their video has been accepted. Sealing this space helps ensure that the encounter with blackness on the site appear objective, as if these videos inherently produce racist comments.

The digitality in WSHH and "Formation" is where the manufactured transparency of these architectures and their blackness come together. Blackness is the most complex transparent material in these structures and both works use their machine aesthetics to (re)produce that racial transparency across the architectural structure. Blackness is not just a way of seeing the performer's body; it is a relationship to the fidelity of the image itself. For example, in the twerking video on WSHH, blackness is expressed as two interrelated desires: first, for the performer's body to be an image, available for reading; and second, for the *cinéma-vérité* style of the cinematography and the "natural" response of the DJ's commentary to conceal the desire for a transparent body. The ambivalence of blackness is formally expressed in the digital image that is similarly associated with fantasies of both immateriality and presence.[88] Cell phone recordings like those on WSHH that render their mode of production visible in the frame through their distinctly poor quality, shape, and unsteady shots are illogically part of the common-sense immediacy that comes to define the digital. Even as WSHH expands its media platform, by creating a cell phone app for users to submit their videos directly to the site, WSHH continues to

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[88] Anna Munster, "Digitality: Approximate Aesthetics," *Ctheory*, March 14, 2001, n.p., http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14595; Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual*, 37.

make claims to limited mediation.[89] Defining the digital aesthetic through the perceived nearness or representational "proximity" facilitated by digital image production disregards the technical apparatus. Anna Munster defines a digital aesthetic that is "approximate," referring to both the ultimate visual limitations of the digital image to connect us to "the other" and, like Kracauer, creates the possibility for a troubling (but theoretically productive) proximity between the organic and the machinic.[90]

Approximity shifts arguments about the digital aesthetic from the visible to the visual, the latter being a point of articulation between technologies of sight and cultural expectation; as a result, the digital aesthetic can easily be understood in relation to modern architecture and blackness because it is not bound to specific mediums or technologies.[91] The "redistribution of spatial and temporal relations into an experience of virtual nearness," is in fact an astute way to describe the aesthetics of blackness in spatial terms.[92] Alessandra Raengo is explicit about the ontological overlap between the black body and image technologies. She argues the black body shares the collapsed semiotic structure of the photograph, an overinvestment in indexicality she describes as a the "photochemical imagination."[93] Approximity is not unlike the DJ's demands in the twerk video for the pregnant dancer to perform in a way that is consistent with her image. Blackness is the demand. Thus, not every visible body or Internet video is black; blackness is expressed in the careful negotiation of bodily visibility and technological invisibility. The alignment of digital and black aesthetics shows a clear parallel between the videos of bodies on

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[89] "WorldStar Updated Their App So You Can Post Rachetness Directly From Your Phone," *Complex Magazine*, November 7, 2014, http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/11/worldstar-camera-app.
[90] Munster, "Digitality."
[91] Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual*, 3.
[92] Munster, "Digitality."
[93] *On the Sleeve of the Visual*, 37.

the website and actual bodies—neither have any inherent racial meaning or value. Yet, WSHH does not function as a space for intercultural interfacing without engaging in the ontological confusion of approximity. The most advanced image technologies cannot make the bodies entirely accessible, legible, or available to be shared among viewers—they remain approximate.

Figure 3.14 Pencil Lines in "Claim"

Approximity is a critical term for the flattening effect of governing logics like space, race, gender, or transparency on images of bodies and bodies as images. This combination of visual concerns aligns in "Formation" at the points when the image is processed so it resembles a warped video. The visual effect on these occasions closely resembles the imperfections of the video surface and even includes the symbol for "play" and the word typed out in retro block letters in the corner of the frame. This visual effect is effectively rendered so there is a close relationship between the image surface and Beyoncé's retro styling. Yet, the texture of the video surface does not align with modern architecture's slick appearance and, as result, this video surface expresses an excess that cannot be contained through vision. Each scratch emphasizes the

difference between the content of the video and its mediated surface, so its stylization clearly indicates that the surface is not transparent.[94] The movement between flatness and depth initiated by the grainy images is used to articulate the approximity between the black performers and the visual apparatus. The technique is particularly poignant because it appears when Beyoncé and her dancers perform in an empty parking lot and when a man dances inside a convenience store because both of these settings are commonly subject to surveillance. The International Style was an attempt to build objective architecture; thus, it is a visualization of the surface politics of the technological fetish, not unlike the overinvestment in the visibility of race. However, in the process of describing the modern architectural styles in these hip-hop images, it is possible to locate where their excesses are no longer neatly contained and where these modern hip-hop architectures begin to open up the space for revised interpretations.

Figure 3.15 Complex Transparency in "Formation"

[94] Laura U. Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics," *Screen* 39, no. 4 (1998): 331–48, http://screen.oxfordjournals.org/content/39/4/331.short.

3.4 Residual Space and Black Revision

Systemization, modularity, minimalism, and transparency in gridded architectures are all formal strategies that tidy the "inescapability of excess" that emerges when visualizing race and, left unquestioned, they present an internal logic that will always appear orderly and rational. Of course, the critical responses to modern structures are all working to disrupt the seamless layers of modern design and consider the functionality of the unplanned residual spaces that appear in these regimented structures.[95] These critiques are not rejecting modern design outright; instead, concepts like phenomenal transparency and superadjacency are merely suggesting that there is more occurring in these spaces than designers tend to acknowledge.

Modernist architecture communicates through repetition, it is one of its most recognizable features, and so it is an ideal place to begin revising modern architectural values and to find the residual space within these structures.[96] Patterns are repetitions of sameness that are capable of managing variance by recapturing the rhythm. Ironically, standardization is evidence of architectural modernism's reasoned techniques for maintaining stability, but repetition is also leveled as a critique of hip-hop music and black expressive culture's stagnation. James Snead explains this contradiction in this modern logic; he writes, "progress in the sense of 'avoidance of repetition' would at once sabotage such an effort [to progress]. Without an organizing principle of repetition, true improvisation would be impossible."[97] This rhythm is the powerful synchronicity of "Formation" and the orderly grid in WSHH and "Claim" that draws together the architectures' assorted imagery. Like the formal exercise in Pezo and von Ellrichshausen's "Finite Form," repetition accomplishes two seemingly contradictory aesthetic

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[95] English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, 284.
[96] Mark Garcia, "Prologue for a History and Theory of Architextiles," *Architectural Design* 76, no. 6 (November 1, 2006): 9, doi:10.1002/ad.346.
[97] Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture," 150.

functions: defining the appearance of blackness and creating the conditions for it to change, which explains the revisionist function of hip-hop adopting a modern architectural style. Although the variations in each of this chapter's hip-hop architectures are small, there is a discernable space between each grid point, for example the way the dancers' costumes in "Formation" are all variations on the same theme. Snead suggests this in-between space is no less black; in fact, blackness is what picks up the rhythm, so this is precisely where blackness is located in these designs.

The residual space in each of these works exists at different scales. For example, performances on WSHH often take place in unremarkable spaces: parking lots, cars, and the middle of the street. These settings are big enough to stage action but they are still the kinds of places we pass through to get to where we are going. Venturi describes these spaces as design leftovers, "instead of acknowledging and exploiting these characteristic kinds of space we make them into parking lots or feeble patches of grass—no-man's lands."[98] On the WSHH interface, there are the banner ads and the white space between the thumbnail images. Again, even these immaterial digital spaces need to be traversed in order for the site to function. Like WSHH, "Claim" features the same white space and the almost imperceptible space between the layers of wall, meat, glue, and portrait. Finally, because "Formation" is a cinematic piece it includes the filmic cuts, which rarely appear in WSHH's single-take videos, in addition to residual spaces in the *mise-en-scène.* In each new setting in the music video there are more residual spaces: the gaps between row homes, the mobile but fixed space between the blades of a whirling ceiling fan, and the interlocking tire tracks created by a car doing "wheelies" in a parking lot.

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[98] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 80.

In “Formation” residual space is not just a formal element; a prominent theme in the video and song is the space between expressions of blackness. That is why New Orleans and its racial and linguistic diversity is such an appropriate space to stage the singer’s formations. Beyoncé sings about wearing her husband’s hip-hop ‘bling’ with designer dresses and treating a lover to either dinner at the chain restaurant Red Lobster or a flight on her private helicopter. The humor and pleasure of the song is imagining the space between these oppositions where a black body can occupy these extremes equally.

Modern designs convey their unification and simplicity on their surface, so often the only way to appreciate the residual spaces is the shift in perspective that I describe as revision. In “Formation” the camera smoothly tracks in and out of each tableau and the cinematographic motif causes a shift in the relative distance between objects within the frame. The simple camera movement draws attention to the flattened depth in each of the scenes and destabilizes the space by suggesting that the potential for change is already embedded within the frame although it does not threaten the whole structure.[99] Similarly, during one of the dance formations, the frame’s axis shifts dramatically, as if the camera is on a swinging pendulum. The shot begins overheard, moves closer to eyelevel, and back above Beyoncé and her dancers. This camera movement enacts revision by opening the hidden depths that are concealed by the aerial view, but notably it returns to the spectacular overhead shot. There are also occasions when the video adheres to Rowe and Slutzsky’s description of phenomenal transparency by creating the possibility for a change in perspective when there is no movement in the frame. For example, in one shot crystals hanging from a chandelier dip into the frame during a dance sequences and it creates a pointed relationality between the beautiful women, who in some shots resemble “ladies of leisure,” and

[99] Ibid.

the home's décor. For proponents of modern simplicity, allowing the meaning of the chandelier to change from ornamentation to meaningful architectural form would be the ultimate revision.

Residual space, like blackness, presents a complex point of articulation between visibility and legibility. Race is "a framework for seeing through or [...] seeing *as*;" thus, seeing blackness in any of the hip-hop architectures may include multiple, potentially conflicting, forms of mediation that coalesce around the bodies/images in each collection.[100] The most racially explicit moment in "Formation" is a confrontation between a young black boy who is dancing and a row of police officers in riot gear. This confrontation primarily takes place in two reverse shots: one behind the boy in which the officers are visible and one behind the row of officers in which the boy can be seen. The space between the child and the officers is undeniably the most interesting because that is where the standoff and any potential for resolution are located. Modern architects would hope to erase this space by suggesting that the outer limits are the objective expression of the center. In other words, *of course* there is a standoff between a black child and the police.

Revision helps remake the dramatic scene between the child and police in "Formation" because it first means recognizing how the lines of bodies in the video interact with each other and the space around them and it rejects the idea that the antagonism between the black body and police is a natural expression of the black body's ability to be harassed. Almost in anticipation of an alternate reading, the child and police in the video actually perform the revision. After several shots from a low camera level of the child, there is a reverse shot of the policeman defensively raising their hands. The posture is a clear reference to the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" movement against police brutality and, reversed, it visualizes residual space as a space for possible transformations. Because the power relations in this encounter could go in a different direction,

[100] Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race*, 13.

revision reveals the apparent need to manage black bodies, through organization or force, as constitutive of the relationship between blackness and whiteness.

Figure 3.16 Conflicting Layers in "Formation"

On WSHH the spontaneous cell phone recordings are less produced, there are rarely any cuts, and therefore it is more difficult to recognize revision occurring within the video's *mise-en-scène* or editing. Yet, in the twerking video where the dancer appears so woefully overdetermined, one small part of the dancer's performance creates an opening for revision. While dancing the woman looks at herself and immediately disrupts the attempts to confine her body within the transparent architecture of black female representation. Rap and R&B artists describe this part of her dance as, "check[ing] on it."[101] It means not only enjoying one's own sexual performance, but also finding pleasure in the awareness that someone *else* is watching. When she "checks on it," the dancer is like an actor who breaks the fourth wall of cinematic

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[101] In 2005, R&B and pop musician Beyoncé Knowles released the dance song "Check On It." The chorus of the song is "Ooo boy you lookin' like you like what you see/ Won't you come over and check up on it?/ I'ma let you work up on it/ Ladies let him check up on it/ Watch it while he check up on it/ Dip it, pop it, twerk it, stop it, check on me tonight" Beyoncé and Slim Thug, *Check On It* (Columbia, 2005)..

space. In other words, she activates the residual space between her body and the camera that captures her.

Figure 3.17 "Check on It" by Beyoncé

Figure 3.18 "Checking on It" on WSHH

Nicole Fleetwood offers the theory of "excess flesh" to describe the dancer's self-conscious refusal to take on the denigrating cultural meanings assigned to black women or to respond to the DJ's criticism. [102] "Excess flesh" is a way to describe performances that intentionally enact the paradox of hypervisiblity to disrupt the commodity fetishism of the black female body, so she can produce value for herself.[103] Like revision, excess flesh overloads the visual field, rejecting the transparency it forces onto black bodies. By partaking in the pleasure of her own visual spectacle she exposes the relationship between the image technology she is performing for and her black skin.[104] Clearly, the dancer is not opposed to mediating her body, but her aim is to transform the scene by making the illicit desire of those watching her to be as visible as her own body and for that desire to be implicated in the image-making process. The dancer looks over her shoulder, toward the camera, as she pushes herself forward and backward on the floor to playfully gauge the camera's interest. Successfully, she encourages an adjustment in the frame as it tries to capture her body, effectively rendering the unseen cinematographer's desire on-screen and public. Although the amateur dancer does not stand to gain as much as Beyoncé when she "checks on it," and her body has been inserted into the interface to support the banner ads that fame her performance, this act is an attempt to take possession of her own fleshy excesses.

In her curatorial note for Ruffneck Constructivists, Kara Walker advocates for the kinds of brash behavior exhibited by the amateur dancer; she explains her intention for the exhibit was to gather works that evoke hip-hop's defiant nature, specifically pieces that do not try to incite

[102] Excess flesh is the gendered iteration of Fleetwood's central argument, "seeing black is always a problem in a visual field that structures the troubling presence of blackness" *Troubling Vision*, 3.
[103] Ibid., 111.
[104] Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual*.

traditional change or balance to social categories. Pope.L's abject work is an example of this bad-behaving art that does not close ranks around an ideal representation of hip-hop or race. Instead, Ruffneck Constructivists, like this dissertation, is less interested in the content of unruly hip-hop and uses architecture as a way to consider the setting and conditions for messy and conflicting meanings. This distinction is particularly important in a space like WSHH that is overrun with stereotypical images that can be provocative sites for revision. For example, the logo is one of the only elements of the site that is, by definition, distinct so it easier to identify its multivalent transparency. The logo is a metallic star with the letters W.S.H.H. in the same shiny color that appears in the corner of WSHH videos. Just to the right of the letters is a small bullet hole, recognizable by the look of pierced metal. Unlike any other part of the site, the logo includes animation. On a recurring loop two thin puffs of smoke come from the bullet hole and small red flashes appear across the entire logo. This animated detail is not realistic so it does not present a traditional objectivity. Yet, it is part of a visual culture that links blackness, criminality, and authenticity that suggests these concepts have a spatial transparency, as if they were piled atop each other and it would still be possible to see blackness behind everything else.

Figure 3.19 WSHH Logo

A similar conflation occurs in the film *Bamboozled* (Lee, 2000), a film that makes the issues of realism, racialized representation, and commodity exchange explicit.[105] The film is about a television producer who achieves unexpected success by modernizing the minstrel show for network TV. Mirroring the plot, Lee's film adopts a televisual aesthetic that is interrupted by fake commercials. One commercial parodies the Tommy Hilfiger clothing-line, which became popular with rap artists although there were rumors that the designer resented their patronage.[106] In the fake advertisement the white designer intended to play Hilfiger boasts "we keep it so real we give you the bullet holes." This absurdist moment in the film, like the bizarre smoking logo in the corner of WSHH videos, uses a racial stereotype to create a literal *punctum*.[107] In her description of the *Bamboozled* commercial Raengo explains, "the bullet holes confer a powerful image of a racially repressed content piercing through and tearing the commercial's surface, which, by extension, is also the film's surface."[108] The *added* bullet holes in the film and logo unwittingly damage the supposedly hermetically sealed modern surface and create a residual space. These moments, both inside and outside of the videos on WSHH, allow the excesses of racial meaning (belief, disbelief, attraction, and abjection) to be materialized on the computer screen.

