

THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST: AESTHETICS AND POLITICS IN BLACK FILM AND MEDIA

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In a scathing review of the hugely popular and profitable racial-commentary horror film *Get Out* (2017) by first-time director Jordan Peele, film critic Armond White attacks (among many things) the physical performance of lead actor Daniel Kaluuya. He notes the similarities between Kaluuya's terrified facial expression—prominently featured in advertisements for the film—and the troubling history of African Americans stereotypically represented in film as wide-eyed buffoons. White writes:

The actor's dark-skin/bright-teeth image inadvertently recalls the old Sambo archetype. Kaluuya frequently goes from sleepy-eyed stress to bug-eyed fright. Surely Spike Lee would have recognized the resemblance to Stepin' Fetchit, Mantan Moreland, and Willie Best, the infamous comics who made their living performing Negro caricatures during Hollywood's era of segregation. Peele seems too caught up in exploiting modern narcissism to notice old repulsion. Sambo lives matter.¹

While I disagree with much of the rest of White's assessment, this statement strikes a chord with me. It is true that advertisements for *Get Out*, and indeed, many scenes in the film, rely on tightly framed close-ups of Kaluuya's emotive face: the whites of his eyes prominent against the smooth darkness of his skin. Sitting in the theater with this image projected large-scale in front of me, like White, I too immediately think of Mantan Moreland and Stepin' Fetchit, and the ways an earlier generation of filmmakers had once focused on the whiteness of their eyes and the blackness of their skin.

Unlike White, however, I see the aesthetic connection as a way to begin a conversation about the racialized politics of aesthetics, not the final damnation that White intends. The visual connection between Daniel Kaluuya's performance as Chris in *Get Out* and the legacy of cinematic minstrelsy raises questions about the relationship between film and media's

aesthetic presentation of blackness and how these aesthetics can carry meaning beyond what seems most obvious. If cinema has a troubling history of exaggerating African American features for comedic effect, for instance, how can an African American actor register fear on his face without risk of resurrecting the tired old stereotype of bug-eyes to show fear? Can an African American actor ever appear in a horror film without this risk? Further, if African American fear has traditionally been used for comedic effect, what might this history mean for the contemporary interpretation of such images? Can an African American character's fear ever inspire empathy, rather than ridicule, from an audience?

Interestingly, while Armond White makes the connection between the close-ups of Kaluuya's face and past stereotypes, he avoids any actual contemplation of *Get Out*'s other images. Entering that gap, I would argue that Peele's recurring motifs of single tears or blood trickling down the fixed black faces, even the fact that the whites of Chris's eyes are bloodshot rather than pure white, could be seen to operate as a commentary on the minstrel mask rather than a straightforward rebirth of it.

Why raise these questions? I intend them not as an introduction to *Get Out* but rather as a broader call to reanimate formal analysis in the critical study of black film and media, one that can shift the debates beyond the politics of representation that have dominated the discussion of black images for so long. To that end, I have selected Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight* (2016) and the reality show *Love & Hip Hop* (VH1, 2011–) as objects of analysis for an examination of the racial politics of aesthetics. Though seemingly a world apart, the pair demonstrates the ways in which matters of visual style function in black texts across genres and mediums. Moreover, because discussions of aesthetics are deeply embedded in questions of taste, racial representation, and the politics of respectability, I deliberately juxtapose one text, which has received high critical praise for its portrayal of African American queer men (*Moonlight*) in the realm of film, with one that has been disparaged for its allegedly damaging images of African American women on television (*Love & Hip Hop*).

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A closeup of Daniel Kaluuya in Jordan Peele's horror film *Get Out*.



A shot of Lakeith Stanfield in *Get Out*.

