HAPTIC HAPPENINGS: AN EXPLORATION OF SOUND, QUIET AND BLACKNESS

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTERS OF ARTS

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by
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December 2018

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the lives and works of Black visual artists and filmmakers as visual representations of haptic events. This thesis examines how the lives of the artists and specific works of art are entangled with sound and quiet and directly reflect and shape the complexities black interiority. The possibilities of the black interior expand when the senses are combined and how the utilization of that synthesis centers the interior lives, ideas and art of black people. Centering the interior life creates space for the humanity of black people to be fully realized and explored without disruption both individually and collectively. Artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Hammons, Nick Cave and filmmakers Arthur Jafa and Kahlil Joseph's work is used to illustrate how a haptic event is formed, how the haptic event effects both the artist and the audience and how the outcome of the haptic informs the present moment and often surpass the confines of language. This project extends the concept of *Hapticality* and the futurity of black interior life as a site of reflection, expression and resistance.

DEDICATIONS

This project is dedicated to my mother Laurann, my father Anthony, my aunt Gladys who support me unconditionally daily and continue to be an unwavering source of encouragement and love. If it weren't for you I would have not had the strength to believe in and pursue my passions. I am eternally grateful and I hope I make you proud.

To the Department of Africology and African American Studies, thank you. I can't say enough about what an experience it has been to learn and grow in this intellectual space. I would to thank my advisor, Dr. Amari Johnson for believing in me and this project, your encouragement, and allowing the space for creativity. A special thank you to Ms. Tammey Abner for always having my back and keeping me in the know from start to finish. I would also like to thank Mikana Scott and Dr. Christopher Roberts for their unwavering guidance, support and friendship.

I would also like to dedicated this project to my students who always push me to observe, be open to all the possibilities, and when all else fails lead with love. All of you make me a better person and I can't thank you enough.

Lastly, this project is dedicated to my Aunt Joann, Grandpa Walter, my Uncle Glen, my cousin John-John and my friend Michael Wickliffe. Your lives and spirits run through me and will never be forgotten. I wish I could hug you all just more time and thank you for your light.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
GETTING TO THE HAPTIC THROUGH SOUND, QUIET, AND BLACK INTERIORITY

My aunt Joann used to say that she enjoyed watching television with the sound off sometimes. Without the sound, she was able to make her own dialogue for the characters, create other worlds that only she knew how they would begin and end. She never told anyone exactly what or where those worlds were but everyone could see the power radiating from her eyelids. Her imagination, although never socially expressed, was a sacred space that she carved out inside of herself, solely for herself. During her final year, that interior space that she manifested and her awareness of sight and sound became painstakingly essential to her survival and ours. Being medically declared a vegetable may have hindered her from outward expression but that radiant power was still present in her eyes, the slightest motions of her fingers and the few sounds that managed to escape her mouth. Her minuscule glimpses of expression and her silence impelled us to follow our own feelings down pathways that we were often able to successfully avoid because of the veil of societal clatter. That clatter came to a complete halt every time we entered that hospital room.

For the first few months while visiting, I would sit, motionless, almost afraid to breathe, just watching her. Every time she blinked, moved her fingers, opened her mouth wide like she was preparing to belt out an opera, my heart would flutter with joy and optimism in her prospects. To the 13- year old me, that meant she was present. Her ability to see, hear, touch, feel, were suddenly more important than anything in my entire life. Every day she would lay staring at the television, I would always wonder, was she really watching, could she hear it, did she understand what was going on? Recurrently, she would let out these low-pitched screeches

when something obviously funny was occurring on the latest primetime sitcom or when I would trip on an overbed table. Her eyes maintained that same radiance when she watched television as they did at home. I knew she was still creating her own worlds.

Hospital personnel would swiftly shoot down any hope we had in her recovery. Imagine, strangers who knew nothing about her outside of what a manila file could contain, turn and inform us that her body, her senses, her feelings were merely figments of her past and our present imagination. Those fragments were all we had and we were clinging to them for as long as she would allow us to. Aunt Joann may have not have been well but she was certainly alive. Her senses continued to thrive while her body succumbed to disease.

Fast forward three years, medical crisis had returned but this time I'm in the driver seat. I am stumbling down a hospital corridor, grasping at the walls unable to scream for help because my throat closed. I had completely lost the sight in my right eye and my left eye was quickly following suit. Despite, the rapid loss of my eyesight, my hearing was comparative to that of a bat or moth. Every footstep I heard was so loud that it sounded as if the footsteps were taking place on my skull. The ding of the elevators vibrated in my ears even though they were on the opposite side of the unit. I could hear conversations clearly despite that all the MRI rooms were sealed shut and there were no other rooms along that corridor. It suddenly felt as if I had achieved superhuman abilities all while dying.

I collapsed once I reached the nurses station. Unconscious, I had completely lost my sight and my hearing but not my capacity to feel. I could feel the blood rush through my body. Then nothing. Complete darkness. When I had regained consciousness, I witnessed the fear and disbelief that blanketed my parent's faces summing up the experience from the outside. In those

first few moments after awakening, I attempted to explain how it felt for all my sensory faculties to be attacked and heightened. But I could not. My throat remained too tight for words or sounds to seep out. So, there we sat surrounded by our silence and the unrelenting sounds of medical devices. Again, I was confronted by the uncharted power and fragility of the senses and the sounds and quiet they produce.

Methodology

Haptic Happenings: An Exploration of Quiet, Sound and Blackness utilizes the work and interior lives of visual artists and filmmakers to conduct an analysis on the role that sound and quiet have in shaping black interior life, the future of possibilities for everything that is seen, touched, heard, and felt and the haptic acts those possibilities create. In this thesis, I intend to analyze, probe and extend the concept of hapticality as defined by Fred Moten. "Hapticality, (is) the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you" (Harney, Moten. 2013). In order to uncover the construction of haptic experiences both voluntarily and involuntarily, I will be using the following visual artists and filmmakers, Jean Michel Basquiat, Kahlil Joseph, Arthur Jafa, David Hammons and Nick Cave, who exhibit the various processes of employing the black interior. The selection of these artists aligned the three categories: location, medium, and time period. Each artists, with the exception of David Hammons and Nick Cave who are both from the Midwest, was born and raised in different regions of the US. Region selection was essential because each of these artists combatted different issues during their youths because of where they were from, which in turn informed much of their artwork. I wanted to include four different mediums, painting, film, sculpture and, performance in order to demonstrate that the haptic runs seamlessly throughout the lives and

works of these artists regardless of what medium they practice in. In order to analyze the lives and works of these artists, I primarily use Moten's definition of hapticality in order to locate whether the haptic act is present both in the life and work of each artist, critical responses to the work and how each artist responded to the critic, and lastly allowing the works of art to speak and demonstrate their meaning. These artists align together because they are all black men practicing and displaying art in mainstream institutions globally throughout the latter end of the 20th century and 21st century.

As a scholar who is concerned with black interior life and the capabilities of the senses when combined, the sounds that are assembled through that combination, and how the utilization of that synthesis centers the interior lives, ideas, and art of black people. The necessity for the haptic for me came out of the need for a higher connection to my community and spiritual grounding. As a black person who is not a participant in an organized religion or spirituality but has attempted on numerous occasions to participate in all those sectors seeking guidance, solace and community. I hadn't felt a connection to either yet I still believe that there is a higher power that governs all existence. And for years I saw my inability to connect as a shortcoming of my own making and felt ashamed for not being able to find placement in all the places that I should have spiritually. The past year has revealed the haptic to me. I didn't know that I was experiencing in the hospital with my Aunt Joann was a haptic act all those years ago. I didn't know that what I experienced with my parents during anaphylaxis shock was a haptic act. But when I saw Moten's definition of hapticality, I understood that those feelings were not only valid but one of the highest points of being I had ever experienced. Aside from the parental love from my parents, music, and literature, the only time I feel connected to something larger than myself,

is when I can feel something, express that feeling to someone else, and have them give me that same exact energy back but with their own tensions and emotionality attached to it. It shows me that there is definitely something higher that connects all black people together and that I am not solitary in my experiences. Every moment of joy, pain, or disarray is not only my experience but a communal one. One of the greatest strengths of blackness is that you can't be black alone because none of us have been alone in this project that is America and the haptic provides felt proof of that. The haptic is tangibly intangible.

The haptic allows the body to approach quiet with intention, submerge in feeling, pass that feeling along, receive the feeling back and start the process all over again. This is a continuous life practice that is neither static or anticipated. The senses completely inform the synesthesia that blackness produces. This synesthesia is essential for survival in the present as well as the future. Synesthesia works in unison with the body, the senses, and interior life. "Synesthesia may give us valuable clues to understanding some of the most mysterious aspects of the human mind—abilities such as language, creativity and abstract thought" (Ramchandran, 2001). Our interior lives require exiting the exterior world and looking to the nervous system for signals of what is beyond—such as light and sound.

But what many of us have yet to realize is that quiet is as much of a given in our lives as breathing. It is forever present even in our loudest moments of protest, laughter and everyday conversation. What dimensions of our lives could be unlocked or tapped into if we began to not only examine but utilize the full agency of our interior lives? This power of quiet appears to be, at first glance, extremely individualistic and excluding to the social life and body but with deep examination of the practice of quiet, it is the sounds of the interior that is assembled within the

everyday lives of all black people. In the quiet, the individual not only exists but assents to the collective resonance of black life. Quiet enables the potential communitive connection through the usage sonic frequencies and the interior life. Through exploring the prospects of quiet we can begin to ask ourselves, what possibilities do sound and quiet produce when they are merged? One of those possibilities is experiencing hapticality which can function as a site of internal production which could be used to fuel social rupture and refusal. And that is the refusal of the objectification that has surrounded our humanism since we arrived in America. Objects don't feel. Feeling is our refusal to viewed as inhuman.

This engagement with haptic is essential to black existence because the haptic is a moment where blackness can be fully realized. It has the potential to be the culmination of everything that blackness consists of, the history, the pain, the joy, the confusion, the energy, the love, everything. When we were in the hold of the ships, we couldn't carry the architecture of our homes or the physical things but what we could carry was our languages, our spirituality, our lived experiences and our feelings. And I think that through our feelings, we were able to not only survive but create lives in the depths of wretchedness. I imagine that through those shared experiences in the hold, we had no choice but to figure out how to communicate and share those feelings with one another. That sharing was one of the ways that bonded us in immeasurable ways. We were able to create a life out of those feelings we had, translate them to someone else and having them be able to give those feelings back, letting us know that we are alive and we are going live to the best of our abilities. This ability to not only adapt but to constantly reinvent ourselves after we've been torn apart from everything we know and love, dismantled, disembodied, murdered has been a saving grace of blackness. One of the few things that survived

those experiences was feeling and that ability to continuously translate and express those feelings to someone else and have those feelings given back to you is essential to how we have survived here.

Our survival is dependent on feeling and the crowning point of feeling is the haptic. We have survived through feeling. This is not to say we survived through feelings alone, but feeling was a significant part of that survival. Our feelings are essential because it was the one area that was underestimated for because they weren't viewed as points of commerce. Feelings and our interiors had no dollar or labor value because white people weren't able to profit from them so they remained unaccounted to the exterior world yet they were one of the select things keeping us alive. They weren't taken into consideration because they weren't up for sale. A body can be sold. Labor can be sold. But a dollar amount can't be placed on a feeling. I think the reason we have excelled in music and sports is because we have been able to construct ways to sell feeling in those sectors. Some of feeling in those sectors has been mystified and commodified but the core sincerity of it persists thus making it continuously powerful.

Sound fosters a deeper engagement with the interior when combined with sight and feeling. It creates Haptic Synesthesia. "Sound can be listened to, and, in equally powerful, sound can be felt, it both touches and moves people" (Campt, 2017). We have to make the conscious decision to challenge vision in order to make sensory contact with the haptic. What we have to seek out is "felt sound." All sound consists of more than we can hear. It is an inherently embodied modality constituted by vibration and contact" (Campt, 2017). The pathway to arriving at "felt sound" is looking beyond what we can see and here and adjusting the senses to other frequencies. "Felt sound" constructs the synesthesia that leads to haptic happenings. The haptic

produces “expressiveness, mobility and resistance.” Haptic happenings instruct us surrender to quiet and its possibilities, move beyond language, reach the objective of sound, and assemble feelings that can be felt through others and be transported back to us. “You can tell em’ what ah say if wants to. Dat’s just de same as me ‘cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (Hurston, 1937).