The logo is an example of the close relationship between form and function in modern architecture that tries to align meaning with style so that overdetermined, illogical categories

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[105] Alessandra Raengo, *Critical Race Theory and* Bamboozled (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). Alessandra Raengo argues *Bamboozled* performs its own critical race theory through its uncomfortable combination of media, industry, and commodity fetishism.
[106] Rosemary Feitelberg and Rosemary Feitelberg, "Getting to the Heart of Tommy Hilfiger," *WWD*, March 12, 2012, http://wwd.com/fashion-news/designer-luxury/getting-to-the-heart-of-hilfiger-5789723/.
[107] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1982), 27.
[108] Raengo, *Critical Race Theory and* Bamboozled, 120.

appear obvious or commonsensical. In other words, it is another example of denying the architectural event. However, the difference between inside/outside and form/function will inevitably appear. Reflected surfaces are a reoccurring motif in "Formation" and the obvious similarity between an image and its reflection smartly visualizes the imperfect overlap modern architecture disavows. In one instance a man dances for himself in front of a mirror and later the rising water around Beyoncé lying on top of a cop car reflects the New Orleans Police Department's sinking logo. The inversion between the original and reflected image emphasizes the small, but significant distance between both layers. The meaning of both of these moments seems incredibly clear; these images are about the pleasures of self-made black images and the rejection of the (white) structures that confine the black body. Yet, even the small distance between and image and its reflection has opened a space for the unexpected white fandom that was the subject of much of the popular discourse surrounding the video's release.[109] It seems when modern hip-hop architecture's 'black pattern making' abstracts blackness it necessarily becomes available to non-black bodies. In other words, when blackness is choreographed, anyone can learn the moves.

Instead of changing the racial identity of hip-hop, multi-racial fandom and paratextual performances point towards the transformational energy and potential of blackness as it begins to stand up on its own and is able to be shared amongst bodies. Of course, the ability to 'stand up'

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[109] Craig Jenkins, "White People, Please Think Long and Hard Before Covering Beyoncé's 'Formation' or Rihanna's 'Work,'" *NOISEY*, accessed June 1, 2016, http://noisey.vice.com/blog/white-people-maybe-chill-out-on-covering-beyonce-s-formation; "Why Are White People Trying to Ruin 'Formation'?"; "Brilliant POC Are Making #TrapCovers of Pop Songs So White People Will Stop Ruining 'Work' and 'Formation,'" *Vulture*, February 26, 2016, http://www.vulture.com/2016/02/trapcovers-responds-to-white-rihanna-work-beyonce-formation-covers.html; "White Models March to 'Formation,' Beyhive Swarms," *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/white-models-march-formation-beyhive-894969.

is a function of modern architecture's standardization and its "readiness for acceptance of change" that creates its interminable stability.[110] When blackness adopts this standardized, modular logic its *nothingness* becomes truly inexhaustible.[111] That means when white men sing the lyrics "My daddy Alabama, Momma Louisiana/ You mix that Negro with that Creole make a Texas 'Bama" and "I like my baby heir with baby hair and Afros/ I like my Negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils" they are not consuming blackness, it is consuming them. The same is true of the choice to inhabit WSHH as a space for spectatorship and/or performance. The racial diversity of video performers on WSHH, those that appear to have slipped outside of the site's controlling architecture, only threaten to rupture the coherence of hip-hop's racial identity if race is understood representationally. I have tried to make a more radical suggestion—participating in the space of the site allows any kind of body or image to be rendered as black. Thus, white bodies do not illustrate a structural problem in hip-hop architecture, and as Bakari Kitwana argues, "it would take an army of Eminems to divorce the image of hip-hop from young Black men."[112] The strange alchemy Kitwana describes is actually hip-hop architecture's ability to materialize the visual event of revising blackness, making it possible for blackness to be remade in a different image.

The fan activity surrounding "Formation" and WSHH could not be anticipated, but in "Claim" Pope.L builds the inevitable revision of modern architectural values into the piece. In addition to its changing appearance, the installation undoubtedly begins to smell so that its effects extend beyond the installation space to the entire gallery, which is typically a space dedicated to elevated cultural products. The process of curation and preservation, selecting works

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[110] Adams and Jones, "Alpha," 73.
[111] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)."
[112] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002), 2.

and placing them into productive juxtapositions, could be entirely undone by a work that threatens to put its ‘stink’ on everything around it. Thus, the meat opens up the residual space for the unsanctioned activity of playing with one’s food in a fine art gallery. Items in a grid give up their singularity and distinction and as a result, they become available for the transracial moments that occur around WSHH and “Formation.” As Moten plainly explains, “if you need some, come on, get some. We come from nothing.”[113]

Figure 3.20 Room for Revision in “Formation”

The grid is a design that imposes its will on the objects it organizes, so it easily manages the shift of blackness away from the black body so that it is (finally) apparent that blackness is not the property of these bodies. Because so many people have gathered around the popular works, this shift is easier to identify. The unnecessary use of WSHH as a way to inhabit the Internet and the earnest performance of Beyoncé’s black pride lyrics are not the same as the cultural appropriation of other popular performances like blackface minstrelsy. The austerity of these gridded designs leaves nothing to ‘love’ and there is no path to empowerment through

[113] Moten, “The Subprime and the Beautiful,” 238. Appropriately, to describe the space of negation (blackness) Moten uses an architectural example—the recent subprime mortgage crisis.

these hip-hop architectures, so there is no 'theft.'[114] Furthermore, integrationist fantasies cannot be projected onto these structures because clean modern designs are intended to withstand change while remaining expressions of their original function. None of these familiar explanations for interracial play and identification can explain these non-black fans intentionally abandoning the safe distance that these architectures were designed to provide them.

The revision of blackness is an example of the black sociality that is imagined in radical art works and speculative fiction. Rowe and Slutzky describe the movement from literal to phenomenal transparency like cogs in a machine, recognition of the first transparency sets the entire process of change into motion and the same is true of revision. Yet, a machine that racializes white bodies has more dire implications.[115] Identifying complexity in modern architecture is a devastating critique because it completely rejects the principle of purity. Revision recognizes the complexity of blackness as formal interactions within an image. The idea that objects in a frame are interacting with each other, generating their own ungovernable meanings, and initiating a process of racial transformation troubles the distinction between subject and object.[116] Thus, it is a distinctly aesthetic and spatial process that reveals "how the Category of Blackness *already* carries the necessary tools for dismantling the existing strategies for knowing, and opening the way for another figuring of existence."[117] Because modern architecture positions itself as an expression of nature, the way it materializes that order immediately provides access to an epistemological ground. Le Corbusier's writes, "architecture is a thing of art, a phenomenon of emotions [...] the purpose of construction is to make things

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[114] Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations*, 1992, 23–50, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928593.
[115] Rowe and Slutzky, "Transparency," 1971, 292.
[116] Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics," 87.
[117] Ibid., 82. (My emphasis).

hold together; of architecture to move us. Architectural emotion exists when the work rings within us in tune with a universe whose laws we obey, recognize and respect."[118] Ironically, if this statement is true, the sensory and emotional response elicited by "Claim," "Formation, and WSHH is a law of black revision.

3.5 Conclusion

In the conclusion of *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, an anthology on the movement of black expressive culture across the globe, Harry Elam Jr. writes, "it remains exceedingly attractive and possible in this post-black, postsoul age of black cultural traffic to love black cool and not love black people."[119] This quote has been incredibly influential in the development of this project and the concept of hip-hop architecture. However, there is a distinction in the architectural events described in this chapter and the infatuation with black cultural products Elam describes. The history of black commoditization and racial fetishes is well-documented and these exchanges with blackness are characterized by a combination of attraction and repulsion.[120] The practice of blackface, applying detritus (burnt cork or greasepaint) to the body, is an expression of that complexity. The formations in this chapter do not perform the same ambivalence, not because it does not exist, but because these architectures reject the complexity of desire—except, of course, the desire for clarity.

Despite its supposed simplicity, architectural events between the inside and outside of racial boundaries still occur in these modern hip-hop architectures and this chapter describes the

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[118] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 19.
[119] Harry J. Elam Jr, "Change Clothes and Go: A Postscript to Postblackness," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 386.
[120] Lott, "Love and Theft"; Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny"; R. Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," *Social Text* 27, no. 4 101 (December 1, 2009): 67–94, doi:10.1215/01642472-2009-055.

fall out of building such emphatic black structures. Often hip-hop's diverse fan base has served as a contemporary example of the appropriate attraction to black expressive culture that does not trouble racial boundaries. For example, racial interactions around hip-hop are justified by multicultural rhetoric. However, these architectures use an ideological framework that is supposed to be prepared for any contingency, so when these examples exceed the reasonable and contained pleasures derived from black cultural products, the architectural function of defining blackness remains in tact, but the appearance of racialization does not. Remember, modern architects were capable of justifying glass and brick as appropriate building materials. In other words, modern architectural values build a blackness that may be too flexible to sustain the rationality of racial distinctions. Although online videos can be removed from most digital forums, the non-black performers who enter the black spaces of WSHH and "Formation" literally put their bodies on the line in their interactions with blackness in an effort to match, not remain distinct from, their surroundings.[121]

These architectures construct an indelible blackness that is so unchanging it is capable of consuming non-black bodies. Moreover, modern architecture's firm racial boundaries become the foundation for other claims like value, and even more fundamentally, the status of the Human. As a result, any shifts in that carefully constructed order, like the inverted images and shifts between foreground and background, that confuse these structures can be catastrophic. The next chapter explores the particular appearance and shape of these racial catastrophes. However, revision does not tear these structures apart or even operate from the outside; instead, these hip-

[121] Detrick, "WorldStarHipHop EXPOSED." In this interview Denet, the founder of WSHH, recounts an occasion where he refused to remove an embarrassing video from the site and only relented after the star of the video paid $500.

hop architectures use modern designs that operate from the internal limit point of black visuality, so that all these carefully constructed works can do is rot.

Ironically, the implications of these revisions are a result of the objectivity of modern architectural values and, as chapter one argued, contemporary hip-hop is notorious for mocking strongly held traditions. Although hip-hop's attachments to masculinity, conspicuous consumption, and authenticity often seem in earnest, there is something playfully false about black expressive culture manufacturing categories it was denied access to and pushing these identity markers to their visual limit.[122] This dissertation argues hip-hop's blackness is distinctly architectural, because it organizes space, but perhaps we could also say that there is something distinctly hip-hop about Venturi's duck.

[122] D. C Murray, "Hip-Hop Vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle," *Art Journal*, 2004, 5–19.

4 AN ARCHITECTURAL JOINT: DIAGRAMMING BLACKNESS

"What shape must a culture take when it is so (un)grounded?"

-Fred Moten, *In the Break*[1]

In this final chapter, this dissertation closes the conceptual loop of blackness in (de)formation that, in chapter one, first imagines blackness existing away from the body in non-spaces with non-linear temporalities and in chapter two, uncovers the residual illicit activity that coalesces around this alternatively formed blackness. Finally, this chapter uses all of this imaginative activity to address blackness that exists in real spaces and times and still manages to generate an aesthetic transformation. Chapter one of this dissertation is about stylized, fantastical hip-hop architectures that construct radically new spaces where blackness becomes liquid, plasmatic, and capable of constant movement and change. The bling music videos looked to the future to reframe hip-hop's past, specifically by using sophisticated digital imaging tools. Chapter two addresses the kinds of unsanctioned movement that occur around images that are more rigid because they are grounded by (purportedly) transparent gridded designs. Thus, movement and change are central themes in this project, but what happens when the direction is reversed? What future architectures can emerge from hip-hop imagery that we have already seen? Blackness defines the shape of hip-hop architecture, but what else can this structure become? This chapter aims to understand the topological movement in hip-hop architectures that do not use otherworldly digital imagery and instead have real-life referents. The focus is on analog images that reference real spaces and therefore seek to intervene in the narrow gap between the visible and the visual that black images are expected to close. This chapter seeks

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[1] Moten, *In The Break*, 4.

alternative spatial configurations and routes away from the overdetermined investment in the continuity and legibility of blackness in the analog image and in hip-hop architecture.

Hip-hop architectures that are capable of exceeding the material constraints of black space to generate various kinds of transformation exhibit an active architectural imagination. The first example this chapter considers is the promotional trailer for hip-hop producer Apollo Brown's concept album *Thirty Eight.* Brown's 2014 album was conceived as the soundtrack to a nonexistent film described as a Raymond Chandler-style tragedy set in "grimy project hallways."[2] The trailer is a supercut of shots from several Blaxploitation films, including *Shaft* (Parks Sr., 1971), *Superfly* (Parks Jr., 1972), *The Mack* (Campus, 1973), *Truck Turner* (Kaplan, 1974), and *JD's Revenge* (Marks, 1976). The montage is accompanied by Brown's sample-heavy song "Life is a Wheel" from the "soundtrack." Through clever editing, the trailer makes it possible to follow a central protagonist, who is actually an amalgamation of male Blaxploitation stars, as he seamlessly navigates city streets and the empty hallways of a dilapidated apartment building. The trailer promotes a film, an assembled cinematic body, and a cinematic space that are not only fictional, but entirely imagined.

The second example is Kahlil Joseph's experimental short film "Until the Quiet Comes" (2013), which features the music of the hip-hop/electronic group Flying Lotus. "Until the Quiet Comes" does not feature a composite space like the *Thirty Eight* trailer, but the film has a dreamy and almost otherworldly atmosphere. In the film, the camera moves deliberately through a Los Angeles sunset as black children play and, as if it were predestined, die. Then, without warning, bodies begin to move gracefully in reverse while the world around them continues to

[2] "Apollo Brown - Thirty Eight (Yellow & Black Splatter + Bonus 45)," *Mello Music Group*, accessed May 15, 2016, http://www.mellomusicgroup.com/products/apollo-brown-thirty-eight-yellow-and-Black-plus-bonus-45.

move forward. Finally, in the dramatic conclusion of the film, a man bleeding from bullet wounds on the ground miraculously rises and begins to dance. He removes his bloodstained shirt and, evidently, the finality of death. Then he enters a car and drives off into the night. Joseph's film is not a traditionally continuous work so, like the previous example, it relies on various other kinds of continuity and connection (racial, formal, etc.) in order to make the spaces the film depicts make sense.

"Until the Quiet Comes" and the *Thirty Eight* trailer do not resemble each other, they do not share *mise-en scène* or cinematographic styles, but they both deploy a hip-hop aesthetic that "samples" from familiar spaces and images. Using the architectonic logic of black space, both films bring their diverse "samples" together to create hip-hop architectures that cannot be located in the real world. The apartment building in Brown's trailer and the city block in Joseph's film, where bodies can move in reverse, have clearly not (yet) been realized. Furthermore, the approximation of continuity editing in the *Thirty Eight* trailer does not hold up to close scrutiny; thus, even as a cinematic space, it is impossible to visit. Yet, both films use these samples to create legible works that use familiar imagery as a ground for their imaginative components. For example, the trailer sketches a coherent space through the tenuous resemblance between the historic category of Blaxploitation films and the urban settings predominantly found in these films. As a result, the various filmic units are subordinate to the logic of the architectural whole and the trailer appears complete and self-contained. "Until the Quiet Comes" references actual spaces to suture its discontinuity. For example, the setting for all of the inexplicable events in the film is the Nickerson Gardens housing project in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. Because that neighborhood has such an important and heavily mediated history of racial

violence, its presence in the film, as an image, works in the same way as the classic Blaxploitation films referenced in the trailer.

Even in its imprecise way, the trailer imagines a stable and coherent space and time by using editing logics that resemble familiar cinematic techniques, including the match-on-action and the cutaway, that fulfill the expectations of continuity editing, black visuality, and hip-hop architecture. The trailer illogically creates a unified black image among varied materials and thus seems to narrow the gap between everything that can be seen and the expectation to see everything—or, the space between the visible and the visual.[3] It functions like a map of the formation of racialized assemblages, which "represent, among other things, the *visual modalities* in which dehumanization is practiced and lived."[4] Joseph's film, instead, seems to begin where the trailer ends. "Until the Quiet Comes" references several of these aggregating structures, including housing projects and surveillance. However, Joseph's film features a sudden shift, a miraculous reversal from the constraints of time and space that allows a dead man and various bodies in an infamous ghetto to move freely forward and backward in time.[5] Still, "Until the Quiet Comes" is a polished film that returns to equilibrium even after its time and space are radically destabilized because the joints it builds between blackness and hip-hop architectures are flexible and adaptive. Rather than destroying the appearance of architectural unity and stability that is so well established in the *Thirty Eight* trailer, Joseph's film redefines these concepts.[6]

There is a clear architectural component to both films' work of aggregating bodies and filling gaps. When architects conceptualize the process of cohering distinct and complex building

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[3] Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual*.
[4] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 6.
[5] Kara Keeling, "LOOKING FOR M— Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 2009): 567, doi:10.1215/10642684-2009-002.
[6] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 137.

materials, they actually perform these tasks off-site and on paper. In architectural theory and practice, sketches, drafts, drawings, and diagrams are vital pedagogical tools and perhaps the clearest connection between architecture and other forms of arts criticism. The most complex of these architectural images is the diagram because it is not a blueprint or plan, so it cannot easily be incorporated into the chronology of the construction process. The diagram is a tool for close analysis of architecture's interiority, the meanings of architectural parts and details and their internal relationships that are then capable of expressing the possible reconfigurations of that structure. Thus, the diagram visualizes architectures that have not yet been constructed or otherwise cannot be seen. If we wanted to frame the diagram in the process of architectural production, it is the flat space of *un-building*. Once the diagram is removed from the functionalist discourse of construction and planning, it can become a truly speculative space that serves two primary functions: articulating how spatial relations work and, because the diagram conceives of structural relationships without being constrained by the limitations of actual building materials, visualizing the potential for the emergence of new diagrammatic forms.

