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Whither the Gender of *Get Out*: A Critique of the Cinematic (Im) Possibilities of the  
Black Political Imagination

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A Thesis

Presented to  
the Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by

Daelena Tinnin

June 2018

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Title: Whither the Gender of *Get Out*: A Critique of the Cinematic (Im) Possibilities of the Black Political Imagination

Advisor: Dr. Armond R. Towns

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### **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the entanglements of spatialized racial-sexual violence, conceptualizations of black female subjectivity, questions of the limitations and excesses of media representations and the socioeconomic, cultural and spatiotemporal relations that make black images visible and (im) possible as they are situated in the cinematic black political imagination. Through a materialist media analysis of the 2017 film *Get Out*, I argue that the film and its articulation of the afterlife of slavery fails to account for gender by tangentially engaging black women in its dissection of race and racism. I contend that black women are the absent presence in the film and a dissection of their (in) visibilities is necessary to reveal race's unresolved relationship to race and deepen the film's mediation of the connection between race, gender and representation.

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

okay you guys are gonna love it. get this  
all the black women turn invisible,  
all of them  
just overnight. America goes to sleep and they're there  
and they wake up and they're not  
the scary part? stick with me  
they're not gone. YOU JUST CAN'T SEE EM  
think about it  
they can see each other  
but you can't see them  
and they could be anywhere  
Eve L. Ewing, *horror movie pitch*

On January 24, 2017, *Get Out*, billed as a social thriller from first time writer-director, Jordan Peele, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival to enthusiastic praise for, among other things, the film's skewering of post-race ideologies and the violent veneer of white liberalism. Peele, best known for his work on the sketch comedy show, *Key & Peele*, started working on the script after Obama was elected because he hoped to fill the lacuna of horror films that dealt with the monster of racism. When the film was released to theaters one month after the Sundance premiere, the acclaim continued to mount. Steven Thrasher, writing for *Esquire*, called it "an apt representation of the social death of Black American life." He continued:

In Peele's hands, I found my eyes looking at Chris's floating body and thinking about stolen Africans who were experimented upon (or thrown overboard), Henrietta Lacks' stolen HeLa cells, Emmett Till's little 14-year-old lynched body, music and sports stars being extracted from Black neighborhoods for white profit,

to be lobotomized. I did not experience *Get Out* as a horror movie as such but as the best damn movie I've ever seen about American slavery (Thrasher).

Shot in just 23 days, with a budget of \$4.5 million, *Get Out*, was a critical and financial success. More than a year after its release, the film is a cultural phenomenon – the subject of college curriculum and political debate and immortalized in the landscape of social media memes. It introduced terms like “the sunken place” into the cultural lexicon and received a considerable level of industry accolades, most notable an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. In a word, the film has become language-able in a way that exceeds its content. Despite this, the prevailing reading of the film silences the crucial role of black female characters.

If “horror-satire” as a filmic genre had an exemplar, *Get Out* would be it, as is evidenced by the earthquake-like reverberations its initial release and reception engendered – at least around the topic of race and representation. In an effort to further contextualize the cultural significance of it all, *Vulture* published a retrospective on the film and asked Peele to give deeper insight into the cinematic and political forces behind the screenplay. Peele says:

I had never seen the uncomfortableness of being the only black guy in a room played in a film. That notion is a perfect state for a protagonist of a horror film to be in to question his own sanity. *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Stepford Wives* were movies that did with gender what I wanted to do with race. And then, [once I] decided that I wanted to bite off the difficult task of making a film about race, that was a scary notion. If you fail at that, you've really failed.

The connection to Barack and Hillary was that for the first time. I was looking at gender and race as two parallel civil right movements that you could go crazy with. It almost felt like, “Who has been waiting long enough? It is the woman?” All boiled down. Racism and sexism were seen as two parallel problems. So I thought if you could make a movie as entertaining as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Stepford Wives*, which have what should be an equally offensive notion — that

men are going to conspire against women — you could do it with race. (Yuan and Harris)

I highlight this moment because it provides a glimpse into what the film, by consequence of its racial contours, communicates about gender's unresolved relationship to race.

While some of the reviews, discussions, interviews, etc. note the presence of a gender-focused lens, most focus on the film's latent critique of white feminism and its connection to upholding white supremacy. The prevailing reading of the film silences the crucial role of the black female characters. In a word, all the men are black, and all the women are white. In the context of what many consider a radical black film, *Get Out* creates a conceptual opening to theorize the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality. Particularly, it creates a conceptual opening to theorize why black women are essential to that analysis. Black women animate the most pivotal and, violent moments in the film and thus their absent presence requires further dissection. *Get Out*, specifically the absent presence of Black women in the film, is object of inquiry for this thesis.

In this thesis, I am primarily concerned with the film's tangential engagement with black women. I focus on the absent presence of black women as a demonstration of race's unresolved relationship to gender and the excess of spatialized racial-sexual violence that cannot be contained in the filmic form. I unpack the black female (re) presentation in the film and how their (im) possible presence is rendered consequential by the film's framing and focus.

This thesis argues that *Get Out* and its articulation of the afterlife of slavery fails to account for gender, specifically in the way it uses black women to advance the storyline and doesn't fully bring them into its dissection of race and racism. Black



women are either largely absent or only invoked as a means to advance the black male protagonist's pursuit of survival. I argue the focus on race and racism as solely the domain of black men is a mechanism that conceals race's unresolved relationship to gender.

*Black Feminist Geographies and Materialist Media Studies*

W.E.B. Du Bois' prescient proclamation - "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line"- articulated in his 1903 seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, materially and philosophically attaches race and dispossession to the uneven geographies re-produced in the afterlife of slavery (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*). Du Bois's explication of the Veil, a technology that materializes racial division, coincides with the invention of cinema. The connection between the two generates a critical opening that necessitates an interrogation of the connection between geographies of domination and (in)visibilities, the cinematic processes that re-produce hegemonic subjects and excess of media content. Two theoretical areas take up this critical integration: black feminist geographies and materialist media studies. My analysis of *Get Out* revolves around the epistemologies therein, specifically theories of temporal, spatial and material racial-sexual violence and how the coupled subject invisibilities comes to be (re) presented and (re) produced in the media form, content and excess to evidence human hierarchies. The most apt contextualization of black feminist geography comes from scholar, Katherine McKittrick. McKittrick writes:

Recognizing black women's knowledgeable positions as integral to physical, cartographic, and experiential geographies within and through dominant spatial models also creates an analytical space for black feminist geographies: black women's political, feminist, imaginary, and creative concerns that respatialize the geographic legacy of racism-sexism. (McKittrick 53)

Drawing on the legacy on transatlantic slavery, McKittrick situates the category of “black woman” as the bodily and geographic site of human/inhuman organization and thus central to explications on the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality. Influenced by black geographers like Clyde Woods and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, McKittrick connects black studies, human geography, and black feminism to theorize the racial-sexual black subject through multiple material and textual landscapes. I forefront this specific theorization on spatialized racial-sexual violence throughout this thesis to highlight the absent presence of black women in *Get Out*.

Further, to consider the materiality of media-technologies, I review scholars who advance a materialist approach to media studies. These theories are primarily concerned with the cultural politics of space and time as constituted by media form first, and media content, second. This approach resists the domination of reading media as a singular or neutral object. Important to this are theorizations of the cinematic perceptions and processes that are integral to cognitive ways of knowing and thus integral to contemporary machinations of race, gender and sexuality. Additionally, materialist approaches engender a focus on media as mediation. Contextualizing media as a location implicated in all of the social, cultural, historical, ideological and political forces surrounding it allows for an analysis of *Get Out* that attends to not only what’s on the screen but also what is hidden. In this ethos, I use black feminist epistemology, particularly those related to spatialized racial-violence and materialist media studies theories to illuminate the invisible black female subject.

This thesis investigates the entanglements of the (in) visible black female subject, spatialized racial-sexual violence that evidences human categorization and the excess of media content through a materialist analysis of the dialogue and gendered representations in *Get Out*. I argue, in this film and the responses to it, black women are either largely absent or only invoked as a means to advance the black male protagonist's pursuit of survival. My thesis demonstrates how this dynamic reveals the limitations of cinematic representation and centers the racial-sexual violence as the rupture that reifies human/inhuman categorization through the (in) visible black female characters of *Get Out*, its filmic rendering of the afterlife of slavery and racial-sexual violence. I proceed with a description of the film, a brief overview of my methods, and conclude with chapter descriptions.

