**"But... the luminous tree!" The Uses of the Imagination in Resistant Cultural Production**

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# "But… the luminous tree!"
# The Uses of the Imagination in Resistant Cultural Production

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**Abstract**

This thesis responds to a political impasse that has developed in the United Kingdom as a result of neoliberal austerity measures. This impasse is broadly experienced by political subjects via an affective stasis, the feeling that no meaningful intervention can be made to transform material conditions. I examine the uses of the imagination in the cultural production of anti-racist and feminist organising groups and artistic formations in the UK, focusing specifically on how the cultural objects they produce can reconstitute a collective desire to resist. I investigate the purpose of the imagination as represented in cultural objects and examine how it shapes conceptualisations of futurity.

This project examines the contours of what I have termed, "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential," an affective force contained in cultural production that reinvigorates the resistant desires necessary to build a liberatory structure of feeling. Using a materialist Black feminist framework, it represents its main arguments using creative methods – critical fabulation, discourse and visual analysis, interviews, workshopping, soundscaping – in an online digital assemblage titled **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE.** This landscape uses creative practice to aid the construction of a liberatory structure of feeling capable of pushing political subjects towards action. I argue that serious engagement with the material contours of the imagination requires a deconstruction of the linear temporality that has produced the present political conjuncture and a reconceptualisation of the grand narrative of history on which affective stasis depends. The imagination is not a subjective process of mental cognition but a collective and relational force that finds its most necessary expression in materialist resistance. I read the cultural objects produced by resistant movements as art objects, positing that these objects leave traces of the desires, forces and intensities that constituted them everywhere, lifting the weight of stasis when engaged.

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## A NOTE ON STYLE

The main arguments in this thesis are explored through academic argumentation and aesthetic presentation. This thesis takes on an experimental form, blending standard academic prose with critical fabulation and other creative forms of analysis. As an interdisciplinary writer and researcher whose Black feminist method is grounded in a strong critique of the structuring force of historiography, I have chosen to punctuate my analysis with demonstrations of my creative practice which playfully dehistoricises cultural objects. The creative practice submission for this project, which evidences my own attempts to use cultural objects to produce resistant desire, is an online temporal assemblage titled **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**[1] which should be read alongside this thesis.

Throughout this text, I have utilised footnotes as a space for fact, digression, and at times, as a creative outlet. I do this to provide a challenge to the perceived "structure" of a thesis and to encourage my reader to question the expectation of linearity in academic texts. I do so to evidence the inability of texts with rigid form and style to answer explicitly political questions relating to temporality, social transformation and the burden of history. The style of this document is an invitation to its reader, following Hartman (2019), to challenge the authority conferred by the archive and to grapple with the limits it places on what can be known. If the question that animates this project is, *how do we use our imaginations to move through, around and beyond the affective stasis that plagues our current political conjuncture*? I invite my reader to engage with this document as with my other creative work, as a critical invitation to take seriously the aesthetic dimension to the question of how we should live.

The creative elements of this project, listed as appendices and scattered throughout the thesis, are indicated by black coloured pages and are labelled as "*FRAGMENTS.*" They refuse incorporation into the linear elements of this document, appearing without page numbers. These creative elements should be read as practical demonstrations of the theoretical arguments explored in chapters 1-6. If at times this thesis appears disjointed, playful, temporally compromised, and scattered – this effect is intentional.

[1] **Please note:** This website is best accessed using Google Chrome or Firefox Browsers. It is not supported by Safari. Clicking on the title above should take you to the landscape. If it does not, copy and paste the following into a Google Chrome or Firefox browser – thisisatemporallandscape.vercel.app. You can find a plain text version of the site here, https://thisisatemporallandscape.vercel.app/archive.

**Acknowledgments**

The labour that produced this thesis exists in a world-historical context. That context is increasingly being defined by crises that expose the false promises of liberal democratic states and bring the acute violence and dispossession on which they depend into view. To name but a few that punctuated the writing of this thesis: the ongoing genocide of Palestinians by the settler-colonial Israeli state, the counter-revolutionary war in response to the Sudanese Revolution waged by the RSF and SAF and a migrant crisis that continues to wash the bodies of the dead onto Europe's shores. We find ourselves, as always, in the middle of history. My attempt at theorising the imagination as a material substance is borne from an inability to tolerate this pain and a solidarity with the forms of resistance that can produce a people's freedom. Writing this thesis took me out of the world in ways I hated, I had less time to organise with comrades, less time to *be* with friends and less time to engage my own curiosity. But writing this thesis has revived my theoretical understanding of how we sustain struggle against the waves of despair that threaten to immobilise us. That understanding is crucial, now more than ever. I have never been more committed to establishing the tenets of freedom through radical organisation.