Review of Literature

The research for this thesis utilizes primary sources to engage the following topics: sound, quiet, and the black interior. Kevin Quashie’s conceptualization of quiet is illustrated in *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. Quashie’s work investigates the function of quiet within black existence. The interior quality of our full humanity on display is quiet. The exterior and social life of the black body has continuously been the major signifier of what Blackness is while the interior and all its qualities have been underestimated and overlooked at times. “As an identity, blackness is always supposed to tell us about race or racism, or about America, or violence and struggle and triumph or poverty and hopefulness. The determination to see blackness only through a social public lens, as if there were no inner life, is racist—it comes from the language of racial superiority and is a practice intended to dehumanize black people” (Quashie, 4). This manner of thinking and action has narrowed the framework of blackness and the possibilities for expansion of that framework.

Blackness, in the public sphere, both as a reality and a concept, operates within a system of restraints and boundaries. The exploration of blackness as a concept could be amplified by the usage of something that is unique to the individual body and the social body as well—quiet and our senses. The idea of quiet is compelling because the term is not fancy—it is an everyday

word—it is also conceptual. Quiet is often used interchangeably with silence or stillness, but the notion of quiet is neither motionless nor without sound" (Quashie, 2012). Quiet doesn't equal silence, boring, or absolute stillness; there is an unexplored wilderness within quiet that has yet to be discovered. We have to rid ourselves of this notion that the quiet of our interior lives does not produce sound or color. The quiet is spirited and vibrant. It encapsulates the potentiality of our inner lives when meticulously considered and engaged.

> Quiet is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty. In humanity, quiet is inevitable, essential. It is a simple, beautiful part of what it means to be alive. (Quashie, 2012).

A full, meaningful existence cannot occur from the outside, in. Black humanity has too long been defined by exterior pleasure, strife and terror. If we began to disengage with the notion of the public as the definer of blackness and foster deeper connections with the interior as a pathway to establish our consciousness, how could existence change for black culture and furthermore the black body?

One has to view quiet as a point of surrender. The term surrender in this case symbolizes abandoning oneself entirely to a powerful emotion or influence. The influence and emotional impulse derive from the interior. "Quiet as surrender—the idea that human subjectivity is not tethered to fighting the social world but instead could be imagined as the agency to be had in surrendering to the wildness of one's inner life" (Quashie, 2012). This surrender has to take place in our everyday lives. Quiet doesn't have one singular shape, sound or color. It is the non-uniformity that constructs the impressiveness of quiet within every individual. Surrender is often

depicted as a point of defeat but what if it was viewed as a point of arrival, realization, discovery and unwavering consciousness. Quashie identifies the connection between quiet subject and surrender.

> Hence this argument for quiet: The quiet subject experiences identity as oneness. He or she is not resistant but is simply one. For the quiet subject, identity is humanity and vice versa: being human is one's first identity, the default for understanding what joy and humility and vulnerability mean. The quiet subject finds agency in the capacity to surrender to his or her inner life. If there is a fearlessness in this surrender it is because of the freedom of falling into what cannot be known entirely, as well as falling into all that one is. This is the idea of oneness as everything and nothing, an excellence that cannot be known completely. Quiet, then, is a call to give up the need to be sure, to give up the willfulness of being s resistant public subject, and to embrace surrender. Such surrender is both consciousness and it must be chosen—it is an active state. (Quashie, 2012)

The tradition of resistance and public expressiveness that often consumes the concept of blackness is the vantage point that limits our ability to experience our full humanity. "More specifically, in most regards, black culture is over identified with an idea of expressiveness that is geared toward a social audience and that has political aim; such expressiveness and resistance are definitive of black culture is an effect of the role the public sphere has played in making, marking, and policing racial difference. (Quashie, 2012). Publicness is embedded in the DNA of the black culture and deeply impacts both our public and private lives. My intention is not to discount or undermined spirituality, mediation or tradition because these are in fact real actions that have continuously cultivated black interiority. The goal here is to present hapticality as another available action to explore and as an addition to the canon of engagement with the interior. We need multiple methods of engagement to delve the totality of our interiors.

In *the black interior,* Elizabeth Alexander uncovers exactly where black people have the space to reveal their true selves outside of public scrutiny. She recalls the words of Ntozake

Shange: “As black people we exist metaphorically and literally as the underside, the underclass. We are the unconscious of the entire Western world. If this is in fact true, then where do we go? Where are our dreams? Where is our pain? Where do we heal” (Alexander, 2004)? I believe the answer is within our interiors. We have to be able to enjoy, confront, and refuse within our interior before we can even begin to engage the exterior. First, we must define what the interior is for us and how interior can be used as a vehicle to center black being, ideas and art. Alexander defines the black interior as “black life and creativity behind the public face of stereotype and limited imagination. The black interior is a metaphysical space beyond the black public everyday toward a power and wild imagination that black people ourselves know we possess but need to be reminded of.” That reminder reinforces our commitment to survival and the capacity to move beyond the expectations of what blackness is or isn’t or what it should or shouldn’t be? The black interior provides space to relinquish traditional narrative for possibility and imagination. “Tapping into this black imaginary helps us envision what we are not meant to envision: complex black selves, real and enactable black power, rampant and unfetishized black beauty. What do we learn when we pause at sites of contradiction where black creativity complicates and resists what blackness is “supposed” to be? What in our culture speaks, sustains, and survives, post-nationalism, post-racial romance, into the unwritten black future that we must imagine” (Alexander, 2004)? The future that Alexander references requires imagining but it exists within the interior of every black body.

Engaging the interior and quiet requires the space to do so. Sound has all the possibilities to be that space. The resonance that is sound provides is a temporal threshold that allows blackness to thrive both in and beyond time. Which prompts the question, what are the

epistemological and ontological stakes of sound and blackness? Filmmaker and theorist of experimental music, Michel Chion works to disassemble the often-gaunt theoretical scholarship surrounding sound and its functionality. Sound is "something specific to the human ear is that it is an organ at once external and internal" (Chion, 2016). It is this mingling with the internal and external that fosters the bridge that makes way for the occurrence of the haptic act. The two main characteristics of sound in the physical sense are frequency and pressure amplitude. Frequency is often referred to as pitch and amplitude is recognized as sonic intensity. While the human ear is coming into contact with sound, it is experiencing pitch. "That pitch that is heard is objective" (Chion, 2016). Our agency lies within the objective of that pitch and the objective of pitch is to enable the listener and/or creator of sound to bypass the confines of merely hearing and stimulate the freedom to listen to all the intangible and fleeting qualities that the sound possesses as well as all of its movements. It is the movement that allows us to create an alternative path to our agency and distance ourselves from societal and institutional degradation and the fragility of words and language. Two essential concepts of sound are "acousmatic" and the sound object. "Acousmatic" refers to a sound that has no visibly identifiable cause. The sound object is an "acoustic action and the intention of listening" and it functions to "be free from its sonic origin." (Chion, 2016). Can true autonomy lie within in "acousmatic" and sound object and if blackness naturally hosts those things, what does that mean for the connection to our senses, our liberation, our freedom? Sound and listening are some of the courses of action that facilitate hapticality.

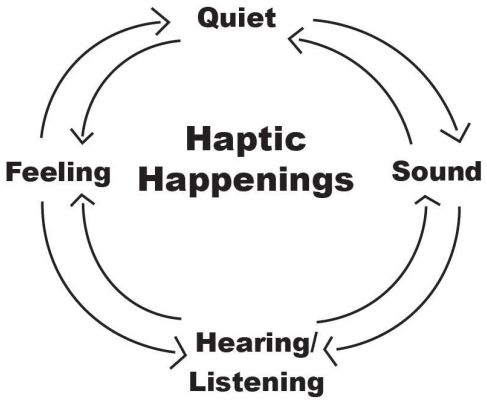
Listening is the "space-making gesture" needed in order to center the black interior and reach the haptic. Hearing is the ability to perceive sounds but listening is the capacity to give

one's attention to sound, take notice of the sound and act upon it. In Tina M. Campt's, *Listening to Images*, employs sound and frequency to inform us of the power in everyday practices of black life that are used to fuel refusal. Those sounds and frequencies mobilize black futurity to a place that commits itself to the "agency, centeredness and cultural location" of black people. The refusal is birthed in the haptic act of going beyond hearing sounds and listening to the images that surround us every day. "Listening requires an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact. It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer" (Campt, 2017). The synesthete of the "quiet hum" of the interior, sounds of the images, and the feelings that are channeled and transferred through black folks. The haptic centers us in the present, develops our future, and by combining the senses we are allowed to be seen, heard and felt with a level of transparency that summons feelings from our sisters, brothers and ancestors through us.

By the age of 16, I had two intensive encounters with the haptic. These two synesthetic events were "different without separability" meaning that they materialized in different places, at different times and for different reasons but they are conjoined because of the feelings, sounds and capacities they produced and how the materials from those productions still reverberate throughout my daily life and the lives of my loved ones. My medical experiences and the experiences with my aunt Joann showcased the inexplainable and underestimated power of feeling and taught me in the latter years that the haptic is indeed a real way to have feelings recognized and reflected upon both individually and communally. The haptic teaches us that our feelings are plausible to ourselves and others and to acknowledge all of our feelings even during the most difficult moments.

The haptic act is giving your shoes to someone else, having that person(s) put those shoes on and give them back to you with their funk attached while saying, 'hey, you got funk, I got funk, let's be funky together.' It's better to be funky together than to funk alone and let's figure out how to transport this funk to the galaxies because we feel the intensity of everything that is happening to black bodies here, we have to reach something that's beyond comprehension or reason in order to discover things that could potentially be life altering. That is the essence of going beyond merely hearing sounds or looking at an image. We have to reach for inexplainable or illogical because everything that is said to be logical here in America doesn't benefit black people. Because logically we shouldn't be getting slaughtered in the streets like animals. Logically we shouldn't be fearful that someone can come in our homes and destroy our bodies and be found as justified in doing so. By going beyond merely listening and seeing, we are refusing to accept the actions that are done against us and refusing the historic stereotype that black people don't have feelings and have this superhuman ability to withstand pain. Taking the inexplainable and making a future out of it.

Figure 1.1: HAPTIC HAPPENING CIRCLE



Order of Analysis

Haptic Happenings: Exploration of Quiet, Sound and Blackness is composed of three central chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion. My intention with each chapter, is to showcase how each artist engages with their interior and black interiority, how that engagement determines what type of haptic event is produced through their work and what that haptic event conveys about the artist and the black existence. The major separation between black interiority and the interior is publicness and the danger that looms over black exteriority and every time black exteriority is threatened, compromised, or dismantled for all the world to see, that has lasting effects on the black interior. Every living being has an interior but the difference between the interior and black interiority is lived experiences of black people, the horrors and unsettled circumstances of enslavement that shadow our existences, the joys, agony and challenges that assemble black life and our ability to adapt. Black interiority goes beyond individual interiority. Black interiority not only belongs to individual but to the collective and is where the shared experiences of blackness can be realized, expressed, and reflected upon. Every black individual has their own interior life where they can reflect upon their own experiences that are solely theirs yet their individual interior is attached to the collective which engenders black interiority.

