Visual Essays on the Music Video Archive of Kendrick Lamar

Brace yourself, I’ll take you on a trip down memory lane.
-Kendrick Lamar, m.A.A.d city

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Abstract:

My thesis project is a pseudo-ethnographic approach to archiving and analyzing four music videos from rapper Kendrick Lamar’s work. Through my analysis, I combine anthropological theory with visual studies to better understand how sound and image work together to construct music videos. Music videos represent a unique site of interest for me because of the ways in which we, as lookers, produce forms of knowledge through our interpretations of visual media. In my work, I’ll be archiving the ways in which Kendrick’s locality, politics, and musical ability intersect between the image and music. In an effort to better understand the impacts of music videos on visual culture, this analysis will hopefully guide a discussion of how we, as viewers, learn to see things – and hopefully, we participate in a reflexive process of trying to define how we see ourselves and our own positions in the world in relation to each other.
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I’m not sure where my love for watching music videos began; I was too young to have experienced the golden age of MTV’s programming and I didn’t listen to anything but the radio in my mom’s car. But when I was about 11 years old, YouTube launched and became my new source of entertainment; I was infatuated with all of the videos and would spend hours getting lost watching sketches and vlogs (still do) and this would inspire me to create my own sketches and vlogs (still do this, too). And eventually, the YouTube algorithms pushed my video recommendations to include the most popular videos, which happened to be music videos. The medium had exploded onto the scene with MTV in 1981 but slowly faded in the mid 90’s after MTV reworked its programming around this hot new thing called “reality television”. Then, in 2005, with the launch of YouTube, music videos finally had a home again where fans could watch their favorite videos over and over without having to wait for MTV’s programming to reset. This was the rebirth of music videos, and over a decade later, technology has continued to push this medium to “stretch the limits of human experience” (Shaviro, 16). The music video as a genre is a complicated and intersectional form that inscribes new meaning to “the visual” as we know it; it’s composed of images (sometimes still, but mostly video), music, lyrics, philosophy, theater, dance, etc. I want to explore the theoretical framework of music videos and how this framework engages with the construction of the visual. Music videos are generally a pretty “fuzzy” category, according to new media theorists such as Steven Shaviro and Carol Vernallis. However, they are a necessary field of study in dissecting the role of contemporary “visual studies” as they help guide us through a world in which we are constantly creating meaning and knowledge production through what we see. Vernallis understands the passivity of viewership that is normally attached to the experience of watching a music video, and so much of her work is focused on slowing down our analysis of the visual in order to draw conclusions about how
music video works to construct and reflect meaning in society. The genre of music video presents endless visual possibilities that not only aims to sell the original song, but also provides new possibilities for imagining the song beyond a listener’s original interpretation; it’s specifically in this ability to reshape the way that we interact with music, images, and pop culture in general that music videos have continued to be such an intriguing site of knowledge production.

In almost every course that I’ve taken at Haverford College, I’ve found a way to work in some visual studies theory by engaging with music videos. For reasons that I haven’t fully had a chance to explore yet, they represent a unique site of interaction between the visual, the artist, and the viewer; it’s made me think, how much can music videos teach us about ourselves? They offer an opportunity to engage with themes of race, violence, gender, and sexuality to name a few; music videos, like other forms of conventional cinema, evoke a voyeuristic gaze that we can examine through the lens of popular culture. In the culmination of all of my ethnographic research combined with my passion for visual studies and video production, studying music video as a theoretical framework and site of knowledge production seems like the perfect way to reflect on my growth as a student and filmmaker.

For my thesis, I’d like to argue for the unique application of music videos as visual tools that both construct and reflect forms of knowledge production through story-telling. The interaction between sound and image in music video allows for new possibilities in defining what comes to exist as “visual” within visual media, and so an intersectional approach to the composition of music, image, and lyric are all necessary when constructing new forms of viewing (and therefore, being) in the world.
For my case study in archiving the interaction between music video and artist, I will be focusing on Compton rapper Kendrick Lamar, who has quickly risen to become one of the most prolific artists of the 21st century. Since 2009, Kendrick has released three full length studio albums and approximately thirty music videos, with fifteen of those thirty coming out within the last four years. In 2013, he first started co-directing his music videos – an effort that evokes similar themes of ownership first witnessed with the rise of the original auteur filmmakers of the French New Wave in the 1960’s. I was drawn to Kendrick for a number of reasons, one of the main reasons being that I enjoy his music and have a massive amount of respect for him as an artist who genuinely seems to care about using his platform to push for new possibilities and social change. My appreciation for his work as a visual artist stems from my natural attraction to music videos, and his are able to be both spectacle/commercial and honest/creative. In my video essay series I’ll be invoking my own voice and reflecting on how my experiences as a music video filmmaker have informed my ability to critique a close-analysis of individual music videos. I imagine it to be a sort of auto-ethnographic lens through which I am able to express my close-readings of music video production.

I personally believe that Kendrick is the greatest rapper alive right now, but first and foremost, he just wants people to know that he’s a kid from Compton – another product of the environment. In a 2016 interview with Noisey, Kendrick shared his greater message for why Compton is such an important part of his work: “What happens is, it invites people in and get another perspective. It brings a whole nother side of the world to Compton. To this backyard right here, and say ‘Okay, these are actually people.” (Kendrick). In February of 2016, Kendrick received the key to Compton, in recognition for everything that he does to inspire the youth that they can achieve anything. “Kendrick Lamar is one of Compton’s greatest ambassadors,” said
City Councilwoman Janna Zurita. “We in Compton are proud of him because he is a symbol of what our city really is – a place where dreams can come true.” (Zurita).

My methodology includes the construction of an archive with shot-by-shot analysis, something that does not exist online. It’s a detailed process of noting whenever the camera cuts, followed by logging that shot’s timecode, description, and setting. In doing this, I will accomplish an extremely detailed and close reading of music videos, through which I can formulate my connections between the image and sound. Where my approach to music video differs from the works of other visual theorists, though, is in my work to construct an archive of music videos based around a single artist. I will then track that artist’s progression over time via close-readings and individually focused analyses. I’m looking forward to applying theoretical foundation to Kendrick’s intersectional approaches to race, sex, violence, hope, and national identity that seem to run thematically throughout his music and visual work.

