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“The Neighborhood Is Dangerous, But We Got There”: Urban Space, Neoliberal Resistance, and Black Representation in Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston*

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ABSTRACT

Since *Looking for Langston* first came out, it has become a classic avant-garde film capturing the queer undercurrent of the Harlem Renaissance and displaying Black gay desire during the height of the AIDS crisis. The film also critiques neoliberal ideology of the 1980s and the ways it has defined urban space. Reaganism and Thatcherism have framed the city with its Black population as a space that threatens the social order. Building on the theories of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Stuart Hall, I argue that the city's importance is not so much as a physical space but as a site for the struggle over representation. Julien's role as a filmmaker is to create a cinematic landscape that challenges the racism of neoliberal thought and provides an alternate imagining of urban space. In *Looking for Langston*, he constructs a queer space that while referencing the 1920s and 1980s, could be applied to any historical moment or Black urban space. By placing desire at the center of this new geography, he questions the way space is defined through capital and posits the Black Subject as an agent of change in the struggle with neoliberalism.



You can look to Langston Hughes' poems, like "Montage of A Dream Deferred." He uses the word montage, which is very interesting to me, in order to talk about Black urban experiences. (Fusco 1988, 25)

The crisis around race is not just a theoretical one, it's a crisis on all levels. It's very obvious what informs it in the age of Reaganism and Thatcherism. When you walk in New York streets and you see the number of Black people on the streets begging something tells you that there is something wrong about the system. (Fusco 1988, 34)

The opening credits of Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* describe the film as a "meditation" on the legacy of Langston Hughes. The narrative structure is non-linear, weaving various visual and audio elements of the 1920s and 1930s with the contemporary era. The writings of an older generation of African-American writers like Hughes, James Baldwin, and Richard Bruce Nugent are intertwined with contemporary ones like Essex Hemphill and Hilton Als. Over the course of forty-five minutes, the camera meanders through scenes of New York of the period, footage of various artists and poets of the era, images of Black gay men in a Jazz Age nightclub, men exploring their desires in idyllic landscapes, men about to have sex in the outdoors, a simple bedroom, and a sound stage with projections of Mapplethorpe images. Interspersing the present with the past, documentary footage with reconstructed scenes, Julien creates a cinematic landscape that excavates and presents a history and culture of gay desire from the Harlem Renaissance to the AIDS crisis that has long been invisible to the public.

Looking for Langston also extends beyond sexuality and presents a potent critique of the way Black bodies were inscribed within urban space at the time. The rise of neoliberal thought in mainstream politics through the 1970s and 1980s in Britain and the United States included a particular framing of the Black body as criminal, non-productive, and amoral. Cities like New York and London and Birmingham became sites of contestation over Black subjectivity between the predominantly white politicians and the Black communities themselves. Through his collapsing of time and space into this filmic representation of Black urban space, Julien reflects



on the possibilities for a space of freedom and transcendence for the Black community at the contemporary moment.

At the premiere of *Looking for Langston* at the 1989 New York Film Festival, Langston Hughes' voice was turned off during the screening to avoid being sued by the poet's estate. The silences only served to remind the audience of the way Black gay men had been sanitized or expurgated from the historical and cultural record. Isaac Julien presents an aspect of the Harlem Renaissance that had remained in the shadows, outside of the public spotlight. The unspoken and unseen desire of the past now confronted and resonated with the audience of the present. Depictions of the Harlem Renaissance are interspersed with the contemporary poetry of Essex Hemphill and the photographic images of Robert Mapplethorpe. The absence of Black gay men from the historical record was transformed into an existential struggle when AIDS threatened to erase their community. Challenging traditional depictions of Black gay sexuality at the height of the crisis and pushing the boundaries of Black filmmaking, *Looking for Langston* is now considered a seminal text of the AIDS crisis (Deitcher 2000, 11-12). Since its premiere, Julien's film has gained even further admiration from academics and critics. *Looking for Langston*, a film with a Black British director exploring the African-American experience, exemplifies this critical direction capturing the complexities of Black identity through a distinctive diasporic lens (Gates 2010, 54-55). Influenced by the work of theorists like Stuart Hall, Hazel Carby, and Paul Gilroy, the field of African American Studies has become more transnational, exploring the development of race in other areas of the Black Diaspora and looking at how these analyses could shape the understanding of race in the United States.