Throughout chapter 2, 3, and 4 the presence of art critics, who mostly do not share the racial or class backgrounds of these artist, emerges often. The critic is a necessary component to the discussion because of their unwavering presence in art. Their role is usually takes place behind the scenes yet their contributions have the ability to determine what is viewed as the standard within the art world next to the curator. Their word can build an artist up and tear one

down just as quickly. It impacts the discussion of the haptic because the critic, who often serves as the white gaze, is in direct opposition of the haptic because the critics' work is based around the unemotional and non-personal expression of an opinion while the haptic is completely motivated by feeling and personal connectivity. That gaze looms over black existence and attempts to render it powerless yet the haptic continues to prevail not in spite of the white gaze but because of its ability to connect the individual to the communal continuously. This unresolved tension with the white gaze is a significant factor of the Black experience but much like with these artists, regardless of whether or not one chooses to acknowledge the gaze, it still impacts black life.

In Chapter 2, I will turn to the work and personal life of visual artist, Jean Michel Basquiat, to confront how the black interior has been put in jeopardy by the crushing forces of the exterior. Basquiat's interior was compromised by overwhelming societal and professional trauma and narcotics usage which made it nearly impossible for his interior life to blossom in the ways it could have. What is of most interest here is how that inescapable entanglement between his interior and the prejudice and social hardships he endured, permitted him to create haptic events for his audience during his brief life and beyond. Allowing him to be a figure of black infinitude. In Chapter 3, I will turn to the work of filmmakers, Kahlil Joseph and Arthur Jafa. Their films use music, everyday black experiences and imagery to assemble haptic events that transports the viewer through a multitude of emotions often leaving them clamoring for composure. Both Joseph and Jafa's work function not only to center the black interior but to display the immeasurable beauty within the complexities of black life, black death, black grief and black transcendence. Their ability to produce images that require a listening eye and a seeing

ear are a direct projection of black futurity beyond the margins of time and space. Building upon the points of the previous chapters, in Chapter 4, I will juxtapose the works of powerhouse visual artists David Hammons and Nick Cave. Hammons' and Cave's occupy opposing stances in their usage of sound and quiet in their artwork and their engagement with the business side of the art world. Hammons' refusal to engage with the media and art world gatekeepers permits him to use his self-imposed reclusiveness to generate what is often viewed as radically improvised artistic moments that occupy inimitable positions in art history. Cave's participation with large art institutions and the public is much more pronounced than Hammons. He even utilizes the public within his wearable soundsuits performance which usually include him taking a public space like a park in the city of exhibition, training and choreographing local performance art students to wear and dance in his soundsuits. These two artists rely on both sound and quiet to create haptic acts that are both essential to their personal survival and the potential of the futurity of black art. Their stances are significant because they represent the various courses black people have had to navigate in order to live and succeed without renouncing their interiors. In conclusion, I would like to discuss the potential of this research and how it could contribute to the future of the study of blackness by highlighting the benefits of utilizing hapticality and black interiority.

CHAPTER 2
BLUE INCANTATIONS: JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT'S INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR DISCORD

This chapter is purposely structured in a biographical format to demonstrate that the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat was a series of heightened haptic events, beginning with him being hit by a car at age 7, to deciding to leave home for good at age 15, to becoming an art star by age 20, to his drive to become a successful artist who could present work in museums worldwide, to his untimely death at age 27. It was undeniable that other people were able to feel the energy that he was producing, Basquiat simply didn't have the tools to process what they were giving back to him, thus making his haptic acts unfulfilled and unrealized leading to his eventual demise. My goal was present his life and art as a site where the haptic had ever possibility to flourish and thrive yet it was often unattended to due to his inability to navigate his life and the art world, which is something that not only happens to black artists but to black people. We can often lack the tools to navigate our exterior lives which can immobilize the potentiality of our interior lives and that weakens our chances at achieving the haptic. Basquiat's life is a primary example of that. Without the haptic, one lacks just one more tool to achieving both individual and collective realization and consciousness.

Next to music, art operates as a site in black culture where our senses are realized, distinguished, and where we go not to "escape the world's ills but rather a place where one can make sense of them. Art is where and how we speak to each other in tongues audible when "official" language fails" (Alexander, 2004). This analogy for art can teeter between romantic and idealistic simply because art is a spectator's sport. People view artworks in order to formulate a critique. What would art be without the watcher? We know that the majority of

artists aren't creating works strictly for spectators, institutions or critics. It's the job of an artist to produce work that reflects their personal and societal experiences, the present moment and their visions or desires for the future. Yet, it is no secret that the opinions of spectators and the agendas of institutions can sometimes pierce the artist and their work. Where is the balance between delivering real, authentic work and appeasing the watching eye?

Jean-Michel Basquiat rose to international art stardom and fell to his death attempting to conquer balance between his public persona and the pure possibility of his interiority. He was able to visualize the sounds that surrounded, consumed, and eventually destroyed him. The genius of Basquiat was the dichotomy between the sophisticated collage of his almost encyclopedic knowledge of music, science, literature, art history, black history and his ability to flawlessly merge them with his natural coolness and artistic intensity through his paintings and charisma. Basquiat's significant yet fleeting 27 years of life was the site of visual discourse [1] and the unrelenting clash of his interior sounds and the noise from the exterior world. That clash ultimately developed into a chokehold [2] that often accompanies black existence, pair that chokehold with the vice-grip of fame, fast fortune, unyielding pressures from art dealers and gallerists to produce work at an inhuman pace, the relentless, racist cruelty from critics, youthful angst and desires, and endless supplies of narcotics, forges the perfect recipe for a catastrophic existence with little means of escape but death. Despite a turbulent lifestyle and premature death, Basquiat left behind over 171 paintings and 917 drawings that captured the inescapable fusion of both his interior and exterior worlds.

As a noted mischievous child who had always been creative and constantly drawing, there was a defining moment in his young life that had lasting effects and would persist as a

place of inspiration. Basquiat was hit by a car at age seven on the block of his childhood home in Flatbush, Brooklyn. His car accident was significant because he was made conscious of his mortality at an age where children are still exploring the lengths of their invincibility. To have that feeling ripped away at such a young age can permanently alter the interior of a child. Following the accident, he spent an extended period of time in the hospital. His mother gifted him a copy of the book, *Gray's Anatomy*, because "she wanted him to have the opportunity to see his own body as it related to the way it had to be reconstructed. His spleen was removed. It was a book that was highly influential to him" (Shulman, 2017). *Gray's Anatomy* references reoccurred consistently throughout all of his work.

Basquiat left home for good at age 15. There are conflicting reports as to the exact reasoning why he left home. His sister, Lisane Basquiat, stated that he "left home because something was burning inside of him and he did whatever it took to become a painter" (Shulman, 2017). Biographer, Phoebe Hoban, explicitly details the abuse that both he and his mother, who was later institutionalized, underwent at the hands of his father, Gerard Basquiat, as his reasoning for leaving home. Basquiat had little to rely on but his ambitions for fame, gut feeling of where he needed to be in order to achieve success, and his superior bank of knowledge. He was really interested in how he could get his art out in a way that could obtain longevity and autonomy. Even as a teenager, Basquiat greatly understood the nature of public space. His first strategic move towards gaining the art world's attention was intentionally placing his poetic graffiti, SAMO, on the walls of Downtown Manhattan versus tagging subway cars like many of the graffiti artists at that time. The tag SAMO was created with his friend, Al Diaz, for their school newspaper while he was attending City as a School in 1976. Basquiat quickly moved

SAMO to the streets to pose thought-provoking, often antagonizing, questions and the poetic jargon that framed the hardwiring of his brain. Phrases like, “SAMO© A PIN DROP LIKE A PUNGENT ODOR” “PAY FOR SOUP, BUILD A FORT, SET THAT ON FIRE” “SAMO© AS A CONGLOMERATE OF DORMANT-GENIOUS.” Basquiat abandoned SAMO in early 1980 tagging walls with “SAMO© IS DEAD” following a fall out with Al Diaz.

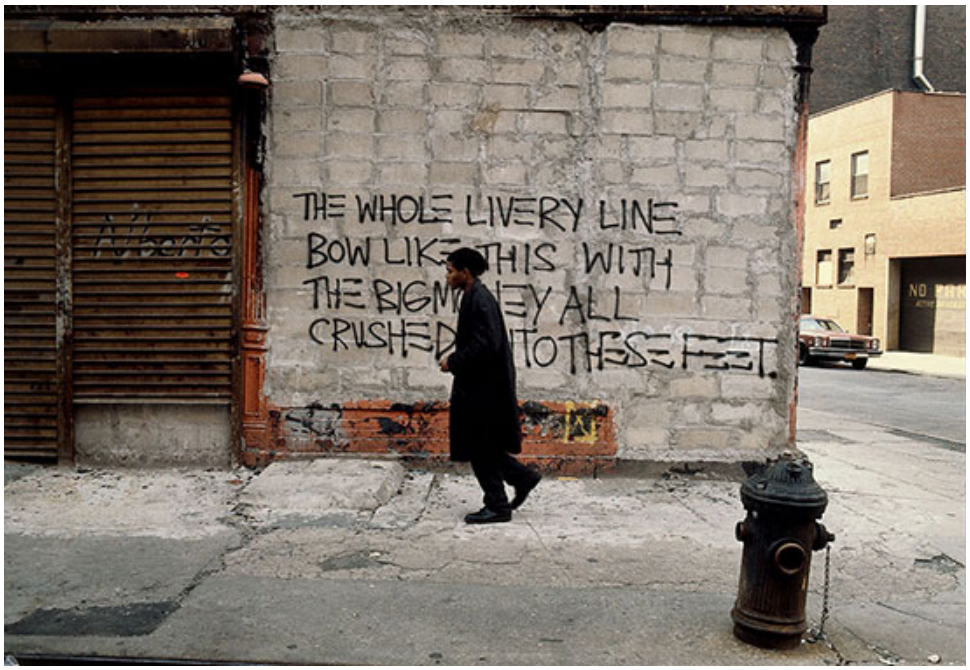


Figure 1.2 : (Jean-Michel Basquiat walking away after completing a SAMO tag. Still from the film, Downtown 81 (1981))

Quickly following his departure from graffiti, he began selling postcards and hand painted clothing at Patricia Fields store. In the fall of 1981, he began to create large paintings in the basement of Annina Nosei’s Gallery. At Nosei gallery, Basquiat’s established himself as the new darling of the art world, barely 21 years-old making anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 per painting. It was difficult to believe that just the one year prior, he was living in Washington Square Park, painting on whatever materials he could get his hands on. He left the gallery after a year because of conflict with Nosei about selling unfinished works and his feelings of being

portrayed as the "ape being locked in the basement" rather than as "an artist-in-residence" like his white counterparts. Collector Doug Cramer remembers being shocked at seeing Basqiuat in the basement. "He was painting away. He looked like a slave, or very close to it" (Hoban, 1998). Artist Gene Sizemore worked as Basquiat's studio assistance for half of the year at Nossei's gallery. "He would move from one canvas to the other like a ballet dancer. He was extremely graceful, agile and athletic. He worked very fast. He would step back to see what he had done, without ever breaking his rhythm, very reminiscent of Ali in his prime, backpedaling with his guard down, but totally in control" (Hoban, 1998). There was no privacy for Basquiat or his creativity practice in Nosei's basement. He was showcased in the way a circus would promote its latest coming attraction. "It wasn't handled well. He quickly became a commodity: 'Come in and watch the artist perform.' He could put out two or three paintings a day. It was easy to take advantage of him" (Hoban, 1998). In interview with Anthony Haden-Guest, Basquiat described his time at Nosei' gallery.

> She offered me a studio. It was the first time I had a place to work. I took it, you know. She used to bring collectors down there, so it wasn't very private. I didn't mind. I was young. It was a place to work, which I never had before. I had some money; I made the best paintings ever. I was completely reclusive, worked a lot, took a lot of drugs. I was awful to people. (Hoban, 1998)

He had several shows after leaving Nosei including notably one of his best, in 1982, at the Fun Gallery at the Crosby St. Studio. From there, he fostered a relationship with gallerist, Larry Gagosian and dealer Bruno Bischofberger and artist Andy Warhol. These relationships would influence the rest of his life and career. As he rose to international stardom, the pressures to produce paintings at rapid pace for various art dealers began to weigh on him immensely which many believe led to his use of heroin. "He was ill-equipped to deal with these rapid changes in

his life, and the almost grotesque hype associated with him from the start. Basquiat's father had punished him for bad behavior; the art rewarded him, enabling the artist to self-destruct" (Hoban, 1998). Basquiat was the physical representation of everything the white, elite art world and America feared and simultaneously desired most. "He filled his work with images and references to the very thing that scared the shit out of a lot of the art world. They wanted it because it was exciting but they didn't want if it came in a package and with a messenger that made them feel more uncomfortable than they already did" (Shulman, 2017). He was the living production of otherness. At the height of his fame, it was sometimes difficult to decipher whether he submitted to that otherness or was smothered by it.