Many thanks to my supervisors Roshini Kempadoo, Julian Henriques and Gilane Tawadros. To Roshini, who shepherded me through this process with warmth, always maintained a revitalising excitement about what this project could be (even when I was unsure) and treated me as a collaborator from the day we met. Thank you for reminding me to aim high, in the words of Di Prima, *I can have what I ask for*. I will miss you coming to me with schemes, ideas and plans to action. To Julian and Gilane, for their firm and gentle correction when necessary.

To Agnes Cameron, our collaboration has been many years in the making, from our very first attempt when I was an undergraduate. You were the first person I thought of to help actualise the creative submission for this project. Thank you for humouring my design plans, the seriousness with which you take computer feelings and all the weird and wonderful aesthetic principles you introduced me to. I loved watching your brain move and the way you allowed my imagination to run wild. I loved when my imagination met the limits of design convention and you sighed and endeavoured to make it happen anyway. One word: BIGGER! This project would not exist without your expertise. I have and continue to learn so much from you. I will have to invent another reason for us to work together in future. To Thandi Loewenson, for helping me think through the earliest iterations of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE,**

**YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**, encouraging me to play with texture and providing me with examples.

Thanks to Rachel Carr and Agnes Perotto-Wills for their help during the fieldwork process, your work was invaluable and meticulous and made my life easier. Tej Adeleye, thank you for making something beautiful out of my voice. Han Gunji-Stephens, for drawing the circle that continues to follow me everywhere. To Sarah Lasoye and Sidra Zabit-Foster for all your help at this project's final stage. You lent your time and your ears to take a little weight off my shoulders and I'll always be grateful for that. To Nydia A. Swaby, who introduced the phrase, *what could be* into my life and who was the first person that encouraged me to take the power of cultural objects seriously.

To everyone I interviewed for this project, I spent many nights trying to justify the connection between cultural objects and material resistance, rehearsing the legitimacy of my attachment to the cultural as sufficiently serious. But it was in the laughter, pleas, dreams, disappointments, fears, gossip and frustrations we shared that my own attachment to resistance was affirmed. I realised that what flows between us is the engine of radical and revolutionary struggle, what flows between us *is* material. You taught me that we cannot predict the future but we can destroy our alienation but taking affect, all the forces and intensities that constitute our meeting, seriously. Because of all of you, I refuse to sequester the imagination to the realm of hoping and wishing, I want it to be central to materialist attempts to re-establish the grounds of possibility.

I engaged in a lot of public dialogue and freelance work over the course of my PhD. I didn't know it at the time but the thinking in this project was shaped by; facilitating a two-week workshop for a group of writers of colour based in Glasgow, a recorded conversation with Languid Hands, creative writing workshops that took place with participants at Toynbee Hall, The Bush Theatre and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, a Cove Park artist residency with bare minimum, The Loophole of Retreat convening in Venice, a conversation with Jay Bernard in Berlin, a public lecture at LIVE WORKS in Italy, short and long conversations with Gail Lewis and Stella Dadzie, an interview with Françoise Vergès, presenting my first ever paper at the Techne conference "On Transversality", presentations at QMUL and The Stuart Hall Foundation, one man's rude question during a public lecture in Bergen and the workshop with curators that followed and presenting a paper at the Spectres of Marx conference at Bielefeld

University. I also must mention Sepake Angiama, who said to me one night in Italy, *Lola of course you have a practice!* and changed many things with that sentence.

Christine and Audrey, I love coming home to you. Thank you for the many movie nights where you took no offence to me falling asleep, your pep talks, your confidence in me, letting me complain *endlessly*, allowing me to live vicariously through various bits of salacious gossip and checking in on me when I locked myself away. Miriam Gauntlett, I will miss you dearly, thank you for how seriously you take the act of friendship. Sandy Ogundele, Elete Nelson-Fearon, Arenike Adebajo, Christie Costello, Vera Chapiro, Micha Frazer-Carroll, Jacob Joyce, George Kan, Lina Dohia, Diamond Abdulrahim, you have all informed this project, whether you are aware of it or not. In the acknowledgements of my master's thesis, I wrote that I am indebted to the sprawling, unwieldy group of queers I call my friends, gratefully nothing has changed. We reproduce one another and always will.