The film opens with a black man being choked unconscious, dragged and stuffed into the trunk of a car on an eerily quiet suburban street. The title card reads: *Get Out*. Cut to Chris, a young black photographer, and Rose, his white girlfriend, as he prepares to meet her parents for the first time. "Do they know I'm black?" he asks. She assures him he has nothing to worry about because her parent's "would have voted for Obama a third time." So, against the emphatic pleas from his best friend, Chris and Rose set out. On the way, they hit a deer and it appears as though Chris is particularly troubled by witnessing the violent loss of life unfold right before his eyes. Upon their arrival, Chris is on edge and reads the Armitage family and their overly accommodating attempts to connect with him as more strange than dangerous. For example, when Dean Armitage introduces the family's servants, Georgina and Walter, he makes it a point to acknowledge how outdated it must look for a progressive white family to have black

servants. He assures Chris that they are a truly necessary part of the family. At face value, Chris and Georgina's initial meeting is typical. She is an obedient black servant to a wealthy white family – subdued and submissive. When she is summoned to pour tea for Chris, and the rest of the Armitage family, she winces and falls into a trance before being dismissed by Missy. It's clear that Chris's presence troubles something in Georgina, but he tosses it aside as a moment of jealousy. Later in a call to his best friend, he even, describes her as having missed “the movement.” Georgina's initial behavior is a smoke signal that is completely missed in Chris' assessment of the absolute madness that's happening to him and around him. Missy notices Chris's nervous tick, a result of his failed attempts to quit smoking, and remarks that she developed her own system of hypnosis that could help. Chris declines. The first night concludes with a family dinner that adds more fuel to Chris' mounting doubts. Jeremy, Rose's brother, can't help himself from making bizarre comments about Chris's blackness and his physical stature. Unsettled from a bizarre first night at the Armitage house, Chris takes a walk to smoke and sees Walter running around the plantation and Georgina strangely staring at her reflection in the window. While Chris is attempting to get back to his room without incident, he is stopped by Missy and as they have a conversation about his mother's death, he is hypnotized against his will. The following day brings the big Armitage family get together created to celebrate the memory of Rose's grandfather. Unable to piece together the breadcrumbs of the demise that lies ahead, Chris goes along with the party, intermittingly pausing to take note of the exaggerated interest everyone seems to have in not just him but his skin, his eyes, his arms, his blackness. Recoiling from the interactions, Chris calls Rod, his best friend, to update him on the strange behavior. Chris

suspects that one of the party goers is a black man who went missing. He attempts to take a picture of the man to send back to Rod but when the flash goes off; the man becomes hysterical and yells at Chris to “get out!” Chris and Rose decide to take a walk to decompress from the party and they decide to end the visit early and leave the Armitage estate together. While they are gone, the party becomes an auction and all the attendees are bidding on Chris. This the first time the audience is clued into a piece of what is underneath the family’s progressive pretense. When they return to house, Chris discovers photos of Rose in prior relationships with black people, including Walter and Georgina. Finally seeing the danger, Chris attempts to leave, but Missy hypnotizes him, and he falls into a state of unconsciousness. He awakens to a video presentation featuring the Armitage family that explains that the family kidnaps black people and transplants the brains of white people into black bodies. This process leaves the black host in the “sunken place.” They are able to watch but they are ultimately powerless. Chris is informed that one of party goers, a blind man, wants Chris’s body so he can take advantage of his photographic talents. Chris is able to escape the house by killing Dean, Missy and Jeremy before the entire surgical procedure is complete. Still, the circumspect ending lingers with more questions. Namely, what do you after you get out?

### *Method*

For my examination of the film *Get Out* I utilize materialist media studies as my method. I conceive of the term “media” in the way described by Marshall McLuhan, in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McLuhan argues that media form requires further dissection because “the medium is the message.” (17) Further, McLuhan asserts that, “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale

or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (9). In this vein, media are technologies whose content is secondarily produced alongside the temporal, spatial and hegemonic reverberations of the preceding form.

In the article, “Race, Media, and the Cultivation of Concern” Herman Gray reflects on the exhaustion of representation studies as “the limit case of critical studies of media” and pushes critical communication and cultural studies scholars to consider “what else might our critical and cultural work in cultural politics produce in addition to calls for corrective, complexity and parity” (255). Gray argues that while scholars have been attentive to how media representations aid in practices and policies of racial inequality, these studies are usually foreclosed by the overestimation of what parity means for recognition. Alternatively, the call to attend to the “sites, scales, and distribution” of raced images pushes critical media studies toward a materialist approach. Gray writes:

By contrast, closer attention to the range and intensity of concerns that gather around the emotional and constitutive work of the image might take us in a slightly different, perhaps even productive critical direction: toward critical scholarly attention to the sites, scales, and distribution of attachments to racial and ethnic difference and away from policy prescriptions. (254)

This shift is defined as a move from matters of fact to matters of concern and it has a possibility to open space to assess what alternative imaginations and ruptures are latent in the technologies that circulate the black image. In this call to center matters of concern over matters of fact, Gray advances a methodology for critical studies of media and race “that opens the potentiality for multiple analytics, alignments, alliances, circuits, and identifications that cut across different space, scales, and temporalities, and not just those defined by nation, citizen, representation, and the text” (256). Gray argues that this approach will focus media critiques on racial logics as opposed to the accuracy or

authenticity of the representative images and allow scholars to account for “what the absence or presence of the image...and their attachment to particular bodies and histories organize” (254). Gray asks, “what if we did not presume that a corrective to the image would repair lost dignity, redress resources imbalances, and help generate recognition, empathy, and trust” (258). It is crucial to assess media as site through which the materiality of race is (re) produced and distributed spatially.

By bringing into conversation literature from black feminist geographies and materialist media studies, I am able to demonstrate the absent presence of black women in *Get Out*, articulate the spatialized racial-sexual violence that reifies hierarchies of human/inhuman and provide important insights into the limitations and possibilities of media form and content.

### *Overview of Chapters*

Chapter two is a literature review that is broken into two overarching theoretical themes: black feminist geographies and materialist media studies. I begin chapter two with a discussion of the (non) space of black female subjectivity and the historical, geographic and lexical violence therein. I also explicate racial-sexual violence as an ongoing spatial project from transatlantic slavery to our presently haunted geographies to articulate the (im) possibility of the black female subject. I elaborate on the black feminist epistemology, the demonic, as the absent presence of black women and an alternative conceptual pathway that disrupts Western conceptions of space and time.

In the second body of the literature review, I elaborate on materialist approaches to film and media that speak to the socioeconomic, temporal and biopolitical modalities that express themselves most clearly in media form. This includes a discussion on

“medium theory” and what it can add to studies of blackness. I also discuss the moving image, cinematic processes and limitations of representation studies. This literature review allows me to argue that the black female characters in *Get Out* are silenced by the film’s focus on race, unpacking their absent presence allows for a more nuanced discussion of gender’s unresolved relationship to race and the racial-sexual violence that exceeds the film’s content.

In chapter three, I provide a materialist media analysis of *Get Out* to explore the spatialized racial-sexual violence as a demarcation of human categorization. I argue that the (in) visible black female subject exceeds the content and prevailing analysis of the film, evidences the violence of human categorization and requires further examination. Finally, I conclude my thesis with a brief chapter that summarizes the previous chapters, and a discussion of questions that came out of my analysis and areas for future inquiry.



## **Chapter 2: (Im) Possible Frames: Black Female Subjectivity in Black Feminist Geographies and Materialist Media Studies**

### *Introduction*

Black feminist scholar James Bliss argues that the spatialized logic of capture inherent in black feminist theorizing “renders Black women as buried subjectivity, producing the ground upon which, all other subjects stand” (Bliss 731). Black feminists frequently theorize at the limits of the human, meaning the dispossessed black female body/subject has historically been conceptualized as the non-space of critical intervention that creates the condition of (im) possibility. What (im) possibilities lie beyond the always already known margins of the logic of capture? Further, how are those (im) possibilities foreclosed or extended when presented in a medium like film? These questions guide my exploration of black feminist geographies and materialist media studies literature as a necessary foundation to analyze gender as the absent presence in *Get Out*.

Drawing from both black feminist geographies and materialist media studies, I argue that black women are the absent presences in the film *Get Out*. To show this, I first conceptualize the black female subject through a thematic literature review of black feminist geographies and a thematic literature review of materialist media studies. Black feminist geographies provide the crucial theoretical intervention that connects racial-sexual violence to the spatial and material project of ontology. This is important for my project because it centers black women as necessary to explications of race, gender and

the afterlife of slavery. Likewise, materialist media studies, with a focus on the excess of representational images and the connections between time, space and cinema, provide the crucial theoretical intervention that advances analysis of the cinematic black image from discussions of inclusion to discussions of the radical political potential to create something new. This is important for my project because much of the prevailing analysis of the film focuses on what representations of blackness means for a more inclusive media landscape, but it fails to account for what it can add to our understanding of racial-sexual violence, time and space. Combining these bodies of literature will allow for a materialist, spatial reading of *Get Out* illuminating the (in) visible black female subject, which I argue is integral to the film's explication of the dispossession and disappearing of black bodies.

The object of my analysis, *Get Out*, is a critique, or satirical documentary, of post-racial America, unmasking white-liberalism to reveal the not-so hidden secret: modern conceptualizations of race are no more than haunted manifestations of transatlantic slavery's grotesque violence. While *Get Out* provided important fodder for public discussions on race, these analyses are lacking the criticality of black feminist scholarships, especially those that connect black feminist theories to theories of space, time and visibility. Therefore, I use theories of the connective tissue between spatialized racial-sexual violence and human/non-human subjectivity to explore what I feel others have missed about *Get Out* – the (in)visible black woman. Inarguably, *Get Out* provides an artful example of the racial-gendered and human/-non-human subjects but to grasp the more nuanced messages of the film, I explain the film's portrayal of black female subjects as essential to elaborations of racism in the twenty-first century, and therefore, of

the hierarchies of human/nonhuman dominating our historically-present realities.

Interrogating *Get Out* from the space of black womanhood, an (im) possible material, physical and spatial location of capture, allows me to analyze how the film backgrounds black women as tangential to its filmic musings on race and recognition.

I break this chapter into two parts based on the above outlined theoretical themes. Part one of this literature review engages the literature of black feminist geographies, which includes, but is not limited to, the work of Katherine McKittrick, along with Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers and Alexander Weheliye. These theories allow for acknowledgement of the spatialized racial-sexual violence that evidence human/inhuman organization. Further they illuminate how character interactions and dialogue in *Get Out* reveal the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality and demonstrate the ontological implications therein.

Part two of this review describes theories of the cinematic, the image of common sense and the modalities of time and space central to media. This contextualizes my reading of media studies as analyses of representation, the co-constitutive functions of race, gender, and sexuality and the cultural politics of space and time - most explicitly elaborated using cinema as a vehicle. This includes materialist media studies theories as articulated by Kara Keeling, Lawrence Grossberg, Armond Towns and Sarah Sharma. These theories allow for a temporal and spatial explication of media form, content and the representational images therein. Rabid consumption of *Get Out*, in Hollywood and academia alike, speaks to the power of media images to limit, continue, or rupture hegemonic ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality.