Aesthetics, Politics, and Taste in Black Film: The Case of *Moonlight*

Moonlight (as many of this dossier's authors also note) is a productive jumping-off point for thinking through such matters. *Moonlight* absolutely deserves all the accolades that it has received for its stunningly aestheticized presentation of a queer African American man growing from childhood to maturity in inner-city Miami. Director Barry Jenkins tells the story in three distinct chapters, each with a specific visual look designed by cinematographer James Laxton and film colorist Alex Bickel. Jenkins and Laxton choose to use the film's visuals to underscore the themes of the film and to add

a layer of meaning that complement the acting and the narrative. For instance, in a scene where main character Chiron is verbally assaulted by his mother, Paula, Jenkins frames Paula's character isolated in a hallway, saturated in red and pink light. The scene suggests the engulfing deluge of Paula's emotions as they overtake her, her son, and the atmosphere between them. Moments like this populate the film and helped *Moonlight* win the attention and the acclaim of discerning critics. The film racked up a slew of awards, and from its run at film festivals through its culminating Best Picture win at the Academy Awards, the film's cinematography was singled out for special praise.

This last point is particularly important, as the film and television industries have typically prioritized the beautification of white skin on screen, with lighting and color schemas designed to optimize every nuanced detail of white skin and white performance. In the late 1970s, Jean-Luc Godard referred to Kodak film stock as “inherently racist” because it had been designed to optimize the reproduction of white skin and, therefore, could not capture the nuances of darker skin tones. He refused to use it despite it being the industry standard.² The centrality of whiteness in the industry means that cinematographers do not often learn, or care to learn, how to adjust their camera settings for black skin. This practice of lighting for white actors is so ubiquitous that it has led some white filmmakers, cinematographers, and costume designers to address the limits of conventional lighting by making changes to the set design or clothing choices of the actors. That is why the Eddie Murphy-scripted comedy *Coming to America* (John Landis, 1988) ends with the bride wearing a pink wedding dress: the cinematographer did not know how to light the scene to adequately capture Murphy’s chocolate skin next to a white garment.³

Such an accommodation is based on the ingrained perception that the technology *is* what it *is*, just that, with no possibility of adjustment. In such a way, racial bias has become an intrinsic part of the technologies of film and television, with a lasting impact on what makes it to the screen.⁴ The limitation, however, is not technical but ideological. Recognizing that aesthetic choices carry racialized politics requires acknowledging that the very process of filming is a political act. Barry Jenkins and James Laxton indicated as much when they repeatedly asserted that they designed *Moonlight*’s visual style, in their words, to “elevate” this story of African American men and women living in an economically impoverished neighborhood.⁵

In a similar vein, media maker Ricardo Gamboa has explicitly chosen to have high production values for his web series *Brujos* (about four gay Latino graduate students who are also witches) because, he asserts, queer people of color have never been deemed worthy of being filmed that way. Gamboa quotes Frantz Fanon (quoting the Bible) in *Wretched of the Earth* (first published in 1961) to explain the motivation behind his aesthetic decision: “the last shall be first.”⁶ Gamboa’s perspective highlights why there has been so much celebration over *Moonlight*—that is, the beautiful cinematography connotes that its characters are *worthy*. However, it may trouble the celebration of those aesthetics to point out how much the praise heaped on the film’s look is undergirded by a racialized politics of style.

In *The Wretched of the Screen*, Hito Steyerl differentiates between “rich” high-resolution images and “poor” low-resolution ones, wielding the terms not only to get at their qualitative value but also to emphasize their ideological and material circumstances:

It never mattered that these high-end economies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author.⁷

To Steyerl’s observations, I would add that the film and media industries have a “possessive investment” in aesthetics that is tied to racial politics and racial representation. George Lipsitz has used the phrase “the possessive investment in whiteness” to highlight the social, cultural, and political currency attached to white identity, as rooted in white supremacy and the victimization of nonwhite peoples. Lipsitz invokes Richard Dyer’s claim that the power of whiteness lies in its ability to mask itself in invisibility. Dyer himself examined the ways that Western visual culture, particularly cinema, has labored to imbue screen whiteness with seemingly natural connotations of goodness and beauty.⁸ Combining Dyer and Lipsitz with Steyerl, then, can create the basis for an understanding of the racialized politics of film and television aesthetics. Film and television have created an aesthetic (via lighting, coloring, framing, etc.) that is designed to beautify and humanize whiteness while simultaneously masking the process of that beautification and humanization. That aesthetic has become the visual marker of “quality” or “prestige,” and, for the most part, black images have been excluded from that aesthetic representation. Thus, when a film like *Moonlight* is celebrated for its “beautiful” cinematography and style, it is crucial to keep in mind that such discussions are never free from the racial politics, and inherent racism, that buttress them.