This project of analyzing Kendrick’s archive of representation through music video needs to take the appropriate form in order to address this intersectional visual medium, and so I’ll be constructing a video essay series focused on documenting my close-analysis of each individual video in the archive. The four video essays will be pre-scripted to include specific theoretical moments of intervention within my close-reading of the individual sequences within each music video. Apart from just identifying these sequences and their meanings within the context of the full song/music video, I’ll also work it into my larger argument for Kendrick Lamar’s music videos as a site of constant visual possibility. By combining text, voiceover, image, video, and music, I hope to mirror the historically multi-layered process of constructing a music video. In a recent TEDxTalk, popular video essayist Evan Puschak said, “so what is a video essay? Well it’s
about as hard to define as a written essay is; it’s like written essays blend into articles, reportage, pamphlets and short stories [video] essays blend into films, documentaries, TV journalism, photojournalism – and the lines there are always going to be blurry.” (Puschak) For someone who has never attempted to create a video essay before, I vastly underestimated how many times I would have to re-do takes in order to get a clean delivery. Through Puschak’s TEDxTalk, I was able to better understand how to channel my notes into a script that would feel both personal and analytical; through this process of trying to find the right way to articulate my thoughts, I ended up better understanding my own point of view about the essay topics.

I plan on releasing the video essays regularly on a YouTube channel that I’ll run, as to engage the same audiences that are attracted to Kendrick Lamar’s music videos. Kendrick Lamar’s VEVO channel on YouTube (which is the home of most of his music videos online) has accumulated over 1.9 billion views since 2011. My hope is that, by making this series of videos public, people will become more curious about the construction and role of music video as a critical site of engaging the human experience through visuality. If anything, I hope to encourage more music video viewers to be curious and pay close attention to the work being done in the music video between sound and image; also, I generally hope to provide an environment that openly questions how we as viewers are constituted through certain visual techniques.

Admittedly, I do have a personal stake in the success of this project beyond the submission of this thesis; I currently wish to continue working in the visual field as a music video and commercial director/producer. This close-analysis of Kendrick Lamar’s music videos will necessarily lead to a deeper engagement with the visual in my own work, as well. With the advertisement of these videos on YouTube it’s entirely possible that the power of the internet
could offer up some connections to other successful artists who might be interested in working together.

In addition to my “work” consuming and taking notes on specific, individual music videos, I’ve also looked into the physical production of those music videos online through other YouTube videos. I’ve recently begun combing through some more theoretical frameworks that seek to explain music videos within the larger field of visual media, as well; not only have these texts helped contextualize music videos within a more academic field, but they are also useful as guidelines for how to write a close analysis of a music video. For example, in Steven Shapiro’s short “Quick Takes” manifesto about the development of music video over the last decade, accurately titled *Digital Music Videos*, he provides a close-reading analysis of several music videos through text that attempt to provide a sensory visual experience for readers. I’d like to present a short passage from the opening of his third chapter, which poetically draws out the sensuality that is embedded within Animal Collective’s 2013 music video, “Applesauce”, as an example of how text can function as a part of the visual breakdown of music video.

**Gaspar Noe**’s video for Animal Collective’s song “Applesauce” shows us the backlit silhouette of a young women (the model Lindsey Wixson), in extreme close-up, eating a fat, juicy peach. At the start of the video, Wixson’s profile glides into the frame from screen right; then the peach, held in her hand, comes into the frame from screen left. Because of the backlighting, it is only in shadowy outline that we can see her face, the fruit, and her fingers grasping it. (76)

I really admire Shaviro’s ability to slow down the video and take such a careful frame-by-frame approach to his analysis. While there are still limitations in trying to explain a video through a text-based explanation of what’s happening on the screen, I believe that he does manage to provide readers with enough detail so that they can imagine the music video in their head. I’ll apply this method of using text to express visual concepts to my script-writing process, in an effort to create dialogue that is both mindful and stimulating; it’s my goal to create text that
simply attaches itself to the visual essay, much like how the image attaches itself to music in music video.

Before engaging with the literature in more detail, as a general contextual/framing note I wanted to introduce how Carol Vernallis approaches her close analysis of visual media. In Vernallis’ book *Experiencing Music Video*, she engages with two methods of analyzing music videos: one way is to compare music video to other audio and visual forms (such as music, film, photography, etc.) and the other would be to analyze specific examples of music videos and draw conclusions based on the technical construction of the visual on an individual basis. In my thesis, I plan on applying this approach by creating and then analyzing individual music videos from an archive, while also operating within larger theoretical frameworks that are rooted historically within the field of visual studies.

For my research, I’m going to focus on two sites: music videos located mainly on YouTube, and music video theory located within various texts. While not a traditional site for ethnographic work, themes such as the gaze will still be extremely relevant in my approach to looking at this work through my computer screen. It is limiting in that I won’t be interacting with other people to discuss the work directly; the video essays will be a conversation starter rather than entering a pre-existing conversation. At the same time, the fact that these visual essays will be entering a new conversation is something that I look forward to because of the lack of a close-reading of music videos online. There are YouTube channels that script out and deliver video essays on cinematic conventions and specific films, but they generally seem to ignore music video as a viable space to engage with the visual.

The “visual” is not just what you see; as WJT Mitchell explores in “There Are No Visual Media”, the components of what make something “visual” are important to analyze in order to
explore how we see ourselves. “Writing, printing, painting, hand gestures, winks, nods, and comic strips are all ‘visual media’,” Mitchell explains, “and this tells us next to nothing about them” (12). By suggesting “there are no visual media” and dismantling the term, Mitchell opens the term up to new discussion and scrutiny. “Cinema, then, is not just a ratio of sight and sound, but of images and words and of other differentiable parameters such as speech, music and noise” (10). This theory can be applied further to music videos, which not only feature music and lyrics with the image, but are derived completely from what you hear. Steven Shapiro writes that this relationship between the image and music might seem familiar because of the ways that it draws on classic cinematic conventions while also engaging with new possibilities of visual aesthetics. Their short duration and emphasis on repetition require us to engage with music videos on a much more microscopic level than a feature length film; a passive viewer might not be aware of all of the work that has gone into the construction of a social commentary through the visual but that isn’t to say that their subconscious has not absorbed this message of reality. “Music videos, with their brief duration, do not have the time or the flexibility to unfold convoluted plot developments as narrative movies do. But also, because music videos are so short, directors can shape them at a frame-by-frame (or should I say scanline-by-scanline) level, in a way that is not practical for full-length feature films” (15). In breaking down the details within a music video, frame by frame, you are not only making conclusions about aesthetic meaning but also about how humans interpret the visual through music videos. “They are sensations that do not quite reach the level of conscious perceptions (Sparrow). We feel them, we are affected by them, but we cannot grasp them or comprehend them” (16). Shaviro is extending the impact of the music video by associating the visual with the construction of our own self-reflexive human subjectivity. “Insofar as the medium is the message, recent music videos give us an experience of
conditions that extend well beyond and beneath the range of our all-too-human subjectivity” (16). In this way, music videos do not only stretch what is possible in terms of creating a visual aesthetic, but also in terms of creating new forms of subjectivity.