Thank you to my family, who reminded me at key points that I could finish this PhD and it would not finish me. To my mother, who pulled out a paper and pen so she could get it right when people asked her what her daughter was working on. This PhD is dedicated to my grandmother, who did not live to see it finished but who reminded me, as we laughed together by her bedside, that the most important thing is to be happy. I intend to celebrate thoroughly in your honour, grandma. I wrote at your memorial that my missing you is proof of our interdependence. I am connected to others, whether I want to be or not. There is no goodbye. I promise to keep insisting on your memory – at the dinner table, in my work, everywhere it is possible to speak about you and the way you changed me. You taught me I am responsible for everybody; Gail Lewis reminds me that Black feminism is a project of ethical relation. I have built my life around these claims.

I am always interested in where writers write. I find it important to note that I wrote much of this thesis in the British Library, Science Floor 2 – one of the only free spaces to work until 8pm in London. I wrote two chapters at Cove Park, an artist residency in Scotland. Thank you to the staff at the Black Cultural Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, The Feminist Library, Lambeth Archives and Bruce Castle Museum for diligently answering my questions and for allowing me the permissions that brought this project to life. Trawling through the collections, I was continually struck by the material I engaged with. I felt affinities I had to write a whole

chapter to explain. I endeavoured there and then to share that feeling with as many people as possible in whatever way I could.

The title of this thesis steals a line from Jackie Wang's poem *The Coral Tree*. Many thanks to Jackie for allowing me permission to use this line. I read this poem over and over again with different workshop participants across Europe during my fieldwork. Every time I learnt something new from how they responded to it. Participants stated and restated their awe at how a writer could so beautifully describe the threshold between the destroyed world and the luminous one. I realise now that resistance means walking this line daily.

Finally, to Abeera Khan, you are my interlocutor in every sense of the word, every developing thought finds its final expression in our partnership, nothing means more to me. Thank you for reading and re-reading, challenging, sparring with, and correcting me. Being with you heightens my curiosity, it reminds me of what it is I do not know and increases the urgency of finding it out. It is an honour to have changed your mind about the importance of aesthetics in radical struggle! Thank you for imploring me to do something different, to experiment with a form I had not tried yet, that idea was yours. I would not have had the courage to do so without your reassurance. You remind me to laugh, in every endeavour to shake me out of own seriousness, you teach me that there is no critical thought without play. I pinch myself when I think of the life we are building together. You took *care* of me at every stage, teaching me in the process that there is no revolutionary vanguard, radical struggle or possibility of liveable life without that kind of labouring for one another.

**Authors Declaration**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work, I have identified where work has been produced in collaboration.

For Christiana Feyisetan Fawole (1927-2023)

# INTRODUCTION

In Jackie Wang's chimeric poem, *The Coral Tree*, readers move through a once destroyed city made luminous by a coral tree. Wang's speaker makes two key observations as they narrate the architecture of this dreamscape,

> so I think… these flashes of the luminous should be shared. I don't believe the imagination can fix everything, (I am a rigorous materialist!) but it can do some of the work: the work of creating openings where there were previously none (Wang 2021, 98),

and as the poem draws to a close, "that's where I was: walking through a destroyed city. But …the luminous tree!" (Wang 2021, 99) The motivation for this research project is best represented by the speaker's insistence on recognising the luminous tree, a hint of beauty enveloped in a squalid atmosphere. It identifies the imagination as the affective driving force for material resistance and argues that more than a decade of neoliberal austerity (one operational component of racial capitalism in the United Kingdom) has produced a political conjuncture defined by fatalism that crystallises in what Raymond Williams (1961) termed a "structure of feeling" defined by stasis and despair. It posits that the cultural objects produced by anti-racist and feminist organising groups and/or artistic collectives from the past and present contain affective currents constituted by the imagination that can reanimate the impetus to resist in political subjects. This process occurs through a reconstruction of the desires that form a liberatory structures of feeling which precedes resistant intervention. Much like Wang's speaker, whose return to the coral tree *insists* on the possibility of creating new openings, so this thesis attempts to make a materialist case for the existence of what it terms "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" a substance contained in cultural objects that enables political subjects to see through political impasse, the so-called "drawn-out present" and replenish the desire for transformation that produces political action. It does so by investigating and critiquing the role of traditional historiography in the replication of a temporal linearity which affirms stasis and consigns radical movements to cycles of victory defeat. It argues that creative engagement with cultural objects enables the circulation of emancipatory affects which form the impetus for resistant action and that serious attention should paid to the role cultural production plays in resistant movements and the materialist analysis they produce.