Technology is one route through which ideology informs the discussion of *Moonlight*’s aesthetics; the context in which these aesthetics are discussed is the other. At times, the celebration of *Moonlight*’s cinematography veers into the territory of fetishization, perhaps because Jenkins’s and Laxton’s technical choices deliberately signal a relationship to other critically praised films, such as Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail* (1999).⁹ Further, the decision to shoot the film in widescreen Cinemascope and to design each of the three chapters to imitate three

distinct film stocks (Fuji, Agfa, and Kodak) further signal the film's adherence to visual standards of "quality" cinema.¹⁰ Such connections ultimately reward the critics and cinephiles able to recognize them, providing a sense of satisfaction that Julio García Espinosa describes in "Towards an Imperfect Cinema," positing: "Perhaps the cognitive power of art is like the power of a game for a child. Perhaps aesthetic pleasure lies in sensing the functionality (without a specific goal) of our intelligence and our own sensitivity."¹¹

Yet, when some observers likened *Moonlight's* visuals instead to *Belly* (1998) by music director Hype Williams, other *Moonlight* fans shot down or dismissed the comparison, as if it were an insult to speak of the two in the same frame of reference. This refusal was less about the films' aesthetics than about matters of taste and respectability: people literally refused to see the aesthetic similarities between the two films. *Moonlight* was a critical darling, but more than that, *Moonlight* was a resoundingly serious film, as evidenced by its acclaim at such prestigious (i.e., white) events as the Telluride Film Festival and the Academy Awards. While *Moonlight* was a critical darling that gained momentum primarily in the world of white film festivals and art house theaters, *Belly*—a crime film starring rappers DMX and Nas that has a cult following among African American audiences—gained traction primarily through black word of mouth. For fans who might have seen *Moonlight's* appreciation by predominantly white critics and highbrow institutions as a source of validation, the connection to the popular *Belly* and the African American masses had the potential to "contaminate" the former. It was as if merely mentioning *Belly* in the same breath as *Moonlight* would downgrade Jenkins's critical darling from "a film that happens to be black" to the industry's pejorative category, "black film."

Erasing a film like *Belly* from *Moonlight's* cinematic lineage functions to elide the significant aesthetic work that African American film and media makers have been producing for so long in spaces outside those that are critically prized by the film and television industries. For decades now, African American talent has taken its creative energies into television, music video, and advertising, either because of a lack of entrée into the film industry or because of a preference for other formats. *Belly* director Hype Williams, for instance, became famous by creating distinctive, polished, and artistic hip-hop music videos with signature flourishes that made his work readily identifiable. Williams would be deemed an auteur if that cinematic term were ever applied to creators in a nonfilm medium. When critics and scholars celebrate the aesthetics of a film like *Moonlight* with no mention of a film like *Belly*, they

send the message that certain types of aesthetics can exist only in certain types of spaces, thereby reinforcing the high/low dichotomy that marginalized black film and television for so long.

The Beautification of Love & Hip Hop

Far from *Moonlight*, there is a show that could be considered its polar opposite, in terms of critical regard: VH1's *Love & Hip Hop*.¹² Having focused already on its matters of representational politics and affect, I now want to focus on the trajectory of the show's form rather than its politics of representation; I trace how shifts in aesthetics can reveal the interplay of race, gender, and class, and how they can come to bear on the televi-sual image.¹³

The most common approach to the critical analysis of reality television focuses on its representational politics: where the text fits into a longer history of black representations, whether the characters uphold or subvert racial stereotypes, and how the potential for pleasures and possible readings may exceed the obvious interpretations of the text and its meanings. Without a doubt, these are questions that matter, ones with which scholars of black cast media are still struggling. Yet, here I want to make the case that focusing on aesthetics can tell us a great deal about the workings of race, class, and privilege as they pertain to black film and television. Further developing my own stake in the benefits of formal analysis, I hope to demonstrate one of the ways that aesthetics play an active role in the racial politics of black film and television.