Diagrams have come to symbolize architectural newness in theory and practice and they are certainly sites for "dream building," but precisely because diagrams exist in a feedback loop with themselves, they instigate their own destruction.[7] That means understanding generation and degeneration as two sides of the same diagram page.[8] Simply, the diagram is "an icon of catastrophe."[9] Once the diagram provides an explanation of architectural joints, particularly the relationship between sign and signified, that relationship can be disrupted to make a new

[7] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing."
[8] Bryan Cantley, "Two Sides of the Page: The Antifact and the Artefact," *Architectural Design* 83, no. 5 (2013): 43, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ad.1660/abstract.
[9] Anthony Vidler, "What Is a Diagram Anyway?," in *Peter Eisenman: Feints*, ed. Silvio Cassarà and Peter Eisenman (Milano: Skira, 2006), 26.

grammar. For this reason, Peter Eisenman, who has likely contributed more to the theorization of the diagram than any other architect, frames the diagram as a semiological project.[10] The purpose of introducing this chaos to the architectural form and liberating a new architectural grammar is to allow the diagram to construct spatial relations without serving them.

The diagram is the ideal tool to exit the deterministic loop the *Thirty Eight* trailer and "Until the Quiet Comes" are caught within because of the effect of continuity their blackness produces, but also presupposes. First, because the diagram renders the "conceptual techniques that come before any particular technology" it is capable of identifying the formal possibilities of black images that precede the technology of the racialized assemblage.[11] Second, the diagram is an inherently catastrophic form with an intrinsic violence that makes it a shape-shifter. As a result, the diagram has the potential to be an image uniquely capable of expressing the articulation of blackness in the world and its fungibility in space.[12] Finally, the diagram cannot easily be contextualized within the functionality or linearity of the architectural process, so it helps articulate architectural forms outside of their physical presence and the actual loads they bear. As a result, the diagram is capable of introducing ambiguity to both architectural forms and to architecture as a discipline. For example, the diagram is not "building" anything, even though it is undeniably architectural. Indeed, "there is nothing ontological about the diagram—it declares itself for or against nothing."[13] Because of its autonomy from functionalism and the building process, the diagram can be the model of an insidious black architecture capable of remapping the terrain of black images. In *Nobody Knows My Name,* James Baldwin makes a

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[10] Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); Silvio Cassarà and Peter Eisenman, eds., *Peter Eisenman: Feints*, 1. ed (Milano: Skira, 2006).
[11] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 223.
[12] R. Haidu, "Striking the Ground," *Oxford Art Journal* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 217, doi:10.1093/oxartj/kcu009.
[13] Vidler, "What Is a Diagram Anyway?," 25.

similar point. He claims his exclusion from white masculinity made him a better writer, capable of outwitting white America precisely because he was kept at a distance. Unlike his white counterparts, whose cultural observations were part of a process of self-validation, Baldwin adopted a diagrammatic practice in his writing about the world because he "never had anything to lose."[14]

This chapter takes a diagrammatic approach to the *Thirty Eight* trailer and "Until the Quiet Comes" in order to map hip-hop architecture, first, as an expression of the spatial relations of black visuality and, second, as a possibly generative space within the predetermined designs of black representation. This chapter attempts to find "the join[t]," the violent points of articulation that bring together black bodies and the "black cultural traffic" that sustains race relations in the image.[15] However, with the help of the diagram, these joints are the places where hip-hop architecture is capable of recycling existing architectural forms to create new ones, so that these joints are always working against their own "diagrammatic inevitability."[16] Ultimately, this chapter asks what can be articulated with a black architectural grammar. In her canonical essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" Spillers discusses the overdetermined words used to describe blackness as America's grammar (of anti-blackness). She parses expressions of blackness and identifies them as "signifying property *plus,*" so that black images are overflowing and overwhelmed by racial meanings.[17] In response, this chapter's

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[14] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, Reissue edition (New York: Vintage, 1992), 217.
[15] C. Sharpe, "Blackness, Sexuality, and Entertainment," *American Literary History* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 828, doi:10.1093/alh/ajs046. Sharpe borrows the phrase "the join" from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to describe the unacknowledged violent forces that embed the black body into American visual culture.
[16] Eugenie Brinkema, "Violence and the Diagram; Or, The Human Centipede," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 24, no. 2 (2016): 91, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/619390/summary.
[17] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.

diagrammatic practice aims to separate black images from their function, i.e. that of supporting the architecture of the Human, to see what else they can become.

The first function of the diagram is explaining how architectures work, by addressing them at their joints. Because the *Thirty Eight* trailer is a discrete and tightly constructed image of a racialized assemblage, the chapter will use a diagrammatic approach to argue the trailer's joints visualize the ambivalence of the spatiality of blackness; specifically, the negotiation between its exchangeability and its structural necessity. The flexibility of these joints allows the trailer to shift the ground beneath itself and sustain its improbable coherence and stability. In this way, the trailer proves hip-hop architecture is "post-contradictory work, an architecture that has passed beyond the stage-management of tensions."[18] As a result, when "Until the Quiet Comes" employs the same joints and stages its sudden shift in equilibrium, the articulation of blackness remains in tact. However, in the process of destabilizing and re-establishing black images, the short film expresses the possibility of reconfiguring familiar black architectures. For example, "Until the Quiet Comes" uses the anti-black joint called a "pornotrope," which is an image borne out of the physical and sexual domination of slavery that combines violence against the black body and sexuality. Because of it origins, the pornotrope is a joint that is constitutive of blackness in visual culture and cannot easily be dismantled. However, through the film's style and its manipulation of space and time, "Until the Quiet Comes" allows the pornotrope to perform its own rearranging of the expected and acceptable affects around the black body.[19] By including these joints and exhausting their flexibility, Joseph's film performs the second function of the diagram, visualizing new syntactical possibilities. Ultimately, the diagrammatic

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[18] Ole Bouman, "Amor(f)al Architecture," in *Folds, Bodies & Blobs: Collected Essays*, by Greg Lynn, Books-by-Architects (Bruxelles: La Lettre volée, 1998), 11.
[19] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67; Weheliye, "Pornotropes."

articulation of blackness through these hip-hop architectures collapses the processes of construction and destruction to design the possibility of a black body being un-built.

After the previous two chapters that defined the various styles of hip-hop architecture and the space it creates for different encounters with blackness, this chapter considers what hip-hop architecture may still (un)build. Because the diagram is trying to access meanings and architectural joints that are not currently visible, either because they are obscured by the entirety of the structure or because they have not yet been imagined, performing a study of the diagram in hip-hop architecture reiterates black studies' commitment to the absent figures in black cultural expression.[20] More specifically, this scholarship addresses black subjects as the unrepresentable, "absented presence" in space.[21] Similarly, as the hip-hop architectures discussed in this chapter spatialize the logic of the racialized assemblage, they are the product of an "absence" of internal difference and, more broadly, the "absent" reality of the complexity of blackness. In architecture, these absented presences take the form of details like smoothness and suspension, both of which are visible in each film. Before my diagrammatic analysis of the two films, this chapter will begin by reviewing the architectural concept of the diagram and the language to describe the appearance of the diagram, particularly the interiority it aims to express. This theoretical basis will become a tool for spatializing the black grammars in the *Thirty Eight* trailer and "Until the Quiet Comes."

[20] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Christina Sharpe, "Black Studies: In the Wake," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 59–69, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00064246.2014.11413688.
[21] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxv.

4.1 Diagrams: Architecture's Catastrophic Imag(e)ination

The diagram appears often in architectural theory, its definitions are broad and it is one of many kinds of architectural images. Initially, the architectural diagram is a simple concept. Diagrams are architectural images that often use simple notation systems to visualize relationships in (un)built environments. In order to best articulate the specific theoretical value of the diagram, it is often helpful to explain what the diagram is not. First, the diagram is an image, but it does *not* resemble or imitate any building because diagrams are not design plans. Instead, it is an abstract expression of spatial relationships and movement. That means there is *not* a linear or direct temporal relationship between an architectural idea that is rendered in a diagram and actual construction.[22] Second, although diagrams are architectures, they are *not* complete or static. The diagram allows architects to rework existing designs and establish relationships that remain vague and open to change.[23] Their ability to shift and move makes it clear that diagrams are also *not* subject to the material limitations of architecture or the image. All of these negative definitions indicate the combination of generation and degeneration that constitute a diagrammatic practice, "diagrams are active, and the view that sees them as mere blueprints to be translated or reproduced is outdated. The diagram is the engine of novelty, good as well as *ill*."[24]

The negative definitions of the diagram can be tested and used to distinguish the diagrammatic images in this chapter from the Bling videos discussed in chapter one that also exhibit topological movement and refer to spaces that are nonexistent. Resemblance is the primary difference between the diagrams discussed in this chapter and the imaginative images in

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[22] Anthony Vidler, "Diagrams of Diagrams: Architectural Abstraction and Modern Representation," *Representations*, no. 72 (2000): 1–20, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2902906.
[23] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 41.
[24] Sanford Kwinter, "The Genealogy of Models. The Hammer and the Song," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 58.

Hype Williams's Bling Age videos. The design tools used to produce the Bling videos, the same that transformed architectural practice, are capable of building hyper-real worlds. Yet, unlike the diagram that is intentionally uninterested in resemblance, Williams's videos were capable of giving incredible texture and detail to artificial architectures. As a result, the surreal images can visualize alternate realities where blackness can be in control of itself. Diagrams similarly convey concepts that far exceed their surface meaning, but they use existing architectural signs. Bling videos would more convincingly be aligned with another kind of architectural image and technology, the perspective drawing. This distinction does not position either image type as more culturally significant than the other. Perspective images do not un-build, but they have the "potential to unify the relative time of our world with the absolute time of the image [...] to redefine the distance between the world and its representation, a distance that would allow man to recognize his place in a new order."[25]

The diagram has historically been an important tool in design studios, where architects and students can explore alternative architectural shapes within various parameters. In the Beaux-Arts tradition architects performed a kind of architectural study known as the *analytique*, a diagram that exaggerated the size of small design elements that envisioned the structure as "a detail among details."[26] Later, French students continued this tradition with the *parti pris*, a non-representational rendering that makes a definitive claim about a structure's "bias." American architectural students in the 1950s did nine-square exercises in which they considered spatial problems and solutions within the confines of a 3x3 grid.[27] These kinds of exercises consider

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[25] Alberto Perez-Gomez and Louise Pelletier, "Architectural Representation beyond Perspectivism," *Perspecta* 27 (1992): 38, doi:10.2307/1567174.
[26] Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail," in *Semiotics 1981* (Springer, 1983), 302, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4615-9328-7_32.
[27] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing," 27.

diagrams as working hypotheses for solving the problem of expressing a structure's internal relations outside of the representational mode. Because the diagram both precedes and follows the architectural event, it is distinct from other visual arts. The *analytique, parti pris,* and nine-square exercise are all attempts to express sophisticated concepts with a limited set of architectural signs.

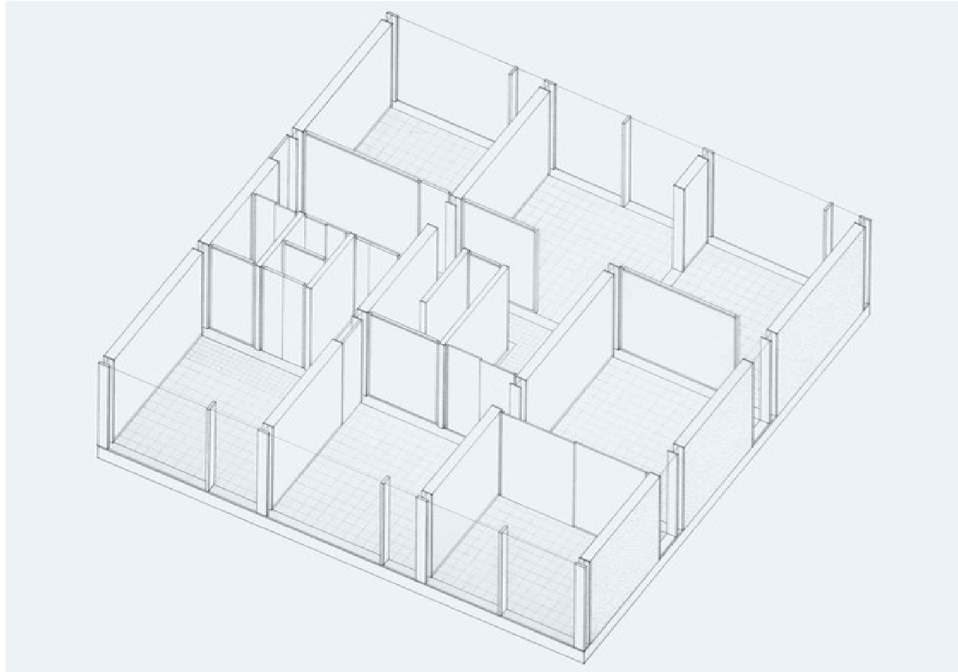

Figure 4.1 Nine-Square Exercise

For Eisenman, the diagram is a superimposition of structural relations that opens the space between figure/ground, form/function, and sign/signified to express architecture's unrepresentable "interiority." The interiority Eisenman's diagrams attempt to access is a design's unifying principle, which is the synthesis of a form's past and possible future arrangements.[28] Stan Allen writes "a diagram is a graphic assemblage that specifies relationships between activity and form, organizing the structure and distribution of functions. As such, diagrams are

[28] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing."

architecture's best means to engage the complexity of the real."[29] This is a peculiar spatial arrangement that understands a design's interiority as anterior to the meaning-making structure. Yet, the interiority of architecture is not exactly immaterial; rather, these relationships actually define a structure's material specificity because they dictate the possibilities of generating new forms in the future.

Eisenman positions the architectural sign as the primary problem to be solved through a diagrammatic practice. Indeed, the architect and the black studies theorist begin their project with the same claim: Eisenman argues the architectural condition is defined by the "metaphysics of presence;" thus, just like the black image, any attempts to construct architecture or concepts that are not present creates not merely a technological but also an ontological conundrum.[30] Unlike linguistic signs that have an arbitrary relationship to their signified, architectural signs are internally "motivated" because they have a material and structural relationship to their signified.[31] For example, parts of the built environment like planes or columns are the result of an alignment of form and function, so they must literally bear the weight of the structure's program.[32] In order to reach its full speculative potential the diagram needs to be the catalyst for un-motivating the sign. Un-motivating the sign removes it from the fixity of overdetermination, which is the first step in un-building an architectural structure and accessing its internal relations. Thus, a diagrammatic practice is about shedding the literal weight of building materials and the

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[29] Stan Alen, "Diagrams Matter," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 17.
[30] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing," 30.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Eisenman, "Diagrams of Interiority," 50.

symbolic weight of a form's history in the discipline's design tradition in order to focus exclusively on rearranging these joints.[33]

The biggest distinction between Eisenman's writing and the diagrammatic approaches of a younger generation of architects that were particularly influenced by philosopher Gilles Deleuze lies in the way they understand the process of un-motivating the architectural sign. All approaches to the diagram foreground the ideas of abstraction and generation, but Eisenman is primarily interested in explaining how architecture exceeds, but does not abandon, its materiality. For instance, Eisenman and Deleuze both use the term "superimposition." Deleuze uses the term to describe the diagrammatic nature of art that escapes the figurative by mapping all painterly points, particularly the in-between.[34] Francis Bacon's blurred images are examples of these interactions within the frame so that the diagram superimposes formal elements from the past and those that have to yet be realized. Eisenman's superimpositions similarly combine the past and possible futures, but the result is not liberation from representation but a closer understanding of a structure's possible reconfigurations that are informed by its present presence. Not surprisingly, the difference between Eisenman's diagram and Deleuze's diagram is the weight and material practice of architecture.