Carol Vernallis also comments on the relationship between music video and cinema, writing in *Experiencing Music Video* that “sound’s power over the image, the spatial and temporalizing of the image and the theatricalization of the characters, makes music video a distant cousin to cinema” (132). Here, Vernallis, like Shapiro, is drawn to the effect that the music video has on the positionality of its viewer through the intersection of sound and image. She continues by saying that “sound structures music video’s world, determining the paths of its characters” (132). Building on this foundation, we can apply this theory to trace the ways that Kendrick Lamar constructs new forms of visuality through a development of his sound. Sound here also has the added impact of influencing time in music video through the pacing of its rhythm; time can be represented in a variety of post-cinematic ways via the image in response, including slow-motion or fast-motion. Another way that music videos reference time is through their self-aware production of images based on historical archives; the music video medium remixes and appropriates older forms of media in an attempt to create new forms of visual expression. Shaviro writes that, “music videos are often deeply self-reflexive and strikingly innovative in form and technique” (10), but that “this is a pragmatic development, not a process of degradation” (84). The distribution circuits for visual content in the contemporary moment allow for a much wider circulation of images that may not have been possible for the images that are being referenced.

One of the ethical concerns that I have arises when I invoke my own positionality as a white male filmmaker in relation to the work being done by Kendrick Lamar in his music videos.
I think that being aware of this gaze and how it affects my position as a viewer and as a filmmaker is the first step in being more mindful about how I address this field of study. Also, I am concerned about the reception of a video that offers a visual analysis that doesn’t match up with someone else’s interpretation.
9 years ago, before DAMN. won a Pulitzer Prize, before To Pimp A Butterfly debuted at number one, before Good Kid MAAD City went platinum, and before Section.80 earned Kendrick “the torch” from Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, there was The Kendrick Lamar EP. Released just before midnight on New Year’s Eve in 2009, the 15-track EP was and still is a defining marker in the history of Kendrick Lamar’s development as an artist. Growing up as a teenager in Compton, California in the early 2000’s, surrounded by gang violence and the constant threat of police brutality *maad insert*, Kendrick dedicated himself to his craft in order to create a better future for himself. Even at the young age of 22, Kendrick is aware of the expectations that arise out of being a “Compton rapper”; he enjoys shattering those expectations to show just how unique his voice is, while also being openly proud of his city.

*source: (3:59 – 4:10)*

“To get in this rap game, I know it won’t be easy. Cuz my shit different, I know. He from Compton where he from have he killed before? Truth is, I ain’t the most ruthless, but I’m not cupid.”

But the music was only one part of K-Dot’s transformation into King Kendrick; in 2009, Top Dawg Entertainment – who had signed Kendrick as a teenager a few years earlier – launched their official YouTube channel; today, that same channel boasts nearly 400 million views. The development of this online platform allowed TDE to market their artists directly to an audience in new ways, while still maintaining complete creative control – this wasn’t MTV and there wasn’t a big cable network that could censor them or stop them from hitting ‘upload’ at a moment’s notice *insert upload click*. So they got to work – TDE created an online archive of
music videos, promotional teasers, interviews, and vlogs, presenting their small roster of artists *insert Black Hippy photos* to the public in this new virtual space. Music videos, now more accessible than ever, became an important site of creative/cultural expression and self-representation for artists; they opened up new possibilities for constructing a visual language that was directly rooted in the relationship between image and sound.

In 2009, following the launch of the TDE YouTube channel, Kendrick Lamar released the first three music videos of his career. In order, he released videos for “Bitch I’m in the Club”, “Compton State of Mind”, and “Jason Keaton & Uncle Bobby”. “Bitch I’m in the Club”, which he performed under the name K-Dot, is a record that Kendrick has defined as his “wackest song” *source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYFfkBSo2mg (43:00)*

And “Compton State of Mind” was, according to Kendrick’s manager and TDE president Dave Free, “the worst video ever”. *source: http://www.mtv.com/news/2246258/kendrick-lamar-dave-free-little-homies/*

Both videos were also directed by Free, under the alias “Dee.Jay.Dave”. These videos were also the foundation for what would become “The Little Homies”, a directing duo made up of Kendrick and Dave – but this happens years later. For now, we turn back to the third video that Kendrick released just two days before the EP on December 29th, “Jason Keaton & Uncle Bobby”. This video, directed by Justin R. Barnes and produced by Drop City, was the first music video that Kendrick released under his real birth name. In an interview shot during the production of the “Jason Keaton” video, Kendrick explains his reasoning behind the name change. *source* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z19aS4U8EsE (0:08 – 0:27)
So if we’re going to trace the ways that Kendrick’s music videos communicate specific themes and visual languages over time, then this video is the perfect starting place.

The song is one of the more reflective and conscious tracks off the EP, and in a phone-call interview with Justin R. Barnes, I learned that Barnes had specifically requested to shoot “Jason Keaton” because he felt that it had the most to say – Kendrick agreed. It’s a song about two African-American men that have been incarcerated, and Kendrick empathizes with their pain while also trying to make sense of his frustration towards the institutional oppression of African-Americans. The first verse is dedicated to his friend Jason Keaton, where Kendrick somberly imagines just how bad Jason must be feeling in prison, away from his family. The second verse is an equally intense verse about his Uncle Bobby, who was released from jail after 15 years only to face life in prison a year later for getting his third strike. In the final verse, the 22 year old passionately raps about the problematic institutional racism that connects these two stories, thus making them universal:

*source* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRhfdZGb-nM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRhfdZGb-nM) (3:03 - 3:13)

The mood and story of the song is manifested in a variety of different ways throughout the video. Immediately, you see that this entire video (minus the exit interview) is edited to be black and white. I spoke with the director, Justin Rev Barnes, who discussed why he opted to strip the color from this video:

*interview 13:48* “You focus, it’s not about everything else when the color’s stripped. One thing was doing it black and white, we’re telling a story of black and white. I’m not a lyricist, but I’m a visualist…When you put things in black and white, there’s more focus on the subject and the conversation – I just wanted people to really listen to the song, more than watch a video for like a dance move or something. I wanted them to be informed.”
“Jason Keaton” is also made up of quick rhythmic cuts, with almost 140 shots across the 4 minute 35 second timeline; also, every shot is handheld. This shooting style does add some disruption and shakiness to this image, which could very well have been a technical choice by Barnes to capture Kendrick in a “real”, documentary style, but I believe that this is likely a consequence of the fact that this video was shot with no budget. This note raises an interesting question: how can an artist represent themselves truly if they lack the resources to make a proper video?