The trans-Atlantic relationship between Great Britain and the United States is more direct in *Looking for Langston*. The film is just as much a representation of the Black subject on one side of the pond as it is of the Black subject on the other. As the film begins, the camera closes in on a funeral scene and then quickly cuts to a figure in the coffin. The viewer first suspects a stand-in for James Baldwin, who had died the previous year and to whom this film is dedicated. Instead, he/she finds Julien himself [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.

His presence reminds the audience of the devastating effect AIDS could have on every gay man, even the creator of this cinematic world. It also links the struggles of the quintessential New York artists and writers to figures living elsewhere – in this case, a London-based filmmaker (Gates 2010, 55). Other visual clues point to a shift from New York to London. In one shot of two men that had just left the club, the Bankside Power Station is visible in the background. The policemen that raid the club at the end of the film wear the standard issue Metropolitan London police hats with the checkered black and white band. Finally, one of the angels overlooking the empty nightclub is none other than Jimmy Sommerville, the 1980s gay British pop sensation. These seemingly small markers shift the scene across time and space, changing the statement that the film is making. By transforming New York into London, Julien points out that the very same ideological definitions and constrictions on Black culture in the American context are present in the British one.

Looking for Langston becomes a film about the representation of urban space and the potential it has to challenge neoliberal thought. In the epigram in the beginning of the paper, Julien notices the very real effects that these economic policies have brought on the Black community in both the United States and Great Britain. His observation of the image of the



Black beggar becomes a symbolic stand-in for the entire system writ large. For him, it marks the failures of neoliberalism for the Black community. While for others, these kinds of representations reinforce how poverty and criminality are an inherent part of the Black community. With many supporters of both Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher looking at televisions and newspapers from their suburban and rural homes, these visuals become symptomatic of an urban space that housed and reproduced this kind of depravation. Although neoliberal thought consists of a carefully constructed argument based on economics and individual responsibility, the image becomes the central medium through which the ideology enters the mainstream consciousness. Julien is aware of the potential power as a filmmaker to reformulate the visuals and reveal the ways that this neoliberal discourse and policies have destroyed the Black community.

A careful consideration of *Looking for Langston* must begin with 1989, the year it officially premiered. It was an important moment marking the end of the first wave of neoliberal ideology that transformed the political, economic, and social structures of the United States and Great Britain. Ronald Reagan just completed his two-term presidency, while Margaret Thatcher was soon to be replaced by John Major as head of the Conservative Party. These two leaders oversaw the dismantling of the welfare state, the waning of union power, the privatization of state resources, and the rise of the financial and business sectors with lower taxes and laissez-faire economic policies (Harvey 2005, 51-55). Building on the work of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, this faith in free market capitalism was accompanied with an emphasis on the importance of individual responsibility and personal freedom in promoting these values (Harvey 2005, 65). Despite the difference in their development in the two countries, this relationship between the individual and economic success would include a strong sense of community and nation whose membership was inherently defined through race.

The American Right's rise to prominence originates in the mobilization efforts of conservatives during the 1960s in affluent, white suburbs like Orange County, California. The inhabitants of this area fought against the Left that had obtained great legislative gains since the New Deal and had played a large role in shaping the American cultural life with the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement. They believed in the combination of economic libertarianism, American patriotism, and social conservatism that was missing from the mainstream (McGirr 2002, 6). Twelve years later after being carried by this movement to the California governorship, Ronald Reagan was able to build on this support and coalesce a



majority with the Christian Right that felt betrayed by Jimmy Carter's liberal attitudes and former Southern Democrats that believed they were deceived by Lyndon B. Johnson's passing of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 (Harvey 2005, 49-50). Neoliberalism became the dominant ideological force in American politics, redirecting the role of government to cater to these groups' needs and dismissing the issues facing others that did not fit into this worldview. This includes the lack of a response to the AIDS crisis in the early years, the war on drugs, and the slow dissolution of the safety net.