In times of political despair, I return to creative works precisely because they encourage relational engagement, adding new texture to a shared political condition. They foreground

emancipatory affects which enable a rejection of political immobility. My research forms part of a legacy of creative attempts to grasp another set of social relations and my own interests lay in illustrating the relationship between the tangible (materialist analysis) and the non-tangible (affect) in the production of resistance. In response to discourses of stasis, this project resituates the imagination as a force capable of withstanding linear notions of temporality which position the past neatly behind us and the future in front. In moments of crisis, in which forward movement is obscured by ongoing catastrophe, such an condition produces the feeling that political subjects have arrived at a political impasse, that they are stuck in an arena in which resistant action is futile. By analysing and creatively engaging with the cultural production of resistant movements, I posit that the "Imaginative Revolutionary Potential" stored inside them both precedes and is produced by the physical acts of resistance they record. This thesis holds that the imagination should be thought of by materialists as a substance that can and should be drawn on collectively, used to renew and sustain organised and spontaneous resistant action. Driven by the author's profound dissatisfaction with the world as is and their interest in the dismissal of the non-rational in materialist analysis, this project argues for neither a naively optimistic embrace of the imagination or its wholesale rejection. Like Wang (2021), it believes that the imagination cannot fix everything but it *can* do some of the work. It aims to investigate what exactly that work is.

An insistence on the ability to remark, study and understand what remains beautiful amid disaster has rightly been critiqued as a function that displaces the urgency of disaster itself. My interest in the imagination derives from a desire to challenge a binary in which the imagination is either merely a function of aesthetic pleasure, unconnected from political forces or read empirically as a function of individual cognition. I argue that understanding the process of imagining as *only* connected to aesthetic pleasure has limited its political function and revolutionary capacity precisely because aesthetic concerns are often sequestered to the realm of the subjective. These widespread understandings have been developed through Western philosophical engagement[2] with the imagination as a mental faculty closely related to a theory of art, as evidenced in the Socratic dialogues (Murray 1922) which posit the imagination as a function of the "divine irrationality" of the soul, or relate it to the capacity to create "true beauty" or the ability replicate images (phastasia and phantasmata) in service of the divine

[2] I do not refer to "Western philosophical engagement" as an unchanging monolith. I recognise how notions of the imagination in Western scholarship have changed and developed over time. With this statement, I seek to emphasise the hegemony of specific foundational conceptions of the imagination derived from scholars of so-called "Western Civilisation" which remain central to understandings of the imagination in the present day.

(Jorgensen 2017). Historically, the imagination has either been understood as explicitly irrational or as Jorgensen argues, "as a capacity in human consciousness to connect sensation and understanding, thus serving to bring about rational cognition (knowledge)" (Jorgensen 2017, 21). Such approaches and their study have honed a mystical and mythological reading of the imagination that has long neglected its political function.

This thesis theorises a creative and socio-political understanding of the imagination as a collective and relational process of bringing that which does not previously exist into being. I suggest that this process is strongly related to the ability of political subjects to see beyond the misery of the present, organise for better conditions and conceive of a thoroughly contingent, expansive, and vibrant vision of social relations in the future. Whilst the Kantian account (Kind and Kung, 2016) of the imagination has allowed for a broad-based conception of it as a faculty of representation with cognitive, aesthetic, and moral consequences; I find this philosophical account's taxonomising of *types* of imagination to be another way of abstracting this phenomenon from its actualised existence in cultural objects and collective organisation. My argument requires some belief that cultural objects are not in and of themselves entirely self-evident, they might contain, store, hold or hide certain meanings that are revealed in the process of creative engagement with them. This thesis performs several types of cultural analysis (discourse and visual analysis as well as critical fabulation) as a means of engaging with the Imaginative Revolutionary Potential stored in cultural objects. It follows Christina Sharpe (2016), Saidiya Hartman (2008; 2019) and Tina Campt (2017) in their investigations of the resonances, ruptures, sounds and rumblings of Black resistance in the cultural archive. I understand "cultural objects" as the result of processes of material production which define culture and can, at any time, as Terry Eagleton argues, "muster vigorous resistance to dominant powers" (Eagleton 2024). Through comparative analysis, I read cultural material in light of a Marxist dialectical tradition which studies the contradictions inherent to abstract forces in order to characterise periods of capitalist development. This project treats the archival material of "past" and "present" resistant movements situated in the UK as cultural and artistic objects, in order to posit the function and potential of the imagination they contain as well as its purpose in the furtherance, fortification and creation of grassroots organising and concepts of futurity. It holds, as Sharpe argues in her theorisation of the wake that "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (2016, 9).