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation that is essential to demonstrate how spatialized racial-sexual violence reifies hierarchies of the human and nonhuman but do not foreclose on the (im) possibilities of new imagined and material geographies. Further, these theories provide a lens through which I can analyze how the visual (un) representation of black women is a productive mechanism through which to see the (im) possibilities of the black imagination. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the theories covered and a glimpse of the materialist analysis of *Get Out* to come.

### *Black Feminist Geographies*

Black feminist geographies and the epistemologies therein bring to light the ways in which the physical and imaginative relations of space, place, and location are bound up in geographies of domination like transatlantic slavery and racial-sexual violence. This review builds to an explication of the demonic as the absented presence of black womanhood. This theorization, as influenced by Sylvia Wynter, advances a new epistemology wherein sites of black women's historically present locations do not simply measure the empirics of the silenced racial-sexual subject, but rather, delineate the ways in which space is an unfinished, alterable project. Further, black feminist theories of the spatialized racial-sexual violence that categorize historically present understandings of humanness are crucial to the argument that the afterlife of slavery relies on colonial constructs of gender and sexuality to maintain demarcations between human and non-human and, therefore, legitimize violence on racial-gendered bodies.

Literary critic and black feminist scholar, Hortense Spillers, provides critical and revolutionary formulations of black female subjectivity. As such, her interrogations

further black feminist epistemologies in many ways and create theoretical space wherein black women and their attendant bodily narratives, histories and experiences move from the already known margin to the “insurgent ground” of a radical black feminist politic. In “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,” Spillers argues black women’s sexuality is both a paradoxical “discursive static” that resists and necessitates location, and a semiotic archive invented through the machinations of transatlantic slavery. This twin orientation points toward the dysmorphic and nebulous approach to black women in popular culture, literature and academia. In other words, the cultural compulsion to particularize the racial-sexual body is incomplete without the development of a grammar that speaks directly to and for the black female subject. For Spillers, this is the “landscape of prohibitions that mire its subjects in nostalgic reiterative gestures of a frozen temporality,” and it must be interrogated as the ruptured site of human (im) possibility. (13) This rupture initiates the black female subject as the limit at which gender and sexuality can no longer be categorized, making her the most central character in modern race-gender theorizing. Spillers writes:

She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of cunning difference – visually, psychologically, ontologically – as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between human and ‘other.’ At this level of radical discontinuity in the ‘great chain of being’ black is vestibular to culture. In other words, the black person mirrored for society around her what a human was not. (155)

In Spillers’s theorization this is the “paradox of non-being” and it is the antecedent cultural location of the Black woman. Existing in a (non) space and place produces the black female “subject” not as a subject, but as an invisible interval in the dominant/critical public discourse. Still the “lexical gap” she signals to is a limit that

demands interrogation through and beyond empty politics of inclusion and representation. Spillers writes:

The structure of unreality that the black woman must confront originates in the historical moment when language ceases to speak, the historical moment at which hierarchies of power (even the ones to which *some* women belong) simply run out of terms because the empowered meets in the black female the veritable nemesis of degree and difference. Having encountered what they understand as chaos, the empowered need not name further, since chaos is sufficient naming within itself. (156)

For Spillers, “interstice” is the (non) space black female subjectivity occupies in the field of Western discourse. As James Bliss surmises, “The violence that occasions the appearance of the Black woman as a historical actor is so great that this subject can only enter our field of view as a distortion, a gap, a black hole” (Bliss 745).

Spillers’s foundational text, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” furthers the insightful work of “Interstices” by again turning to the violence of transatlantic slavery and (non) space of the black female subject to create a place from which to theorize “a different social subject” (80). Spillers argues that Du Bois’s “color line” promulgation is unfinished because the invention of the “black woman” holds in it a critical opening through which we can excise the geographic processes that re-produce racial-sexual violence, insufficient and violent Western grammar, the demarcation between the body and the flesh, spatiotemporal marginalization, and what it means to exist in “the not-quite spaces” (Spillers, 65). Spillers offers a dissection of Western grammar’s “overdetermined and normative properties” and a radical re-articulation of the psychic and bodily violence of the New World ontological project that makes the black female subject im/possible. Moving from what she calls “that zero degree of social conceptualization,” Spillers argues the

antecedent and concealed brutalized flesh moving via cargo through space and time operates as a technology and a text in which to read the black female subject (Spillers, 67-68). For Spillers, returning to the Middle Passage is productive as it places the black female subject as an anterior ontological body/flesh that both precedes the symbolic order and becomes its condition of possibility. Spillers writes, “This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh – of female flesh “ungendered” – offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations” (68). Spillers’s work lies at the intersection of psychoanalytic theory, black feminist epistemologies and cultural studies, and pushes those intersections toward a central question: if black women cannot have and do not have access to purchase gender as an analytic category, then how can we use the misnaming of the black female subject as a text to write us into a larger human project? This is the “insurgent ground” Spillers builds toward as a means to articulate how different forms of domination of race and gender, “create both the conditions of possibility and the “semiosis of procedure” necessary to hierarchically distinguish full humans from not-quite-humans and nonhumans” (Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 24).

In *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye takes up Spillers’s conceptualization of the “flesh” and its attendant modalities to argue that her work is essential to disrupting the category of the human in Western modernity. Weheliye’s, “habeas viscus” is a signal to name the impact of violent political domination on the flesh and an argument to reclaim that brutality as a material possibility for liberation. Still, Weheliye’s intellectual project is intimately connected to the intellectual projects of two black feminist scholars, Spillers

and Sylvia Wynter, and their contentions that the (non) space of black women is a theoretical opening for the (im) possibilities of human categorization. To be clear,

Weheliye writes that Spillers' interdisciplinary intervention is set in place to

theorize some general dimensions of modern subjectivity from the vantage point of black women, which develops a grammar, creates a vocabulary that does not choose between addressing the specific location of black women, a broader theoretical register about what it means to be human during and in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade, and the imagination of liberation in the future anterior tense of NOW. (Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 39)

As elucidated by Weheliye's interrogation, Spillers's vast theoretical insights dissect the psychic, physical and lexical violence of transatlantic slavery and its afterlife to animate the racial-sexual violence of material and discursive inventions and absences. In doing so, she pushes black feminist epistemologies to build a new emancipatory politic by thinking, writing and theorizing the black female subjectivity differently.

Katherine McKittrick's work takes up each of these charges in many ways. Namely, she argues for a re-imagining of black feminism as a spatial project. It is not within the scope of this project to cover all of her contributions to black and feminist geographies. However, I will focus on McKittrick's main argument: alterability of space and place is underscored by the connection between in/human geographies of domination and black women's geographies. This alterability calls attention to the material and metaphorical modalities of geography that push against the always already known narratives of modernity and dispossession. McKittrick argues that geography's attachment to the static and attendant naturalizations of bodies and places must be interrogated to demonstrate the ways in which racial-sexual violence spatializes differences and categorizes struggle. While the connections between black feminism and



human geography aren't steadfastly identifiable in social theory, McKittrick argues that locations of black women, especially when cited through the "seeable-public-uninvisible" body-flesh of black women, evidence "how traditional geographies continue to arrange uneven spatial practices" (52). McKittrick insists transatlantic slavery is the historically present force that addresses locations, uneven spatial practices and technologies of violent captivity and the rupture that opens a new space to theorize how black women continue to inhabit the uninhabitable. Consequently, black women's survival and resistance evidences a "nondeterministic impossibility" (xxv).

McKittrick elaborates:

More specifically, transatlantic slavery incited meaningful geographic processes that were interconnected with the category of "black woman": this category not only visually and socially represented a particular kind of gendered servitude, it was embedded in the landscape. Geographically, the category of "black woman" evidenced human/inhuman and masculine/feminine racial organization. (McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xvii)

McKittrick's project signifies the ways in which the historically present geographies of black women speak through and challenge existing cartographic rules. These geographies act as a conceptual space through which the physical, metaphorical, theoretical and experiential modalities of space and place can be altered to rework the collapsing of biocentric categories and location. McKittrick argues that citing and theorizing the "locations of captivity" initiates a sense of place whereby "black women can manipulate the categories and sites that constrain them" (xvii):

Their different practices of spatial manipulation make possible a way to analyze four interrelated processes that identify the social production of space: the naturalization of identity and place, discussed above; the ways in which geographic enslavement is developed through the constructs of black womanhood and femininity; the spatial practices black women employ across and beyond

domination; and the way in which geography, although seemingly static, is an alterable terrain. (xvii)

McKittrick emphasizes that the link between the material and discursive mapping of space produces racial-sexual violence. Further, the space of the (black female) subject creates an intervention that points toward conceptualizing black geographies, which is to say that domination is a spatial project from colonialism to transatlantic slavery to our historical present terrain. This isn't to suggest that this spatialized domination is fixed as it relates to scale and impact but rather to illuminate the ways in which geographic domination is a violent process that "names and organizes where racial-sexual differentiation occurs" (xii). McKittrick continues:

This material spatialization of "difference" – for my purposes, the spatialization of the racial-sexual black subject – in various times and locations in turn makes visible new, or unacknowledged, strategies of social struggle. Geographic domination, then, is conceptually and materially bound up with racial-sexual displacement and the knowledge-power of a unitary vantage point. It is not a finished or immovable act, but it does signal unjust spatial practices; it is not a natural system, but rather a working system that manages the social world. It is meant to recognize the hierarchies of human and inhuman persons and reveal how this social categorization is also a contested geographic project. (xvi)

In other words, the history of transatlantic slavery is illustrative of and central to the discussion of how locations of captivity produce a different sense of place for black women. As the racial-sexual producers of the technology necessary to enslavement, black women are visually and socially embedded in the geographic landscape of both enslavement and our historically present landscape.