Meanwhile in Britain, neoliberalism tied the free market with the anxieties of the public with its economic trajectory as a welfare state and the insecurities with its national identity after the Second World War (Harvey 2005, 61-62). With the failed expansion of the welfare state under Harold Wilson in the 1960s and Britain in the economic doldrums in the 1970s, a similar anti-Left sentiment as that in the United States slowly pervaded British society. The success of trade unions, the rise of anti-Vietnam and student movements, the development of youth subcultural groups, and the increasing number of immigrants arriving in the country all shaped a pervasive sentiment of the decline of Britain. This became an increasingly central component of political discourse in the elections of 1971 and 1973 (Solomos et al. 1994, 22-23). Like in the United States, neoliberalism became the dominant ideological force in British society. Building on the same intellectual roots as Reagan, Thatcher succeeded in bridging the Conservative Party's neoliberal economics philosophy of free-market capitalism and individual responsibility with the social conditions visible to the public.

The discourse surrounding race within neoliberalism is similar both in the British and American contexts. It embraces multiculturalism on its own specific terms. In the United States, the "freedom and opportunity" to succeed is open to everyone regardless of race or ethnicity. However, the socio-economic conditions of certain groups make upward mobility easier. When certain racial and ethnic groups are unable to reap the rewards, it is seen as a personal or even communal failure rather than one of the system as a whole (Melamed 2011, 43). For example, America's welfare system was seen as empowering African-Americans and women and therefore threatened the social order that privileged the traditional family. By not enabling men to make a living and provide for the household, the welfare system destroyed the heteronormative nuclear family. More and more of the poorest and most unproductive of society were locked away, as seen in the rise of incarcerations starting with Richard Nixon and continuing through the present (Duggan 2003, 15-18). The same dynamic took place in Britain



at the time. Over the course of a decade, from 1970 to 1981, Black criminality changed from the notion that certain individuals participated in these illicit behaviors to a whole scale indictment of Black culture whose way of life fosters such actions. Even though studies have shown a direct correlation between poverty, racism, and criminality, the essentialization of Black culture was seen by most as “common sense,” a term repeated in neoliberal discourse over and over again (Gilroy 1991, 105,109). This sentiment took away any possible engagement of the public with the realities of people that were suffering the most under the system. It also elevated the racial divisiveness in American and British society without being accused of racism.

These parallels are important because neoliberalism reshaped the economic foundations of white supremacy and embraced a racial discourse that is similar on both sides of the Atlantic. When Julien describes the situation of African-Americans in New York, these same conditions are just as applicable to Black communities in British cities. From the beginning of his career as a member of the filmmakers group Sankofa, Julien was influenced by the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy (Fusco 1988, 11-12). These figures wrote with others at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham University during the late 1970s producing a series of working papers that exposed the ways that race was embedded within the ideological framework of neoliberal thought: this included *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*; *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and racism in 70s Britain*; and *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. This work explored how neoliberal discourses on race have invaded all aspects of British society, including the media, education, and the response to youth subcultures (Lott 2015). These different elements exemplified Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s model of hegemony how at very specific historical moments, through “coercion” and “consent,” a coalition of groups is able to obtain dominance over society (Hall 1996b, 45). The Centre’s model of the relationship between race and neoliberalism found resonance in African-American Departments in the United States. The work of figures such as Hall, Gilroy, and Hazel Carby shaped numerous American scholars’ analysis of race in the 1980s and 1990s (Baker et al. 1996, 13-14).