Ultimately, the diagram debate concerns an issue of performance, i.e. the ability for something to "act" in some way—the performance of the architecture and also the performance of the architect. In other words, debates about the diagram are about "who" and "what" can perform architectural labor. Insofar as they expresses the possibility for architectural forms to gain autonomy and decenter the designer, all theories of the diagram offer a critique of modern architectural values and modern architects. Yet, they do so with different investments: the more

[33] Mallgrave, *An Introduction to Architectural Theory 1968 to the Present*, 31.
[34] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon the Logic of Sensation*, 105.

"philosophical" the approach, the weaker the attachment to the material constraints of architectural practice. Eisenman is interested in the diagram as generative and a catalyst for architectural autonomy, but his theoretical perspective reiterates how difficult this performance is. For architectural theorists R.E. Somol and Sarah Whiting, Eisenman's ability to address emergent performance in architecture is inhibited by his interest in the index and representation.[35] As a result, the distinction between Eisenman and the Deleuzian architects is narrow and imprecise; for example, Somol uses Deleuze's approach to the diagram but writes the introduction to Eisenman's *Diagram Diaries*, so that these two approaches even appear in the same book.[36] In other words, these theorists end up in very similar places, but they differ in the way they understand the labor of architectural performance, i.e. the way a structure exhibits its potential for being something other than what it is.

For Somol and Whiting, Eisenman's approach to the labor of architectural performance is reminiscent of Robert De Niro's acting, where "one witnesses the struggle, not just within the character, but between the actor and the character, such that the trace of the construction is visible. There is no other way to say this except that, when watching De Niro, it looks like work (think of the signature mugging and concentrated gestures) […] 'De Niro architecture' is hot, difficult, and indexes the processes of its production: it's clearly labored, narrative, or representational."[37] The slippage in this critique between De Niro as actor and De Niro as architecture summarizes the two performance issues in this architectural debate. Somol and

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[35] H. Frichot, "Drawing, Thinking, Doing: From Diagram Work to the Superfold," *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural and Policy Studies* 30, no. 1 (2011): 6, http://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/view/rmit:14747.
[36] R.E Somol, "Dummy Text, of the Diagrammatic Basis of Contemporary Architecture," in *Diagram Diaries*, by Peter Eisenman (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 7–25.
[37] Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism," *Perspecta* 33 (2002): 77, doi:10.2307/1567298.

Whiting argue that Eisenman's architecture fails to seamlessly transform into other forms, so it is bad at "acting." They also seem to suggest that, despite being the designer who conceptualized these structures, Eisenman has failed to shed his own disciplinary commitments and perform as a philosopher.

In the eyes of his critics, in other words, Eisenman fails to achieve Deleuze's radical metaphysics and, although it is clear in Eisenman's writing that his diagram is intended to open up new architectural possibilities, the conservatism of his diagrammatic approach is better suited to addressing black architecture. De Niro's performances may be unsuccessful because the actor is so present in each character, but this critique is an unintentional yet shrewd assessment of the "metaphysics of presence" in black visuality, because it emphasizes the naturalized relationship between architectural forms, images of blackness, and the structures they support. Escaping that presence *is* work. Unlike Deleuze's emergent architecture, Eisenman's more conservative concept of the diagram maintains and foregrounds the connection between architectural forms, like images of blackness, and the structures they support as a necessary one.[38] Said differently, the relevance of his position for black visuality highlights the fact that it is not by removing black images from visual culture that these ties are undone. In fact, the possible disarticulation of blackness in the World must be initiated from the inside because blackness is already the absented presence in the World. As Frank Wilderson III explains, "the onus is not on the one who posits the Master/Slave dichotomy, but on the one who argues there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness. How, when, and where did such a split occur?"[39]

Fortunately, there are structures that visualize the "split," or un-motivating of the architectural sign, that Wilderson can only imagine. Designs by Kazuyo Sejima and her team,

[38] Somol and Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism."
[39] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 11.

SANAA architecture, are examples of "diagram architectures" because they embody the diagrammatic process by transposing the diagram into three-dimensional space without reducing it to a plan or blueprint.[40] SANAA designed the Glass Pavilion at the Toledo Museum of Art and an aerial view of the structure bears striking resemblance to the abstract bubble diagrams used by Bauhaus designers.[41] The pavilion's streamline, glass structure is one story and comprised of several curved walls that separate different spaces for the museum's various exhibits and functions. Like a traditional diagram, the transparency in the pavilion provides clarity in the structure's spatial arrangement. In order for diagram architecture to move beyond its traditional, descriptive function and become generative it needs to be inhabitable but incomplete and un-built. In the Glass Pavilion the rounded edges and in-between space in the museum perform this function because they encourage visitors to move in different, un-mapped directions. Moreover, because all of this movement is transparent, people appear to be *in* the walls of the pavilion, so each visitor's body and direction becomes a one-of-a-kind architectural feature. Diagrams, on paper or in real space are non-narrative; similarly, the glass in the pavilion makes it impossible to read the structure or assign it symbolic meaning. Any attempt to interpret the pavilions walls would be like falling through a text. All visitors can do is experience the shifting bodies interacting in the space. Indeed, the bodies moving in the walls are not the "content" of the architecture; rather, because they are entirely visible and their movement changes the appearance and functionality of the structure, people become a part of the architecture's "matter."[42] These people and their movement un-motivate the wall so that the architecture's appearance and function are not collapsed. Again, this action occurs from the inside.

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[40] Toyo Ito, "Diagram Architecture," *Croquis* 77, no. 1 (1996): 18–24.
[41] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing," 27.
[42] Alen, "Diagrams Matter," 18.

As a diagrammatic architecture the Glass Pavilion is "an instrument of suspended reality" because it seems to float across the architectural field between conception and construction and it halts the overcoded interpretive process.[43] The diagram performs an architectural sleight of hand, because suspension is not magical or even digital. Instead, architectural suspension is the technique of dispersing a structure's mass across multiple grounding positions. Suspension is an ideal outcome of a diagrammatic approach to a structure because "the metaphysics of presence" is literally a heavy burden. In the process of redistributing the weight of a structure, architectural forms can take on new appearances or meanings even though their weight has not changed. In other words, suspension creates a delay between an architectural image's presence and its function for the critical analysis of its interiority.

Figure 4.2 Glass Pavilion at Toledo Museum of Art

Eisenman criticizes the "cybernetic hallucinations" of a younger generation of digital practitioners, perhaps for making it too easy to perform unburdened by the "metaphysics of presence;" however, Eisenman's former student Greg Lynn is a designer of virtual architecture

[43] Vidler, "What Is a Diagram Anyway?," 21.

who has crafted a helpful vocabulary to describe diagrammatic aesthetics.[44] Lynn describes the *appearance* of a floating structure, freed from the constraints of its gravitational weight, as "light." Not to be confused with weightlessness, lightness is the "resistance to an absolute gravity [...] not an absence of materiality."[45] Anti-gravitational architectures are often imagined as constructions with high-tech, lightweight building materials—the architectural equivalent to digital imaging tools.[46] Yet, in the same way digital images do not create greater proximity between the image and its subject, lightweight structures do not actually resist gravity or float. A structure only appears light because it is suspended. Perhaps paradoxically, that means a light structure is actually multiply grounded. Suspended architectures only appear light because, as opposed to a lightweight design, they are not subject to the singular pull of gravity. It may be worth repeating this distinction: bling videos and their unrestricted rendering tools are weightless; Deleuzian diagrams that imagine unbounded possibilities for architectural emergence are light.

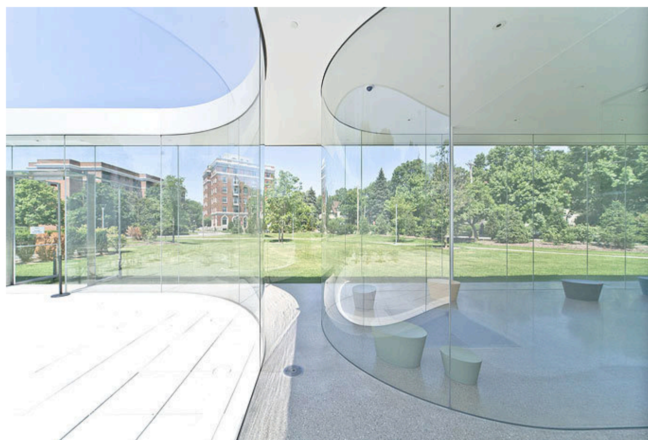

Figure 4.3 Interior of Glass Pavilion

[44] Lynn's book is almost a literal index. Most famously, Lynn coined the term "blob" architecture.
[45] Sanford Kwinter, "The Genealogy of Models" The Hammer and the Song," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 58.
[46] Ibid., 99.

Figure 4.4 Lightness in the São Paulo Museum of Art

Diagrammatic architectures like the Glass Pavilion register multiple kinds of suspension—from the commonsensical to the technical. For example, we might say that the possibility of an inert drawing or building being able to rearrange itself or turn people into architecture requires a "suspension of disbelief." Also, the creative process signaled by the diagram "has become a way of holding back, keeping everything in a state of suspension."[47] Because diagrammatic architectures are never translated into built forms, as much as they are made three-dimensional, they are suspended in their ideal function so that they can express their interiority regardless of actual conditions of time and space. For example, only in the diagrammatic version of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, one of the most famous architectural diagrams, is the perpetual exertion of power it imagines entirely accessible.[48] To summarize:

[47] Robin Evans, "Architectural Projection," in *Architecture and Its Image: Four Centuries of Architectural Representation: Works from the Collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture*, ed. Eve Blau et al. (Montreal : Cambridge, Mass: Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1989), 33.
[48] Hyungmin Pai, *The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America* (MIT Press, 2002), 171.

interiority is the aggregate of all of an architecture's possible configurations at the same time it is an expression of its limitations for change and lightness is the illusion of being unrestrained by these parameters.

Architectural suspension is, however, more complex than a set of colloquialisms, although they do help describe how the effects of dispersing a structure's mass can be a catalyst for architectural fantasies—specifically, lightness. The difference between suspension and lightness lies, again, in the appearance of the performance of labor. Suspension is an architectural practice and lightness is an image effect. Both do work, but lightness renders that labor invisible. A suspended structure achieves its reprieve from gravity through opposing tension and resistance between the structure and ground. For example, the indeterminacy of the Glass Pavilion is an example of the diagram's suspended aesthetics as the structure floats in-between meanings and spatial arrangements. The structure is open yet closed and the glass is similarly material and visually immaterial. Every detail in the design that has two opposing functions creates another ground or structural support so that the structure's meaning is suspended. When the complexity of this construction is obscured, for example in the way the thin walls of the Glass Pavilion hide the building's specifically engineered temperature regulation system in favor of a slick surface, the structure is perceived as light.[49] Suspension and lightness are clearly linked concepts; however, understanding how lightness obscures the productive architectural ambiguity of suspended structures explains how the interiority of architectures, that inherently have many meanings, can be foreclosed and made inaccessible through the appearance of seamlessness and continuity.

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[49] "Glass Pavilion - SANAA," *Arcspace*, September 4, 2006, http://www.arcspace.com/features/sanaa/glass-pavilion/.

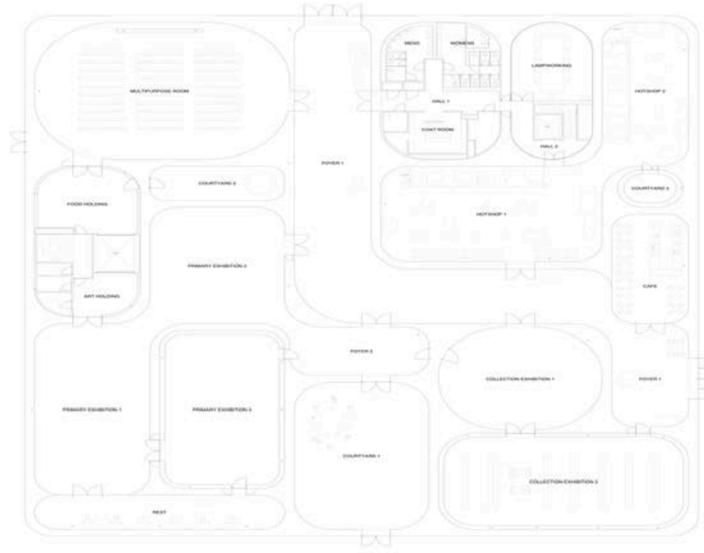

Figure 4.5 Plan for Glass Pavilion

The US Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled "The Architectural Imagination," is a rich example of the influence of Lynn's concepts of suspension and lightness. The curated exhibition features the work of twelve architectural teams, including Lynn's, constructing speculative projects located in actual sites around Detroit, Michigan. The exhibit's directors, Cynthia Davis and Monica Ponce de Leon, describe Detroit as "once a center of American imagination, not only for the products it made but also for its modern architecture and modern lifestyle, which captivated audiences worldwide."[50] The curators selected projects that revitalize the city's former productivity in Detroit by reimagining its industrial remains, including a former rail line and a post office. It should be noted that across its various subgenres, hip-hop aesthetics collectively do the work of reclaiming discarded sounds, technologies, and space for the disenfranchised communities where hip-hop was created. Thus, these post-industrial designs that use the remains of Detroit's urban spirit, specifically embodied by the

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[50] "About," *The Architectural Imagination*, accessed July 3, 2016, http://www.thearchitecturalimagination.org/.

automotive industry and Motown, in order to construct new cultural spaces, are quintessentially hip-hop projects.

Lynn and his design office, Greg Lynn FORM, have been so central in the discourse of topology and architectural diagrams because the architect's designs and writings are intimately connected to imaging and visual culture. For that same reason, his work often bridges the gap between architecture and cinema. Indeed, the fantasy of lightness, structures transcending their material limitations particularly to generate movement, is decidedly cinematic. Lynn's contribution to the exhibit of American architects at the Biennale is called the Center for Fulfillment, Knowledge, and Innovation and it is a redesign of the Packard Plant, an abandoned automobile factory. Lynn's project is a multi-use space with various interconnected programs working across the plant's existing 1.7-mile long structure. FORM worked with the Oscar-winning visual effects lab Framestore to create a film about the Center to accompany the design presentation.[51] The film intercuts images of the derelict factory and renderings of Lynn's structure. Lynn designed a honeycomb-like form that is contoured around the pre-existing plant with bulbous nodes that look like internal organs. The open weave and organic appearance of Lynn's design emphasizes the futuristic flow of the structure that attempts to connect industrial production with the design's lofty ambitions of personal and community enrichment.

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[51] Framestore won Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects for *The Golden Compass* (Weitz, 2007) and *Gravity* (Cuarón, 2013). The design team was nominated for Academy Awards for *Superman Returns* (Singer, 2006), *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008), *and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows-Part 1* (Yates, 2010).

Figure 4.6 The Packard Plant 1939

Figure 4.7 The Packard Plant 2012

The FORM film is a cinematic diagram; it is a series of architectural images that un-builds the Packard Plant and reveals its potential for design changes.[52] The five-minute short is organized into three sections, separated by a title card, that highlight the most important features of Lynn's design—circulation, multi-use, and transformation. Each section begins with digital images that express the architectural idea. For example, in the "Circulation" section, white lines multiply and move in various directions on a black screen until they create an outline of the Center. At various points the camera seems to follow the white lines as they sketch the space and seamlessly transform into white dots. At some moments it even seems we have entered the digital rendering of the Center. All of this action takes place on a black screen. More than providing a clear image of the Center, this section of the film creates the impression that these white lines and dots could produce any shape that they desire.

Figure 4.8 FORM Film Title Card

[52] The FORM film is not the only example of a diagrammatic film. The same term has been used to describe Sergei Eisenstein, Kubrick, Buckminster, Fuller, Robert Smithson. See Sanford Kwinter, "The Genealogy of Models" The Hammer and the Song," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 57–62.