The music video is mainly comprised of performance shots, with a small amount of b-roll gathered from driving around Compton spliced in. However, the opening sequence of the video does do some narrative work to set up the performances – Kendrick receives a letter with a correctional stamp (if you look close, the address is actually a title card for the music video) and goes upstairs to his apartment to read it and respond. When he arrives back in his room, he plays a vinyl record and reveals a bunch of crumpled pieces of paper – previous attempts to write back, but he just couldn’t find the right words. In his performance shots, Kendrick often raps with his head tilted down, looking offscreen. When he does look into the camera, though, his performance is very somber and slow-moving; he often holds his gaze with the lens, directly confronting the audience by extending his feelings and stories through the screen. He often uses his arms to make gestures that reflect specific lyrics or just to add emphasis to his delivery. He performs against a variety of landscapes and backdrops that make up his neighborhood; he stands outside the courthouse, in front of the lockup, and below massive Los Angeles skyscrapers; the bustling corporate infrastructure towers over him and he appears small and almost overwhelmed in these frames. The featured artist, JaVante – who is not listed on the track – also performs with a similar energy, against a variety of seemingly random textured city backdrops (brick walls,
parking garages, graffiti’d stairwells). “Jason Keaton” shares a lot of similarities with other rap videos, where the majority of the visual is dedicated to cutting back and forth between various angles within performance setups. But the harsh contrast and often overexposed backgrounds add a stylistic element that really pushes “viewers” to be “listeners”. The visuals here, according to Barnes, are justified as being sometimes out of focus or overexposed because the more attention they bring to the words that he’s saying, the better. By placing emphasis on the audio value of the song, Barnes uses the visuals to guide his audience towards being active listeners and participants in his storytelling.

But that’s not the end of the video, yet – the Drop City signature is to always conduct a short exit interview with the artist so they have the opportunity to inform viewers about who they are, what their message is, if they’re dropping any music, whatever it may be. Barnes created Drop City because he was fascinated by the amount of undiscovered, under the radar talent in the hood, and he wanted to give those artists a platform to share their stories while also creating opportunities to continue producing his art through filmmaking. In this exit interview, Kendrick prophetically makes a reference to being a good kid in a mad city, foreshadowing the title of his second studio album, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* which would arrive three years later in 2012. Justin Barnes had this to say about the interview:

*interview* 16:10 “That was the dialogue that we would have with Kendrick. I’m probably four or five years older than them, but you don’t have to be a certain age to have certain life experience. And what I gathered from his songs is that this is just – I knew from the beginning that this was a guy who sees things and knows how to tell stories back to people. And he’s not just having a conversation, you can hear in his voice there’s emotion coming through it.”
Kendrick dedicates himself to making music that embodies the human spirit – he has these stories and exists as a storyteller because, like everyone else in Compton, he’s just another product of his environment. The difference is, though, Kendrick took a different path, one that he would continue to expand on as he gained more success. With that success, he acquired more resources and more access to capital to fund his artistic projects – the visual language communicated in his later videos continues to evolve, and we as viewers, must continue to pay attention to how we look.
Video Essay #2: HiiiPower

“HiiiPower” is more than just the lead single off Kendrick’s first studio album – it’s a movement. And, fittingly, the music video for the song isn’t what you might expect from a traditional rap video – it intercuts intense, choppy archival footage from revolutions around the globe with a number of performance and narrative scenes. In July of 2011, Kendrick released Section.80 without the backing of a major label to help support its distribution, but still managed to tap into a very passionate fan-base on the West Coast. So when Kendrick released “HiiiPower”, his fans were listening. This music video is an important document in our archive because it demonstrates that a multimedia approach to creating a visual language that still reflects Kendrick’s politically charged beliefs is possible – and this is a movement away from traditional forms of representation in rap videos that often fall short of exploring the potential power of music videos. Here, we observe how the “HiiiPower” music video becomes a site of revolution; Kendrick’s opening on-screen text manifesto is deeply personal but vague and mysterious – this immediately keys the audience in to the fact that this is not a music video that you can just watch passively. Not only do you have to literally look closely at the video in order to make sense of the archival references that the music video is making, but in doing so, you become engaged in a different kind of close-looking and analysis that is not usually activated for watching music videos. Through an examination of “HiiiPower”, we might better understand how this different way of looking might guide us to reframe the potential of music videos within visual culture.

Directors Fredo Tovar and Scott Fleishman (“AplusFilmz”) collaborated with Kendrick on the concept for the video – previously, Kendrick was just the subject of his music videos, but
with his contribution to the concept of “HiiiPower”, Kendrick marked his transition into a more involved role as the creative director. The video opens with a television countdown screen, but as it approaches 0, an Egyptian Eye of Horus flashes onto the countdown template. The eye represents a symbol of protection, royal power, and good health; also, it is a precursor to Kendrick’s bars about “writing our own hieroglyphs” and to some of the archival footage from the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. These three tenants of the Eye of Horus are similar to the three things that the “HiiiPower” movement is based on: heart, honor, and respect – each of them represented by an “i”. At shows, crowds will often lift three fingers in the air to symbolize that they are a part of the movement, a symbolic gesture that we see used through this music video as well. Figures from the civil rights and Black Panther movements are often referenced throughout the music video; their presence is meant to be like that of a role model, guiding people to achieve those three things for themselves. Although this music video is so intensely artistic and political, we also have to remind ourselves that – because it is a music video, it is also a tool for Kendrick to use in order to promote himself and sell albums. Some references, like the graphic autopsy of Tupac, may present a possibly problematic scenario in which Kendrick is directly profiting off the image of a man who was murdered. I don’t think his intentions are bad at all, but generating sales is an integral part of why artists produce music videos, which we should keep track of.

Over a gritty yet jazzy J. Cole beat, Kendrick performs in an empty warehouse. In one performance setup, he leans on a big panel of stained glass windows, gazing outside. The camera, filming Kendrick’s profile from a side-angle, moves from close-up to medium to long shot as Kendrick continues his performance. The other main performance setup in the warehouse is Kendrick sitting on a wooden crate, with his head low. In this setup, though, which is often filmed from close-up, Kendrick gazes directly into the lens when rapping. Thirty seconds in the
video, the first use of archival footage appears as we see the “AplusFilmz” logo on top of some grainy footage of a fire. Quickly, static rushes over the image as it transitions into the next archival shot – Malcolm X in a suit, delivering a speech. Throughout the first half of the video, we continue to move in and out of these archival flashbacks – most of the time the images are not directly in sync with the lyrics, but rather reflect a universal message of revolution.