Julien’s discussion of New York with Fusco builds on Hall’s appropriation of Gramsci and applies it to his understanding of the relationship between cities and neoliberalism. He connects the American city with Nicaragua and Grenada where neoliberal resistance occurred against American military forces. He proclaims these places as “key sites of representation” (Fusco 1988, 34-35). This turn of phrase marks space as a fluid entity that is constantly redefined and



reconfigured by various groups. Here, Julien captures Henri Lefebvre's tripartite model of space that breaks it down into spatial practices or material space, the representation of space, and the space of representation. Spatial practices/material space refers to the real lived conditions occurring within the space; the representation of space refers to the planning and conceptualization of the space from the beginning; and the space of representation is the symbolic renderings of the space by its inhabitants (Stanek 2011, 81-82). The importance of Lefebvre's model is its ability to capture the way space is not only a physical entity but an imagined one. It is given meaning through daily interaction with others and things within that space and through emotional, intellectual and other kinds of human responses that extend beyond that moment and place (Harvey 2006, 130-132). Above all, a critical engagement with space must be dialectical considering other places, other times, the way these conditions shape its inhabitants, and the way its inhabitants shape its meanings. It is from this dynamic that a political culture is borne (Harvey 2006, 148).

The insistence on the dialectic nature of space defined by Harvey through Lefebvre resonates with Hall's definition of Black urban space. In his analysis of *Policing the Crisis*, Michael Keith explores how although Hall never directly analyzes the city, the framing of "law and order" in relation to the Black community transformed the meaning of urban space. The harsh police tactics of the 1970s played an integral role in criminalizing Black youth. These policies were part of a larger neoliberal project that aimed to transform economic, political, and social structures. However, the crime rate on the ground did not correspond to the racial panic brought by the depictions of urban landscapes. By building on traditional narratives of cities as a dangerous place, urban space became associated with Black crime. The realities within the space shaped the imagining of urban space, but at the same time, this imagined construction went on to shape the realities within that space. The urban landscape becomes a space of deconstruction (or of a play of language) where meaning constantly shifts and changes (Keith 2009, 540-545). In this instance, the city becomes the battlefield on which the Gramscian back-and-forth takes place. As neoliberalism aims to define Blackness in terms of pathology and criminality, the Black community transforms the city using its own vocabulary and building a political response to Reaganism and Thatcherism.

At the center of this struggle it is not so much a question of what the space incorporates but what the space means. How does one fight back against a system when one does not have access to the economic and even political resources to gain ownership of the space? In that



spatial context, the debate over representation becomes even more important. In his argument with Salman Rushdie over the artistic merits of films like Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* (co-directed by Maureen Blackwood and Julien) or The Black Audio Collective's *The Handsworth Songs* (directed by John Akomfrah) in the pages of the Guardian newspaper, Stuart Hall tried to articulate that the importance of these films lies in their ability to position Black identity within these debates about representation and then to explore the repercussions of these forms of Blackness on the public. The way they capture and speak to the larger structures of power that define the Black community at large is more important than simply trying to create an "authentic" representation (Hall 1996a, 171). Culture plays a "constitutive" role in shaping of the material lives of various groups (Hall 1996a, 165). Even beyond, these forms hold the potential to speak back to power and transcend the very material condition in which they were created.

The role of the Black filmmaker, according to Julien, is not only to respond and challenge the dominant representations of race, but to also provide an alternative way of how race could be envisioned. The language of struggle presented by the debates of figures such as Hall, Gilroy, and even Julien himself in his writings was a central issue in the debates over Black cinema between Hall and Rushdie. Both sides believed that it is not enough to simply replace negative representations of the Black community with positive ones. A truly transformative visual culture needs to respond to neoliberalism on multiple levels. First, it must challenge the construction of what it means to be Black. Neoliberalism framed Black identity as antithetical to its value system, particularly as a productive force in the growth of capital. It also completely decontextualized Black identity from the historical forces that led to its evolution. Traditional narrative structures in film and television have simply reinforced the ideological conceptions of race. At the same time, it limited the possibility of transcending the psychoanalytic relationship between the object and the spectator. One prominent example from the era described by Julien is *The Cosby Show*. The Black audience is allowed a moment of recognition with the characters on the screen, however this allegiance simply reinforces the moralistic values of neoliberal ideology (Julien and Mercer 1996, 205).