The FORM film is diagrammatic not only because of its speculative imagination, but also because the film also visualizes formal interactions occurring at the design's joints that suspend the structure in order to express its interiority. For instance, there is tension within the shots of the decaying Packard Plant. It is clear that the structure was once an impressive industrial space. Yet, today nature is encroaching on the building and the fluid cinematography emphasizes this permeability that opens the plant to its surroundings. The organic elements in the space are interesting because they are part of the space's past and part of the decaying building's future; there are missing walls that open the building entirely to the outside; patches of overgrown grass, and chunks of concrete that were once part of the building have now become rocks. Finally, there is a split screen with an image of the decaying plant on one side of the frame and the corresponding image of Lynn's design on the other. Consequently, as the film progresses, the space between the past and future is drawn closer together. The film diagrams several joints in the architectures: between the Packard Plant and its surroundings; the Plant and Lynn's Center; and, of course, between the images and the things they represent. As a result, the film brings the space's past and future into the same project so that the film becomes "an intermediary in the process of generating real space and time"[53] The climax of the short film is the moment when the renderings of Lynn's design are actually moved from the blank black space onto the Packard Plant and Eisenman's superimposition is literally realized. This is a truly diagrammatic moment because in the film it is possible to see what architectural forms can become, based on their pasts. This productive superimposition in the filmic diagram conveys the unrepresentable concept of the architectural imagination.

[53] Eisenman, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing," 28.

Figure 4.9 Split-screen in FORM Film

Figure 4.10 Superimposition in FORM Film

Framestore's filmography illustrates their expertise in creating anti-gravitational worlds—they received their most recent Academy Award for work on Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) and they previously produced effects for fantasy and science-fiction films—but the actual lightness in their collaboration with Lynn is a product of the film's ability to create multiple joints where the image of speculative architecture meets the ground. The FORM film's

diagrammatic writing is performed by the cinematography that traces the differences between the Center and the Packard Plant in order to create the tension in the images that paradoxically supports the impression of seamlessness in the structure. For example, the film counterbalances all of the futuristic imagery and speed in the digital renderings with aerial shots that slowly glide over the expansive Detroit site. The real space in the film, which is materially different from the virtual rendering and poses the biggest challenge to actually constructing the Center, becomes the ground for an imaginary architecture. The split screens and the superimposition in the film repeatedly show us what this architecture is and what it can become. Similarly, the title cards that divide the film all include small portions of Lynn's tubular structure impossibly floating in the Packard Plant's debris and it appears as if the past and possible future have been brought into perfect balance in the diagrammatic present. As a result, the structure becomes light. It is easy to imagine the actual placement of the Center floating across East Grand Boulevard and Concord Avenue in Detroit. The complexity of the FORM and Framestore collaboration is undeniable. In the same frame, the film manages to create a coherent shot of two radically different images. Maintaining the distinction between the Packard Plant and the Center, without creating a rift in the image, is the goal of much of Lynn's topological theory and the purpose of his collaborations with Hollywood.

Despite the quality of the rendering that makes the imaginative work appear stable, there are still possibilities for shifts in the FORM film where the illusion of lightness disappears. There are so many places where the tenuously balanced rubble could fall over. As the film illustrates, engaging with the formal possibilities of the Center means opening up the ground of the Packard Plant. The limit point of suspension and lightness is catastrophe, because both are assemblages based on conflicting tensions that could erupt at any point. However, architectural and

mathematical catastrophes are not destructive. As Eisenman and theories of the diagram have already made clear, un-motivating and un-building are productive actions that do not destroy signs or structures. For example, to emphasize a point I made before, lightness is the appearance of being unencumbered by the force of gravity. More specifically, lightness visually opposes the *concept* of gravity. Gravity is a singular force that is relative to the Earth's mass, so when suspended structures touch the Earth at various places they create multiple grounds, each with their own gravitational force. While gravity produces a strong and stable plane because it works evenly across space, suspended structures apply oppositional pressures to this coherent idea. More precisely, lightness is the eventual breaking point in the plane of gravity. Lightness is therefore *anti*- the singularity of gravity. Less fanciful that the anti-gravity found in science fiction, lightness is no less catastrophic to the central force of gravity through which we understand terrestrial space.

Figure 4.11 Lightness in FORM Film

Catastrophes "represent abrupt transformation across a continuous surface," and catastrophe theory, developed by mathematician René Thom, is a way to interpret and predict

these ruptures, whether they refer to natural phenomena or theoretical shifts.[54] The term has been used to describe mundane events like a crest in a wave or occurrences as dangerous as a prison riot.[55] To observe a (small) catastrophe, hold a piece of paper in both hands and gently apply pressure towards the center. Eventually, the paper will create a ripple, a "cusp," but it will not tear. Lynn's writing makes it abundantly clear that lightness is not negating and Thom's models of catastrophe are similarly generative instead of destructive (the paper will not tear!) because the theory is concerned with the discontinuities and differences that can occur in a singular system.[56] Thus, the theory adheres to the word catastrophe's Greek origins, which refer to 'overturning,' not breaking.[57] Thom's work resonates in architectural theory, particularly when curves, waves, and pleats can be the design tools for introducing dramatic change into otherwise continuous and smooth structures.[58] In the motivated architectural sign, form and function exist on the same flat plane and because that surface cannot be broken, new forms can be generated in the cusp of catastrophe. For example, the tubes of the Center for Fulfillment, Knowledge, and Innovation fit neatly into the open walls and ceilings of the Packard Plant where the force of nature caused the original architecture to give way.

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[54] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 125.
[55] Stephen J. Guastello, *Chaos, Catastrophe, and Human Affairs: Applications of Nonlinear Dynamics To Work, Organizations, and Social Evolution* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2013).
[56] Peter Timothy Saunders, *An Introduction to Catastrophe Theory* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1.
[57] "Catastrophe, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 3, 2016, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/view/Entry/28794.
[58] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 120.

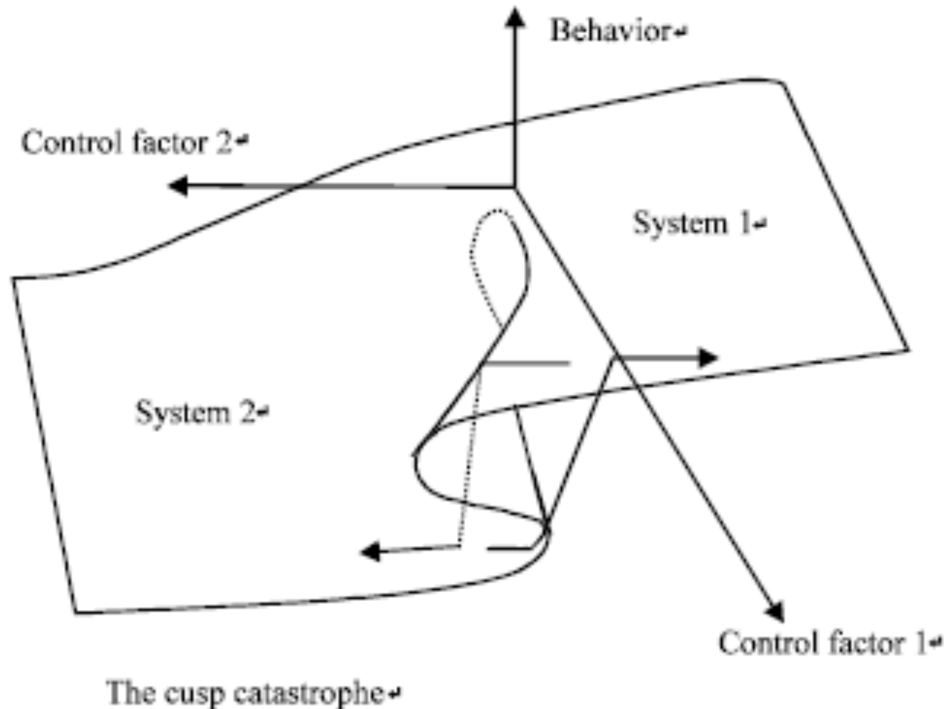

Figure 4.12 A Catastrophic Model

A catastrophic diagram indicates where things like the Packhard Plant and Lynn's center come together and where their differences will eventually create enough strain to create a cusp. However, a catastrophic diagram cannot identify the exact moment when a catastrophic event will occur along a surface. Like all other diagrams, catastrophic diagrams are non-deterministic, but can only offer multiple zones or cusps where violent shifts in equilibrium may occur. [59] These cusps are sites of violent change and intensive points of entry where different geometries merge. In other words, diagrammatic violence describes the joining of generating and degenerating forces that produce new architectures; as such, it is a structural necessity. Of course, a building is incapable of representing its own destruction while remaining upright, so a diagrammatic practice attempts to expose this violence that exists at the core of a structure's interiority. Diagrammatic violence performs a circumvention of the "metaphysics of presence"

[59] Ibid., 128.

that allows new spatial arrangements to be formed. Even though this violence can be obscured by the generative potential of lightness, I would like to be clear that this is not merely a formal issue. For example, from the perspective of black urban history, revitalization projects like the Center for Fulfillment, Knowledge, and Innovation have been devastating for black communities. Urban renewal initiatives have been nicknamed "Negro removal" projects in black communities.[60] At what point does a project designed to bring Detroit's past and future closer together become destructive?

The FORM film brings that diagrammatic tension onto the filmic surface so that "the diagram is both the instrument of thought and its mirror."[61] It is not a coincidence that this description echoes the interaction between an object and its shiny image discussed in Chapter 1 and the motif of reflections discussed in Chapter 2. There is not a direct line from the diagrammatic image to the built environment and as the Bling videos indicate, these interactions become productive when they occur along the same plane so that an object/body and its imagistic reproduction can exist in a non-linear relationship. Similarly, the reoccurring image of the mirror in this theoretical writing and my close readings foreground the "approximity" between an object/body and its image.[62] In that small in-between space diagrammatic images stage catastrophic events.

4.2 That's My Joint

After many pages of addressing the significance of spatial relations and the diagram's ability to visualize the points of articulation in architecture, it is important to return to hip-hop and acknowledge that the genre has been referring to "the joint" for decades. This term, used to

[60] Melvin L. Mitchell, *The Crisis of the African-American Architect: Conflicting Cultures of Architecture and (Black) Power* (iUniverse, 2003), 106.
[61] Vidler, "What Is a Diagram Anyway?," 20.
[62] Munster, "Digitality."

describe a good song, a popular place, a marijuana cigarette, or a Spike Lee film are all points where things and people come together. Indeed, *Bamboozled,* the Spike Lee Joint referenced in the previous chapter, uses bullet holes as a point where race, commerce, and the cinematic image come together, but not without doing damage to each other. In Lee's work, film style often exists in tension with the established meanings of blackness in visual culture. Thus, the nickname for Lee's controversial films not only anticipates my diagrammatic lens, but it also refers to how *Bamboozled* itself presents these points as violent or catastrophic. A true diagrammatic practice privileges these points as defining an architecture's interiority. Hip-hop joints are diagrams, images of what blackness may still build, and so they give "form to the joinedness of what is joined."[63]

Emphasizing the joint is also important because it articulates the stakes of the theoretical debate about the diagram in the context of black studies and blackness. Suspension un-motivates the architectural sign by dispersing its meaning across space, lightness visualizes this freedom from gravity and weight, and Eisenman's reluctance to abandon the materiality of architecture in favor of force and virtualities exists squarely in-between. His theoretical position, which is committed to understanding architecture's capacity for change within its function, is the joint. The "metaphorical aptitude" of blackness similarly moves between the elasticity of blackness and its fungibility; however, the implications of the black body being un-motivated from its overcoded forms of expression in order to fulfill the anti-black pleasure of exchanging black bodies is undeniably problematic.[64] Thus, a black diagrammatic practice must understand that un-building blackness and forgetting the joint only supports the construction of new racialized assemblages. As Hartman explains, "from this vantage point, emancipation appears less the

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[63] Brinkema, "Violence and the Diagram; Or, The Human Centipede," 82.
[64] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 7.

grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection."[65]

A diagrammatic reading of hip-hop architecture identifies the logic of the racialized assemblage *before* it is formalized in architecture or in the image. For example, pornotroping is an anti-black architectural joint that spectacularly joins black pain and white pleasure that originates in domination of slavery and reoccurs in visual culture. This means that, regardless of its appearance at different times and in different mediums, i.e. cinema, photography, painting, etc., pornotroping describes "the process through which slaves are transformed into flesh and then subjected to the (un)pleasure of the viewing sovereign subject."[66] Because pornotroping is the alignment of blackness's form (violation) and function (white delight and affirmation), it is a motivated image. Clearly, the aim would be to disarticulate this joint, but the ethical approach to diagraming blackness should parallel Eisenman's insurgent diagram theory. There is no opting out of the seamless integration of the pornotrope, but there is the possibility of opting out of its lightness so that this historical entanglement will no longer appear obvious or natural. Rather, diagramming black subjection reveals the suspension of pornotroping, its inherent ambiguity, and the possible productivity of blackness's capacity for change.[67] Because pornotroping is distinctly ocular, this tension occurs on the same surface and, like the example of the pressure applied to a sheet of paper, at any point that flatness will succumb to a catastrophic ripple.

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[65] Ibid., 6.
[66] Weheliye, "Pornotropes," 71. Spillers uses this term to describe the sexual component of black dehumanization that she understands in gendered terms, but when Alexander Weheliye adopts the term he argues it is not necessarily erotic. He expands the concept to describe the simultaneous and opposing tension of subjugation and rapture, which describes pleasure or, in spatial terms, deliverance.
[67] Weheliye, "Pornotropes."

The exigencies of the black experience make it compelling to skip directly to the moments in hip-hop's black architectural diagrams that create catastrophic ripples across their surfaces. Yet, black studies scholars have argued this work cannot be imagined, designed, or outlined without understanding the terrain of whiteness or the "American grammar" that begins with the ontological rift of slavery.[68] The diagram's investment in expressing absented presences offers the possibility of articulating the unrepresentable violence of "black flesh" in anti-black architecture.[69] Indeed, the diagrammatic violence visualized in hip-hop architecture parallels the quotidian "scenes of subjection" that allows whiteness to join the epistemological framework of the Human by achieving architectural lightness that is repeatedly and obliquely grounded by black flesh.[70] Katherine McKittrick explains the relationship between suspension, the illusion of lightness, and the need for critical analysis that begins with mapping; she writes, "the naturalization of 'difference' is in part, bolstered by the ideological weight of transparent space, the idea that space 'just is' and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true."[71]

This chapter's close reading begins by diagramming the *Thirty Eight* trailer because the labyrinthine montage so powerfully and effectively combines black images that it turns its own imperfections into stabilizing points. Consequently, its joints are models of the flexibility of articulations of blackness in space, the same that sustain the blackness of contemporary hip-hop. The trailer does not include any catastrophic cusps so understanding these joints requires a

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[68] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*; Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)"; Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
[69] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Theodora Danylevich, "Beyond Thinking: Black Flesh as Meat Patties and the End of Eating Everything," *Rhizomes: New Media Cultures*, no. 29 (2016): 1–1, doi:10.20415/rhiz/029.e15.
[70] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.
[71] *Demonic Grounds*, xv.

diagrammatic reading, one that identifies the points where there is the possibility of multiple, contradictory meanings and how the trailer manages those moments. A diagrammatic reading is non-narrative so it not only attempts to disassemble architectural joints by locating the places where they can be un-motivated, but it also demands they "come clean" as overwrought.[72] The *Thirty Eight* trailer is an example of a hip-hop architecture that has problematically recycled existing architectural joints only to construct a new narrative about the fungibility of blackness that appears seamless and light. Fortunately, "Until the Quiet Comes" performs a diagrammatic analysis of these joints on screen by including many of the same points of articulation as the trailer, but staging a catastrophic moment that leads away from narrative logic. Applying pressure to the joints in the trailer and observing their deformation in Joseph's film indicates that the possibility of rearticulating blackness is always present in the joints of hip-hop architecture.