Sometimes, however, the lyrics do line up with the archival footage:

*music video* 0:38 – 0:41 & 2:39 – 2:45

Sometimes it can be confusing as to what the context is surrounding these quick flashes of protests and riots – the filmmakers have edited the archival footage and added effects that create distortion on top of their already low resolution, which sometimes makes the videos illegible. In order to better understand some of the less obvious references being made, we have to consider the time that this song and video were being produced. The HiiiPower single was released April 12th, 2011, and Kendrick told Complex that, “I started working on Section.80 like four months prior to it coming out.” *source*:

http://www.complex.com/music/2011/08/interview-kendrick-lamar

So if we consider what is happening in the world around the end of 2010 going into 2011, we’re reminded of the Arab Spring, the Egyptian Revolution, and the Tunisian Revolution. Again, this music video finds ways to guide viewers into being critical lookers and thinkers by asking them to consider the global context of each archival scene. A really important note to make, which is more closely related to the final dramatic narrative scene, is that the Tunisian Revolution was sparked by an act of self-immolation. This act of protest led to the man, Mohamed Bouazizi, becoming a martyr and symbol of radical revolutionary change. As the video approaches the end, we’re thrust into a darkly lit, tightly packed room, where Kendrick –
in all black – takes a red gas can and pours its contents all over him. A direct reference to the symbol that Bouazizi represents for catalyzing radical revolution against oppressive regimes, Kendrick takes out a match and throws it on the ground – the video cuts out right before the match would have impacted the gas. Instead, we’re taken to a different scene; here – we dolly out from a close-up of a retro television, broadcasting static. As the camera pulls back into a wide shot, it’s revealed that there are two young children sit with their backs facing the camera, completely fixated on the glitch television screen.

This music video isn’t just a nod to the figures that have inspired Kendrick’s political ideologies; it’s also a direct attempt to engage viewers via music video in a way that is serving a sort of revolutionary mission. In many ways, the “HiiiPower” movement that Kendrick explores throughout the song and video is a reflection of how much he was inspired by the work of Tupac’s “Thug Life!” code of ethics. The Code of Thug Life was an ethics document meant to serve as a peace treaty between rival gangs in Watts, California – essentially, it’s a code of how to be a righteous or justifiable thug. “HiiiPower” might have started as a local movement, but – just like with Kendrick’s approach to storytelling in his lyrics – the universality of it introduces a uniquely humanizing effect.

When we talk about the intersection between image and sound within music videos, it’s important to keep in mind that our goal shouldn’t be to make a claim that one is better than the other. Music videos, as a genre, depend on the mutual relationship between sound and image together – how they work with each other though, is specific to each individual production. Here, with “HiiiPower”, we get access to a side of Kendrick that is driven to make meaningful change through his work. By using his platform to create a music video that represents a movement dedicated to social justice, Kendrick has not only added depth to the number of possible
interpretations of his song, but – and more importantly – Kendrick has proven that music videos as a medium have the potential to be universally humanizing.
Visual Essay #3: Alright

I went into this video essay thinking that writing up an analysis of Alright would come naturally to me because it’s easily my favorite Kendrick Lamar music video that he’s released – so far (and I don’t believe I’m alone on that one) *source* [http://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/kendrick-lamar-best-music-videos-2095542](http://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/kendrick-lamar-best-music-videos-2095542)

Whenever somebody asks me why I want to make music videos, this is my first example. This video is so much more than a music video; it’s a short film, it’s a portrait, it’s a political statement – there’s so much happening here, from the opening gotham-esque black and white landscape shots, to the chaotic tunnel lights with loud screams, to the classic hood image of a pair of silhouetted sneakers tied around a telephone pole. However, this write-up has proven to be very difficult – because I like it so much, I’ve placed an added pressure on myself to do the music video justice with my video essay. For example, through watching Alright over and over again since its release in 2015, I became so obsessed with finding specific cinematic details that would justify, at least on paper, my appreciation for the video, that I forgot how to watch the music video. Which sounds silly, because if you’re looking at a screen, you’re watching it, right? Yes, of course, but if you don’t intentionally participate in what’s happening on the screen, how will you be able to find meaning in the symbols that are presented? How will you understand the moments where sound and image come together in new ways to disrupt conventional music video tropes? How will you be able to appreciate Kendrick Lamar as an artist and image-maker?

But before I go on, it’s also important to introduce that Kendrick isn’t just the subject and star of the video, he’s also one of the co-directors; The Little Homies co-directed Alright with Colin
Tilley in a collaborative process that sought to blend sadness, evil, and hope into a unified narrative. In an interview with MTV, Colin Tilley said that *source*

“I’ve never actually worked with an artist like Kendrick that wants to keep pushing the creative to a whole ‘nother world. Every little detail matters to him. So, it was really fun to continue to mold the concept from where we started.”


Kendrick’s identity (which is always shifting based on the character or voice that he inhabits) is a production of his environment, and yet his work is so global and worldly. And this isn’t to take anything away from the songs themselves, because they are inherently a major piece of his music videos, but every time that Kendrick puts out a video, he changes visual culture in a significant way. The way that we look at things and find meaning is constantly being reshaped by works such as Alright; especially within the context of other music videos. At the intersection of lyric, music, and image, Alright is Kendrick’s attempt to bring a message and feeling of positivity to those who are struggling. Confronting themes of social injustice, specifically the oppression of people of color via institutional racism and police brutality, Kendrick’s music video archive is an important site of knowledge production. We can trace these themes back to his 2009 music video for “Jason Keaton & Uncle Bobby”, comparing the representations of these issues over time in order to better understand how Kendrick Lamar visualizes the world. And I also want to make sure that I talk about the actual video itself because that would be embarrassing, so here are a few moments that embody the visual language that he has constructed.

The all-knowing narrator, Kendrick, poetically describes an intense pain and struggle, as you’re presented with vignettes of the chaos – you enter mAAD city. Cinematically, you enter a
whole other level of engagement through the technical use of slow motion to draw out scenes of destruction, violence, and sadness. Alcohol is sprayed right at the screen, a bottle explodes into a car’s window. The POV shot from within the car is used to shock you, while also forcing your positionality as the audience – too close for comfort, but somehow removed from the chaos around you.