A reality show on VH1 that chronicles the lives of women who are connected to the hip-hop industry, primarily via their romantic relationships, *Love & Hip Hop* premiered in March 2011 and was immediately criticized. Because many of the women on the show are rappers' girlfriends, mistresses, and "baby mamas," some critics called out its "negative" representations of women of color. Some of the show's women are queer, some are unapologetically opportunistic, and still others are loud and physically violent. The criticism of the women, therefore, is grounded in the long-held politics of respectability discourses that have criticized women of color for their distance from white, middle-class, heteronormative standards.¹⁴

During the show's seven-season run, *Love & Hip Hop* has steadily developed a formal style that connotes "quality." On a technological level, even the actual quality of the images has noticeably improved, most strikingly in its interview segments. In earlier seasons, a cast member sat in front of a background, framed in medium close-up, as



Nas in Hype Williams's *Belly*.

she provided perspective and commentary on scenes that were intercut. This aesthetic design located the women in specific locations, such as their homes, visually reinforcing the underlying conceit of reality television, which purports to give viewers a window into the real lives of the people on the show. Yet, more recently, the interview segments have opened with a subtle tracking movement, creating a more “cinematic” feel for the interviews. Furthermore, the clarity of the image has improved, with backgrounds subtly but perceptibly blurred by setting the focal length of the lens, allowing the figures of the women to stand out distinctively in the foreground. Finally, the women are shot in a less documentary style, with more soft, white light creating an ethereal quality, one that—for me, at least—immediately calls to mind the hallmark soft lighting of the days of classic Hollywood.

The result of this shooting style is that the women appear less as “real” people embedded in their respective lives and more as archetypes: they literally stand out from their backgrounds, framed as glamorous celebrities and bathed in dazzling, beautifying light. This look, coupled with the

women’s increased notoriety outside of the show that has made the cast members into celebrities in their own right, moves the women out of the visual discourses of “real people” and into the terrain of cinematic figures. It is a move that carries meaning in and of itself.

In her discussion of “rich” versus “poor” images, Steyerl argues that poor images have a degraded quality because they have been so frequently reproduced, disseminated, and shared. She writes: “Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.”¹⁵ For Steyerl, then, poor images literally bear the low-status mark of their accessibility. By contrast, high-quality images suggest a protected, well-regarded nature, as with film prints that have been safeguarded in climate-controlled archives.¹⁶ For the women on *Love & Hip Hop*, the higher quality images of the later seasons suggest a transition from the accessibility initially promised by the reality television genre to a performative state associated with higher-status scripted television.



A shot of Moniece Slaughter on *Love & Hip Hop: Hollywood*.

This upgrade in aesthetics has implications for the presentation of the women's behavior and lives, too. Scenes of the women preparing meals are shot in high definition, adding a level of sophistication to the quotidian task and presenting the fruits of their labor as culinary masterpieces. Love scenes between women partners are shot in slow motion with soft lighting and close framing. Although some could argue that this is designed to eroticize women's sexuality for a male gaze, I would counter that these romantically shot scenes equally provide a rare glimpse of queer women of color engaged in loving intimacy on television.¹⁷

In effect, style on *Love & Hip Hop* has evolved from Steyerl's poor image to her category of the rich one. To shoot the women on *Love & Hip Hop* in this manner is effectively to shoot them the way that the film and television industries have always filmed white women.¹⁸ By giving these women access to the same aesthetic framing typically reserved for white women, the show also gives them access to the qualities typically associated with white femininity. Anyone watching the show can literally see the increased production values developing through the evolutions in clothing, lighting, and camerawork. Yet viewers are so attuned to the ideological implications of these aesthetics (without necessarily recognizing them as such) that they innately sense the change more than they visually comprehend it. The women, bathed

in the soft glow of warm, white light, suddenly—almost imperceptibly—*feel* more beautiful, more compelling, more watchable to the show's viewers. And yes, worthier.¹⁹ After years of criticism for being too loud, too sexual, too violent, too *ratchet*, the women are finally being filmed like ladies.