In addition to the pressure to produce more and more work, Basquiat was forever conscious of the racist implications that consistently strangled him as black man in America and the fine art world in the 1980s. That inescapable reality of having the ability to sell out an entire show in one night and come outside and no cab will stop to pick you up was a constant repetition for Basquiat. The coded language that critics and curators used to describe him and his work was a continuous reminder of his color.

> There is this tendency to say well he is a primitive artist. He was a kid who grew up in New York City in the 1970's and 80's. What art world did to him reminds me of what happens in various points in black history to black artists. You become a representation for white people of all black people because you're the only black person they know. The guy obviously spent a lot of time thinking about his place in the world was and what the place of black people and black men were. It's in all of his work, over and over again. (Davis, 2010).

He knew that beyond race he was no different from his white counterparts who were making neo-expressionistic work and it made him feel secluded in the artistic landscape. Everyone knew that a white male artist would never have to endure that level of scrutiny and subjection. "Most

of the reviews have been reviews on my personality more so than my work. They're just racist, most of these people. They have this image of me as this wild monkey man running around" (Davis, 2010). Basquiat kept numerous notebooks throughout most of his career that were the explicit evidence of his interior compass. It was there were he released his fears and varied streams of consciousness. His drawings and paintings were where he addressed that strain and throughout moments of his career he expressed his feelings about the distress he experienced both publicly and privately. "His paintings iterate and reiterate the personal, historical, and cultural chaos he felt as a black man living the dysfunctional American dream" (Hoban, 1998). Ann Temkin, Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at MoMa NY stated,

> When you first see brand new work chances are if it's really significant it will be uncomfortable to somebody like myself because I am so immersed in what painting up until now looked like. And with Basquiat, many art professionals had skepticisms about what he was doing because the paintings didn't necessarily fit their idea of museum painting. Yet, of course that's exactly what is necessary to create the art of the future. (Davis, 2010).

The strain of not being able to show in large mainstream galleries and museums like Leo Castelli, the MoMa, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, having your work be described as "primitive" by museum curators and being turned away from art dealers because they do not have time to manage "a difficult, wild man" yet at the same time having thousands of dollars, drugs and women thrown at you constantly was an exhausting existence and the perfect breeding grounds for volatile behavior and self-destruction.

In spite of the murky terrain of galleries, museums, riches and rejection (both societally and professionally), Basquiat had a direct appeal to wide spread audiences both in and beyond the academic art institutions. A feat that many of his contemporaries were not able to achieve. The idea that art was only to be appreciated by the elite and functioned to isolate certain groups

of people from being able to experience it infuriated Basquiat. His work appealed to everyone, both intellectuals and people who did not possess a vast knowledge of art history but could view the work and connect to it. This is the artistic manifestation of the haptic act. His painting and drawings were not calculated by the way of formal schooling. They were informed by his instinct. Lisane, Basquiat's sister, firmly believed that "his creative influence came from inside. I think he just came here that way" (Shulman, 2017). The union between his advanced mind and childlike hand made him a standout among his peers and viewer. The poetics and word play from his SAMO days remained an anchor throughout his entire career. In his paintings, he utilized the repetition and crossing out of words to emphasize their significance. "I cross words out so you will see them more: the fact that they are obscured makes you to want to read them" (Hoban, 1998). Those details were of utmost importance to Basquiat. Those words may have gone unnoticed without being made pictorial. Highlighting the very thing that the eye or ear wants to avoid because it makes you uncomfortable was not only what Jean-Michel paintings were built upon but it was an unhindered reflection of his experience as a young black man trying to navigate the world.

Figure 1.3: (© The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. *Horn Players*, 1983. acrylic and oil stick on three canvas panels mounted on wood supports.)

Basquiat's widespread appeal and success was a direct threat to everything that upheld the art world's white exclusivity and aristocracy. Former girlfriend, Suzanne Mallouk, revealed in the documentary, *The Radiant Child*, that "he had this real fear that he wasn't really allowed in because it was a mostly white affluent world" (Davis, 2010). This fear helped to foster a dilemma within Basquiat that black artists had been experiencing for decades: being labeled a black artist versus being labeled an American artist. Langston Hughes addressed this conflict in his 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." The essay opens with the passage:

> One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. (Hughes, 1926).

This passage captures the desire of some black artists to not be "burdened by the problem of race. To be not called a black artist seems to perform some kind of liberating function in the minds of people. So, who needs to know or who needs to not think of you as a black artist in order for you to become a real artist" (Marshall, 2008). Blackness often symbolizes a lessening and crudeness that white people were drawn to but needed to remain a safe distance from in order to maintain their power and that was directly reflected in the reviews of Basquiat's work. Some black artists believed that removing the word "black" from artist and replacing it with "American" could shift the focus in the room in an immense way. Nelson George sums up internal conflict between the black artist and the art world dictating the value of black artists. "Now you're here with the *elite* of this particular world who control your value. You're beholden to this world to make you what you are but you are aware that you can become cold and then what am I to them. I'm just last year's interesting thing. I'm just last year's interesting negro" (Davis, 2010). Basquiat must have certainly felt this way and the historical mistreatment of black subjects in art did not provide solace under these circumstances. "I think there is a lot of people who are neglected in art and I don't know if it is because of who made the paintings or what. But black people are never really portrayed realistically or not portrayed in modern art enough" (Shulman, 2017). Being black, one cannot separate themselves from the experiences of their ancestors, from their interiority or their social experiences so his work reflected his and the interiors of black life, even if he didn't want to classified as a black artist. "It was very important to Jean-Michel to be regarded as an artist versus a black artist. While he was also incredibly connected to the black experience and to his blackness because he was a black man" (Shulman, 2017). Labeling aside, Basquiat knew that his experiences and pulse as a black man is what made

his work, indisputably his very own, yet for an artist who craved recognition and fame throughout most of life and career, blackness was a complex responsibility on his pathway to success. “There are really complicated matters that make us say that I don’t wanna be regarded as a black artist or I want to be regarded as an American artist. But in fact, it is because of a certain kind of tragedy. Jim Crow Laws, lynching, civil rights that causes Basquiat’s work to have the kind of potency that it does” ” (Shulman, 2017).

Michael Stewart, a 25-year-old graffiti artist, died after 13 days in coma following an arrest and brutal beating by five New York police officers. Stewart idolized Basquiat and even resembled him physically. The death frightened Jean-Michel. Keith Haring, Madonna and several galleries gave money for Michael Stewart’s defense fund. When Basquiat’s ex Suzanne went to him to ask if he would contribute, and he was terrified to contribute. He feared that if he gave any money towards the defense fund it would somehow be implicated or that the police would soon come after him. He kept saying over and over again that it could have been him. Stewart’s death was another example of Jean-Michel’s mortality. “He created a painting called Defacement. The painting was diaristic. He saw himself there. He saw the potential for his own annihilation at the hands of authority” (Shulman, 2017). Following Stewart’s death, paranoia set in, Basquiat believed people were after him and that he too would be brutally murdered. He became unhealthily concerned with his social placement. Gallerist Mary Boone reflected upon Jean-Michel’s emotional state towards the latter of his career. “He was too concerned with what the public, collectors, and critics thought. He was too concerned about prices and money. He was too conscious of his place in the world, and who he had dinner with and everything that implies. He was too externalized; he didn’t have a strong enough internal life” (Hoban, 1998). He slowly

began to unravel at the seams.

Many friends and associates from the early stages of his career felt that he was isolating himself by spending all his time with Warhol, who was often regarded as Basquiat's art father to Basquiat and one of the only people that Basquiat would listen to and trust during that time. Warhol was his closest friend. Basquiat saw that their show of collaborated works, made between 1984-1985, would finally give him the validation and respect that he desperately sought from the art world. The work did not receive the celebration he was anticipating. Jean-Michel's relationship with Warhol almost instantaneously deteriorated because of the horrific reviews in which he was referred to as "Andy's Mascot" or "Andy's Lapdog." He felt betrayed. It had appeared as though Andy had turned his infamous vampire-like stance upon him to use him for his youth and his fame much like he had done in the past with the young people he collected in his Factory. The pair remained estranged through Warhol's death in February 1987. Upon receiving the news of Warhol's death, Jean-Michel was completely distraught and grieved the death for an extended period of time both publicly and privately. As his distrustful of almost everyone grew, the paranoia that he was working backwards and drugs became central to his life for the next year. It appeared that he lacked the tools to navigate the art world elitism and the fast pace lifestyle of partying and drug usage.

> He was very happy about the success, but he was depressed because he won the lottery and it didn't change his life. He achieved a lot of his goals, but not his objectives. Strategically, he got placed in this collection, that gallery, and this magazine, but that was not happiness and it didn't offer the solution that he thought it was going to offer. It didn't offer the antidote. (Brown, 2018)

In April of 1988, Basquiat had a one-man show at Vrej Baghoomian Gallery. The show appeared to be a point of redemption for Basquiat, receiving high praise from critics, who noted that some

of high detailing that his work was known for, was absent. The starkness of the paintings was a departure from his usual work and exuded a different kind of energy. Themes of death, grief and isolation not only penetrated the paintings but could be felt throughout the entire gallery. Jean-Michel was recorded as looking gaunt and unwell at the show. Friend and collaborator, Glen O' Brien, stated that Basquiat "was in a bad frame of mind. He thought that the press was going to get him. He was really worried about an article that was being published on him in New York Magazine. He was upset about his relationship with his father. He was having a hard time with drugs. It was all kind of hitting him at once." (Davis, 2010). Just four months later, on Friday August 12, 1988, Jean-Michel Basquiat died of a heroin overdose in his Crosby street apartment at age 27.

Figure 1.4 (© The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. *Riding with Death*. Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1988)

"Why art? If our senses and consciousness were entirely in tune with nature, if we could

communicate and understand each other, then there wouldn't be any need for art. In fact, we would all be artists. We would all be as one" (Schepisi, 2014). Jean-Michel Basquiat was able to construct haptic experiences between his internal introspection and his audience through his paintings and drawings. Viewers of Basquiat's work are able to directly experience the immense light, humor, complexity, intensity, and urgency that black interiority possesses. His innate ability to synestheticly conjure black history and art history seamlessly with his external experiences, interiority, directness, and natural talent is what made him an ingenious painter. Basquiat's paintings delivered frequencies that reflected his Haitian-American and Puerto Rican heritage, lifelong subjugation, youthful spirit, and unquenchable curiosity. In a quiet gallery or museum, those sounds leap off of his paintings. He wanted to be somebody and that's exactly what he became. 30 years after his death, he continues to celebrated, lines stretching around museums and galleries for entrance into his shows, and becoming one of ten painters whose paintings have broken the 100-million-dollar mark at auction. An interviewer once said to him, 'You can either be a great or a great tragedy.' Basquiat smiled and said, 'why can't I be both' (Hoban, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

ARTHUR JAFA AND KAHLIL JOSEPH'S PARADIGM OF POSSIBILITY

> Somewhere there is a video camera that has been shut off for the last 20 years. It's rigid, unblinking eye has been tirelessly scanning a parking lot somewhere, silent witness to all the comings and goings of the past two decades. [...] However, this perpetual observer has no stories to tell, no store of wisdom, no knowledge of the grand patterns. Locked within a great immutable Now, it has no sense of past or future. Without a memory to give it life, events flicker across its image surface with only a split second to linger as afterimages, disappearing forever without a trace.
>
> -Bill Viola, "Video Black—The Mortality of the Image," 1990

This chapter will exhibit how Arthur Jafa and Kahlil Joseph's short films and their self-constructed philosophies manifest yet another approach to the haptic. The filmmakers juxtapose each other because they have developed two differentiating ideologies that not only create haptic events that completely reflect the black interior in their films but through their close relationship with one another, they are able to produce nearly the exact same emotional pulse in their work. Jafa's ideological approach is to make films that have the same ontological integrity as black music while Joseph's approach is to present work that showcases black life with as much authenticity as possible yet they manage to achieve the same outcome: presenting all the beauty, frequencies, and grit of black modality without being preoccupied with anything besides blackness. Unlike visual artists David Hammons and Nick Cave (analyzed in Chapter 4), Joseph and Jafa come from completely different regions of the US, Jafa, Mississippi and Joseph, Seattle. Those regions inform their self-constructed paradigms. Both filmmakers help us understand the haptic by creating visual experiences that amalgamates the sounds, images and emotionality of black life. Because of their 15 plus years of frienndships and collaboration, the hapticality between the pair is obviously illustrated in their work, through their shared themes of black cultural existence, black music, black death and grief. By watching and listening the possibilities

that Joseph's and Jafa's films provide a site to witness and reflect upon the collective experiences of blackness, revisit it and play it back. Film is an object that functions as a capsule of memory and possibility for the future. Jafa and Joseph exploit that object in the best possible way and take the viewer along for the ride.