At 1:30, one of my favorite shots is used in order to represent a shift in the video from Kendrick’s spoken word poem to the introduction song to Alright (the video is composed of 3 different elements/chapters). The shot starts as a man is seemingly thrown onto the ground. It’s a sideways close up on the man’s head as it slams into the ground, and his hands are cuffed. Then, an amazing bit of skill on the part of Rob Witt transforms the entire frame and the world within it. The camera spins and pulls back to reveal that the man is not actually on the ground, but now he’s thrown up against the wall. He uses this shift to create some distance between himself the police officer, who is now revealed as the camera slowly pulls back to a medium close up. He quickly reaches for his gun, as camera shakes quickly. Then, the camera slows and becomes very smooth, tracking the gun as it comes into focus. The shallow depth of field focus your attention on the tip of the gun as the trigger is pulled and the bullet flies out; the use of special effects here is shockingly real and difficult to watch.

We cut to the 2nd chapter of this short film, which features Kendrick and his crew riding in an old, beat up police car – the full Black Hippy crew is with him. The camera quickly pulls back and reveals that the car is being lifted up by 4 white police officers. The inversion of race/power here is intentional and effective, also: Kendrick is the driver – he has the power and everyone knows.
Finally, we arrive at Kendrick’s performance of the song. *Alright* is a positive, uplifting song that is based on the idea of making Kendrick fly. Kendrick flies above/out of Compton as a symbol of possibility and hope. Mothers and their children watch as Kendrick flies above the streets of Compton in adoration. Other key shots that construct Kendrick as a positive, inspirational force include the opening shot of Kendrick driving around with a young boy, dancing. When talking about the role of children in the music video, Tilley notes that *source* “for me, it comes back to the hero. The whole world we created is like a fantasy, a dream world. When Kendrick’s floating through the city, that’s him being like a superhero to these kids, him being something these kids can aspire towards.”

Another scene that gets a lot of love in this video is the stereo dancing sequence. At multiple times throughout the video, dancers appear in front of a large wall of stereos. This expression of pure joy is framed within the context of Kendrick’s hopeful future of change. As Colin Tilley described, *source* “It’s taking something negative and putting a positive spin on everything that’s going on. It’s giving hope. When you see people dancing, that’s an act of celebration. That’s expressing yourself in a certain way. That expression is so key to this whole video.”

The last shot, and perhaps the most powerful and lasting shot of this film, is Kendrick’s fall from grace. He stands on top of a streetlight as a white police officer rolls up. The police officer takes a look up, as Kendrick looks out over his city, apparently unfazed by the cop’s presence. The cop pulls out a “finger gun” and shoots Kendrick down. A sequence of shots show Kendrick falling from the streetlight. Each shot of Kendrick is cut between fading in/out of black, adding to the dramatic pacing of the video. You hold your breath as he finally hits the ground, and a cloud of dust erupts around him. Finally, Kendrick looks up at the camera and
smiles. This shot is also possibly derived from an older Erykah Badu video, *Window Seat*. Tilley: *source* “I really wanted to tell this story of Kendrick bringing positivity to the world that we created, the m.A.A.d. city we created. I felt like that’s what we did.” Kendrick and Colin definitely form a bit of a dream team with this one, as they manage to blend a serious, thoughtful narrative with the year’s most uplifting and positive track.
Video Essay #4: *ELEMENT.*

*ELEMENT.* is one of the freshest new music video cuts from Kendrick’s 2017 Pulitzer Prize winning *DAMN.* Released in June 27th 2017, this music video stands out as one of the most compelling and multi-layered music videos from Kendrick because of the way that he uses reference to add a whole other dimension to the expression of a visual language. The music video is directed by a filmmaker named Jonas Lindstroem, co-directed by The Little Homies (which, as I’ve explained in a previous video is the directing duo of Dave Free and Kendrick Lamar). Kendrick continues to carry over his ability to direct as a true auteur, constructing a world with his team that draws visual and political inspiration from selected works by photojournalist Gordon Parks, all while remaining uniquely personal to Kendrick’s experiences as an African-American man from Compton, California.

The opening shot of this video immediately references the work of Gordon Parks (*Untitled*, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1963): a black person’s hand reaches up from underneath a lake and shoots straight up, towards the sky. This shot is in slow-motion, along with most of the scenes that reference Parks’ photos – Lindstroem’s focus is on reenacting these still portraits through slow-motion, animating the still images with life, but not in a way that removes them from their aura. Accompanying the opening shot is a suspenseful instrumental building into the pre-song narration.

*music video*

The third shot of the video is also a reference to the work of Parks, drawing on the images that he distributed for *Life* in his series “Harlem Gang Leader”. The following shot is also a reference to Parks’ work; outside, three children stand behind a barbed wire fence, with one of
the young African American boys aiming a pistol at passing cars. This is a nod to Gordon Parks: *UNTITLED*, 1956 (Alabama); from Parks’ photo essay, “SEGREGATION STORY”, 1956. I could continue listing all of the scenes that reference one of Parks’ works, but you understand the effect of how reference is being enacted here to shed light on these violent scenes of racial prejudice and the oppression of African-Americans in society.

In response, Parks once said, “I saw that the camera could be a weapon against . . . all sorts of social wrongs. I knew at that point I had to have a camera.” The parallel exists with this analysis from Monique Penning of MonsterChildren: “Lamar’s razor-sharp observations on blackness in America in his lyrics is his chosen weapon against the injustices that still exist in racially charged modern-day America.”


In other video essays on *ELEMENT*, the analysis is mainly focused on the parallels that connect Kendrick’s commentary on the treatment of black people in America with Parks’ photos. The Nerdwriter is a popular video essay channel on YouTube, and he did a video about how *ELEMENT* creates a parallel between Kendrick and Parks.

*source*

“By citing Parks, Kendrick aligns their artistic goals. He, like Parks, commits to depicting the realities of his community with clear eyes. Even if that means depicting himself as the product of a violent culture, or a violent country, or, sometimes, as someone who perpetuates those things. I’m not a big fan of music videos but the way Kendrick brings the visions of Lindstroem and Parks into sync with his own is masterful.”

Wait, did he just say that he doesn’t like music videos?
“They’re often just a promotional add-on to a medium that works just fine on its own. In fact I think most of the time music works better without visuals. Videos seem to limit songs somehow.”