The Last Shall Be First

There has been a shift away from formal and textual analysis in the field of film and media studies. These methodologies are seen as passé, "old school," or even overly simplistic (and no doubt some of this work may warrant these critiques). Yet, I suspect that, as with the celebration of style in *Moonlight*, here, too, other politics are at play. In some ways, to reject formal analysis is to subconsciously reject the earlier era of film studies that treated the study of black film (and eventually television) as marginal or inconsequential. In other ways, this move away from formal analysis is also an acknowledgement of the incredibly rich and multifaceted terrain that black representations cover: the critical study of industrial practices, labor, and global strategies—to list some of the most popular topics in the field right now—are all essential to any understanding of the complicated subject of black film and media. Certainly, analysis of black images has for too long been stuck circling around questions of

representation rather than seeking to understand how they are created, exhibited, and circulated throughout the world.

Questions of style, though, cannot be separated from questions of politics. Aesthetics bear the indelible imprint of racial ideologies. Beautiful images such as those that populate *Moonlight* and *Love & Hip Hop* signify taste, money, a capital investment in the professional education and training of the crew, and the availability of resources to underwrite particular cameras, film stock, and lighting equipment.²⁰ Moreover, the aesthetically beautiful image is legible only as “beautiful” via the processes of articulation and recognition created and maintained by the media industry. It is not just that the images created in *Moonlight* and *Love & Hip Hop* are beautiful, but that they are beautiful in precisely the way that white images have traditionally been beautiful, and black ones have not.

This is tricky territory, then, and requires scholars to tread carefully. The celebration of certain “beautiful” aesthetics can serve to reinforce an established taste politics that has traditionally dictated an aesthetic marginalization and degradation for people of color throughout the history of the medium. What does it mean to celebrate the cinematography in *Moonlight* for “elevating” the image of the people whose story it tells? Does this not suggest that their stories and their images are inherently undeserving of being represented in cinema without the valorization of high-quality style? At what point does the conversation about how the images *look* supplant the discussion about what the images *do* in service of the film’s larger messages and how they make viewers feel? To the extent that these premises of aesthetic privilege function to separate a film like *Moonlight* from those other media texts with decidedly lesser quality images where the bulk of the work in telling black stories is still taking place—television, web series, even lower budget films—then it is worth interrogating the significance of a film like *Moonlight* as far as blackness is concerned.

I intend these questions as provocations rather than condemnations. I am not suggesting that high-quality images are simply indicators of whiteness or that low-quality ones are inherently more authentic for representing blackness. On the contrary, I am fascinated by the power that style holds, especially as it pertains to the black image, and how the implementation of that style can form a powerful critique of the film and television industries’ long-time racism. At the same time, I want a more rigorous, thoughtful, critical interrogation of how these images come to be, what they signify, and how they train viewers to read race in ways that extend beyond narrative. In proposing an emphasis on aesthetic and formal analysis, I am

suggesting, not a “return” to traditional film studies approaches, but instead, a study of black images that was never “there” in the first place.

Notes

1. Armond White, “Return of the Get-Whitey Movie,” *National Review*, February 24, 2017, www.nationalreview.com/article/445206/jordan-peeles-get-out-trite-get-whitey-movie.
2. It was only when furniture companies complained that Kodak film did a poor job of representing the richness of their brown wood in advertisements that Kodak addressed the problem, with positive—albeit unintentional—outcomes for the photographing of black skin.
David Smith, “‘Racism’ of Early Colour Photography Explored in Art Exhibition,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2013, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jan/25/racism-colour-photography-exhibition.
3. Estelle Caswell, “Color Film Was Built for White People. Here’s What It Did to Dark Skin,” *Vox*, September 18, 2015, www.vox.com/2015/9/18/9348821/photography-race-bias.
4. In television production, there were “Shirley cards” with images of white women used to calibrate proper light and color settings on the cameras. This, of course, meant that the cameras were then incapable of properly rendering African American actors on their screens.
5. Gregg Kilday interviews *Moonlight* cinematographer James Laxton about his approach to the film’s look: “For despite *Moonlight’s* gritty subject matter, they [Laxton and director Barry Jenkins] didn’t want a neorealist look. Instead, Laxton shot in widescreen CinemaScope. ‘We really tried our best to elevate the story and put it on the screen in a big, major way to create a very immersive experience that’s almost a dream-like state,’ he says.”
Gregg Kilday, “How ‘Moonlight’ Became a ‘Personal Memoir’ for Director Barry Jenkins: ‘I Knew the Story Like the Back of My Hand,’” *Hollywood Reporter*, November 11, 2016, www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/how-moonlight-became-a-personal-memoir-director-barry-jenkins-i-knew-story-like-back-my-han.
6. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 2.
7. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 35.
8. Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
9. Chris O’Fault, “Barry Jenkins’ Favorite Films: 24 Classics Loved By the ‘Moonlight’ Director,” *IndieWire*, May 31, 2017, www.indiewire.com/gallery/barry-jenkins-favorite-films/.
10. Chris O’Fault, “‘Moonlight’ Glow: Creating the Bold Color and Contrast of Barry Jenkins’ Emotional Landscape,” *IndieWire*, October 26, 2016, www.indiewire.com/2016/10/moonlight-cinematography-color-barry-jenkins-james-laxton-alex-bickel-1201740402/. Note that other critics and fans have