4.3 Hip-Hop Architecture: A Racial Catastrophe

The *Thirty Eight* trailer and "Until the Quiet Comes," reorganize actual, familiar spaces into cinematic spaces that do not exist, which is the first indication of their lightness. These racialized assemblages achieve that lightness by using expectations of black visibility, to appear natural and unmediated, to obscure the labor of their own construction— in other words, they take the cool approach to performance that evades De Niro. At the joints we can observe the negotiations between sameness and difference that are essential to the coherence of the racialized assemblage's differentiated mass. For example, the point of the trailer is not to simply replay one entire film or one continuous shot; on the contrary, in order to "float" the idea that all of the "samples" fit together, it lets us see its own seams. This balancing work is not unique to the examples in this chapter; rather, it describes the spatial relationship between blackness and the

[72] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.

image in general, insofar as the "black image" is the one that maintains in equilibrium the goal of absolute visibility with a sense of lightness. Blackness and the image are oppositional; imaging the entirety of blackness is simply impossible. Yet, blackness, the image, and architecture are all "pure present and always tense," meaning despite their actual complexity and figurative capacities, they are occurrences of transparency and legibility, but also fixity. [73] As a result of their shared function in the visual field their alignment can make these distinct entities appear smooth and light, as if the gap between the visible and the visual had been bridged.

The *Thirty Eight* trailer expresses its lightness through formal and generic continuity. The particular scenes from each sampled film are less important that the joints that connect the images. The trailer exploits the iconicity of these film images to make its fictive space appear familiar and coherent. Unencumbered by the composite films' plots, actual duration, or the industrial and cultural context that created Blaxploitation films, the trailer is able to align their recognizable imagery and disregard their differences. The way the trailer treats these images, with an approximation of continuity editing and reoccurring visual motifs, also helps create the illusion of the trailer's "joinedness" and the impression that characters from one film can easily enter the space of another. For example, a simple match-on-action is all that is needed for Shaft to enter the backseat of Goldie's car in *The Mack*, a film released two years later.

The joints are where the short film exhibits its creativity and constructs the "epistemology of ignorance" that *makes it make sense*.[74] The most succinct example of that ignorance is a moment in the trailer when the reproduction of a shot from *Shaft* is so dark that, even after countless viewings, it is almost impossible to see the action. Yet, the trailer proceeds

[73] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66.
[74] Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).

oddly untroubled by a literal black-out of visual information. The joints are the places where the trailer solves problems of illegibility or lack of verisimilitude. Repeatedly one car enters a dark city street and there is a cut to another car or black body rounding a corner so that the dark *mise-en-scène* helps obscure what would otherwise register as continuity errors. Thus, the joints not only construct a (in)coherent cinematic space, they are essential for leveraging the affective black masculine cool that flows through the entire montage.

The clearest connective tissue in the trailer are the generic traits of Blaxploitaiton, the period in film history cited in the trailer, which functions as a joint that both brings the trailer together but also illustrates where the inexact definition of Blaxploitation can open the trailer up to different interpretations.[75] The Blaxploitation hero was and continues to be an embodiment of the vexed status of blackness in popular culture. First, he broke from the previous marginalization of the black body in American film to reach a popularity that made the black body distinct, cool, and desirable. At the same time, as the trailer attests, the same move made the Blaxploitation hero an exchangeable cinematic image. Un-motivating the hero's image by allowing these conflicting meanings to exist simultaneously becomes a stabilizing point for the trailer's architecture so that the blackness of the trailer can be supported both 'here' and 'there.' In the trailer there are images of black men as stylish bosses and adventurous urban cowboys intercut with images of black men being shot, tied to chairs, and hunted by police. So although the trailer includes many of the visual tropes of action films—it even ends with an explosion—there is an equally present motif about black victimization. As a result, the nostalgia for a singular, raw blackness associated with the hyper-masculine Blaxploitation hero can easily be leveraged in the trailer for meanings that extend beyond and even contradict the image, like the

[75] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 69.

desire for newness, unsentimental repurposing, and multi-layered mediation that characterizes contemporary hip-hop. Attempting to reconcile the industrial, cultural and racial forces that shaped the Blaxploitaton film cycle would destroy the trailer and its lightness by removing the tension that keeps it suspended.

Racialized assemblages privilege form over content so, although images of Richard Roundtree as Shaft and Ron O'Neal as Youngblood Priest are both part of a long and nuanced history of race and cinema, the trailer treats them as image types. Each of these Blaxploitation figures is an icon, a "fixed image so immersed in rehearsed narratives that it replaces the need for narrative unfolding."[76] When the men become a kind of image they appear on the same material plane as the filmstrip and other iconic props and settings that appear in Blaxploitation films. On more than one occasion the edge of the filmstrip is visible so that the materiality of the image and even its movement through a projector take precedence over the montage's content. As a result, the icon and the visible apparatus initiate the smooth transference of racial meaning from bodies to other highly-circulated objects in and around the trailer. The shot of Priest walking that is immediately followed by a shot of Superfly driving, both in the same screen direction, graphically align the black body and the car. The same effect occurs through the repeated emphasis on Shaft's leather jacket and the city streets that all of the Blaxploitation heroes navigate. Because they share the same architectural function of maximizing visibility and legibility, the joint between these images create formal commensurability that disperses the trailer's racial meaning across the objects within the images and the images themselves.

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[76] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 46.

Figure 4.13 Multiple Materialities in Thirty Eight *trailer*

A light architecture resists interpretation, but it is not weightless. As the *Thirty Eight* trailer diagrammatically abstracts black visual culture as the capacity for interconnectivity, it becomes capable of adding more content to itself. For example, although the Blaxploitation boom is a recognized moment in American film history, there are vast generic differences between Blaxploitation films and their protagonists. *J.D.'s Revenge,* is a film about a college student possessed by the ghost of a hustler who died thirty years before. This work should appear to be in sharp contrast with a story about an urban hero like *Shaft*. Instead of content, the "sampled" films again have visual similarities that justify their inclusion. Specifically, all of the films include the worn appearance of aging celluloid. There is a clear similarity between the treatment of black skin and the surface of the trailer, both of which become a materialization of the color line that racializes and assembles the bodies and objects that appear behind that line. Blackness "assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal," so that the sampled images from the 1970s would seem to obviously accumulate into an image of the present in black cultural expression.[77] On one hand, the scratches on the film and the places where color seems faint

[77] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66.

activate a cinematic history that dictates the look and the meaning of the trailer. On the other, if these surface effects are the connective force of the trailer, that logic would justify the inclusion of hypothetically countless films with various plots that share the same surface texture going forward.

The editing in the trailer reconfigures the existing footage, which is the goal of a diagrammatic practice; however, the trailer's uses of continuity editing to create even a new narrative opens up the structure only to close it again. Diagrams and diagrammatic readings are non-narrative so they attempt to un-build these stories insofar as they obscure access to a structure's interiority. Early in the trailer there is a visual exchange between characters from *Shaft* and Isaac from *JD's Revenge* and the shots are easily sutured together with eyeline matches, but as I mentioned earlier, the plots of these films are radically different. Therefore, trying to create a narrative from the montage, as opposed to diagrammatically following its formal linkages, would be like trying to read the Glass Pavilion. The Glass Pavilion is a diagram architecture so it strips the narrative from its design, while the trailer's approximation of continuity editing encourages viewers to fall through the work until they are left solely with the trailer's underlying concept—the valuable connectivity of blackness.

The trailer's editing creates a linear temporal order for movement through the hip-hop architecture whereby black connectivity is not flexible as much as at it appears fungible. The Glass Pavilion uses transparency and the flow between the inside and outside of the pavilion to create continuity with itself and it surrounding space so that the structure appears to go on forever. The trailer does not leverage the connectivity of blackness to create this kind of "imaginative surface;" instead, it constructs a narrative about blackness that is interchangeable by suggesting the role of Blaxploitation heroes can be occupied by an endless series of different

black bodies.[78] In other words, the *Thirty Eight* trailer is a promotional image for black cool that uses images from the past to create an architecture that is oriented toward the future of infinite possible black outcomes; yet, all of the movement in the trailer leads back to the naturalization of the racialized assemblage.

By abstracting a structure to its joints and "joindedness," the diagram visualizes the unconditional interiority of architecture, which remains the same regardless of the structure's stylization. This is what Eugenie Brinkema's analysis of *The Human Centipede*, a particularly "graphic" film, describes as the "violence of the diagram," "the violence of ontology [which] is beyond any violence of force, disgust, torture, humiliation— those are the violences of the light, of representational depth and perspective."[79] Similarly, lurking beneath the trailer's cool performative surface is the suspended (after)life of slavery, which allows the trailer to construct infinitely more grounding points that stretch and suspend blackness to create the structure's light appearance without needing to provide a rational support for it.

All of the formal techniques and references the trailer employs to establish its lightness—sampling, Hollywood's visual economy of race, iconicity, the flickering movement of the film strip, and continuity editing—are all expressions of the circularity that sustains the *Thirty Eight* trailer's visual style and its mode of cohesion.[80] Indeed, these black images are defined and fortified by their own circularity making the trailer appear light and self-contained as if it was responding to a natural order. Yet, thinking diagrammatically about this very shape helps articulate the possibility of more spatial relationships that are not visible in the trailer but are still bounded by the curve. Ultimately, the *Thirty Eight* trailer relies on curvilinearity to stabilize the

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[78] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 7.
[79] Brinkema, "Violence and the Diagram; Or, The Human Centipede," 91.
[80] James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood From the Dark Side* (Routledge, 1994).

accumulation of cinematic references that would otherwise threaten to make the video too dense to untangle. Perhaps the song sampled in the trailer explains this best. The repeated song lyrics is, "life is a wheel/and in the center of the wheel, people come and go."[81] Bodies move in and out of the trailer, reinforcing the circular motif in the car wheels and headlights, Shaft's movement through abandoned hallways, and the characters' shifting screen directions as they double-back across the constructed space. Of course, these graphic similarities require continuity editing to close the loop because although all forms of filmic continuity are not functions of blackness, blackness is a force of continuity in visual culture. The actual points of continuity in the trailer—the matched screen directions and shared elements of *mise-en-scène*—are points that express blackness not as content, but movement. The diagram is "a loophole in global information space that allows for endlessly expansive, unpredictable, and liberating pathways for architecture," but it is a loop nonetheless.[82]

Figure 4.14 Curvilinearity in Thirty Eight *trailer*

Identifying the trailer's curvilinearity returns this reading to architectural shapes and to the value of the diagrammatic reading that identifies spaces where even the tightly enclosed trailer can rearticulate established architectural grammars. In architecture, curvilinear forms layer

[81] Apollo Brown, *Life Is a Wheel*, Thirty Eight (Mello Music Group, 2014).
[82] Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, "Introduction," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 15.

different building materials into smooth almost liquid, yet heterogeneous, mixtures that are capable of incorporating difference and ambiguity and are responsive to outside pressure.[83] For example, the City of Culture of Galicia is a cultural center in northwestern Spain designed by Eisenman in 2011. The project includes a museum, a library, and creative workspaces.[84] The design mimics the typography of the landscape to weave the earth and structure into a smooth continuous whole that flows in multiple directions. Within the static permanent structure are infinite in-between states, particularly as the external force of sunlight interacts with the complex's curved surfaces. At any moment the cultural center can take on a radically different appearance. The project is a diagram architecture, like the Glass Pavilion and the FORM film, but it diagrams the landscape by visualizing what it can become based on its current configuration.

Like the curved rooftop in the City of Culture, the circular motifs in the trailer cohere black visual economy, specifically by bringing it into a shared plane. This transactional space is capable of expressing architectural interiority because of its fluidity and openness to transformation. The result is a feedback loop that allows hip-hop architecture to transform the appearance of blackness, while the flexibility of blackness facilitates hip-hop architecture's expansion to include a more diverse and larger amount of images. Diagram architectures often take curvilinear shapes because they can visualize the interaction of a structure with external forces while remaining in tact; these designs are often described in terms of their viscosity because when external pressure is applied they become stronger and sturdier structures that act

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[83] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 100.
[84] "City of Culture of Galicia," *Eisenman Architects*, accessed May 15, 2016, http://www.eisenmanarchitects.com/city-of-culture.html#top.

like sticky solids.[85] The rolling movement of curved architecture is like the process of deferral in the trailer. Once the narrative logic of the trailer dissipates, resemblance becomes a new ground for the short film. For example, attempting to separate the trailer based on the contextual differences in the different films leaves us with the visual similarities between the shots, particularly the sepia color and grain of each image. These architectures will always move in a direction that contributes to stabilize and maintain their connectivity and lightness.[86]

Figure 4.15 Curvilinearity in The City of Culture

The City of Culture allows the effects of sunlight hitting the structure to make space for innumerable points of expression superimposed on the same architectural site; as a result, it is an effective response to Eisenman's critics who argued his diagram theory did not place enough emphasis on generation and newness. But the City of Culture is actually a "cunning" architecture that weaves itself into the landscape and uses its curves to contextualize itself in its surroundings so that its boundaries move outward, beyond the actual walls of the complex. [87] For example,

[85] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 146.
[86] Ibid., 113.
[87] Ibid., 119.

although the design includes multiple free standing buildings, The City of Culture uses the same stone and grid design on all of the rooftops, creating the image of a pliant skin pulled across the entire complex that allows the buildings to blend in with the Earth. Mimicking the landscapes stages the "suspension of disbelief" or "epistemology of ignorance" that is the first part of the radical diagrammatic performance of the complex. The seamless integration of City of Culture buildings into the mountainside is an optical feat that allows the architecture to disappear into its surroundings while the mountainside emerges as architecture. Aesthetic pleasure in architecture comes from a design's ability to make nature reveal itself and Eisenman's design traces over the landscape for this purpose.[88] However, in the process of un-motivating the architectural sign by rendering its fluidity through curvilinearity, the City of Culture also denaturalizes and shifts the ground beneath the structure.

The *Thirty Eight* trailer similarly appeals to the senses by using black skin and film style as grounds that justify and internally motivate the racialized assemblage allowing it to efface material, spatial, and temporal differences in the same way blackness demands actual bodies and things share space and temporalities. Finding the joints in the trailer first reveals the complexity of the montage and, more importantly, it un-motivates black forms from their "natural" function when they can no longer appear to justify the assemblage. As a result, a diagrammatic approach to the trailer expresses the points where the figurative capacities of blackness exceed its functionality. The City of Culture builds this generative capacity into its design but the same methodological tools applied to the trailer similarly un-build the architectural form and its ground.

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[88] Christiana Vollaire, "The Geometer's Betrayal," in *Laurent Pariente - Oeuvres*, by Pariente Laurent (Lyon: Pariente, 2000), 89.

Figure 4.16 Pliant Skin in The City of Culture

While the *Thirty Eight* trailer requires a diagrammatic reading in order to disarticulate the racialized assemblage that it neatly visualizes, “Until the Quiet Comes” is a diagram architecture with the potential for radically different spatial arrangements. Yet, Joseph’s short film resembles other hip-hop videos. It features dancing, an impoverished black community, bling, custom cars, and controversial content. These elements have come to define hip-hop imagery so, separating these forms from their function is just as challenging as it is to un-motivate the architectural detail. The short film also features circularity in its *mise-en-scène* and in its sequencing. As a result, Joseph’s film would seem to visualize the same inescapable cycles of signification as the trailer. The fact is all black images include contradictions and the distinction, as the counter-reading of the trailer indicates, depends on whether or not these ambivalences are allowed to take on their own formal autonomy. “Until the Quiet Comes” transforms the small complexities in the black image into catastrophic cusps.

Because the generative possibilities of the diagram come from the interaction of architectural forms, as opposed to their narrative, my approach to the “Until the Quiet Comes”

begins with segmenting the film and noting the joints between sections. Each section of the film expresses a different internal logic. The first part is about "diagrammatic inevitability," so that the history of (aestheticized) violence inflicted on the black body comes to dictate its possible positions moving forward. The second section is the cusp, the "anexact" section where the film maintains its surface appearance but the events no longer seem inevitable and the action can move in any direction.[89] Finally, the last section is the return to equilibrium. Thus, the film visualizes the diagrammatic process from stability, to catastrophe, and back. Although the distinctions between sections are intentionally blurred, diagramming each one and comparing the music video before and after the cusp reveals the diagram's potential to generate new forms.

Section one in "Until the Quiet Comes" is about a tragedy, but because this violence is against a black body, the film seems to anticipate it. The film begins underwater where small bubbles and a tangle of red and white fabric float across the screen. Then the film cuts to a long shot of an empty pool. The camera tracks forward into the arid space and cuts to a close up of a boy standing alone in the pool. He stares off in the distance and the camera rises to prepare for his next move, slowly raising his hand in the shape of a gun and firing the imaginary weapon. The camera cuts to the reverse shot and, inexplicably, an imaginary bullet ricochets off of the curved sides of the pool, hitting four walls before hitting the child. He falls to the ground and the film briefly cuts to an entirely different setting, nighttime in an apartment courtyard, where another black man is lying on the ground. The first part of the film ends by returning to the pool scene where the child lies dying on the concrete and a massive amount of blood pours in a graphic curve out of his body and stains the ground.