McKittrick locates the body as a conceptual opening that produces a necessary text for spatialized violence when theorized across geography, black studies and black feminist epistemologies. In other words, the body evidences the connection between

black women and geography. Bodily codes, particularly those demarcated by race and sex, spatially produce uneven sites of difference that impact both the physical and experiential modalities of difference. McKittrick continues:

That is, racism and sexism produce attendant geographies that are bound up in human disempowerment and dispossession. This can be seen most disturbingly, in locations of racial and sexual violence – dragged bodies, historical and contemporary lynchings, rape – wherein the body is not only marked as different, but this difference, precisely because it is entwined with domination, inscribes the multiple scales outside of the punished body itself. Bodily violence spatializes other locations of dehumanization and restraint, rendering bodily self-possession and other forms of spatial ownership virtually unavailable to the violated subject. (3)

For McKittrick “multiscalar discourses of ownership” – possession and dispossession of people, places and things – necessitates a return to the black body as the “ungeographic” reinforcement of how we come to define space, place, ownership and value. (4).

McKittrick argues that traditional geographies belie black self-possession because the connections between bodies and landscapes are materialized through a “racial-bodily stereotype” that assumes the dispossessed black body is “naturally in place” (4).

McKittrick’s theoretical thread tracing racial-sexual violence as an ongoing spatial project from transatlantic slavery to our presently haunted geographies articulates the (im) possibility of the black female subject and her attendant bodily, material and discursive experiences as the necessary rupture for human/inhuman categorization. Further, this rupture evidences what theorizing the seen and not-seen geographies of black women can incite for the unfinished project of space and place.

Following the argument that black women’s geographies are illustrative of the alterable and unfinished present sociogeographic organization, McKittrick connects to the work of theorist and philosopher Sylvia Wynter to advance “the demonic” as the

absented presence of black women. Building from Wynter's dissection of its etymological, philosophical and scientific origins, McKittrick clarifies the demonic as a "non-deterministic schema; it is a process that is hinged on uncertainty and non-linearity because the organizing principle cannot predict the future" (xxiv). Consequently, this schema disrupts the Western conception of time and space that presuppose sequential linearity. The demonic, then, summons an alternative conceptual pathway and works to articulate a social, geographic and technological system that requires (dis) order to produce an outcome (xxiv). McKittrick's demonic grounds epistemology is heavily influenced by Wynter's vast intellectual project to include her explications of the invention of Man, Man's geographies and interhuman geographies. For McKittrick, these explications are crucial to historically, temporally and spatially answering the question of when and how black women's geographies come to both delimit and open spaces for different genres of the human. To be clear, Wynter is concerned with sociospatial and intellectual periods that evidence the category of human and how representations of human come to be overrepresented as Man. The geographic processes and sociospatial ruptures that coexisted with the inventions of Man are of particular importance to McKittrick's argument as, relatedly, Wynter's explications conceptualize the "uninhabitable" as those grounds that by Man's violent domination have been produced as the "space of the human Others... disembodied and... transparently abnormal" (Wynter 128). Further, McKittrick asserts that "if Man is an overrepresentation of humanness, Man's human geographies are an extension of this conception" (128).

The cartography of the uninhabitable is then one important way that Man's geographies come to be overrepresented. Influenced by Wynter's essay, "1492: A New

World View,” McKittrick argues that “the uninhabitable still holds currency in the present” and builds on that conceptualization to posit that the those who live in the unlivable space are doing so by way of “racial-sexual management and geographic growth (which “grew” due to free slave labor) (130). McKittrick writes:

That is, the uninhabitable creates an opening for a geographic transformation that is underscored by racial and sexual differences. To transform the uninhabitable into the inhabitable, and make this transformation profitable, the land must become a site of racial-sexual regulation, a geography that maps “a normal way of life” through measuring different degrees of inhabitability. This geographic transformation, then, does not fully erase the category of “uninhabitable,” but rather re-presents it through spatial processes as a sign of social difference. (131)

Further, the spatial processes reveal the limitations current geographic processes as the subjects who occupy “the spaces Otherness are always already encountering space and therefore articulate how genes or modes of humanness are intimately connected to where we/they are ontologically as well as geographically.” (133)

In order to push the dichotomy of the habitable/uninhabitable toward a theorization of more humanly workable geographies, McKittrick returns to the demonic as the spatialized absented presence of black women to establish a different ideological path that treats racial-sexual difference as a conceptual opening not a marginal inevitability. Black women face ontological, spatial, material and discursive erasure as a result of transatlantic slavery and its historically present machinations yet these women, “if legitimately posited in the world (placed, unsilenced), call into question our present geographic organization” (133). Therefore, this epistemological shift – demonic grounds as the geographies of black womanhood – advances a spatial grammar that sites the complex (im) possibility of black women’s “sense of place” (133). McKittrick explains that if the uninhabitable, the grounds of black feminism, is inhabited this is geographic

evidence the space and place are “socially produced and alterable.” The complex, contradictory and chaotic place of black women is therefore producing political resistance to (re) present what is categorized as human. McKittrick argues:

If these conceptual and political differences are not simply cast as marginal, they do not have to replicated marginality. Demonic grounds are not, then, only reifying and politicizing marginality in itself. Rather they are also a projection of what the biocentric human (genres of black womanhood) means in relation to “the normally inhabitable.” (135)

The ways in which black women’s geographies relate to geographies of domination, or the uninhabitable, can be seen as communicative and creative expressions that assert new forms of life. McKittrick, again arguing through Wynter’s contribution to black geographies, asks, “if our expressive demands can demonstrate a new worldview, in what ways can ethical human geographies, or interhuman geographies, be mapped?” (141). These (im) possibilities signal the simultaneous geographical work of living, expressing and imagining that evidence the projects of space, place and humanness as unfinished and thus, alterable.

This reading of black feminist geographies explicated theories of the connections between spatialized racial-sexual violence, the historically present legacy of transatlantic slavery and present conceptual limitations of black female subjectivity. It also reviews theories of human/inhuman organization as evidenced by the material and discursive experiences of black women. These theories attend to the absent presence of women as a conceptual opening to rethink political resistance and the unfinished project of space and place.

*Materialist Media Studies*

My reading of materialist media studies brings together conceptions of the moving image, ontology, and cinematic processes to explore the ways in which cinema has a potent power to habituate cognitive maps whereby the audience makes sense of the world. Further, this literature is concerned with how those cognitive maps produce ways of knowing and seeing that postulate the Black image as both authentic aesthetic portrait and political proxy. Finally, to interrogate the critical gap of both the film's content and the proceeding discussions, it is important to frame my analysis in theorizations that speak to the excess of representation concerns and look at the socioeconomic, temporal and biopolitical modalities of media form that (re) produce and rationalize hegemonic power relations.

Thinking and writing about the perceptual and cognitive processes demanded of audiences to make sense of film as both a communicative technology and a mechanical apparatus used to spread and create raced, sexed and gendered images is the starting point for Kara Keeling's interdisciplinary interrogation of film studies, queer theory and black cultural studies. Keeling's book, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme and the Image of Common Sense*, dissects the relationship between black visual culture, habituated cognitive labor/processes, hegemonic cinematic assemblages of raced and gendered subjectivities and possibilities to visualize alternative social realities For Keeling, W.E.B Du Bois's "color line" proclamation and the contemporaneous invention of cinema is a conjuncture in need of deeper articulation. Keeling writes:

An investigation of the nexus at which the epistemological and ontological mechanisms of racism and the socioeconomic interests that racism serves collide with the mechanisms and interest that animate cinema might open a critical interrogation into the lingering logics of racism and the complex ways in which "race," "gender," and "sexuality" have come to both inform and deform various

anticapitalist movements towards Black Liberation (Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 1).

Further, while starting with Du Bois, Keeling's proceeding theoretical foundation is created by reading Gilles Deleuze and Frantz Fanon together to produce an epistemology of cinema that attends to how questions of race, representation and the capitalistic function of media are framed. Keeling draws on Deleuze's notion of "the cinematic" to situate the moving image as a condition of existence, and a (re) producer of social reality. Keeling reads this contention along with Fanon's temporal critique of psychoanalysis and the ontological project to rethink the "problems" of cinematic representation.

First, Keeling argues that the power of cinematic perception exceeds the confines of the moving image and works to make, re-make, arrange and re-arrange how we see, think, feel and experience our social realities. Further, cinematic processes regulate what is seen and what of the "seen" image is perceptible. Elaborating on the cinematic and cinematic processes, Keeling writes:

They designate a specific perceptual schema that is adequate to the task of perceiving those images and that corresponds to a "matter" that is itself cinematic. Neither cinematic perceptual schema nor cinematic matter precedes the other. Together they constitute the cinematic, an assemblage that might also be referred to as "twentieth-century reality" because we neither posit nor access "reality" except via these processes, which were perfected by film. (12)

Further, this perceptual schema relies on clichés or common memory-images, to include experiences, knowledges and so on, that enable movement. For the purposes of Keeling's argument, this movement is thinking, and that thinking is conditioned to "accommodate oppression and exploitation, even our own" (15). An important piece to this assertion is cinema's internalized relationship to capitalism. Because images are constituted in accordance with a system that privileges money, cinematic processes and perceptions are



consequently limited to retain only that which serves monetary interests. Connecting this argument to the challenges before filmmakers, Keeling writes:

The political challenge for filmmakers, according to Deleuze's analysis, is to reveal that which has been hidden in the image by rediscovering, "everything that has been removed to make [the image] interesting" or by "suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we are seeing everything." Both operations are important political processes because the realm of visibility – what can be retained from each image's appearance to an eye – is conditioned in advance by common sense. For filmmakers involved in aesthetic projects having to do with representing identities that have been negatively or un-represented, this means that merely placing in front of a camera an image presumed to be identical with the category needing to be represented is not enough to challenge the forces that deny that category representation. The filmmaker also must interrogate the very constitution of that image as representative. (18)

Ultimately, every cinematic image contains in it a matter that exceeds and precedes the image itself. That matter affects and is affected by the temporal and capital machinations of producing, consuming and maintaining cinematic reality itself.