This is an unexpectedly hot take from someone who is so clearly fluent in breaking down how the visual works to create meaning. It feels like his approach to music videos is based on a hierarchy that ranks the song at the top, instead of approaching the genre as collaboration between sound and image – because music videos, especially Kendrick Lamar’s, do an important work in creating more possibilities for interpretation, and not limiting them. It’s about looking at how a video’s energy and narrative reflect the mood and lyrics of a song, while demonstrating the transformative nature of the visual language that is being constructed. By closely looking at music videos, we are in turn forced to reflexively look at ourselves, to better understand how it is exactly that we’ve been trained to see or not-see these works of creative expression. And while I understand the point about music videos being promotional tools, it would also be wrong for him to assume that Kendrick is not using the ELEMENT. video as a promotional tool, just because it’s a progressive and historically significant piece. He also misses out on an opportunity to talk in depth about the relationship between sound and image, and how sound, video, and still images operate together in the service of constructing a narrative music video. And I don’t mean to say all this to trash Nerdwriter’s opinion, either, without his work I wouldn’t have even known how to construct a video essay – I just think he might be missing out on a lot of important work that music videos do because of a preconceived idea that the visual has a responsibility to expand one’s experience of the song, and it’s really so much more about reframing how you look. This video required weeks of research in order to contextualize the symbolic references that are being
made, which introduced me to an entirely new form of “looking” in relationship to music videos – I had to train myself to always be searching for examples of reference. What scenes, what frames, what characters are being recreated as an homage to Parks – and for what purpose?

Music videos occupy a distinctly unique place in visual culture in terms of reference – there’s an entire history of music videos just repeating the same concepts and scenes from the past.

There’s a certain logic of reference here where music videos, as an in-between genre, can recycle images from past films or videos, often without issue – and they’re able to do it partly because each music video features a different song, which means that the image that is being recycled does not necessarily indicate that the meaning behind that image is recycled. And with someone who is so clearly a master at storytelling, the use of reference helps Kendrick historically locate the struggles experienced by people of color through Parks’ ability to capture life and struggle in a very raw, honest way. It’s just another example of Kendrick finding a way to make the personal universal – and this time, he brings Parks’ work back into public discourse with him.
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TEDxTalks. “How YouTube Changed The Essay | Evan Puschak | TEDxLafayetteCollege.” YouTube, YouTube, 9 June 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ald6Lc5TSk8


Appendix


Video Essay 2: [https://youtu.be/-gVO6G8JK4A](https://youtu.be/-gVO6G8JK4A)

Video Essay 3: [https://youtu.be/M_RJ3ouiFFE](https://youtu.be/M_RJ3ouiFFE)

Video Essay 4: [https://youtu.be/i-ixObCHz0I](https://youtu.be/i-ixObCHz0I)