- also located *Moonlight* thematically within a legacy of black filmmaking such as the black queer-themed films *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989) and *Pariah* (Dee Rees, 2011).
11. Julio Garcia Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," *Jump Cut* No. 20 (1979, 2005): 24–26, www.ejumpcut.org/archive/online_says/JC20folder/ImperfectCinema.html.
 12. I use the title *Love & Hip Hop* to serve as a general title for the original *Love & Hip Hop* reality show as well as the spin-offs in the series *Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta* and *Love & Hip Hop: Hollywood*.
 13. This work is valuable. See my own earlier contributions: Racquel Gates, "Activating the Negative Image," *Television and New Media* 16 (2015): 616–30.
Gates, "Keeping it Real(ity) Television," *Watching While Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences*, ed. Beretta Smith-Shomade (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 141–56.
Gates, "You Can't Turn a Ho into a Housewife: 'Basketball Wives' and the Politics of Wifedom," *In Media Res*, September 26, 2011, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2011/09/26/you-cant-turn-ho-housewife-basketball-wives-and-politics-wifedom>.
 14. Rizvana Bradley convincingly argues that the mother in *Moonlight* presents an example of a figure who is complex, rather than the straightforward pathological maternal figure found in films like *Precious* (Lee Daniels, 2009). Yet, I would offer that Naomie Harris's impressive performance in the film benefits from the actress's British nationality and professional theater training—both of which were invariably mentioned in press about her—and provided a layer of quality and credibility that allowed critics to see her as nuanced rather than stereotypical. Rizvana Bradley, "Maternal Miracles: Black Maternity at Cinema's Edge," *Film Quarterly* 71.2 (Winter 2017), 46–52.
 15. Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 38.
 16. In that regard, the decision about *what* deserves to be archived, protected, restored, etc. is itself a political act. I make this argument in more depth regarding the *Pioneers of African American Cinema* box set. Racquel Gates, "Art and Artifact: *Pioneers of African-American Cinema* and Its Contemporary Relevance," *Film Quarterly* 70.2 (Winter 2016), 88–93.
 17. It is also important to note that the audience for *Love & Hip Hop* is primarily women.
 18. Coincidentally, a similar evolution can be seen in the development of the interview segments in *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (E!, 2007–), notably coinciding with the family's shift into the worlds of art and high fashion.
 19. Similarly, other aspects of the show's form, such as episode run time, carry implications for how they signify. The first season of *Love & Hip Hop* ran in weekly, thirty-minute time slots and comprised nine episodes. Beginning in its second season, *Love & Hip Hop* expanded to an hour-long slot with approximately fifteen to sixteen episodes per season. Thus, the show has moved up from the thirty-minute slot typically associated with comedic sitcoms to the hour-long duration that prestige television dramas and soap operas usually occupy. The increased number of episodes has allowed the producers to construct narrative arcs of longer duration, with slow buildup, melodramatic peaks, and satisfying resolutions.
 20. As an early example of how access to money and resources can be manifested at the level of the image, consider Charles Burnett's masterpiece *Killer of Sheep* (1978), shot in black-and-white because of its relative affordability compared to color stock. The film is often discussed as an updating of the aesthetic tradition of Italian neo-realism, but it is important to consider how matters of capital led Burnett down that path in the first place.