The camera movements and editing logic in the first part of the trailer all seem ordered

[89] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 41.

around the inevitability of the child's death. The diagram is about emergent possibilities, but they remain bounded to the order of interiority. Thus, although there are cuts and movements in the frame, these moments constitute diagrammatic change because these reconfigurations are bounded by the interior logic of violence against the black body. Thus, the purpose of the reframing is not to defy that logic but rather to move in order to fully capture the violence on screen. In her description of the positioning of the black female body in the World, Spillers writes, "I describe the locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. *My country needs me, and if I were not there, I would have been invented*."[90] The first section of the trailer expresses these recursive loops where the film makes room for events to be 'invented' that give order to the formal techniques that occurred before. For example, the relevance of the floating red fabric is not apparent until the shot of the blood bubbling and flowing from the child's body. It is his death that justifies the film's prelude. Thus, the discontinuities in the trailer make sense, even retroactively, through the death of the child.

As Spillers argues in relation to the black woman, the black child is a tool for this (cinematic) world-building. Like the trailer, this first section of Joseph's film aligns form with function so it becomes a challenge to consider other possible outcomes for the child. For example, the pool scene deploys continuity editing, which is essential to orienting viewers in the space. The irony is that the child cannot participate entirely in this world—he does not even have a real gun. Yet, any violence visualized in the process of building this World always lands on the black body, so that he becomes a (literal) ground. In the *Thirty Eight* trailer black bodies are used to create feeble graphic matches, which strip each man from his individuality and vitality.

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[90] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 64. (My emphasis)

Joseph's film extends this concept to its dramatic and dangerous limit point.

The function of the diagram is simple, "the diagram diagrams," and the beginning of "Until the Quiet Comes" is distinctly "graphic;" seeing a child die alone on the hard and barren concrete of an empty man-made pool that is slowly being surrounded by wet red blood is boundary pushing even in hip-hop visual culture.[91] The saturated colors of the violence only make the events more explicit, especially because there is a stark distinction between the abandoned pool and the space just above it, where the edges of palm trees are visible and the sky is clear and blue. A diagram is a visual tool for making the invisible visible and in the opening section of the film, before the catastrophic cusp, the potential for violence against black body remains an absented presence. The one elided event in the opening is the actual violence towards the "flesh" that is the interiority of the architecture of the Human. Thus, the missing bullet is a visualization of Hartman and Wilderson's description of blackness as "the position of the unthought."[92] Overall, the first section of the film visualizes the (cinematic) World as being built *through* the damage of the invisible bullet.

Diagrams visualize the absented presences and articulate the spatial relations that have the potential to be radically changed by a catastrophic cusp. To be clear, catching the specific moment when harm is done to the black body on screen would not be enough to rectify the horror; it would not appropriately place blame or render justice because "blackness disarticulates the notion of consent."[93] A body that is defined as violable cannot be a victim and violence that is constitutive cannot be considered damage. Therefore the purpose of un-motivating the black body is removing it from the architectural function that requires its subjection. The violence

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[91] "Violence and the Diagram; Or, The Human Centipede," 87.
[92] Hartman and Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought."
[93] Ibid., 186.

against black flesh described by black studies scholars is not metaphorical or symbolic, but it also manifests itself in the visuality of racialized assemblages that "discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans."[94]

Figure 4.17 Medium Shot in "Until the Quiet Comes"

"Until the Quiet Comes" is narratively about this violence, while the *Thirty Eight* trailer features the violence of fungibility as an absented presence in its stylistic and nostalgic joints. The trailer visualizes the organization of the racialized assemblage and its movement to lightness. Similar joints can be identified in "Until the Quiet Comes," with the difference that Joseph's film includes a dramatic shift in equilibrium that is initiated by an aerial image of the dead child. As I have explained, this violent event is a requisite part of the film; however, the way the same violence looks in the aerial shot is distinct. Initially we see the boy in a medium shot as he lies on the ground in a pool of blood. Then, there is a cut to an aerial shot from which we can we see that an impossible amount of blood has flowed out of the child's body in one deep-red painterly curve.

[94] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 3.

Figure 4.18 Aerial Shot in "Until the Quiet Comes"

The single aerial shot is a pivotal point in the film because it is a pornotrope, the joint between horror and beauty that expresses the distinctly ocular violence against the black body.[95] This architectural moment occurs in the cut between the tragic and violent medium shot and the striking and stylized overhead image. While the image of the child certainly is not sexualized, it is aestheticized so that violence has been folded into the coherence of the image. Diagramming the *Thirty Eight* trailer parsed the meaning of the curve in the existing architectural grammar as a mechanism that creates continuity, obscures difference, and attracts surrounding bodies and objects into its arc. The curvilinearity in the *Thirty Eight* trailer, I have argued, accommodates the inconsistencies in the montage, so the bend is a product of the stretched logic of the racialized assemblage. The same is true in Joseph's film; however, the appearance of a curve painted in the blood of a black child visualizes the joint where the violent interiority of anti-black architecture pushed against the seamless surface of the racialized assemblage and the latter finally gave way. The result is an image of black pain that is inconceivable in the World that existed just before, i.e. the World featured in the medium shot.

[95] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Weheliye, "Pornotropes."

After the aerial shot of the dead child the film enters the second section of the diagram, i.e. the catastrophic cusp, but that does not mean the architecture falls apart. Un-motivated signs and un-built architecture exist nonetheless and in the shots that immediately follow, the cinematic space appears largely intact. As if to purposely emphasize the durability of black architecture, these shots include references to actual black spaces that ground the ambivalence of the pornotrope and the mysterious events that will occur after the catastrophic joint. After the aerial shot of the dying boy, the film cuts to the exterior of a housing project where a helicopter flies overhead. The hazy orange sky is the distinct color of Los Angeles light and text on the screen confirms that location by identifying the setting as the Nickerson Gardens in Los Angeles, specifically in the Watts section. In this moment "Until the Quiet Comes" references another diagram, the idealized architecture of the Panopticon. Surveillance and housing projects are both part of the "habitual formation of bodies" into racialized assemblages that are the support structures for state sanctioned violence.[96] Similarly, Los Angeles's complex racial history that would seem to weigh the film down and require extensive interpretation and contextualization instead appears light and not in need of questioning. The film's references to real life spaces, the history of racial policing, and other familiar imagery, all captured on 35mm film, grounds the fantastical fact of a child dying from firing an imaginary gun. Thus, the shots that follow the catastrophic joint all visualize the suspended aesthetics of the racialized assemblage that allows the forces of anti-blackness to easily flow through the structure and to make that violence appear light.

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[96] Keeling, "LOOKING FOR M— Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," 567.

Figure 4.19 Tools of Racialized Assemblages in "Until the Quiet Comes"

After the helicopter flies overhead there is a shift in the tone and imagery of the film that visualizes the fall-out after the catastrophic joint. Most notably, the boy who died in the opening of the film is alive. Thus, the first rearrangement that occurs in the cusp is positioning policing at the beginning of the violence, not as a response. Consequently, surveillance and housing projects are similarly un-motivated. In the next shot, two children, including the boy, are playing on a football field. Then the camera tracks past more lighthearted moments: a man cleaning a car; another young man offering the previously dead child a snack; and, poignantly, a group of boys with boards strapped to their backs pretending to fly. The seemingly uneventful moments in the middle of the film, from the exterior shots of the housing projects to the children playing outside, are clearly distinct from the deterministic violence that appears normal in the opening. Thus, the mundane events, when black bodies are safe, are actually extraordinary. Furthermore, repositioning the black boy and allowing him to shift from the position of inevitable victim to child at play un-motivates his image from its pornotroping function.

To briefly summarize: the act of removing the black body from the structure it supports is catastrophic because the oppositional ground of the black body stabilizes the philosophical

articulations of the Human and whiteness. The end of Joseph's film does not liberate the black body from the architecture of anti-blackness; all catastrophic diagrams return to equilibrium. The last shot of the quiet, cusp section is the young boy from the beginning proudly walking alone. Fortunately, the last time we see the boy he is alive, but after this point the film quickly accumulates more dead bodies. First, there is a man wearing a red jacket lying on the ground in the same courtyard we quickly glimpsed at the beginning of the film. Later, there is a shot of that same body submerged in the water that appeared at the beginning of the film, so that we can now identify the previously indistinguishable floating red and white fabric as his clothing. Then there is another body lying in the courtyard wearing a black shirt and, again, we have seen this man before. The man in the black shirt appeared in the cusp sequence giving the young boy a snack and mingling with neighbors. In fact, his prone body appeared even earlier in the film in a very quick graphic match after the boy was struck by the imaginary bullet. At this point the film has included three bodies and folded them into multiple temporal ripples. The fabric in the water and both men in the courtyard initially appeared entirely out of context, as if the film momentarily folded in on itself. As a result, the reoccurring images are like diagrammatic superimpositions that bring a form's past and future into close proximity.

Figure 4.20 Suspension in "Until the Quiet Comes"

The final section of the film visualizes the diagram's return to equilibrium and in that

process, the implications of the catastrophic change are revealed. Catastrophes occur across continuous surfaces and that plane is important because it is the matter that disruptive forces act on and the enduring quality of the structure from which new forms are made. Blackness's "metaphysics of presence" does not mean the black body is denied time; instead, the enduring connection of a motivated form limits its capacity for change. Thus, time becomes a material that is subject to change after the catastrophic joint. The *Thirty Eight* trailer visualizes the presupposed continuity of black architecture, so a diagram of this structure would aim to suspend black time, which means allowing multiple times to exist simultaneously to distribute black temporality. Comparing the sections before and after the catastrophic cusp in Joseph's film helps to clarify this point. The first section is locked in the rigid design of inevitability that denies the black body any suspension. The child dies in the bottom of an empty pool so that he cannot float away from the ground or the fact of his vulnerability. However, immediately after the catastrophic joint, the shocking and entirely unnatural amount of blood begins to literally fill the pool and signal a shift in the film's expression of violence against the black body. After the catastrophic joint the same illogical ordering of time that predestines a child's death can be reconfigured. "Until the Quiet Comes" is a diagram architecture, so although my reading imposes a chronological sequencing for clarity, there are moments of suspension, specifically where bodies are submerged in water, throughout the film so that bodies can exist differently (alive and dead) before and after the catastrophic joint.

The final section of the film generates an entirely different spatial-temporal configuration without adding time or creating a distinct fracture in the film. The sequence begins with the man in the black t-shirt lying on the ground. Then there is a cut to the underwater setting as a surge of bubbles float toward the surface of the water. When we return to the courtyard, a passenger in a

car looks out of the window to observe the corpse. Suddenly, the body slowly begins to move to the beat of the music. He rises from the ground and begins to dance through the courtyard. The hip-hop dancer known for his robotic "animating" dance style, Storyboard P, performs the character. Animation, just like cartoons, can be seen as types of diagrams.[97] Mark Rakatansky, for example, is particularly interested in the work of the famous animator Chuck Jones, who created some of the Looney Tunes characters. Jones's work is distinct and diagrammatic because the first step in his process is identifying the set of internal relations, or interiority, of his characters. Then when Bugs Bunny or Daffy Duck move or even impersonate other characters, they do so with their own distinct spatiality.[98] The same logic is central to Storyboard P's performance. Throughout the performance he keeps his eyes closed and leads with his chest so that his limbs follow but his body appears only loosely connected. Incredibly, he maintains the bodily posture he had as a corpse throughout the dance. The effect of Storyboard P's performance is actually of a dead man dancing, not a man coming back to life. Thus, this distinct moment of change in "Until the Quiet Comes" is generative, but not miraculous or immaterial. In fact, the dancer's uncanny and unnatural style makes the character's postmortem performance possible entirely without the help of any cinematographic tricks or digital tools. Thus, his dancing, in addition to revising the finality of death, produces a reorganization of the analog film's indexical claims of presence.

[97] "Motivations of Animation," ed. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, *ANY Magazine*, Diagram Work: Data Mechanics for a Topological Age, 23 (June 1998): 50–56.
[98] Ibid., 53.

Figure 4.21 Postmortem Performance in "Until the Quiet Comes"

Even with skillful animation, Rakatansky argues architectural forms are distinct from actual bodies because they cannot be brought back to life; perhaps unexpectedly that distinction holds true in "Until the Quiet Comes" and it reveals the racial significance of Storyboard P's animation.[99] The racialized assemblage establishes the boundaries between Humans and nonhumans so that blackness is denied access to the living at the same time it establishes the vitality of other bodies. Storyboard P's performance is a visualization of the liminal space of black ontology. Delighting in Storyboard P's beautiful, fluid, and un-dead performance is another instance of pornotroping in the film. Previously in the film, the ability for the black body to move in unnatural ways, to be killed by an imaginary bullet, seemed to prove the violability of the black body. Again, the figurative capacities of the black body can justify its replaceability and insignificance. After the catastrophic joint and cusp, Storyboard P's improbable movement is imaginative and productive. In other words, the dancer's un-motivated and un-dead movement is superhuman instead of subhuman because it inverts his "impotentiality." Weheleye explains, "impotentiality, once actualized, kindles the originary potentiality that rests in the slave thing,

[99] Ibid., 52.

which is nothing other than 'a potential for pornotroping.'"[100] The dancer's body is incapable of escaping from its oppositional relationship to the Human, but generating this illegible movement becomes an "insurgent ground" in the anti-black architecture the first half of the film diagrams.[101]

In the final moments of Joseph's film, the dead man dances away from the courtyard, where he laid dying, to the parking lot, and finally contorts his body to fit through the window of a waiting car that rides off into the night. Viewers should be reluctant to read the end of the film as an escape. Instead, segmenting the film as this close reading has done shows that even with a catastrophe in the middle, the death of the child and the death of the dancer are mirror images.[102] Thus, the men in the car waiting to give their un-dead friend a ride are expressions of the film's circularity. At stake in this pessimistic reading is ensuring that the unrepresentable violence that is the structure's architectural interiority is not recouped for the function of buttressing "white flights of fantasy," that would use the dancer's capacity for change to prove full-Humans can escape death or any other obstacle.[103] The dancer moves expertly; yet, like the other performances discussed in this chapter, his movement is labored. While the *Thirty Eight* trailer maps that labor, "Until the Quiet Comes" uses the diagram to suspend it, so that it is productive. This chapter builds to this point where the dancer's movement through death is not misinterpreted as transcendence, deliverance, or any other form of lightness.

4.4 Conclusion

The catastrophe in "Until the Quiet Comes" does not eliminate the horror repeated in the

[100] Weheliye, "Pornotropes," 77.
[101] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.
[102] Although I have described the reasons this chapter does not rely on Deleuze's diagram theory. It should be noted that the philosopher used the diagram to address Francis Bacon's triptych. Thus, his approach to the diagram uses the same three-part framing.
[103] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 22.

film; it actually pulls a much longer history of racial violence into itself in order to rearrange it. Most notably, the locations of Joseph's film are haunted by the history of the Watts Riots that occurred almost half a century earlier. Catastrophe theory has been used to describe the social tensions that lead to upheavals like the events in Southern California. A catastrophic diagram could not anticipate when the force of violent encounters between the black community and police would create a catastrophic joint, which we now know was a mundane traffic stop, but these diagrams visualize the mounting pressure that began as early as the migration of black Americans to the West Coast decades before. Like the other diagrams and diagram architectures discussed in this chapter, Watts's interior tension is the product of forces that exist outside of the localized events of 1965. For example, the Glass Pavilion and The City of Culture both blur the boundaries of architecture and nature so that any architectural events that occur will necessarily land on the surrounding area as well. Thus, when the events of that summer are described as catastrophic, it makes sense to ask what that insurgent action was catastrophic to.