Jason Keaton & Uncle Bobby

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot #</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Shot Description (Shot Length, Camera Angle, Camera Movement)</th>
<th>Location (INT/EXT)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Sound (Lyrics, Noise)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00 - 0.01</td>
<td>CU handheld tracking of hand</td>
<td>EXT. outside</td>
<td>Close-up shot of a hand (post-office) carrying mail. On the outside, we can see a letter stamped by a correctional facility - we later find out that this letter is addressed to Kandrick.</td>
<td>song begins, cpe heartbeats, cpe heartbeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.01 - 0.02</td>
<td>MED handheld, fixed</td>
<td>INT. mainroom</td>
<td>Kandrick enters from offscreen to the right of the frame, approaching his mailbox. He wears a white polo shirt with a dark snapback in reverse (maybe a red nationals cap). He grabs the letter from the previous shot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>OTS CU handheld, fixed</td>
<td>INT. mainroom</td>
<td>OTS of Kandrick reading the letter — reveals the text “Jason Keaton &amp; Uncle Bobby DIR. Drop City”. Also breaking a thin rule here going over Kandrick’s sight to reveal the letter. Previous shot was filmed on the other side of Kandrick’s line of sight, thus breaking the 180 degree rule.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>OTS XCU handheld, fixed</td>
<td>INT. mainroom</td>
<td>Punching in to close-up of the letter in Kandrick’s hand. Angle changes slightly from earlier.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot #</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Shot Description (Shot Length, Camera Angle, Camera Movement)</td>
<td>Location (INT/EXT)</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Sound (Lyrics, Noises)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00 - 0.03</td>
<td>Classic television countdown screen (scratch 3, 2, 1) but with a small edit - at around 2 seconds in, an Egyptian Eye (Eye of Horus) flashes on the screen. Important for a few reasons - for one - this eye represents a symbol of protection, royal power and good health. On the other, it's also a precursor to Kendrick's emphasis/repetition of his lines about writing his own hieroglyphs. Important to analyze what it means for Kendrick to 'write our own hieroglyphs' - inspirational message about hope, destiny.</td>
<td>silent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.03 - 0.11</td>
<td>XCU handheld shallow DOF</td>
<td>INT. warehouse</td>
<td>Kendrick introduced in this opening performance shot, he's sitting on something in an undisclosed warehouse. The camera tilts from high to low as Kendrick drops his head and looks down towards the floor. Using an extremely shallow DOF, the only thing in focus in this XCU is Kendrick's eyes and mouth as he raps the intro. Soft di/trig highlights the right side the frame. Kendrick appears pensive, maybe insecure or anxious, with his head tilted down as he raps. The sky is falling, the wind is calling. &quot;Stand for something, or die in the morning.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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# ALRIGHT SHOT LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot #</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Shot Description (Shot Length, Camera Angle, Camera Movement)</th>
<th>Location (INT/EXT)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Sound (Lyrics, Noise)</th>
<th>Repeated Scene?</th>
<th>Refs?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0:00 - 0:05</td>
<td>WIDE establishing still slow-motion</td>
<td>Los Angeles/Oakland</td>
<td>Opening shot of the city from the water. Back and white, dark, clouds, light flickering off the waves. A black bird flies through the frame.</td>
<td>pre-song, waves, white noise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0:06 - 0:08</td>
<td>WIDE slow-motion low-angle tilt upwards</td>
<td>Oakland Port</td>
<td>Slow-motion tilt upwards of the Oakland port cranes. Vertically industrial imagery.</td>
<td>Random metal clanking, electrical sounds, echoes of some distorted voices.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0:08 - 0:10</td>
<td>MED/WIDE static slow-mo</td>
<td>Oakland River</td>
<td>A tugboat driving from the right to the left of the frame, in the background a larger ship centered in the frame. Lots of smoke mingling with the dark cloud/whore in the sky.</td>
<td>Sound continues from previous shot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0:10 - 0:14</td>
<td>MED/WIDE pan/tilt up and left, slow-motion low-angle</td>
<td>House on street</td>
<td>No street signs visible. Camera swiveling a house on the corner of this particular block. On the left of the frame is a tree, the house, a lot of smoke clouding our view, some telephone wires, and a curb covered in graffiti. As your eyes move to the right of the frame, and down the street that the house is on, you see two men looking at the camera in the background, with a bunch of fresh tile marks on the pavement in the foreground (the result of someone doing donuts). The smoke is likely the result of the burnt rubber. A string of telephone wires running down the block, and a silhouetted pair of sneakers hanging by the shore /aces on one wire in particular.</td>
<td>Subtle silence - the wind? atmosphere.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0:14 - 0:16</td>
<td>MCU static up low-angle</td>
<td>Tunnel</td>
<td>Disrupting the slow-motion atmospheric shots - a quick shot of the overhead lights in a tunnel flashing by super fast. Not just visually disruptive, also hear Kendrick screaming out of nowhere.</td>
<td>Kendrick screaming, disruptive, anger/frustration/plain.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0:17 - 0:20</td>
<td>MCU low-angle crane (circling from right to left)</td>
<td>Telephone wires</td>
<td>A pair of sneakers on a telephone wire. The camera quickly circles around them. Possibly, the same pair as from the earlier shot but unclear.</td>
<td>Suspenseful sound design ( País building into something).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0:20 - 0:21</td>
<td>WIDE worm-eye view (lifted up completely) camera slides left to right</td>
<td>City, skyscrapers</td>
<td>Looking straight up to the sky from the pavement of a city street. Skyscrapers, cranes, and telephone wires pass into view, blocking view of the clouds/sky. Lots of light reflecting off the skyscrapers, creating very</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot #</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Shot Description (Shot Length, Camera Angle, Camera Movement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00 - 0.07</td>
<td>MCU slow-motion pan right</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>A young black girl peers her head from behind a wooden pew. Right third of the frame. High-key lighting. Instrumental begins.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.07 - 0.14</td>
<td>CU slow-motion static</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>Three black men wearing all white take their seats in the church. Close-up of their faces as they sit. Shot not really in focus (accidental, not on purpose), not flowers on a table behind them. Instrumental continues.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.15 - 0.16</td>
<td>MED low-angle slow-motion static</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>Rack focus to Jesus hanging on a crucifix in the church.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.16 - 0.22</td>
<td>XCU eye-level slow-motion pan left</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>First time we see Kendrick: his hair and beard are short, he turns his head, and offscreen to the left, background heavily blurred, lots of bokeh. &quot;I am a sinner...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.23 - 0.29</td>
<td>CU slow-motion static</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>A little girl with her hands together, praying, looking upwards with her eyes opened. A spotlight on her, slightly overexposed - the rest of the church is underexposed. Only lighting the subjects of the frame.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.29 - 0.33</td>
<td>WIDE slow-motion handheld OTS</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>Kendrick sitting in the very back of the church in all white, watching from the lower left third of the frame. In the center right third, we see a funeral proceeding, with about 30 people all dressed in white sitting quietly in their pews. Kendrick looks around, distracted.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.34 - 0.35</td>
<td>CU slow-motion static</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>Candles in glass jars burning.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.35 - 0.37</td>
<td>XCU slow-motion static</td>
<td>INT. church</td>
<td>A close-up of the frame, out of focus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.37 - 0.44</td>
<td>WIDE high-angle crane circling</td>
<td>EXT. field</td>
<td>First performance, high-angle of Kendrick in his all-white church outfit in an open grassy field. The camera moves quickly on the crane, imperfect - not too smooth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.44 (1 frame, intercut)</td>
<td>Quick interval frames of Kendrick in a different setting to match the beat of the song. A jarring effect that builds suspense for the beat drop.</td>
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<td>MCU, static, slow-motion</td>
<td>EXT, outside a building</td>
<td>A black father (the same man from an earlier scene which shows him covered in blood, lying on a street at night) outside teaching his son how to box. He grabs his son's hands and pulls him into a fighting stance, preparing him to defend himself. The father is wearing a shiny blue button down with a vest and the little boy is shirtless. The father looks to be asking his son to hit him, but the son refuses, and slams away from him back the way when he goes to grab his hands. scene cuts out as the father slaps hit son and gets ready to fight.</td>
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<td>MS, static, low-angle, slow-motion</td>
<td>A younger black boy standing shirtless, surrounded by white smoke. His eyes are closed, but his chin is lifted up, he is basking in light coming from directly above him. The smoke continues to roll in in slow-motion, but the boy stands perfectly still.</td>
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<td>MS, static, low-angle, slow-motion</td>
<td>EXT, parking lot, in the truck</td>
<td>Continuation of shot 17; the group of men hop out of the pickup truck and start charging at something off-screen to the right. The lyrics of the song sync with the action on screen, and the use of slow-motion also adds to the grungy/vibe of their exit.</td>
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<td>WIDE, static, slow-motion</td>
<td>EXT, curbside, dusk</td>
<td>Low-light shot of Kendrick wearing a red flannel jacket, crouched on the sidewalk. The quality of the image here is slightly blurred, making it difficult to determine to read Kendrick's emotional expression right now. On the street, pieces of trash fly by in the wind. In this shot, he just crouches right in the center of the frame, directly inserting himself into the landscape (and Dromon).</td>
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<td>MED/WIDE, low-angle, static</td>
<td>EXT, sky is backdrop</td>
<td>Continuation of Kendrick's &quot;hero&quot; performance shot. He continues looking down, not performing directly into the lens. Clouds fly past him in the blue backdrop of the sky.</td>
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<td>MCU, slow-motion, static.</td>
<td>INT. bedroom</td>
<td>Romantic slow-motion sequence of a black couple, half-naked, either pre or post sex. Very soft lighting creates a heavy shadow that blurs the man's face, but illuminates the woman's. She has her eyes closed, and pulls away from the man. Her hand on his neck, his hand caressing her arm. She's wearing black lingerie, he's shirtless and wearing boxers. As she pulls away and turns her head, the man</td>
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"I gotta slap a pussy-ass nigger, I'ma make it look sexy if I gotta go hard" - Gordon Parks, "MUHAMMAD ALI", 1996
Links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56GO5kBrMI (Dec 18 2009)


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUEI_ep9iDs (Mar 31 2015)


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnYCwQeryyc (Oct 10 2015)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jug2HZ3dkoc (September 2015)