Keeling continues to build her theoretical framework by turning to questions of how these cinematic perceptions are created under circumstances of domination, exploitation and oppression. Keeling argues that the "politics of visibility" produced on the ground of the cinematic collapses into reformist politics unless it liberates itself "from the world of the cinematic and the common senses that animate it" (10). This connects Keeling's theorizations on film to the parameters of black ontology and its relevance for discussions of visual culture. The violence of colonialism, and the various logic and economized modalities therein, are fundamental to the perceptual mechanisms that categorize hierarchies of raced and gendered subjects, which takes definitive shape and form in the cinematic. Consequently, Keeling argues:

Current thinking about and studies of race and representation customarily acknowledge that theories and assertions premised on any assumption that racial

categories neatly and predictably organize living beings are problematic. Yet those studies fail to interrogate the mechanisms that authorize their own embrace of racial categories that describe that which they presume is represented via visual media. (27)

For Keeling, media analysis that limits its inquiries to possibilities narrowly and violently produced within the realities of colonial discourses inevitably reproduces the hegemony of those same colonial discourses. In order to trouble this analytic double bind, Keeling turns her methodological deliberation to Fanon's explication of the black and the white. Building from an etymological and sociological dissection of the equation "black" = "problem," in the context of visual representation, Keeling argues that this presumption "raises the possibility that the Black and the White each are problems in the sense of a prosthesis or of projections of a project thrown forth in order to dissimulate or to provide shelter" (28). Accordingly, Fanon provides a theorization of the projection, the problems and what they are both intended to shelter. In so doing, Keeling argues that Fanon "uncovers the hegemonic assumptions that inform contemporary discussions of race and visual representation" (28). This leads to an analytical opening whereby the visible and invisible figures of visual culture, in my argument- the black female subject, haunt our present understandings of race, gender and sexuality. Keeling interrogates what she calls the failure of prevailing considerations of Fanon's connection to film theory by engaging his work in *Black Skin, White Masks* to produce a cinematic Fanon. This allows for a reading of the "the black image" that attends to the socioeconomic, cultural and spatiotemporal relations making it visible. (29) Keeling argues Fanon's dissection of the temporal mechanisms that animate the (re) production of blackness is paradigmatic to the temporal transformation of cinema and thus brings the biopolitical modalities of cinema

into stark relief. Still, while Fanon understood the importance of film as a form privileged to produce and circulate the black image, he also understood that reforming images does not, by consequence, disrupt the colonial violence that produces the black image as always already a problem. This is, in part, a consequence of the temporality of colonial existence. Keeling argues:

Once the recurrent violence of colonization and enslavement and the configuration of (neo) colonial temporality authorized by that violence have been acknowledged, studies regarding race and representation will be relieved of their quest to locate and identify more accurate (some-how less problematic) representations of blacks, whites, and so on, and charged with the daunting task of understanding, articulating, and challenging (in ways that must hold open the possibility of the impossible) the socio-economic relations and the spatiotemporal configurations made visible by images. (35)

This charge must be informed by a reframing of questions that hold images open to (im)possible representations while also attending to the machinations of the cinematic machines.

Likewise, In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Lawrence Grossberg argues that media needs to be analyzed according to the question of mediation itself. Which is to say that there is a multiplicity and excess to both media content and form— a conjuncture that needs to be explored. Grossberg argues that media studies are often limited by “the fact that it constituted a particular object” and consequently treats media as a stable entity with changing content (206). This focus obscures the context of media “whose materiality cannot be simply reduced to either the technological or the economic” (207). Grossberg goes further to identify the limits of this logic that often conceal more productive questions and in turn focus efforts on deconstructing the object of study like

the medium or the audience. Alternatively, Grossberg argues for a different starting point.

He writes:

If we begin, as cultural studies must, by recognizing that the media are themselves constituted by and within changing contexts, then it seems to me that our starting point can only be constructed at the intersection of the changing configurations of the conjuncture and the changing practices, locations, organizations, and effects that might have been traditionally been gathered together under the sign of media and popular culture. (215)

Given the constant chaos of media - in their various technologies and delivery systems, the complexity exceeds the efforts to respond to a singularity that isn't temporally, materially or discursively possible. Grossberg points to "medium studies" as an approach that locates media in its broader cultural context, conceives of its ability to define space and time, troubles the dichotomy of technology and content and sees media as "modalities of articulation creating environs or organizations that define the allowable logics of discourse and mediation" (220). Such an approach allows a decentering of media as objects and instead a focus on the context of the "larger configurations of power operating across the conjuncture" (221).

Sarah Sharma's, "Taxis as Media: A Temporal Materialist Reading of the Taxi Cab," furthers medium theory by broadening what she considers "politically restrictive notions of what constitutes media," and secondly, by exploring "how the taxi's mediation of time might contribute to wider discussions over the materiality of media-technologies." (457) Sharma argues that the turn toward materiality and temporality in media studies is often dominated by the arrival of new media and this analysis obscures the continuous politics of time that impact all media. For Sharma, "how media are conceptualized needs to be broadened to include not just the changing dynamics of space

and time but also the cultural politics that different media are implicated in” (458).

Sharma’s argument is guided by the work of Harold Adam Innis and Marshall McLuhan and their take on ‘medium theory.’ She writes:

Their theories of media maintain that the content is secondary to the spatial and temporal effects that are produced at the level of culture. It is in ‘medium theory’ where questions of space, time, and the cultural and political effects of transportation media are central. In ‘medium theory’ media are understood as environments in which social life unfolds. (458)

In this vein, the taxi is a medium because it mediates practices, relations and forms of social difference, namely race and gender. Further, Sharma notes “the relationships between technology and temporal synchronization” as a key theme in media theory. Moving through this theme, Sharma is able to argue that the taxi mediates bodily experiences of time between drivers and passengers. This mediation is delineated by lack and excess according to existing power structures. Essentially, Sharma advances an opening that expands how scholars define media and “insist that labor, social difference, and the cultural politics of space and time are not external effects or byproducts of media, but rather quite central to how media mediates” (463).

Building from Sharma’s work, Armond Towns considers “the ways that media technologies have racial implications that always exceed their representational capabilities” (“Rebels of the underground” 2). In doing so, Towns contextualizes the Underground Railroad as a media environment “structured by the dynamic, nonlinearity of oral mediation, which is in necessary contrast to Western forms of media such as print, phonetic literacy, and mapping, which promote linear thinking” (3). Further, this also situates the Underground Railroad at the intersections of geography and communication – under constant material transformation to fit the shifting locations of physical

emancipation. As such, the Underground Railroad is a mediated space that structures race in time and space. Towns argues that the material environment, not representations as pathway to discuss material practices, should be a primary site of analysis as it points to the “always-already structured by raced understanding of media” (5). To illustrate this, Towns outlines the two discourses needed to theorize the Underground Railroad as a mediated environment by first, explicating “oral forms of mediation,” and second, “the physical black bodies of enslaved people as media” (6). The necessity of oral communication, as opposed to writing or mapping, and the presence of the physical black body as the delineation of freedom evidence the ways in which media form allows for different experiences of space and time. The ways in which black men and women sought their freedom is a productive material landscape through which critical questions about what constitutes media can be advanced. According to Towns, “These forms of classifying and mapping should not be understood as separate from the ways that media transform our environments, but wholly read within them. In addition, people can toy with, disrupt, and challenge these classificatory ways of thinking” (12). Relatedly, this approach to theorizing the connections between race and media reveals what is gained by a materialist approach to mediation and communication. As Towns writes, “some forms of classification can miss more than they reveal” (12).

In “The (racial) biases of communication: rethinking media and blackness”, Towns continues his argument by reading Fanon and McLuhan together to open more space for a critical focus on media form. Towns applies medium theory to the structure of racial representations to argue that “the media technologies we use, or not, racialize the environments we inhabit” (475). Representation studies has long held a primary position

in media studies scholarship, incorporating both critique and celebration. According to Towns, while some scholars have pushed to move beyond representation, it is often the starting point and thus, a preemptive limitation on what is produced. Alternatively, theorizing from the starting point of media form allows Towns to connect contemporary representations of blackness to forms of media not often attended to in black studies like, print. Reading McLuhan's argument about phoneticism as a form of media that structures Western and non-Western ideas of space through Fanon considerations of the Manicheanization of Western Europe, Towns argues that "McLuhan unintentionally implies that phonetic literacy and print provide a frame to consider materialist approaches to the relationship between violence, racialization processes, institutions, and media technology" (479). This critical intervention allows Towns to connect the printing press and phonetic literacy to, not only, structures of Man and his others, but also, New World exploration and transatlantic slavery. Ultimately, media forms are implicated in conceptualizations of space and time, "in ways that are not neutral, but racial as well" (480). Relatedly, old and new media forms, "continually transform the ways in which we come to understand conceptions of blackness, they *mediate* our understandings of blackness in ways that always-already transcend questions of 'unfair representation'" (480).

This reading of materialist media studies looked at theories of the connections between the moving image, ontology and cinematic processes. It also reviewed theories of media as mediation. These theories attend to the material and temporal locations and excesses of media content and argue for a focus on media form.

*Conclusion*

This chapter provides the theoretical framing through which I will examine the (re) presentation of the black female subject in the film *Get Out* and consider what the invisibilities therein tell us about the possibilities and limitations of the cinematic black political imagination. I use *Get Out* as a sight of inquiry that allows me to explore the connections between black women's geographies, spatialized racial-sexual violence, the social production of space and the excess of media content.