Video possesses emotional and spiritual data but no memory or consciousness of the past or future. It solely functions in the present but that function eliminates limitations that other art forms have to contend with by creating a limitless present. Time is what locks video to the present but the events that occur on the screen are rarely tied to that moment exclusively. Film displays how points in time differ from points in space because of its employment of spatial temporality. Film and its unrelenting eye provide the viewer with the occasion to look at the space between the objects and examine the moments and movements that can sometimes be missed during everyday life. It challenges the viewer to reach beyond their conceptions of what images, sound and movement are capable of. It may not have a memory or be a living entity but what if it were handled as such? What kind of possibilities could film generate for self-knowledge and reflection? Those possibilities come to fruition when filmmakers experiment with the landscape and presentation of film. The magic of video is when the real-life image and the electronic image merge and becomes a single entity, making it impossible to detect when the real-life image ended and the electronic image began. Video allows history to not only be retold but reimagined through the creation of "signaletic events" which surpass the passiveness of traditional art objects and occupy a performative form. Art therefore fuels the technology and the technology reflects the art.

Arthur Jafa, artist, cinematographer, and filmmaker unwavering inquisitiveness and

relentless commitment to the addressing black people in his work. He has been actively participating in the film industry for the last 30 years as a cinematographer most notably for Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* (1994), and Solange Knowles' 'Crane's in the Sky' and 'Don't Touch My Hair' music videos. Born in Tupelo, Mississippi in 1960, Jafa has been stringing images together for as far back as he can remember. As a small child, he began storing images cut from magazines and newspapers that he felt belonged next to each other in three-ring binders which would eventually be referred to as "the books" by his friends. The books would develop into a practice that would become a point of obsession with an edge of 'OCD intensity' especially when it came to the later books. They would serve as a direct location to mark his thoughts and interests. The books allowed me to bring into focus, crystallize, and articulate those interests. The books were a testing ground, if nothing else a place to play, experiment with the idea of context, belonging, alienation, those kinds of things. What happens when you put this next to that?" At his last count, there were around 200 books before he abandoned them in 2007 after making the transition to digital storage. While studying architecture at Howard University and being interested in art and its functions, he began formulating questions that still echo throughout his work. "If Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* were a house, what would it look like? If Jimi's *Electric Ladyland* were a house, what would it look like? What would it feel like" (Moshayedi and Walker, 2016). Today those questions take the shape of, "How do you map the singularity of black being, onto an apparatus in order to produce a distinctly black expressive artifact" (Moshayedi and Walker, 2016)? Jafa is interested in what he has termed "ontological integrity" of things meaning the metaphysical nature of being and the soundness of their moral character. He is less interested in making 'art' as he is in making

‘things.’ Those things are significant because they “have a certain kind of power and a certain kind of resilience. When people look at things, those things get worn down by the gaze. So how do you make a thing an artifact that can resist that wearing away that happens, when it’s constantly bombarded by the gaze, specifically the white gaze. How does a thing maintain its integrity in the face of the white gaze”(Moshayedi and Walker, 2016)? In Jafa’s world, there are no fixed objects and they thrive in their non-locatability. Most people like to think of objects as being deprived of an interior life, Jafa and his work beg to differ.

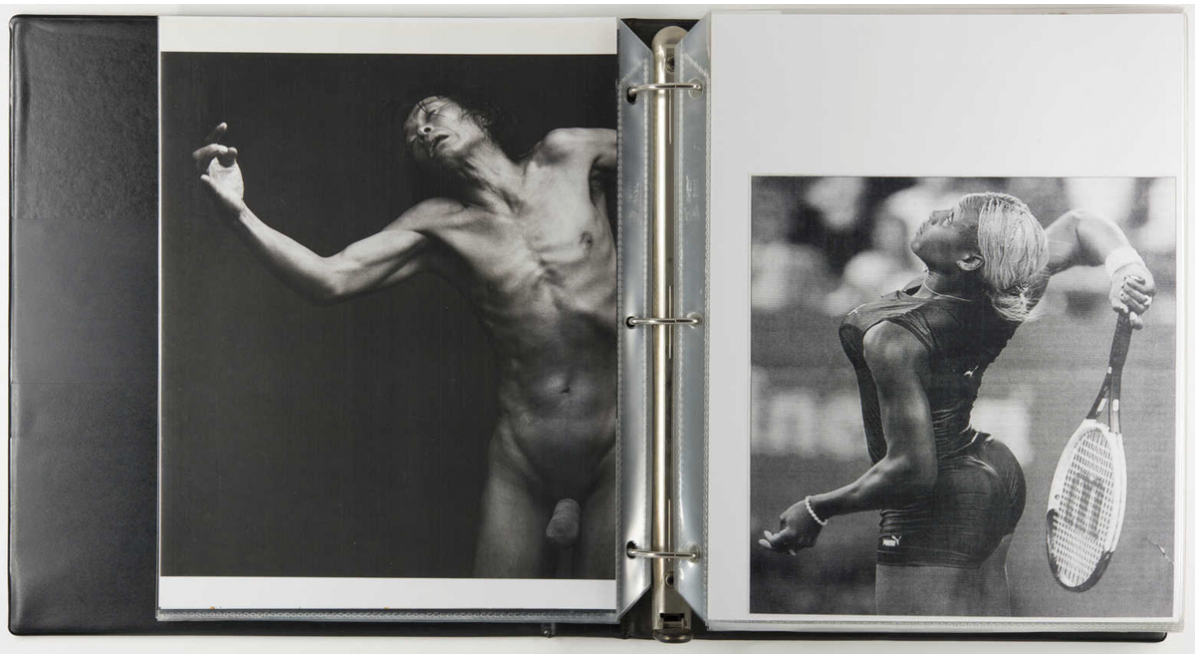


Figure 1.5: A detail of Arthur Jafa’s clipped imagery presented in binders at the Hammer Museum’s “Made in L.A.” exhibition in 2016.©ARTHUR JAFA/COURTESY GAVIN BROWN’S ENTERPRISE

Jafa notes that he has spent most of his life training himself to do ‘the opposite of human nature’ but over the last few years he has pushed himself toward things that disturb him. By vigorously pushing himself towards the perplexed, he developed insatiable habit of recording certain things because those things often disappear and promising himself to record the spiritual quality of the things that strike him. It often appears that there is existential spiritual quality that

not only accompanies but is built into the fibers of Jafa's work. There are several self-developed philosophies that continuously permeate his work but there are two that are unnegotiable regardless of the project, his privileging of black folks and making cinema that has the "same the power, beauty, and alienation of music." When Judith Benhamou-Huet, French journalist and independent curator, asked Jafa 'what does it mean when you say, "I speak to black people?" Jafa replied,

> It just means that's who I address. I'm really happy that anybody sees my work. I tend to be less concerned about whether they like it or not per say. But I'm happy that people see my work and if they appreciate it that's great. But I'm very clear that I'm basically addressing black people and it's not that I'm against anybody. It's just privileging black folks. Black folks don't get privileged for a lot… I don't think art is going to change anybody's opinion about anything but I do think a bare minimum of what it does is destabilize the tendency to unconsciously or without any psychic cause understand people as being less human than you. Because if you have to occupy somebody else's shoes for two hours that means that when you come into an interaction with them where your privilege or your entitlement is going to oppress them in some way; it just means you got to work harder to maintain a fantasy that they are less human than you. So that's why I think it's important to not address white people. I'm addressing black people and everybody else gets to listen in if they want but it's not about them. (Benhamou-Huet, 2017)

Music, in Jafa's opinion, is the place where black people have been the fully realized.

> Music is the form most actualized, most felt. Purely immaterial, and yet it's an affirmation of our being, of the fact that we exist, that we do have culture, that there is a continuity. Even if its culture made in free fall. Ultimately what I have been most interested in is how you make a thing that is the manifestation of a specific—not necessarily finite but particular—set of existential and cultural assumptions. What if this fundamentally immaterial aesthetic becomes a material aesthetic? Then it becomes positive proof of the concrete dimension of black being…Music is key, imagine the things that are lost? What kind of legacy can we imagine despite that loss and despite the absence of things that never were? (Serpentine Galleries, 2017).

Jafa's ability to construct possibilities out of loss, absence, life and death enable his works to be seeped in intensity and visual dexterity, through his synesthetic approach of combining images,

sounds that are fully rooted in black interiority and infusing them into cinema. The purpose of that action is to make the work as black as possible while as Jafa says "still having to deal with my humanity" (Sargent, 2017).

Black humanity is bound up in illogical circumstances and Jafa's work not only puts those constrains on view but forces the viewer negotiate their position within those circumstances. His 2009 short film, *Deshotten 1.0* was made alongside his collaborator, Malik Sayeed, showcases a young black man, who is narrating the moments of his life before a near fatal shooting. The film switches back and forth between the moments leading up to the shooting, the aftermath of the shooting, the young man in the hospital, unconscious, surrounded by family and what is assumed to be friends, and a young girl who witnesses the shooting while trying to shed the other children around her. What gives this film its substance is the narration writing by Fred Moten and tightly woven collage of repetition. The narration includes lines, "I hide my eyes so you can feel me. Know too much about how I move. Don't let nobody get behind me. Hands slide on the block like smoke. Activate the code on which you found. Went for the one who never hides. Concentrate until the surprise come. Write my own scene and play it out. Remember that shit but don't feel it" (Jafa and Sayeed, 2009). Those lines allow the viewer a stark yet abstract guide to the interior of the young man and the possibilities of what is to come. The viewer watches the young man walk outside multiple time and the shooting from multiple angles each time revealing a little bit more details than the clip before it. Things around the young man move slowly yet appear to be happening at lighting pace. There is a fierce, hard hitting sound, that is a mixture of firecrackers, heartbeat, the grueling vibration that accompanies horror films, that looms over the film except the hospital scenes. Closeups of the family and

friends' hands and the side and back profiles of their faces create an intimate shield of their identities. The only faces that are shot head on is the shooting victim and young girl who witnesses the shooting. The barriers are clear here, no face no trace yet the two faces that are shown here conjoin all these characters together, the family members at the hospital as well the children and bystanders trying to avoid stray bullets. Jafa swiftly yet elegantly displays how one exterior action of violence binds the interior lives of those both directly and indirectly connected the event.