While many on the Right saw the AIDS crisis as retribution for the gay community's sinful acts, *Looking for Langston* confronts this moralistic stance by putting these erotic images at the very center of the screen. Without a specific narrative line or even at times, a spare set, the queer space Julien creates on the screen appears as pure distillation of Black gay male



desire. Even without these particular references, Julien's portrayal of queer space is also his representation of urban space. The foundation of his vision is grounded in the historical development of a Black gay community in Harlem at the beginning of the twentieth century. With the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North, more and more gays and lesbians congregated in Harlem and created various social settings, institutions, and support networks that enabled them to thrive for most of the 1920s until the Great Stock Market crash of 1929 (Garber 1989, 318-319). A voiceover accompanied by documentary footage of the "Negro in Art Week" exhibit of 1927 explains how these individuals lost their sponsorship by white patrons because they no longer wanted to support Black artists whose sexuality was seen as a threat to the race. Despite the end of this backing, queer spaces where gay men met did not completely dissolve. Instead, they morphed into new spaces of desire that fulfilled the needs of individuals of the community. As the camera moves from setting to setting, *Looking for Langston* captures the shifting nature of queer space.

Even with the references to the Harlem Renaissance, Julien's portrayal of these spaces transcend that particular moment in time. In the nightclub, a disco ball hangs over the bar making it just as much a period piece of the 1920s as of the 1970s [Fig. 2].



Fig. 2. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.



When a tuxedoed man leaves the building, the camera pans to a forested area/ cemetery with two men clad in leather find themselves after cruising the space [Fig. 3].



Fig. 3. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.

Later, the viewer is confronted with the image of two men with their pants around their legs with the ominous verses from Essex Hemphill's poem "i am the darker brother" hovering over: "Now we think/ as we fuck/ this nut/ might kill us./ There might be a pin-sized hole/ in the condom./ A lethal leak." Again, the poem captures the threat of death present during the AIDS crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s that killed many Black gay men. Yet, the threat of death at the hands of homophobic strangers, policemen, gangs, etc. could have taken place at any time. The movement of the camera from scene to scene reflects how these singular articulations of desire are fleeting. The filming in black and white not only gives these recreated scenes the patina of history, but create distinct shadows in which the private desire of the characters are acted upon.

By exploring these private moments, *Looking for Langston* becomes a meditation on the city. Historically, the anonymity and privacy within the vast urban space has allowed these erotic



moments (Désert 1997, 21). The simple sets and basic set pieces become stand-ins for the greater city. This marks a shift from a more realistic depiction in his earlier 1986 film *The Passion of Remembrance*, where the urban setting alienates its Black inhabitants. Documentary footage from the early 1980s, interspersed throughout the film, shows protesters and marchers facing the police. At another point, a montage of images of suited white businessmen entering and exiting shiny modern office buildings leads to the camera panning out and capturing two Black men walking along a run-down neighborhood and discussing the lack of help in the jobs center and the menial tasks they would have to take to make a living. The visual referents of the city are clearly presented in stark segregated terms. Whereas the center of capital is the domain of the white upper class, the margins of economic, social, and political power are relegated to the Black lower class. Three years later, Julien foregoes the realism of the earlier film and creates a brand new representation of the urban space that challenges the suggested alienation and displacement of the London of *The Passion of Remembrance*. The city becomes a space that is now created by a Black gay Subject and is defined through the prism of desire rather than traditional capital.