In this chapter, I detailed the dissection of the paradoxical (non) space of the black female subject as evidenced the lexical gaps in the Western grammar's overdetermined and normative properties, the bodily violence of transatlantic slavery and the flesh as a site that engenders and ruptures contemporary understandings of humanness. I elaborated on spatialized racial-sexual violence that haunts the present landscape in the afterlife of slavery. I also dissected the black feminist epistemology, the demonic, that conceptualizes black womanhood as an absent present. In the second part of this literature review, I focused on approaches to media studies that illuminate the socioeconomic, temporal and biopolitical modalities of media form and content.

This chapter gave the theoretical background of the historical, geographic that came to produce the black female subject through space and time. In the next chapter I provide a materialist analysis of *Get Out* to demonstrate how the concepts covered in this chapter are realized in cinematic representations and erasures of black women.

Specifically, I argue that black women are the absent presences of the film *Get Out* and only tangentially engaged to contextualize and advance the main character's recognition and survival. In other words, I concern myself with how we might view, analyze and interrogate the absent presence of black women in the film *Get Out* differently through



the critical theoretical interventions of black feminist geographies and materialist media studies.

### Chapter 3: Can You See Her: An Analysis of the (In) Visible Black Women in *Get Out*

this one is even better than the last. you'll love it.  
it's like \_\_\_\_\_ your typical *Exorcist*-type situation  
you know  
not religious, but *Old Testament inspired*.  
like, rivers of blood.  
it goes like this  
the men who climbed to acclaim on our backs  
digging their knees into our kidneys  
dirty nails into our thighs  
all of their books, films, albums,  
whatever they made in this life  
catches on fire.  
but before it burns it bleeds.  
stigmata, on paper  
staining the nice office carpeting of important people  
and then turning their hands to boils  
when they reach out to touch the thing they once loved.  
the men don't burn, just their work.  
and they watch it all happen from comfortable chairs they didn't pay for  
before the locusts come  
Eve L. Ewing, *horror movie pitch 2*

#### *Introduction*

Eve L. Ewing's poem, "horror movie pitch", written in response to the 2017 presidential inauguration and published just days before the release of *Get Out*, is an apt example of the horror that is living in a body categorized as both black and female. The historical, cultural, socioeconomic and political events that led Eve to imagine a world in which black women have a sort of twisted visibility are the same events that led Jordan Peele to consider the horror of black men in a supposed post-race world. When I left the

theater, I kept this poem close in my thoughts. What does happen when black women can only see each other? If they did disappear would it even matter? What would they leave in their wake?

In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon writes, “I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me” (59). The feeling of seeing yourself on screen is one of both profound happiness and profound confusion. Such is the nature of consuming cinematic images as a black woman in the twenty-first century. The interval Fanon writes about is more than the temporal texture of anticipation. It is a hope without resolution. When the news of Jordan Peele’s social thriller hit, I was intrigued, if not perplexed. Having been a fan of his sketch comedy show, I’m hyper aware of the way his biracial identity and romantic relationships with white women have seeped into his approach to social commentary regarding gender. Beyond that, I have my own familial connection with black men who date white women. That’s not really saying much in 2018 but is indicative of my particular approach to the film. I saw *Get Out* - for the first time - alone. It’s the kind of movie that invites a still, personal, methodical viewing. I left the theater eager to talk with someone, anyone, about what Peele, and the rest of the cast, was able to accomplish. The violent theft of the black body through time and space, the frustration of micro-aggressions, the way racism heightens your senses and adjusts your body language. It’s all in there. Still, I left wondering what the film says, or rather doesn’t say, about black women. Where do black women fit in cinematic renderings on violence in the afterlife of slavery?

The production on *Get Out* began in February of 2016, and in the initial ending, Chris is arrested and taken to jail instead of being recused by Rod. In the Vulture

retrospective on the film, Marcus Henderson, the actor who plays Walter the groundskeeper, offered some insight into how the movie fits into the current sociopolitical moment:

I remember when they gave the verdict that Darren Wilson wouldn't be indicted, and you felt defeated. Like, "Man! Can we catch a break?" What the original ending said was, "No, you can't catch a break," because that's our reality. But the new ending gave us a break, and I think that's why we enjoyed it so much, because we want it so badly. The similarities of the narrative are so parallel to what actually happened in Ferguson. When I have conversations with people about it, we talk about the importance of watching that black body get away to tell his story. Because you know who didn't get to tell their own story? Trayvon Martin. Mike Brown. Philando Castile. (Yuan and Harris)

I highlight this moment because it provides another applicable layer to the interrogation of where black women fit or don't fit into the film. I remember watching the film and my heart absolutely sinking when I heard the sirens in the background in the final scene.

There was an audible dread in the theater. I prepared myself for what I knew was coming – another black life taken away by the hands of the state. I appreciate the level of thought given to disrupting the narrative, even if for a moment, and giving a glimpse of what is possible after you've killed the oppressor.

Still, I left needing something more. While black women appeared on screen, their presence was muted as the film pursued an analysis of race at the expense of gender. This is more than an analysis of a directorial choice, it is a comment about the political machinations of the world that seep into the content. I left thinking about the absolute lack of care given to black women who are also victims of police and state violence. I left thinking about the black women who are also devastated by the racism and sexism that is baked into our very landscape. Where is Sandra Bland's story? Where is Korryn Gaines story? Where is Rekia Boyd's story? Where is my story? In the interval, I wait for her.

Experiencing *Get Out*, and all the cultural shifts that have come after, as a black woman is the particular memory-space that's more than a unique vantage point. It is a conjuring that's born from what Spillers calls the "paradox of non-being" or the "interstice" (*Interstice* 155). It is the excess that cannot be contained in the dialogue. It is the rupture of human (im) possibility. In this chapter, I argue that black women are the absent presence of the film *Get Out*. I proceed with an overview of the relevant theories from chapter two and then move into a material analysis of scenes and reviews from the film. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of my analysis.

As I laid out in chapter two, the prevailing discussion of *Get Out* can be expanded by engaging the film through theories of black feminist geographies and materialist media studies. Black feminist geographies highlight the ways in which the social production of space and place are connected to geographies of domination like transatlantic slavery. Hortense Spillers provides a conceptualization of the black female subject that moves her from the margins to the insurgent ground of a radical black feminist politic. She does so by arguing that black women's sexuality is paradoxical "discursive static" invented through the violence of transatlantic slavery. Spillers argues that Western grammar lacks a language to speak to the racial-sexual body and this renders the black female subject as the limit at which gender can no longer be categorized. This is important because it makes the black female subject the most central actor in modern race-gender theorizing. Black women exist in a (non) space and place that can be used to theorize a different social subject. By connecting human geography to black studies, black feminist geographies do more than just identify black women through time and space, they also site/cite the racial-sexual violence embedded in the landscape

used to categorize humanness. Thus, black women are central to explications on the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality as racial-sexual violence haunts the present material, imaginative and discursive landscape. Finally, the demonic is conceptualized as the spatialized absent presence of black women and black feminist epistemologies creates an intervention and a spatial grammar to site the complex (im) possibilities of black women's geographies.

My reading of materialist media studies looks at a few themes: the limitations of representation studies, the moving image and cinematic processes that produce cognitive ways of knowing and the importance of theories of media form that speak to the socioeconomic, temporal and biopolitical modalities that (re) produce and rationalize hegemonic power relations. Analyses that attempt to correct or critique problems of cinematic representation can be aided by considerations of the conjunctural matter that precedes and exceeds every cinematic image. Cinematic processes and perceptions are created under circumstances of domination, exploitation and oppression. Because of this, critiques that center the politics of visibility often fall into reformism, rather than liberation. Alternatively, a materialist approach attends to the socioeconomic, cultural and spatiotemporal relations that make black images visible and (im) possible. Media as mediation provides another layer to this conceptual approach as it formulates a reading of media as more than a singular object of study. "Medium studies" or "medium theory" locates media in its broader cultural context to decenter media content as the primary focus. Finally, this approach allows for a focus on how media form mediate our understandings of blackness in ways that move beyond questions of fair or authentic representation.

Black women are the absent presence of the film *Get Out*. They are central to the most pivotal moments in the film but are too often backgrounded in support of the male protagonist's search for recognition and survival. I highlight some key moments in the film that are central to my argument. Of the three black women in the film, Georgina, Chris's Mother and the Detective, two are visible onscreen. The visible black women don't spend much time onscreen, but their words and actions linger long after they leave the frame. This analysis is also an evaluation of what the racial-sexual subject, in particular the black woman, adds to the film's meditation on the connections between race, gender and representation. I separate this analysis into sections focusing on each black female characters' movement in the film.

#### *Get Out and Black Women as the Absent Presence*

In order to contextualize the stated importance of the history of transatlantic slavery to the film, I dissect reviews that note the film's impressive exploration of the horrors therein, with no mention of gender throughout them. For example, Tauriq Moosa, writing for *Complex*, situates the film's effectiveness in its ability to amplify the everyday microaggressions that come with living in a black body. He then connects this to the film's foregrounding of slavery and argues that the film necessarily amplifies the violent mania of racialization. He writes:

*Get Out* takes this even further of course: in its twist, white people are revealed as brainwashing, modern day slave-owners. Here, the worst fear that black people have is confirmed and sharply amplified. They are indeed seen as alien, in the sense that they're depersonalized, which harkens back to the mindset that perpetuated slavery in the first place. (Moosa)

Brent Staples, writing for *The New York Times*, situates the film's effectiveness in its ability to subvert the myth of a post-race America. Again, this is read through a lens of the film's commentary on transatlantic slavery. He writes:

The film is a disquisition on the continuing impact of slavery in American life. Among other things, it argues that present-day race relations are heavily determined by the myths that were created to justify enslavement — particularly the notion that black people were never fully human. (Brent Staples, *New York Times*)

Victoria Anderson, writing for *Independent UK*, situates the film among other movies that more explicitly use the horrors of slavery as a central theme. She writes:

Coming in the wake of a slew of slavery-themed dramas such as *Roots*, *Underground* and *Twelve Years a Slave*, *Get Out* is a transparent nod to the genre. The slavery subtext is hinted at early on when we find that Rose's liberal, professional mother goes by the name of "Missy": a common appellation for the Mistress of a slave-holding. Yet the film's subtle genius lies in its ability to trace almost invisible, yet indelible lines of continuity from the centuries-long slavery period to the present day. What has often been missed in the discourse around slavery, and the persistence of post-slavery power relations, is its strategic and enduring psychology. It is this elusive quality that Peele's film manages to capture. (Anderson)

I extensively note these reviews to highlight the ways in which the memory and bodily legacy of transatlantic slavery is central to the film. Further, while the preceding reviews note this fact, none of them note how gender is a specific and necessary material component of that historically present legacy. Invoking transatlantic slavery situates the film in geographic and discursive landscape that is constituted by racial-sexual violence and Georgina's character placement as stand-in to for that history brings that racial-sexual violence to bear upon her silencing. This context is important to understanding why Georgina's absent presence haunts the film's focus on race.