Love is the Message, The Message is Death is Jafa's most well-received work to date and has been regarded as a worldwide sensation. Curator Helen Molesworth describes the film as a

> Masterful convergence of found footage that traces African-American identity through a vast spectrum of contemporary imagery. From photographs of civil rights leaders watermarked with "Getty Images" to helicopter views of the LA Riots to a wave of bodies dancing to "The Dougie," the meticulously edited 7-minute video suspends viewers in a swelling, emotional montage that is a testament to Jafa's profound ability to mine, scrutinize, and reclaim media's representational modes and strategies. Alongside segments of familiar Black icons and historic events are also scenes featuring lesser known figures: anonymous bodies in various states of elation and despair. While *Love Is the Message* poignantly embodies the artist's desire to create a cinema that "replicates the power, beauty and alienation of Black Music," it is also a reminder that the collective multitude defining Blackness is comprised of singular individuals, manifold identities and their unaccountable differences. (Molesworth, 2017).

The entire film was put together relatively quickly in just two or three hours yet it doesn't feel like it. It feels an extended meditation on blackness that would take years to compile. Hands down, the most difficult scene of the film to watch is the murder of Walter Scott. The viewer sees Scott running for his life only to be gunned down moments later by a police officer. All while a choir echoes, "We on an ultralight beam" in the background. The whole moment seemed perfectly constructed but Jafa insists that the pairing was "instinctual" and "not just a group of images set to Kanye's song" (Sargent, 2017). This is a perfect example of a haptic act between

the work, the filmmaker and the audience. The film's ability to take events that have seen multiple times worldwide, eject the feeling out of those moments, giving them to the viewer without precaution and allowing the viewer to project their feelings back is the nucleus of hapticality.

The short film began circulating back in 2016 shortly after its completion not by Jafa but Kahlil Joseph, Jafa's friend and fellow filmmaker. Joseph began showing the film at the Underground Museum, "an institution founded by Joseph's late brother, the artist Noah Davis, in the Arlington Heights neighborhood of Central Los Angeles" (Maikoiyo and Birnie, 2016). Joseph would play the *Love is the Message* before screenings at the Underground Museum without giving the viewers any type of warning or explanation as to what they were about to witness, leaving viewers winded through a trek of emotional states. In June 2016, Joseph was invited to screen his film *m.A.A.d* at Art Basel fair in Basel, Switzerland. While there, Joseph hosted a private screening of the then never-before-seen original cut of Beyonce's *Lemonade.* Again, Joseph showed *Love is the Message* with no given context. The film caught the eye of art dealer and gallerist, Gavin Brown. After seeing the film and being deeply affected by it, describes the event as "one of the most pure art experiences I've ever had because I had no idea what I was looking at" (Dean, 2018). Brown contacted the Jafa which led to him offering Jafa a show at his gallery. From there, the film has travelled to Serpentine Gallery in London, where Jafa had solo show, the Julia Stoschek Collection in Berlin, MOCA Los Angeles, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, High Museum in Atlanta, Van Every/Smith Galleries at Davidson College in North Carolina and the Metropolitan Museum of Art has acquired it. The film seamlessly fuses all of Jafa's inner workings, black visual intonation, the structural and technical

of architecture, “the joy and horror of black history, culture and being” and the ontological, phenomenological and epistemological essence of black being. Although *Love is Message* showcases black interiority in nearly every possible way. Just as blackness is infinite and cannot be confine to a single image or work of art, neither can Jafa.

Figure 1.6 Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death* (4 stills), 2016.
©ARTHUR JAFA/COURTESY GAVIN BROWN’S ENTERPRISE

Unlike Jafa, filmmaker Kahlil Joseph, doesn’t operate from a strict set of self-developed philosophies. His approach is simple and to the point. He has absolutely no interest creating anything but the representation of Black people. He began making films in his early twenties but was highly encouraged by growing up in a household that exposed him to black cultural phenomena and attending a photography program at age 15. His work embodies authenticity and consistently works find ways to display that which is unspeakable. With Joseph, there is no script, just sparse notes scribbled on napkins. Music videos are a natural fit for his practice and approach

of “visual stillness.” That stillness “can make the mundane into the epic and the horrific into the sublime” and letting the sounds and the body organically speak for themselves.

> You can’t fake body language. So, I became increasingly interested in people’s body language and gestures especially black folks. You travel to Brazil, Africa and the way the lean and walk is way more eloquent than any words I could put in their mouth and try to say. But when you kind of get people out their heads and just say hey, can you move like this. I’ve also learned that words are so limited. (Tate, 2017).

Joseph images are harvested and nourished with sustenance. “He is adamant about the detail and slowing the viewer down to the point of visual mediation, but he is more fascinated with gestural particularities.” He weaves tales of black interiority that showcase the nonlinear beauty and the visceral wholeness of life, death and the persistent ache of grief. Being that Joseph lost his father to brain cancer and his brother Noah, just a few years later to a rare cancer, it is no surprise that death has been enveloped in much of his work since then. Working in the arena of music videos versus featured films has given Joseph capacity to experiment with celestial territory and the grounds to express his grief without the use of words.

> What I learned in the music space is that there is stuff I’m trying to get at, that words just are not enough. I don’t care what the character says or what the action is. I’ve been able to do things. Even the Storyboard (P) moment in *Until the Quiet Comes* was a watershed moment. My father had just passed when I made that and I sort didn’t know what to do with all that emotionality but I remember how I wanted the thing to feel. I felt like that was my therapy, *Until the Quiet Comes.* In general, the space that I’m occupying right now, I feel like I’m able to create things that I don’t have words for. (Tate, 2017).

Producing videos that lead with an “emotional eye” and a delicacy that only the black interior can produce (Als, 2012).

Joseph’s work is absent of the usual visual riffs that run rapid through the music video sphere. Rather the viewer is gifted with dreamlike landscapes that pulsate with the unflinching reality of black existence. He creates masterpieces that are beyond critic. A primary example of

this is the 2013 short film, *Until the Quiet Comes,* for music producer Flying Lotus. Joseph had been trying to work with Lotus for a long time, approaching him four years prior to the making of Until the Quiet Comes. Lotus had turned down Joseph's offer. Joseph stayed busy during that in between time, making the short film, *Black Up*, for Shabazz Palaces. Jafa describes the film as "startling, funny and witty." After seeing the video online, Lotus reached out to Joseph sending him a 30 second clip of music he was working on for his upcoming project, *Until the Comes.* Joseph listened to that clip for seven months imagining what he could make with 30 seconds. He didn't feel constricted by 30 second. It actually excited him. "There's so much that happened in that 30 seconds" (Tate, 2017). He was eventually sent more music from Lotus to use in the video.

Until the Quiet Comes takes place in Nicholas Gardens in Inglewood, California and displays a sequence of events that as much tragic as they are phenomenal. Opening with crystal blue water, a faceless figure enters the scene floating through the water with his red button shirt. The following shot is of a little boy in a drained pool, who resembles a young Snoop Dogg, with his trigger finger cocked to the side letting off imaginary bullets. Almost instantaneously, a real bullet flies through the shot, striking the little boy in the chest. The boy lays dead in a pool of his own blood draped around him like a blanket. Before the viewer can even process what they just witnessed, Joseph's camera moves effortlessly to children playing in an empty field during a blood orange sunset, one of the children being the boy that was just in the pool and hanging out in the Gardens. Beauty seems to followed by death, the scene shifts to dancer Storyboard P, who was shown earlier sharing a bag of Cheetos with the boys, lays on the ground dead. Storyboard rises from the ground not as though he is rising from the dead like a zombie type character more

like some unseen force is pulling him up to reverse his death. The entire neighborhood aligns the housing complex taking in the resurrection. Their expressions somber. He removes his shirt revealing a transparent bullet hole in his chest and dances his way not into the back of the ambulance that's parked but into the back window of his chariot, a cherry red Chevrolet Impala. Flying Lotus gazing out of the passenger side window like an undertaker taking the whole scene in.

> The way Storyboard P gets up from the ground in a way that makes the viewer question whether or not it is an effect. It's actually it's not, that just the way Storyboard manipulated his body to make it appear as such. This is the definitive treatment of Storyboard on camera. He is full command even through the last moment when he is getting in the car into that end of the video. We've all seen that scene before but we have never seen it executed in that way. It's some 'Houdini shit'. (Tate, 2017).

Figure 1.7 Flying Lotus: Until the Quiet Comes short film (still) ©Kahlil Joseph

With short films like *m.A.A.d* and *Fly Paper*, Joseph has continued to expand on his practice both in and outside art institutions. His thought process is moving towards how he can

transform physical space of the institutions he is showing work in. He is less concerned in making work for the institutions themselves. His purpose is not to become a star of the art world but to bring the art world to wherever he is. There is nothing frantic about his work. It is intentional and introspective. Joseph transcends the expectations and conditions of music videos by forging possibilities that merge his interior experiences with his subjects. He creates emancipatory moments that discard time and convention with a grace that only he can manage to pull off.

Arthur Jafa and Kahlil Joseph produce work as if there no other option but black because "if they don't see happiness in the picture at least they'll see the black" (Joseph, 2017). Feeling is at the heart of their work. Despite having differentiating modes of getting at the feeling, both filmmakers manage to express it in very similar ways. Their friendship and drive to make the blackest films possible is a reality partially because of their employment of hapticality, the sensibility to display black aesthetics authentically, and their commit to finding the beauty in resilience without discarding the pain. The pair is obsession with blackness is not evident but consistently pronounced in their lives and work. Joseph and Jafa's work is the living manifestation of the phrase, "black is you, black is me, black is us, black is free" (The Last Poets, 1968).

CHAPTER 4
DAVID HAMMONS AND NICK CAVE: PRODUCING SOUND AND CONFRONTING VISUALITY

This chapter examines the works and the institutional approaches of visual artists, David Hammons and Nick Cave. This chapter more than the others focuses on sound because Hammons and Cave's work produces sound in some of the most unconventional ways and but their need to use sound as a tool derived from the same reasoning: the complexities of the black experience and the tribulations of working in mainstream art institutions. Hammons and Cave's art is presented here in a compare and contrast format to establish the differentiation in their tactics when engaging critics and the institutions and their commit to their communities and how that all tension revealed itself in their work. What both artists teach us about the haptic is the power of surrendering to the feelings within through unconventional avenues and how that surrender creates self-determination for the individual and collective.

Midwest born visual and performance artists, David Hammons and Nick Cave contributions have shifted the terrain of art. Hammons rose to acclaim in California in the early 1970's. He has consistently defied art-world protocols throughout his entire career by rejecting the tradition of creating and showcasing collectable and sellable art. His work reflects how he functions in the world, ever present yet maintaining anonymity. Cave is a professionally trained dancer and sculptor who is currently based in Chicago. His art career surged after he created his first Soundsuit in 1992 in reaction to the Rodney King beating. Their approaches to displaying and concealing the body juxtapose each other in arresting and intricate ways. Cave's Soundsuits and Hammons' performance work and his bringing jazz musicians to perform in the museum during his shows composes an undercurrent of sound. Their practice of performance is both a

reflection and response to sociality conditions.

The discarded materials that both Cave and Hammons utilize in their work demonstrate the urgency within black social and material culture. The manner in which Hammons conducts himself is as complex as it is simple. His persona both public and private has reached levels of mysticism creating a cult-like following of his work. Hammons manages to slip in and out of view both publicly and privately. He has no listed contact information (phone number, email or even address). "He turns down offers of high-profile shows, only to appear unannounced in the unlikeliest of venues. While his work circulates lucratively through the secondary market, he doesn't have any standard sense of a dealer. He speaks to the press rarely" (Stern, 2009). He has purposely made it nearly impossible to reach him in what appears to be straight punch in the gut to the mainstream art market. A curator from the Whitney Museum once said, "you have to know someone who knows someone in order to get in within reach of Hammons and even then, he may slip through your grasps."

He experiments with subjection and position not only with his artwork but in his studio practice and interior life. To go from making it a point to be seen when his career was starting to take shape in the 70's to choosing to descend into invisibility from the 80's forward is as much about that "feeling" as it is strategy. There is no one way to place or pin down Hammons both in and outside of the art institution. "I like being form nowhere; it is a beautiful place. That means I can look at anyone who's from somewhere and see how caught they are" (Hammons, 1991).