The connection between economy, race, and morality found in urban space is upended and reconfigured where race, sexuality, and transgression become the central motifs of Julien's cinematic representation of the city. Black Subjects are now able to enact their fantasies and to fulfill their pleasures on the screen itself. They are the ones who actively set the terms that place a value on their actions and actively define the space on their own terms. The moralistic admonishment, legal consequences, and potential for murder found in the traditional neoliberal city do not intrude on this nightclub and cemetery in the same way that a jealous lover or a broken condom could impact the physical act. When the police and hooligans invade the club in the end, all of the possible victims of violence vanish into thin air [Fig. 4].



Fig. 4. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.

Julien does not allow them to suffer any consequences from the expression of their desire. Pleasure becomes the economic currency of this space. According to the excerpt on patronage during the Harlem Renaissance presented in the film, these supporters of the Black gay artists were able to dictate the production of art. The works had to represent the patrons' vision of Black identity. An authentic representation of the inner thoughts and desires of these individuals was not allowed. Connecting the poetry with the inner consciousness of the Black gay artist, Julien proposes a new economy. It is based not in the productive value in the accumulation of capital, but in the expression of desire. For example, Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" is adapted visually into one character fantasizing about his object of desire, Beauty. The dissemination of the poem is not placed within the marketplace and sold to the public nor does it cater to the whims of a white donor. The only value the poem holds within this cinematic space is the pleasure of the character and the viewer of the film.

The Black Subject here takes an active role in the creation of the space. This does not involve a simple act of rendering but of fully transforming the space within which this representation occurs. Julien's "key sites of representation" is not the same as Lefebvre's "spaces of representation." He places his phrase within Hall's idea of hegemony where the



responsibility of the Black Subject is to fight back against the terms that have been set for him (in this case). About two thirds of the way into the *Looking for Langston*, the main white character, saunters around in his underwear, glancing and touching the hangings of Robert Mapplethorpe nudes. He works his way back to a modern chaise lounge and gives some cash to a Black man also dressed in white briefs [Fig. 5].



Fig. 5. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.

Although no overt sexual act is performed, the white man is able to fulfill his desire through the act of seeing and the Black callboy is rendered passive and impotent within the power dynamic. Juxtaposing this scene, a little after, the camera focuses in on a Black spectator looking at a set of Mapplethorpe images. The privileging of viewership has completely shifted with the Black subject now holding the power of the gaze. His eyes are staring out to the audience and his mouth is slightly open while shots of men's legs with pants around their ankles take over the screen. Now the pleasure is controlled in the eyes of the Black Subject, a shift from the traditional racial dynamic.



In the end, the audience is not a bystander in the power dynamics of this cinematic space. The viewer becomes complicit in the perpetuation of neoliberal discourse and the understanding of space. These same two scenes implicate the real audience watching the film. Moving through the projected Mapplethorpe images, the white guy glances and touches the scrim with the projected images. Despite the sexual undercurrent of the end of the scene, he seems absolutely chaste when he hands over the money to the callboy. He shows himself to be in control over the entire space. When the film intercuts to the Black spectator looking at the film, the lighting has gotten darker and the ominous words of Essex Hemphill's poem "i am the darker brother" that describes a condom breaking and spreading AIDS, are voiced over in the background. The spectral eyes and mouth of the Black spectator interrupt the dreamlike quality of the previous scene [Fig. 6].