Georgina, the Armitage maid, is the first black female character to appear in the film. Her presence is immediately haunted by the film's evocation of transatlantic slavery. The Armitage estate is intended to visually and psychologically (re)present a plantation. Consequently, Georgina's location within that historically present rendering invites gender into the frame. She is, presumably, the only female victim of the Armitage family's violent schemes. As such, her presence adds another layer unexplored by the film's focus on race. It's more than simply having a black woman (re) presented in a film that purports to dissect the machinations of liberal racism. The film intentionally and effectively uses the legacy of transatlantic slavery to contextualize the contemporary horror that is living in a black body. Even writer-director, Jordan Peele remarked that slavery is "the present spectre in the movie." (Harris) Once gender enters the frame, especially in a black female body, this absent presence haunts the film's focus on race, reveals its limitations and exceeds what the film's content is able to accomplish.

When Georgina appears in the frame for the first time, she is standing in the Armitage kitchen and as the camera slowly turns to reveal her face, Dean Armitage looks at Chris and says, "we keep a piece of my mom in here." While this is a moment of cinematic foreshadowing, it also functions as a demarcation of (in) visibilities of Georgina as one the only black women to be appear in the film. The piece of the Armitage matriarch is allowed to live on in Georgina's body. The next time Georgina appears she functions solely as a smoke signal to Chris that something is amiss. Chris is sitting at a table with Rose and her parents when Georgina is summoned to pour tea for the group. She makes her way around every glass at the table, but she stops at Chris's glass when she hears Missy explaining the annual Armitage party in honor of Rose's

grandparents. Missy says, “We just kept it up because after they died, it felt like...we keep them close to us.” (00:21:24-00:21:34) In that moment, the film audibly shifts, and Georgina’s expression goes blank, her head tilts and a hint of fear flashes across her face. She stays suspended in her psychic horror long enough for the tea to come spilling out of Chris glass. The scene continues with Georgina apologizing for the spilt tea:

MISSY. Oh Georgina.

GEORGINA. I’m so sorry.

MISSY. That’s okay. Why don’t you go lay down? Just get some rest.

GEORGINA. Yes, I think I will. [Georgina smiles slyly and exits the frame]  
(00:21:34-00:21:45)

This scene reveals some latent invisibilities unaccounted for in the dialogue. Later in the film it is revealed that Georgina is another one of Rose’s victims, kidnapped as a racial-sexual body to house the brain of Rose’s grandmother. This is important for the highlighted scene because she is only used as a plot device. She is necessary to signal to Chris and the audience that danger is afoot, but she is not especially nuanced. Further, her movement throughout the scene again functions as a reminder that the Armitage family is continuing the legacy the enslavement.

In another pivotal scene, Chris finally has a face to face conversation with Georgina. To add a little more context to this scene, Chris has become increasingly paranoid by the small and big aberrations in the Armitage house. One such peculiarity – his cell phone is being unplugged. He has up to this point argued with Rose that it must be Georgina behind the scheme as he continues to read her behavior as jealousy against his interracial relationship. The dialogue in this scene is especially important as it highlights Chris’ attempts to connect with Georgina and by consequence invites gender,

however understated, into the frame. After Rose confronts Georgina about the cell phone, Georgina privately talks to Chris in the room:

GEORGINA. I owe you an apology. How rude of me to touch your belongings without asking

CHRIS. Nah. It's cool. I was just confused.

GEORGINA. Well I can assure you there was no funny business. Allow me to explain. I lifted your cellular phone to wipe down the dresser and it accidentally came undone. Rather than meddle with it further, I left it that way.

CHRIS. It's fine. I wasn't trying to snitch.

GEORGINA. Snitch?

CHRIS. Rat you out

GEORGINA. Tattletell.

CHRIS. Yeah

GEORGINA. Oh, don't you worry about that. I can assure you I don't answer to anyone.

CHRIS. Right. All I know is sometimes, if it's too many white people I get nervous. You know? (00:52:11-00:53:22)

The interaction reads as though Chris is joking or looking for some sort of affirmation that he is amongst a fellow black person who reads the situation as he does. More importantly, the dialogue is elevated by Georgina's bodily exaggerations. In what is arguably the most visually arresting moment in the film, Georgina staggers a bit, gasps as if she is building a border between her mouth and her words, her eyes are unnerving and dizzy, and a tear falls down her face as if to indicate there is pain behind the polished veneer. The scene continues, and Georgina responds, "No, no, no, no, no. Aren't you something. That's not my experience. Not at all. The Armitages are so good to us. They treat us like family." After she has hurriedly exited the frame, Chris, visibly shaken, says, "This bitch is crazy." Brandon Harris, writing for *The New Yorker*, had this to say of the scene: "In that instant, in what passes between them in that terrible awkwardness, the trauma of black life in America is writ large." (Harris) If indeed this scene conveys the

trauma of black life, it is hindered by the way frame closes on Chris exclamation that Georgina is crazy.

Once again, Georgina's absent presence pushes the film, via the black male protagonist, forward. Georgina's physical movement is especially important to further analyze this scene. Her tears, her eyes, her body language all signal what exceeds her language in that moment. She is fighting something or someone. In this scene a mediation on race and gender is taking place. While not explicit in the dialogue the scene forecloses the possibilities within Georgina's attempts to break through the "sunken place" and thus ignores what gendered alternatives might reside for how to get out. The film goes to great lengths to utilize the flash of a camera as the technology that ruptures the hold of the "sunken place" yet fails to explore why or how the only black female character suspended in psychic trauma doesn't need the assistance of technology to temporarily return to her former self.

In another scene, a climactic moment of *Get Out*, Chris finds photos of Rose's black victims in a small closet. Given the foreshadowing up to this point, we can surmise, Georgina has cracked the closet door in an effort to, once again, push Chris toward the truth. Georgina is the only woman who appears in the sea of photos, yet the film doesn't give any additional context or nuance to how she came to be trapped in the "sunken place" herself. Georgina, while being a visible character, exists on line between the thought and unthought in the prevailing discussions of the film. The racial-sexual violence that precedes her appearance is animated by the film's centering of the afterlife of slavery. Still, her character is constantly backgrounded as a plot device to advance the black male protagonist's pursuit of survival. Georgina physically lurks in some of the

film's most pivotal scenes. Analyzing Georgina in the full scope of the film, reveals she is one of the most complex and central characters. Her absent presence is used continually to highlight the horrors of the "sunken place" and to warn Chris that he should get out as soon as he can. In the end, her character suffers a violent death as Georgina is unable to completely free herself from the "sunken place" and is killed by Chris in the midst of his pursuit for survival. The frame stays with her as her head crashes against the car window. The final appearance of one of the only visible black female characters is one of absolute violence.

Chris's mom, unseen and unnamed throughout the entire film, adds another layer to my argument that black women are the absent presence of the film. The first time she is absently summoned, Dean Armitage asks Chris about his parents. Chris responds, "My dad was never really in the picture. My mom passed away when I was 11...hit and run" (00:19:31-00:19:41). To contextualize the importance of this moment, it must be stated that Chris' mom is, for the rest of the film, always already absent. She has no physical presence in the movie, other than Chris. Further, her absence is the result of violence. Her flesh ruptures through a seemingly mundane moment in the film and lingers through the entire film. This event, the traumatic loss of a mother at a young age, has a major impact on Chris' interactions with the Armitage family, particularly his interactions with Rose and Missy. For example, Missy holds the revelation of his mother's death until she is ready to send him to the "sunken place." Her death is the gateway Missy uses to access Chris' consciousness at its weakest point. The younger Chris, expecting his mother to come home at her usual evening time, never reacted despite the fact that the time when he could expect his mother to be home had long passed. Instead, he stayed in and watched

television. She manipulates the guilt he has for never acting to save his mother. He isn't directly responsible but his indifference, by his own admission, prolonged her suffering and incriminates himself in his mother's death because he did not call the police to report her missing. In the initial hypnotism scene, Chris sits down to talk with Missy after he has wandered about the Armitage plantation. The conversation starts with Missy admonishing Chris for his smoking habit, but quickly turns to his personal trauma.

MISSY. What about your mother?

CHRIS. What about her? Wait are we... [Chris pauses and begins to scratch the arm of the chair]

MISSY. Where were you when she died?