Cave's Soundsuits, both stationary and wearable, capture both the sound and the quiet of his work. The wearable suits are used for performance purposes and the stationary suits are used for traditional display in museums. Cave's engagement with art institutions has been distinct

from inviting other artists to perform and holding church services in his installation, *Until*, to enlisting and choreographing students from performance arts schools to take over an entire city park and perform in his Soundsuits. His personal website only has one photo and an email address. You can purchase his Soundsuits via an online catalog yet there are no prices listed. One could say that's a consequence of poor design but that's not the case. The catalog is beautifully designed and it appears that Cave is poking a bit of fun at consumption and capitalistic standards of the art world.

David Hammons was born on July 24, 1943 in Springfield, Illinois. Despite being an artist, he recognized early in life that athletics and music were perceived as two ways one could escape the Midwest. He made the connection between the possibilities of escapism and the allure of success that athletics and music possessed. He used his infatuation with music and athletics as subjects and companions within his work. He has infamously stated his views on athletics, particularly basketball.

> The issue is, I was deprived of a basketball career by being too short. It's an anti-basketball sculpture (*Higher Goals*). Basketball has become a problem in the black community because kids aren't getting an education. They're pawns in someone else's game. That's why it's called Higher goals. It means you should have higher goals in life than basketball. (Hammons, 1986)

Hammons is one of 10 children. In 1963, at age 20, he left home for Los Angeles, California where he attended Los Angeles City College for one year. Then he went on to Los Angeles Trade Technical College where he studied advertising. Through the study of advertising, Hammons became aware of what buyers wanted and what the seller had to do to get them. Perhaps this is one of the factors that sparked his disdain for the art market, art world and its traditional practices.

` Hammons also took weekend and evening classes at Otis Art Institute while attending LATT and eventually went on to Chouinard Institute. Hammons sought out Charles White, draughtsman and printmaker, while at Otis. After many months of trying to convince White to work with him, Hammons was eventually able to study with him privately. At that point, many black artists like Hammons were greatly shocked to discover that there were black artists like White who had been practicing art for 30-40 years.

White's influence can be seen directly in much of Hammons' early works which were prints. The influence White had on Hammons extended beyond just artmaking. White's social commitment to making art for and about black people and the political climate of 1960's along with the rise of black nationalism can be seen throughout Hammons work as well. "Hammons translated White's socially committed, hand-drawn realism into a contemporary realism of found objects and materials." These were not your standard prints. The print that garnered the most notary was the body prints. Hammons used his body as the printing plate, smeared it, as well as his clothes and hair with margarine and a host of other materials. Then he pressed himself against a board, dusted the board with fine chalk to set the impression. By placing himself in the position of subject, he became both the "creator of the object and the object of meaning" (Hammons, 1991).

Nick Cave was born February 4, 1959 in Fulton, Missouri. Since the age of four, Cave has been transforming anything he could get his hands on (dollies, glitter, glue feathers, buttons, feathers) and making them beautiful. This process of collecting discard materials and reconstructing them has been a lifelong exercise for Cave. He is the youngest of seven brothers. Cave told the New York Times, "when you're raised by a single mother, with six bothers and

lots of hand-me-downs, you have to figure out how to make those clothes your own" (Loos, 2016).

Cave perfected his sewing technique at Kansas City Art Institute in the fiber department. In 1982, Cave earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from KACI. During his undergrad career, he also studied dance with Alvin Ailey program. He commuted back and forth between Kansas City and New York throughout that time. He attended North Texas State University from 1984-1986 and went on to receive his Master's degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1989. Cave has been the chair of the Department of Fashion Design at the Art Institute of Chicago since 1990.

Shortly after becoming chair of the Fashion Design Department, Cave's world, on a personal and social level, like many other black people was consumed by the Rodney King beating that took place March 3, 1991. Rodney king was pulled over after a horrifying chase with the LAPD, was ripped from his vehicle, thrown to the ground, surrounded by a slew of police officers and beaten relentlessly. The grainy black and white video circuited through every news outlet and made its way into the homes of every American. The violent directness showcased in the video and the act itself depicted that America is a brutal, racist place to inhabit. The four officers that were put on trial were acquitted. The L.A. Riots immediately followed the announcement of the acquittals. 3,767 homes and businesses were burned. 53 people were killed. 2,000 people injured. The national guard was eventually called in to defuse the riots. Rodney King's quote, "Can we all just get along?" rings as a significant piece of the legacy of the event but no black people felt like getting along was a possibility in the moment and years to follow.

He walked to Millennium Park to reflect and gather his thoughts surrounding the incident.

> I remember that I just felt depressed. And I remember thinking that my identity is really only protected in the privacy of my own home. That the moment that I leave this space, I could be just another profile. Then I was thinking about myself as a black male, and that on top of that, what am I trying to be as an artist, what does that mean? It was really hard…I was just so emotionally charged by that experience and yet I couldn't really share it with anyone at the same time. (Bolton, 2014)

He looked down at the ground and saw a twig. This object represented all of Cave's feelings in that moment: discarded and thrown to the side. Cave was able to locate power within those twigs. He wanted armor and desired something to hide inside of. He collected twigs and made a wearable forest. Creating a fortress around his body, the violence of America was eclipsed and transformed him into unidentifiable being. Post Rodney King, discarded materials went from being transformed solely for beauty and became a shield, a second skin. Cave joined a longline of cultural reactors to collective trauma in the production of what one might call a costume. Thus, the Soundsuit was born.

Hammons' breakout moment were his body prints. He began creating the body prints in the late 1960's through the early 1970's. Those prints embodied the urgency of the Black Power Movement and the "inescapable presence of their creator" (Stern, 2009). They garnered quick success because these prints were "traditional, two-dimensional, frameable & saleable objects, they did very well in the art marketplace." The body prints were mediations on African American existence even when they began to disintegrate. Whether or not it was intentional by Hammons, black viewers were able to find visions of themselves in the prints. "These X-ray-like figures were punctuated with exacting details of skin, hair, clothes, and body parts created by the process of one-to-one transfer" (Hammons, 1991). Despite the success of the body prints, Hammons completely abandoned them in 1974, relocated to New York and began experimenting

with found objects.

He rejected the concept of framed work. He felt like the frame created a barrier between the object and the viewer. What weight do the barriers carry? Art institutions aside, what are larger social implications do barriers uphold and create? After moving to New York, Hammons settled in Harlem and began his "lifelong practice of making sculptures from the highly charged detritus of urban African American life, including hair gathered from barbershop floors, chicken bones, bottle caps, and empty liquor bottles" (Jones, 2011). The Spade Series developed during this time and marked the beginning of his transitional period. Hammons created two and three-dimensional works and introduced performance into his work. The Spade became a symbol for both connotations and physicality. Leading Hammons to a metaphoric arena and an entrance into abstract art.

> "I was trying to figure out why black people were called spades, as opposed to clubs. Because I remember being called a spade once and I didn't know what it meant; nigger I knew but spade I still don't. So, I just took the shape and started painting it. I started dealing with the spade the way Jim Dine was using the heart… Then I started getting shovels (spades); I got all of these shovels and made masks out of them. It was just like a chain reaction…I was running my car over these spades and then photographing them. I was hanging them from trees. Some were made out of leather (they were skins)" (Hammmons, 1986).

The realization that discarded objects possessed "power of the symbolic." That power constructed a realm of cultural significance and potentiality for recognition & understanding. By taking an object transforming it, gives that object a chance to carry out another meaning from there. Hammons' work with discarded objects was the precursor to Cave's work with discarded objects. Hammons abandoned his use of traditional artist materials. Found objects were more alluring, easily obtainable, cost next to nothing and contained a spirit. This spirit was the driving force of all his work. That spirit was left behind by the hands that twisted the bottles caps, the

lips that took swigs of the liquor bottles and the greasy fingers that devoured fried chicken and discarded the brown paper bags they were tucked away in. The spirit of Harlem. The spirit of black people.

Greasy Bags and Barbecue Bones was shown in 1975 at Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York. The works were assembled using discarded brown bags, spareribs bones, glitter, hair and grease. "The bags were stained methodically with grease, the saturation controlled" (Jones, 2011). He also created mobiles with the same materials. The bones, specific hair type used and grease were all objects of familiarity to black people. These chosen objects connected the intimate and personal to the publicness of the culture. Hammons spent more than half of a decade working with discarded black hair, collecting it from barbershops all over the country. Hammons felt that the less he did, the more of artist, he became. To be as a much artist as possible was Hammons' goal in his career and personal life. His purpose was not to simply be an artist but to model exactly what an artist is. Critiques often classified his work and his engagement with art world as Anti-Art.

It is often said that Anti-art artists are concerned with process and gesture. This is a bit of a stretch because Hammons has always concerned with these factors even prior to his work with discarded materials. This isn't anti-art at all. Now Hammons approach to the way he engaged with art institutions by being selective about what and where he shows, not owning a phone, actively making himself unavailable to needs of institutions and curators and even going so far as not showing up to his own openings. Now, this is marronage. This is anti-art. It goes against everything that the art world is about. Most artists want to be acknowledged and recognized. Following in the traditional of many Dadaists, there is a political and philosophic stance behind

rejecting conventional forms which seem "incapable of acting-or even commenting-upon a world sorely in need of charge." Hammons took the essence of that stance and did more than just apply black aesthetics to it. He was able to create his own philosophy and reasoning behind his rejection of traditional art and museum practice.

Cave's breakout moment was his Soundsuits. Aside from its reactionary origins, the Soundsuits induced deep rituals and folkloric roots that took place globally. Wearing costumes and masks in particular have a dual heritage. One of being that of a ritualistic nature and the other is continuously boosted in contemporary Western activities like Halloween and various iterations of carnival. The carnivals are used as an opportunity for the general public to become the "other." Isn't the carnival just an elaborate form of minstrelsy? If "the general public" created the "other" why would they want to play dress up as the "other?" Fetishism or is it deeper than that?

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and literary critic, four categories of festivals: 1. Free and familiar interaction between people 2. Eccentric behavior 3. Carnivalistic misalliances 4. Sacrilegious. These four categories "provide a political landscape to read the visual and performative signifiers that operate of Cave's soundsuits" (Thompson, 2011). From the Rodney King beating to Cave's carnivalesque response, Cave reassembles the rules of space, protection and artistic performance. The Soundsuits present a fantastical image to the outside world as much as they conceal the identity of the wearer. Soundsuits conceal race, gender, age, and sexual identification of the person wearing the suit. They allow the wearer to perform for the world but hide from it which is a direct mirroring of a large part of black existence in America. Soundsuits do two things at once withdrawal and come out. Soundsuits offer an opportunity for

transformation. It often appears that one of the most detrimental statements that one can make is, I no longer wish to participate in humanism. Whether Cave realized it or not, his suits put forth many questions surrounding the black body and the conditions that they are constantly under. What does it mean to lose your body? What is lost both tangibly and intangibly? What does it mean to lose a body, a black body? Does the body actually belong to the black person? Is your body all that you have? Cave's Soundsuits provide a momentary chance and fortress to opt out of all of it. Race, Racism, Gender, Sexuality, Humanism.

His full body masks obscure the body but not totally sometimes fingers and feet show which obscure the complete fantasy and reverts us back to the very reality/world that we're hiding from. Cave devotes a specialized attention to the head of each mask. Completely obscuring the face until it becomes a large lumpy mound surrounded by an abyss of colorful, antique toys, twigs, countless beads and porcelain birds until the head is completely faceless. The Soundsuit has been described as going against everything that is natural. But what exactly is natural? Is it natural to be in a constant state of total fear for your life, your body because of socio-political factors that were constructed to work against you? What does it mean to be afraid? To live/walk/breathe/die both physically, socially, mentally, spiritually, emotional, metaphysically in fear? Is there anything natural left? And that which is "unnatural" must be wiped out because it simply does not fit that which has been made "natural?" Is the Soundsuit, in its ability to conceal, more natural than it's given credit for?