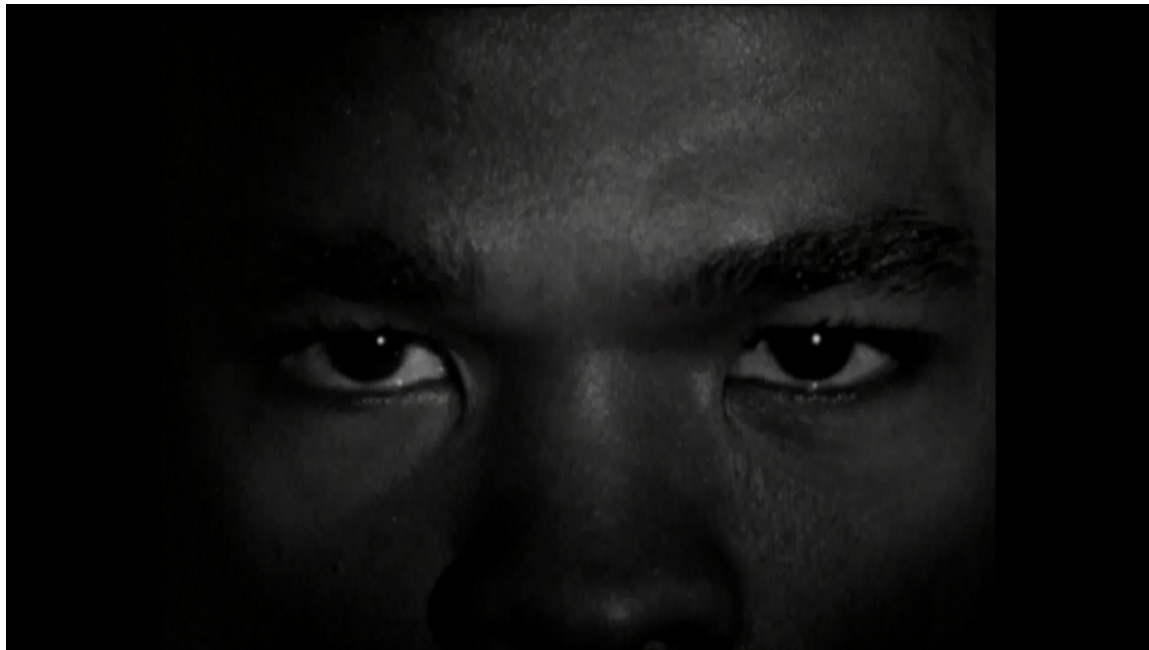


Fig. 6. Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989, 35mm film. DVD. Permission granted by the filmmaker.

The close-up of the eyes and the mouth force the audience to become conscious of the space between the viewer and screen—one that has been taken for granted for so long. All of a sudden, it implicates the viewer who for so long has been complicit within the power



relationship. The spectator-object interaction is challenged as the voyeurism of the cinematic form is no longer a passive experience, but one where the Subject on the screen actually looks back. This challenges the description of the supporters of Reagan and Thatcher in the 1970s and 1980s voyeuristically defining the Black object throughout the media while sitting within their safe homes far from the city in the suburbs. Distance and the inability for the object of their gaze to talk back shelter their worldview. By breaking the fourth wall, Julien foregoes giving the viewer that privilege and extends his cinematic space outside into the real. It questions the limitations of each of our personal space and the way we have traditionally defined. Although such a combustible mix of desire and space could never be fully realized, at least *Looking for Langston* posits new ways to imagine the city beyond the adapted neoliberal economic and social structures.

One of the main legacies of *Looking for Langston* is how it offers alternate utopian vision of urban space. Building on the struggles of a Black gay subculture located in 1920s Harlem and those of their descendants threatened by AIDS in the 1980s, the fulfillment of desire could inspire other expressions of freedom without confines of capital and the constraints of neoliberalism. The film transcends the identity of the Black gay subject and the particularities of a specific time and place to offer new possibilities to communities throughout the Black Diaspora. Since the film came out in 1989, demographic shifts have transformed contemporary cities and yet neoliberal discourses on race continue to define these public spaces. The gentrification of historically Black lower class neighborhoods has led to the suburbanization of poverty. At the same time, the language of law and order remains in place and the images of Black criminality continue to reinforce the old racial stereotypes. One just has to glance at the television and computer screens depicting the marches in Ferguson in the aftermath of the grand jury verdict of the police officer that shot and killed Michael Brown or the London uprising in 2011 with the police shooting of Mark Duggan. The same terms continue to haunt the neoliberal consciousness. Twenty five years after it first came out, *Looking for Langston* reminds the public that representation still matters.



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