CHRIS. I don't want to think about that. [Chris cries and shakes his head as his eyes widen] (00:32:42-00:33:24)

Missy continues to stir her tea. Chris thinks for a second then says, "Home. Watching TV." As they continue to talk, Chris is psychically transported back to that moment. He is 11 again, at home watching TV. He remembers his mother was supposed to be home from work, but she wasn't home. Further, the memory of his inaction of that day leaves him paralyzed in the present moment. Again, her "appearance" stops the film and creates a temporal gap wherein Chris is progressed through a key element in the Armitage family's plot of disappearing black bodies. The hypnosis is not only an important plot point, it is also an element reviews of the film analyzed at length. David Sims', writing for the *Atlantic*, dissects the scene in the context of what it adds to the film's already established legacy. He writes:

*Get Out* will probably stand both as the definitive film of 2017 and as the one with the longest cultural shelf life, in part because of moments like the hypnosis scene. The encounter is all the more horrifying because of how powerless Chris is even before Missy has taken over his mind—and because of how he's left with no logical way to talk or think about the very real violation he just experienced. The exchange is a master class in creating tension and in the effectiveness of simple

storytelling: All viewers need to understand what's going on is the sound of the spoon on the teacup, the shot of Chris's tear-stained face, and the bleak, formless look of the Sunken Place itself. (Sims)

It is clear the hypnosis scene is crucial to understanding not only the cultural importance of the film but also to reading Chris' pain as authentic. However, this contextualization silences the importance of the bodily flesh that is summoned every time the audience see Chris falling into the bottomless void the film calls the "sunken place." His mother is one of the vehicles through which he enters the sunken place. The photograph of Chris's tear-stained face is certainly one of the most provocative images from the film. The sight of him transfixed by the memory of his mother's death moments before he sinks into the sunken place has become a cultural signifier for what precedes the descension into the chasm. Ultimately, the image is language-able outside of the filmic form. As such, the photo is also a demarcation of the film's excess that contains the conjuring of the always already absent black woman whose death produced the tension needed to create the "sunken place." In an interview with *The New York Times*, Jordan Peele spoke to the motivation behind the scene. The interviewer asks, "The most painful memory for Chris is watching television as a kid when he thought he should have been with his Mother at critical moment in her life. Did you intend to make watching television a source of guilt?" (Zinoman). Peele responds:

It's a metaphor for his inaction, and a feeling of guilt where he neglected his family. The fact that the entertainment industry is not necessarily inclusive of the African-American experience is a similar form of neglect and is a symptom of a deeper problem. I wanted to make a film that acknowledges neglect and action in the face of the real race monster. (Zinoman)

Peele pivots from discussing anything related to gender to again point to race as the real monster that not only haunts Chris, but also as the monstrosity the film is seeking to bring to the surface.

In another scene, Rose pulls Chris away to have a talk as the silent auction for his body is happening. Still overcome with grief and guilt, he confides in her about feeling traumatized after the death of his mother.

CHRIS. I told you about that night my mom died. When I didn't call 911, didn't go out looking for her. One hour went by, then two, then three, and I just sat there. I was just watching TV.

ROSE. There's nothing you could have done.

CHRIS. I found out later that, uh, she had survived the initial hit. She laid there bleeding by the side of the road, cold and alone. That's how she died in the early morning, cold and alone. And I watching TV. There was time. There was time. There was time. There was time if somebody was looking for her. There was time, but nobody, nobody was looking. (01:00:47-01:01:58)

Chris cries, falls into Rose's arms, looks her in the eye and says, "You're all I got." At this moment, Chris' mother's death is again summoned as a means to move his character closer to the reveal that Rose is not the safe haven he has presumed her to be. The final frame that features the "appearance" of the unseen and unnamed pivotal black female character forecloses any possibility that her death can do more than create a moment of heightened emotional expression for the black male protagonist. It is crucial to recognize that the psychic violence unleashed in the name of making Chris' pain visible is leveled at a black woman who is never explicitly named or visible herself. Every emotion Chris conjures drips with the violent death of this mother. From the moment he enters the frame she is the absent presence haunting the dialogue, the movement and the plot. Unequivocally, her death is the catalyst for the whole movie. It is



through the violence of her death and the memory Chris has held on to that Missy is able to access his consciousness and send him to the paralytic state necessary for the ultimate goal – the disappearance of another black body.

The black female subject is invisible within the film *Get Out* because the racial-sexual violence that distinguish her material and discursive invention are not visible to the cinematic form that mediates race until she is placed in a backgrounded role to the black male protagonist. By attempting to communicate a satirical return to the past via the invocation of transatlantic slavery the film invites gender into the frame but fails to account for what the limited invitation can do for discussions of race and racism.

Ultimately, *Get Out* reaches the limits of what analyses of race, at the expense of gender, can do.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter provides a materialist analysis of *Get Out* to illustrate the ways in which the film's focus on race backgrounds black women. I examine the representation of black women as they are only tangentially engaged and rendered invisible by the film, the cinematic and political inspirations for the film and the prevailing analysis for the film. I provide examples from the character dialogue and reviews of the film to demonstrate how black women animate the most pivotal and violent moments in the film. These examples further demonstrate race's unresolved relationship to gender and the discursive, material and geographic racial-sexual violence that cannot be contained in the filmic form. By unpacking the black female representation, I demonstrate how the film forecloses on alternatives for discussions on racism and sexism in the twentieth-century.

Finally, focusing on race and racism as solely the domain of black men is a mechanism that further silences the black female subject.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this thesis, I provided a material analysis of the black female characters in *Get Out* as a way to explore the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality. I chose the film *Get Out* as a site of inquiry because I saw it as a productive place to explore the connections between the technological veil of the cinema, spatialized racial-sexual violence, geographies of domination, the afterlife of slavery, cinematic processes that re-produce hegemonic subjects, and the excess of media content. *Get Out* is more than a film, it is a cultural phenomenon unto itself and the prevailing effort to contextualize its cultural importance relegates the black women, who are central to the movie, to the background. I saw this as an opening to reveal the limitations of the film's focus on race and what it means for race's unresolved relationship to gender.

In chapter one I provided a brief overview of the production, plot and aim of *Get Out*. I explained my argument and laid out my methodology. I utilized Marshall McLuhan's definition of media to establish media content as secondary to the temporal, spatial and hegemonic modalities of the media form. I also utilized Herman Gray's argument that representation studies are the limit of critical media studies to contextualize my methodology.

In chapter two, I provide a literature review of the theories that provide the groundwork for my examination of *Get Out*. This chapter was delineated into two major

theoretical themes: black feminist geographies and materialist media studies. The spatialized logic of capture that encapsulates some critical black feminist theorizing guided two important questions for me - What (im) possibilities lie beyond the always already known margins of the logic of capture? Further, how are those (im) possibilities foreclosed or extended when presented in a medium like film? I conceptualized the black female subject through a review of black feminist geographies literature that connects racial-sexual violence to the spatial and material project of ontology. Through black feminist geographies, black women's sexuality is conceptualized as the ruptured site of human (im) possibility as the black female body evidences the limit at which gender and sexuality can no longer be categorized. Western grammar's overdetermined properties fail to mediate the black female subject. As such, the (non) space of black women is a theoretical opening for the (im) possibilities of human categorization. I also explicated the ways in which black feminism is a spatial project. The main argument therein – the alterability of space and place is underwritten by the connection between in/human geographies of domination and black women's geographies. The theory of alterability is crucial to critiquing the lack of attention given to the complex relationship the black female characters in *Get Out* have to their geographic surroundings, the black male protagonist, and the film's approach to the violence in the afterlife of slavery.

Black feminist geographies call attention to the always already known narratives of dispossession that surround the black female subject. Important to this project is the

afterlife of transatlantic slavery that haunts our present landscape and evidences the material, discursive and bodily experiences of black women. Finally, I discussed the demonic as the absent presence of black women. This conceptualization identifies black women as a non-deterministic schema that disrupts current geographic processes and signals alternative ways of thinking, living and creating. These theories were pulled from black feminist scholars like Katherine McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers and Alexander Weheliye.

In the second section of chapter two I discussed materialist media studies. In this reading I brought together conceptions of the moving image, ontology and cinematic processes to explore the power cinema has to habituate cognitive maps. These cognitive maps help audiences make sense of the world. This section was heavily informed by Kara Keeling's intellectual project that examines the relationship between film as a form that mediates hegemonic assemblages of raced, sexed and gendered images. Next, I dissected blackness as paradigmatic to the temporal transformations of cinema. I also discussed materialist approaches to media studies that advance a different starting point for studies of media. Medium studies or medium theory locates media in a broader cultural context that acknowledges media as various technologies that define and manipulate space and time. This theory constantly signals the larger configurations of power that operate across the social, cultural, economic, ideological and political modalities that animate media form and content. I also discussed the ways in which media technologies inform our conceptions of blackness. This means media has racial consequences that exceed the representation capabilities.

In chapter three, I provided a materialist media studies analysis of *Get Out*, focusing on the specific moments that feature and reveal the limitations of the film's focus on race. I first talked about the film's invocation of transatlantic slavery and how that haunts the presence of the most visible black female character, Georgina. I used dialogue from the film, in-depth descriptions of pivotal scene and reviews from the film to support this argument and highlight the ways in which gender, specifically the black female subject, is crucial to discussions on the co-constitutive functions of race, gender and sexuality. Next, I analyzed the unseen and unnamed black female character who provides the bodily and psychic violence necessary to create the film's iconic visualization of the horrors of black life in America – the “sunken place.” I concluded my analysis with a discussion of how the excesses of the material and spatial racial-sexual violence that animate the black female subject cannot be accounted for due to the film's focus on race, at the expense of gender.

#### *Future Areas of Study*

I will now turn to a discussion of areas I would like to explore in the future and questions that came out of this thesis. In this final commentary, I reflect on the contemporary sociopolitical moment and what the increased focus on authentic media representations means for critical media studies.

This thesis allowed me to gain greater insight into the intimate entanglements of racial-sexual violence, our current geographic landscape, media as both form and content and how black women's geographies can engender different ways of creating, thinking and living. As I prepare for continued research in the conceptual and theoretic area of black feminist epistemologies, I would like to investigate the intersections of poetics,

black geography, the afterlife of slavery, Western conceptions of time and space, the symbolic overrepresentation of Man and surveillance through the visual and cultural modalities of media.

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