The desire to hide in elegant fashion has its origins historical and contemporary art. A place to hide equals a place of comfort. The similarities of the philosophical grounding between

the Gang Proof Suit, also started in Chicago, and Cave's Soundsuits is unnerving. Both the Gang Proof Suit and Soundsuit equaled the comfort of protection. Unlike the Gang Proof suit, Cave doesn't want his Soundsuits or himself to be over-coded. From his aloofness towards interviews to his refusal to ascribe to a specific meaning or ideology of his Soundsuits connects with a long history of artists distrusting language.

Thus, the Soundsuits provide protection not only from violence and racism but from the linguistic coding that language, in contemporary art and in general, perpetuates. The soundsuit is gibberish but is not gibberish. A mashing together any and everything formulating calculated and precise nonsense left to the viewer to decipher and contextualize. This process teeters between art and ritual. The SoundSuit have been compared to the works by British artist Yinka Shonibare whose figures directly speak to Colonialism and are covered in Kente cloth. "Cave's work speaks to the performance, dance and diasporic traditions that are part of the artist's own biography" (Thompson, 2011). The Soundsuit transforms not only identity but also the spaces they encounter. "More than a private experience born out of a necessity to hide from violence and racism in the world, they are also bold, dynamic reaction to it" (Thompson, 2011). They retreat, react and share a tradition with riots and possibly marronage.

What would Soundsuits look like if they were worn during a riot in the past like the Stonewall Riots or even festivities like Mardi Gras? How differently would things have been Rodney King, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland and countless black bodies if they have the protective layer of a Soundsuit? This may read as foolish dreams but what else is left for us to do but dream? Imaginative thinking and experimental dreaming are often viewed as luxuries but these are luxuries that we need to seriously start partaking in. "These armors are made not only

for the wearer but for the perceiver. They are ultimately a public experience" (Thompson, 2001). This is a public experience but this may be one solely for the wearer. Yes, the perceiver can partake but only to a certain point. The quiet, the protection and solace of the Soundsuit is for the individual inside the suit. As much sound and beauty as the suit produces, the true splendor of the suit is inside, the parts the perceiver cannot see or participate in. The Soundsuits are of "armor in motion" (Thompson, 2011).

Hammons work is very generous and allows us a window into the black experience and the black community. His art is layered with music, poetry and secrets. It is the merger between sound and quiet, the interpersonal and the private. Hammons tackles urgent issues and weaves more threads around mundane and everyday objects while changing them into objects of strange and rare beauty. His work has been described as:

> Raw Energy! Making his rounds, dreams turned into nightmares heavy into art—that New York art scene outdoor art—dreams turn into realities—all night diners—back in his studio on 125 street—making art out of that which he has heard and seen on the scene of funk! Creating a space for the spirits! That flash of the spirit! (Hammons, 1991).

All his work possesses a spirit. The spirit of black people. The Spirit of Harlem and the urban landscape. Although he lived in Harlem he was not born there and this distance allowed him to have some space to simply observe. "I think I spend eighty-five percent of my time on the streets as opposed to in the studio. So, when I go to the studio I except to regurgitate these experiences on the street. All of the things I see socially. The social conditions of racism-come out like a sweat"(Hammons, 1986). Does possessing distance from a place make a person better able to approach it versus someone who is from the ground of that? To fully understand the humor of Hammons and apparent objectivity with the lens that he views the inner city one has to know that

it is because he is not from the big city and can examine the environment and experiences as an outsider from inside. Through his work, he created a series of visual and linguistic movements which were achievable because he was able to detach himself from the experience of Harlem all while being in the thick of it. The work contains visual puns and sophisticated observations about Blackness and the black experience in America.

> African American folk construction and Outsider art is fascinating for Hammons because it points to an aesthetic, a way of using and doing things, of creating something beautifully from the nothing that is give from the leftovers. By making art from detritus and found materials, Hammons attempts to put himself on the same plane as the historically marginal and opens himself up to their canon of beauty and perseverance that sometimes translates as transformational magic (Hammons, 1991).

An artist who has, for the most part, shown his work outside of mainstream art galleries and museums, the spaces to which most artists aspire. For Hammons, this is a deliberate choice influenced by aesthetic and moral principles. A voice of the African American community and he relies upon Harlem both experientially as a source of inspiration for his work and for materials such as Black hair, Night Train Express Wine bottles and gnawed barbecue bones.

For example, the train figure is predominately shown in African American culture and lore: there's the Underground Railroad; Freedom train and train porters. "The blues is full of train metaphors, which are also used in jazz and rhythm and blues. The "A train" (the song by Duke Ellington about the subway lien that goes to Harlem); "Night train" (in addition to being a cheap high, popular with those down on their luck, is an eagerly piece by James Brown); John Coltrane (the legendary jazz saxophonist is often referred to as Trane). Finally, there is the idea of African Americans "living on the other side of the tracks" in a segregated society" (Hammons, 1991).

The community is generally excluded from the art world. Both Cave and Hammons through their performance practice were able to include the audience and community within their work and made it a point to do so. For Hammons, the community is a source of energy and his most important audience. The community proved to be a point of solace, reflection and comfort for Hammons. His work is charged with vigor, sophistication, rawness and humor which is a natural evolution from Dadaism, Minimalism, Post Minimalism, Arte Povera and Installation art.

Throughout most of his career, David Hammons has defused and deconstructed symbols and stereotypes through constant modification. “He has recycled images, ideas and materials, employing them first one way and then another” (Hammons, 1991). This can mean everything or simply be constitutive elements in a work. Hammons often takes on the now you see it now you don’t, trickster stance. He understood completely that visual stimulation has different levels of cognition. Hammons fixation on the public arena, on creating incursions into collective spaces, is a natural extension and integral part of his interest in the meaning of symbols in a society.

These pieces must be in at every unexpected nook and canny and in our consciousness, “one of those objects that is in the path of you everyday existence” (Hammons, 1991). Hammons connects to the interior life of black people within public space through his usage of discarded materials. By using the remains of things that are most recognizable, Hammons draws us into a tale and weaves it around us while keeping the story personally to his experience. He brings the quiet of the black interior both in and outside the art institution. He communicates and provides form by identifying and repossessing particularly negative, stereotypes, dirt covered, rejected symbols and signs through reconfigured objects. Hammons reconstructs aesthetics. “There’s nothing negative about our images...it all depends on who’s seeing it, and we’ve been depending

on someone's sight...we need to look again and decide" (Hammons, 1986). The same could be said for the sound that both Hammons and Cave produce in their work.

Cave did just that and looked again. He stepped outside of the Soundsuit in order to put the audience in the belly of it. For his largest, most elaborate exhibition, *Until*, to date at Mass MoCA, the Soundsuits were not the focus but the themes of fear of violence and race remained the same. "I only have to walk two blocks to get to the hotel," he said of his commute from the museum to the hotel in the wee hours. "But in two blocks, your life can change forever." This fear and the looming presence of racism manifested through Cave's sculpture, focusing specifically on the lawn jockey and performance work.

> The paradisiacal landscape where the jockeys appear — made from the crystals that would normally go into chandeliers, on a raised platform accessible via four ladders — is the heart of "Until." "I had been thinking about gun violence and racism colliding," Mr. Cave said. "And then I wondered: Is there racism in heaven? That's how this piece came about. The jockeys appear to have a special symbolism for Mr. Cave, though he said he did not see a lot of them on lawns when he was growing up in Missouri in the 1960s — "thank god," he added. He recounted the possibly apocryphal origin of the figures: On a cold winter night, an African-American boy who served George Washington during the Revolutionary War was asked to keep watch on the horses and light the way until Washington returned. But the boy froze to death, in the familiar pose holding a lantern. "It's such a repressive image," Mr. Cave said, adding that it was the element of fruitless loyalty that bothered him the most. In his installation, however, the jockeys will be holding elaborately beaded butterfly nets, which Mr. Cave also called "dream catchers," giving "Until" a hopeful aspect. "There's a lightness to them," he said. "It's about this state of enlightenment, and living with a sense of uncertainty in the most magnificent way. (Loos, 2016).

There was one Soundsuit present during Cave's Mass MoCA exhibition. The Soundsuits do make an appearance in a video at the far end of "Until." Mr. Cave wears one, made with a vintage chicken mask covering his head, as he runs around frantically. "It's about feeling trapped," he said of the video. "Time is running out." That feeling of being trapped produces

sound, quiet, the desire for protection, darkness and light in the work of Cave and Hammons. Leaving the viewer with the question, what can happen if we surrender our interiors to the quiet, darkness and the light?

David Hammons and Nick Cave are two artists who have integrated sound and quiet into their work seamlessly throughout their entire careers. Both of these artists have distinctly different approaches in terms of engaging art institutions and the public but their commit to the black community was undeniable within their work. The two differed in their approach of materials, Hammons chose materials that surround everyday black life while Cave used materials that were often discard. All of these materials contain the memories and emotionality of those who possessed those items before Hammons and Cave found them and use those traits to tap into the haptic along with their audiences. By taking unorthodox approaches, these artists not only create haptic acts but they found ways to engage the art world in ways most viewers have never seen.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

I instruct teenagers and middle schoolers and the majority of them say that their views or feelings don't align with the black church and they don't feel connected to anything spiritually. Leaving them with feelings of shame and confusion that there is something internally wrong with them because they can't or haven't yet connected to religion or spirituality. But when I see them interacting with one another by creating moments where they have processed a feeling, given that feeling to someone else whether it be verbally or non-verbally, and that person or the collective group gives that feeling back to them wholeheartedly along with their feelings. This is the haptic act. That act shows them that their humanity and experiences are not singular, and they are valid because they are giving off this energy that only black people can articulate. Whether it be gazing across the room and giving a look, a hand gesture and connecting in ways where you know exactly what the person is feeling/expressing without necessarily saying it, is the essence of hapticality. For me, the haptic act is a spiritual event because spirituality looks like not being alone or isolated in my experiences and connecting to a higher power through my experiences with another individual or the collective here on the ground. The haptic begins with the individual feeling but is transported through the collective.

The haptic much like blackness is an occurrence of multiplicity, not to be defined by a single act, image or sound. It is a collection of events that come together to help produce feelings that cannot always be defined by language. The haptic act collects and combines the metaphysical, darkness, humanity and creates a way through it, out of it and the mobility to use it. Visual art is a location where the black interior can be fully realized and explored. Where one can reflect on the horrific events that accompany black existence and be emancipated in the same

instance. In order for that to happen, art must "survive the myth of the artist and the individual work of art." It has to "survive under tremendous pressure and duress that those concepts."

The haptic act's purpose is not to provide answers or solutions. It's about creating the capacity to consider all the possibilities that black interiority possesses, taking those possibilities and acting on them. Imagine what type of intimacy and potential could be unleashed if we took the time to surrender ourselves to see sounds, listen to images, feel the feelings we've shared with others. What would it be like to have our humanity fully exposed and feel every morsel of it? The haptic is one pathway we have to finding out. By blurring the traditional definitions of sound, quiet and visual art allows us to proceed in the present and the future with self-determinacy and self-possession. It permits us the agency to remove ourselves from the margins by using visual arts as a vehicle to possibility.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, Arthur Jafa, Kahlil Joseph, David Hammons and Nick Cave lives and works of art serve as looking glass into the haptic in both personal and professional environments. Art, in this content, isn't a site of escapism but rather a place to contend with the illogical matters that blackness undergoes. These artists demonstrate that the haptic is not only alive and well but the possibilities of exploration and expression of black interiority can provide additional avenues of connectivity. The haptic produces expressiveness because in order for a feeling to be given to someone else it has to be expressed and it can be non-verbal but it has to be expressed in some type of fashion that can be understood by the individual(s) who are receiving it. Which is why I choose to use art as a platform for showcasing haptic acts. By expressing feelings, it allows the space for the other individual(s) to be comfortable with expressing their feelings and experiences as well which fosters mobility of our emotions. Our feelings just like

our bodies require movement and the haptic is the mobilization of emotion from person to person. The haptic produces the resistance needed to not stop living and feeling everything deeply, the good and bad, no matter how much we may want to check out at times. The haptic provides us with a passageway and the strength to feel and be felt. Black futurity is primed with possibilities and by looking to and making use the haptic, we could be one step closer to not only defining but feeling liberation.

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