Daniel Widener argues that even before the riots, black Los Angeles had a vibrant arts community; however, in the following decades a growing number of arts organizations hoped to create expressive cultural outlets that supported the community. The focus on community action manifested itself in aesthetic practice and forms that emphasized the ensemble, like the Watts Writers Workshop and the Pan-Afrikan Peoples' Arkestra.[104] Through art practice, the joints that previously connected the black community through violence and systematic discrimination became expressions of the creativity of black power. Perhaps the most famous examples of re-

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[104] Daniel Widener, "Writing Watts Budd Schulberg, Black Poetry, and the Cultural War on Poverty," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 4 (May 1, 2008): 665–87, doi:10.1177/0096144207313677. Also see Kellie Jones and Hazel V. Carby, *Now Dig This!: Art & Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*, 1st ed (Los Angeles : Munich ; New York: Hammer Museum : University of California ; DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2011).

assembled architectures are the Watts Towers. The construction of the Watts Towers preceded the riots, they were built between 1921 and 1955 by Simon Rodia, an immigrant from Italy. However, the three towers covered in tiles, glass, and other debris have become an important expression of black Los Angeles and the arts movement Widener describes.[105] Chronologically, the towers cannot be a response to the riots, but they do effectively map the internal spatial relations that shaped the catastrophic event and its particular racial resonance. The reorientation of junk in Rodia's three towers and their retroactive incorporation into black expressive culture make the Towers another example of diagram architecture. Piled high, the towers superimpose the items' past and future and, through Rodia's improvisational style, the structures are non-deterministic and non-narrative.[106] The result is a generative diagram that transforms the insignificance of these objects into the possibility of an imaginative architecture.

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[105] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
[106] Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert, eds., "To See with the Mind and Think through the Eye: Deleuze, Folding Architecture, and Simon Rodia's Watts Towers," in *Deleuze and Space*, transf. to digit. pr, Deleuze Connections (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2008), 53.

Figure 4.22 Simon Rodia's Watts Towers

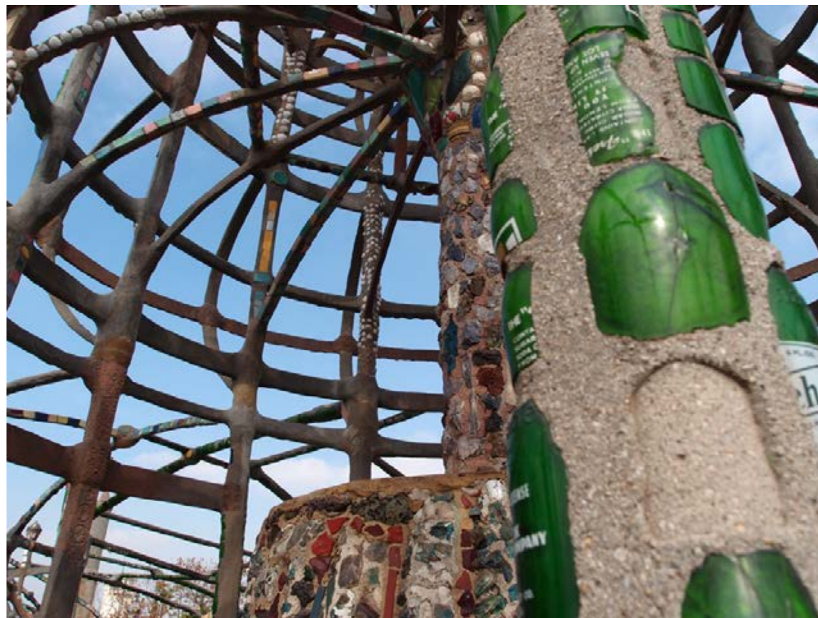

Figure 4.23 Reconfigured "Junk" in Watts Towers

Guy Debord's response to the Watts riots explains the parallel between the Towers and the week of unrest. Debord argued riots occur when people need to distance themselves from their status as commodities. Specifically, "people who destroy commodities show their human superiority over commodities."[107] In other words, anti-black architecture pulls black bodies and commodities into the same commensurable plane so that it would be naive to claim the Watt riots were catastrophic because of the destruction of property. Instead, as Debord suggests, they were catastrophic to the racist logic that aligns black bodies and things. It is therefore not surprising that the Watts Towers can then, retroactively, become a symbol of the productivity that occurs from discarded remnants that always, already had the potential to be reconfigured. Thus, the looting of electronics by people who did not have working electricity; the junk art practice emerging in Los Angeles in the years surrounding the riots; and more recently, hip-hop sampling are all examples of the same diagrammatic impulses that reject the inevitability of black subjection through the rearticulation of black (architectural) grammar.

[107] Guy Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 10 (March 1966), http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/decline.html.

5 CONCLUSION

"A Hip-Hop Joint: Thinking Architecturally About Blackness" begins with two assumptions: hip-hop's visual culture is vast and blackness is not an immanent bodily quality. The project puts these two assumptions into dialogue to make the claim that in its capacity to cohere hip-hop's visual culture, blackness performs an architectural function. In order to make that argument each chapter identifies a different set of hip-hop images that express particular architectural functions. Then, it considers how the organization of these images expresses the spatiality of disembodied blackness. Once hip-hop architecture has been built, so that the *joint* between hip-hop and blackness is clear, other architectural events can be explored. To conclude, I would like to focus primarily on the structures and events that emerge after erecting hip-hop architecture.

Each design movement discussed in this dissertation exists in relationship to the ascendency of modern architecture in the twentieth century. Hypersurface architecture and the contemporary theory of the diagram both emerge after modern architecture's decline. These theories are critiques of modern architecture's objectivity, which rigidly delineates the function of architectural forms. Perhaps more boldly, residual space and phenomenal transparency claim to exist within the modern structure, introducing complexity and contradiction to it from the inside. Architects, perhaps more than other artists or theorists, understand the implications of deploying modernism's values in space: how modern architectural values create hierarchies, disregard the lived experience, and disavow these actions under the guise of transparency. This project follows the generation of architects and theorists who took the threat of the white wall seriously. In the case of hip-hop architecture, the rejection of modern architectural values is a way to argue that blackness cannot be contained in space, like the true archive that Akira Lippit

describes, blackness "fills space, all of space, and still needs more space; it becomes indistinguishable from space as such."[1]

Hip-hop architecture makes no claims to contributing to the field of architecture; however, it does attempt to faithfully present architectural ideas to prove their value for the humanities. Instead of using architecture as a metaphor for the 'scaffolding' of a concept, this dissertation argues blackness is an architectural condition—to be radically outside, yet structurally indispensable. Similarly, the conditions for racial catastrophe that depend on conflicting pressures along the same plane are best explained using physics. Indeed, architecture does not simply make room for the events this project identifies as racially significant; instead, the events are themselves architectural and only the product of particular articulations of space.

To disarticulate blackness from its inevitable place in the architecture of whiteness, each chapter in this dissertation presents a moment or possibility of resistance. In chapter one I argue the reversible movement in the hypersurface creates a surface to stage redress, particularly by rejoining the false cultural binaries upon which immanent racial distinction are made. Eliminating these boundaries occurs through the self-reflexive performance strategy where black images simultaneously 'look' and are 'looked at' in order to force the temporary rearrangement of anti-blackness. In chapter two I use the presence of residual space in hip-hop formations to propose "revision" as a counter-reading strategy for modern hip-hop architectures. Revision reinterprets modern architecture's order as the ideal conditions for creating ungovernable spaces and housing illicit activities. Finally, chapter three argues blackness is the unrepresentable interiority of the architecture of whiteness and the diagram is a tool for imagining the capacity of

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[1] Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 7.

architectural forms outside of their prescribed functions. Thus, the diagram is the stage for the reveal of blackness's structural relationship to "the World."

At this point the preponderance of the prefix "re-" has likely become obvious, but I would like to insist that this is not from a lack of creativity. This dissertation's methodology is in fact constructed around "re-." The prefix "re-" is relatively simple; it has one definition that has been used in three senses. The prefix describes the "general sense of 'back' or 'again,'" which can be applied to verbs to describe actions that have occurred before or actions that will restore a previous state; it can be applied to nouns to denote the process of making or transforming one thing into another; finally, its last sense particularly resonates with architecture because when applied to verbs or nouns it can describe the process of treating or equipping something.[2] These definitions help explain the function of hip-hop architecture as a set of images capable of returning to the visual construction of the social—the way we know blackness because we see—to insert space into that encounter.[3] In each example in this dissertation, in fact, hip-hop images assert their blackness in simple visual terms: there are black bodies in this image, thus it is black. This project does not deny the blackness of these images; rather, it maps blackness and the process of racialization through the alternate route of space. As a result, hip-hop architecture can accommodate changes that vision and the visible cannot.

The value of repetition in this methodology is also an ideal match for popular art forms like hip-hop that exist in a constant cycle of repetition and change in order to suit the needs of the market. Thomas F. DeFrantz, adapting Pierre Bourdieu's writing, argues repetition is

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[2] "Re-, Prefix," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 13, 2016, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/view/Entry/158795.

[3] William JT Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 170, http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/1/2/165.short.

essential to constructing the genre's continued embodied history or the "hip-hop habitus."[4] Hip-hop is constantly shifting its style, politics, and modes of distribution, often to mirror the demographics of its fan base. Thus, the "re-" work described in this dissertation that relocates blackness is not a futile duplication of efforts. Instead, this project offers a methodology to fill-out the ways we know blackness, so we are prepared when we see it, hear it, feel it, or stand in it.

The hip-hop objects addressed in this project purposely engage with many different kinds of spaces that blackness fills—academic canons, popular culture, digital culture, and fine art. Hip-hop's boundless creativity and ability to move in these various realms makes it an ideal object of study for a project on the mobility of blackness. In fact, much of the pleasure of consuming hip-hop images is exhibiting the cultural literacy required to follow hip-hop's pace that seems to discard images and styles as soon as they become widely recognizable. Thus, to engage hip-hop is to follow it. Hip-hop is most valuable as a theory because, as chapter one argues, fixating on any moment in hip-hop history requires the artificial act of removing images from the cycles of change that are an essential part of the image.[5] Hip-hop visualizes "what it means to be black and 'modern' within a global context and particularly in youth cultures."[6] Yet, this claim notably does not indicate a specific hip-hop visual style, it is about the genre's ability to maintain a central position regardless of space and time. As a result, this dissertation only focuses on the content of specific hip-hop images in order to address their movement. Hip-hop is more productive as a system for understanding transformation than a group of styles, so hip-hop

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[4] Thomas DeFrantz, "Hip-Hop Habitus v.2.0," in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Anita Gonzalez and Thomas DeFrantz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 223–42, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1666607.

[5] R. Scott Heath, "Hip_Hop Redux: A Plugin with Extensions," *African American Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 133–44, http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.gsu.edu/journals/african_american_review/v046/46.1.heath.html.

[6] Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 146.

is perhaps the tool, not the object, for addressing other forms of cultural movements. Simply, hip-hop is a theory of change.

The literature used to build hip-hop architecture is expansive and diverse and profoundly influenced by the theorization of black studies scholars including Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Frank B. Wilderson III, and Alexander G. Weheliye. Each writer emphasizes a different set of cultural objects or concerns like artistic practice, gender, and intellectual history, but they all foreground the centrality of slavery, and its afterlife, for postbellum blackness and the timeless architecture of whiteness. My work more closely aligns with the term "Black Optimism," which remains surprisingly pessimistic even when it is used to distinguish between these writers and to describe the possibility of formal "breaks" in anti-blackness.[7] Whether this writing maintains a hopeful outlook throughout or positions it as a fleeting possibility, the rare moments of black resistance have to acknowledge that the "American Grammar Book" has already been written.[8] Consequently, these breaks offer occasions for treating or equipping blackness with the memory of dismemberment before everything returns to equilibrium.[9] As Hartman explains, these processes always include, and are catalyzed by, their inevitable failure.[10] Thus, the redresses, revisions, and reveals in hip-hop architecture are also designed to repeat.

This project treats black studies as a theoretical framework and an object of analysis because it is still fundamentally a visual culture study, so it considers the images and structures of visuality that exist throughout this literature in order to build the speculative events described in the prose. The purpose of Afropessimism and even Black Optimism is to explain the magnitude of black alienation so neither body of literature can easily provide paths towards the

[7] Moten, *In The Break*.
[8] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
[9] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.
[10] Ibid., 75.

liberation of blackness; however, when these scholars define "the World" as the architecture of whiteness, a visual culture approach presents ways to frame disturbances in that World through the image. Anti-blackness is observable at any scale, so albeit small, the mere coherence of the image is a part of the logic of whiteness and any confusion would constitute a shift in that ground. It is certainly confusing to watch Storyboard P, without the aid of any special effects, dance his way not back to life, but to an entirely different liminal state or to watch white men earnestly adopt black female performance, not to assert their difference, superiority, or to have "a bit of the other," but to enjoy being consumed by blackness.[11]

The close readings in this project prove changes in blackness are a vital first step in understanding the possibility of de-essentializing blackness and creating the opportunities for resistant action. However, the architectures of blackness and whiteness, which are two sides of the same wall, are what Greg Lynn calls "cunning" because they are adaptive to their surroundings.[12] Thus, each of these close readings attempts to find glitches, unaccounted for space, and discontinuity in the epistemologies of whiteness, specifically as they relate to the sensibility and legibility of the image. This project's visual analysis makes a slight shift in emphasis from blackness in free-flowing transformation to blackness creating insensible or catastrophic conditions; "the difference is between the pathogenic and the pathological."[13] Indeed, re-using the image, which has been a tool for expressing the pathology of blackness, to visualize what only an image can, i.e. the end of "the World," is an intentional methodological choice.

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[11] bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1999), 22.
[12] Lynn, *Folds, Bodies & Blobs*, 113.
[13] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," 73.

I have already made it clear how important it is to theorize about blackness existing at a remove from the body, so another function of the "re-" prefix is returning to make sense of what has been left behind. The existence of disembodied blackness is an assumption this project makes but the process in which this happens and the kinds of material generated through that process is important and worth description. As the Brian Massumi quotation that serves as this dissertation's opening epigraph says, "look only at the movements—and they will bring you to matter."[14] Thus, a significant part of the analytic value of hip-hop architecture and the movement it maps is providing the descriptive language to describe black matter—its viscosity, flexibility, plasticity, liquidity, and curvilinearlity. With this language it is possible to understand (specifically) how blackness can be held in suspension for critical interpretation, the way it flows into and animates inert material surrounding it, and the way it affectively fills the space of racial encounters.

The vibrancy of hip-hop makes it easy to argue the genre is defiant and reforming and therefore a route to racial parity; however, the analysis in this project illustrates the flaw in this argument is its reliance on progressive logics that do not include blackness. Thus, when this dissertation makes claims about the movement of blackness in order to address its materiality, that work is intended to prepare readers for other claims about black matter that appear in and outside of popular culture. For example, the recent spate of images of police brutality have failed to initiate significant policing reform and, as a result, these images are cited as failing to serve their civic function of protecting the public. However, this is a misreading that does not realize what blackness is or the function it serves in relation to that public. As Wilderson explains, blackness is "the violence that underwrites the modern world's capacity to think, act and exist

[14] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 206.

spatially and temporally" so that these images do already serve their civic function.[15]

#BlackLivesMatter is the political movement that responds to these images and straddles the line of policy argument and media object. The movement's thesis is about the peculiar materiality of blackness, the way it appears stuck in the space of surveillance and disenfranchisement at the same time it is deemed resilient enough to endure boundless abuse. Despite the popularity of the hashtag, for many it remains an oxymoron. Thus, perhaps the more effective rallying call would remove the word "lives" in order to avoid the profound discomfort in aligning blackness and life and deal directly with the production of black matter. The best example of the illegibility of black matter is the redundant response #AllLivesMatter that uses the same pithy phrasing to apparently spread social reform beyond the particular lived experience of blackness. The only way the latter slogan can suffice as an appropriate response to #BlackLivesMatter is if the distinct qualities of black matter, formed through the movement between object and subject, are ignored. Without this distinction it is impossible or even unnecessary to expose the insignificance of the phrase "all lives," which already excludes blackness. The internal tension hidden in the amalgam #AllLivesMatter, visible in Twitter's disregard for spacing, is the epitome of a deceptively *light* architecture.

Hip-hop architecture attempts to build an apparatus for blackness and black expressive culture that explains previous moments in the history of black visual culture but, more importantly, is a tool for looking forward. It is a model for every *post* moment in racial history—post-Obama or post-Trayvon Martin—that appears to be a racial catastrophe so disruptive that equilibrium will never be reestablished. On these occasions the space around blackness appeared so open that theorization about the particularities of blackness would become unnecessary or so

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[15] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 2.

obviously constrained that racial discourse would become unavoidable. Yet, hip-hop has chronicled all of these contemporary events and proven the stability of its architecture as a visualization of the resiliency of race. Hip-hop architecture is a methodology that uses the organization of space and time to understand blackness's expression across these parameters.

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