



Love is the Message, The Plan is Death

Arthur Jafa and Tina M. Campt



Issue #81

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Arthur Jafa's seven-minute short film Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death cuts together footage of Charles Ramsey; Swag Surf, a black variation on the wave at sports games; Fred Hampton's widow the day after his assassination; Bayard Rustin, organizer of the 1963 March on Washington; Storyboard P, dance legend; the 2015 murder of Walter Scott in South Carolina; kids dancing in a club; Hortense Spillers; Birth of a Nation;

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rather away to the screen. I needed that I was not trying to see the process of the images more carefully or more closely. I was trying to tweak or to amplify the relationship to get the impact of the images. I needed to get that impact physically by way of the sound. I actually needed to feel the contact between the soundtrack and the way in which it actually makes bodies move

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large part of the last thirty years thinking about what makes black music so powerful, and how to transpose this power into this other medium, cinema.

I realized that the black voice was at the core (technically, formally, and spiritually) of why black music was powerful. People typically talked about cinema in terms of stories

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me legitimate progeny of the west (in suits), in the sense that a lot of ideas were imposed on us (nonconsensually, so to speak), ideas which we internalized and made something new of, something unique and distinctively American, all without us ever being seen or accepted as the legitimate heirs of these ideas. Black people came to the Americas with the very deepest reservoir of cultural traditions, modes of expressivity. There's a great

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... who want to keep black people out of the particular arena, the hood after all. But remember Cornel went on and said something like, "I think the reason why it's underdeveloped is because it never found support in the only institution that black people had, which was the church."

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One place you see this is in basketball. A player (both moving and in motion) from almost anywhere on the floor can launch the ball into a trajectory where it'll arc, descend, and go through the hoop. You see the same thing in soccer—like with Pelé. And with the *ginga* (caneira). There are things bound up in very complex ways with our experiences (the

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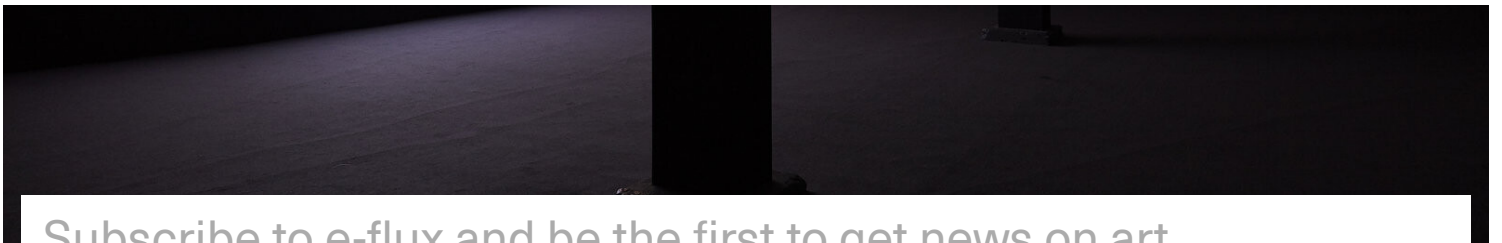
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In the previous film I made, *Dreams are Colder Than Death*, there is a moment when Hortense Spillers makes this startling formulation about the difference between the body and flesh. She says, “The flesh gives empathy.” That’s what I feel like I’m trying to manipulate and at the same time get at—a sort of rendering of how black people feel

... The work feels very connected to me. Her struggle with it. Does the

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considered anistoreally, will appear to be finite, rather than an adaptation to malevolent circumstances. Same thing if you throw people into a barrel.

The people who are dehumanizing others are trying to maintain or hold onto the sense of their own humanity. If I step on a bug, I know maybe the American Society for the

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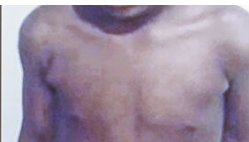
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I'm really interested in making work that is always foregrounding black people's humanity, bad guys or good guys. I like the alien. I'm a big fan of the alien. I'm a big fan of Hannibal Lecter, who I think is black and passing. Fundamentally, I just want to see black people who are complex. And competent at what they do, even if they're mad geniuses

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