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Homo-erection: Black Film and the representation of male homo-eroticism

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Abstract: ‘Homo-erection: Black Film and the Representation of Male Homo-eroticism’

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Key words: Queer Black film, Homoeroticism, Representation, Homophobia, Society.

In the research report, I study the representation of male homoeroticism in the genre of Black film. I argue that the first non-pornographic portrayal of men as homoerotic images in cinema can be found in a French film made in 1950, *Un Chant d’Amour*. While this representation was predominantly White — in terms of its production, cast, and the audience for which it was made — it also offered the first homoerotic depiction of the Black male body in cinema. As such, I draw a link between the historical homoerotic representations of Black men in (White) Queer cinema, and the subsequent evolution of what I identify as Queer Black film. Using close reading analysis to study male homoeroticism as it occurs in Queer Black film from the 1980s until the 2010s, I offer an exploration of the different ways in which this eroticism has been approached across the decades. My three primary case studies are Isaac Julien’s *Looking for Langston* (1989) and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), as well as *Moonlight* (2016) by Barry Jenkins. From a homoerotic perspective, these Queer Black films speak back to Jean Genet’s *Un Chant d’Amour* (1950), which serves as the earliest example of male homoeroticism in cinema. What permeates my analysis, is the presence of “homosexual frustration” where male heterosexual characters are concerned. I conclude by identifying (and introducing) the Hetero-Gaze, which I see as being used by Queer filmmakers to push back against homophobia.