**No art for art's sake**

My research attempts to remedy the absence of critical writing about the imagination's political potential in direct relation to forms of organised resistance to state violence, abandonment and neglect. It belongs to a legacy of materialist cultural analysis in which the imagination is directly related to attempts to transform social and material conditions, rather than merely existing as a precursor, function or by-product of artistic creation. This reconceptualisation of the imagination also depends on a reconceptualisation of political ephemera as a form of artistic production. As previously stated, I understand "cultural production," cultural artifacts, objects, and so on as resultant from forms of labour under capitalism. Following Joshua Lubin Levy and Aliza Shvarts (2017), I understand them to be evidence of forms of what Karl Marx (1887, 130) calls "living labour", an embodiment of "labour-power in action," that is, a process of labouring by which human beings "rouse specific [raw materials], change them from mere possible use-values into real and effective ones" (Marx 1887, 130). Luby Levin and Shvarts (2017) argue that living labour marks the distinction between labour (productive work) and labour power (the capacity to work) to name the middle space in which labour revives a commodity of its use value prior to exchange. In this regard, many of the objects that come under my investigation in this thesis were not produced to be commodities, they are the result of forms of living labour in which the "raw material" of the imagination was reformulated to produce artifacts that contain and reproduce resistant affective currents.

Recasting the cultural objects that I analyse as "artistic objects" resultant from living labour aims to highlight the reluctance to read political ephemera as a form of artistic creation, a reluctance that further affirms the false divide between "culture" and "politics" – a divide which extends the alienation of cultural workers and neatly defines the purposes of both "art" (as a product of culture) and "politics" as oppositional. In *Feminism Interrupted* (Olufemi 2020), I argued against French poet and dramatist Theophile Gautier's (1890) invocation of the notion of an "art for art's sake," the function of which he defined as "the pursuit of pure beauty – without any other preoccupation," (The Art World 1917, 98). I read this as an expression of nineteenth century bourgeois intellectualism devoid of the relational solidarities that might make such an invocation possible. I observe that:

> *Art for Art's Sake* cannot exist while any of us are unfree. Feminists have long rejected the idea because they know that every artistic creation has a social and political meaning. They have instead used art for the sake

> of political vision, art for the sake of our lives and our happiness (Olufemi 2020, 94).

The purpose of challenging the false distinction between "culture" and "politics" by reading political ephemera as artistic objects is to challenge the assumption that cultural objects can be divorced from the ideological conditions that produce them. This recognition helps us understand how one's capacity to imagine is also shaped by the ideological contours of any given time period. If the present condition is defined, in part, by affects of despair and stasis, then this condition is not simply self-evidently true but a result of the ideological effects of worsening material conditions on the political subject's capacity to imagine. Such an impact can be mediated, reversed, challenged. This thesis takes the cultural production of political organisers and those engaged in the project of political transformation as it's starting point because little attention has been paid to the imaginative and artistic value of their cultural production, especially with regard to its effect on conceptualisations of temporality and futurity. In my own experience as a writer and researcher, the most invigorating artistic creation has always had a relationship to the furtherance or fortification of liberatory political concern. This thesis orientates itself against the notion that culture has no function in materialist analysis. Stuart Hall observes that culture is a battleground of interpretive struggle, and that Cultural Studies emerges from in part from a "presumption that classical Marxism alone cannot explain the cultural" (Hall 1997, 25). I follow him in this assertion, taking seriously that at every level, culture – from discourses which circulate, to media representation, artistic production, to ideology masked as "information" – shapes the markers of political possibility at any given moment.

In this thesis, I use the word "cultural objects" when referring to forms of political ephemera and artistic creation: posters, photographs, film, manifestos and interview texts, excerpts of critical fabulation. If we, as Hall (1997) instructs, must understand culture as an interpretative struggle, it must be continually debated and reassessed. This thesis intends to add to this debate, arguing that cultural objects produced by resistant movements are inherently artistic objects because any act undertaken for the sake of freedom is *always already* a creative act driven by the imagination. Like Marx, I understand artistic production to be characteristic of all human societies and recognise the inherent use-value of artistic objects produced from concrete human labour to meet a set of needs, separate from exchange-value commodification. If art fulfils a set of human requirements, then the necessity of reading political ephemera as "art" is intended to free such material from the notion that its value can only be found in processes of exchange. In addition, the effects of engagement with cultural objects, is as Marx argues, two-fold:

> The object of art, like every other product, creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject but also a subject for the object (Marx 1973, 26).

If art also produces a subject for the object, Marx refers to its power to shape and reshape consciousness. In the same way, I posit that the imagination utilised in the creation of the cultural object is stored within it and accessed by a public through creative engagement. By virtue of their experience of the imagination's constitutive force, members of that public go on to act differently. I have termed the substance that is stored inside cultural objects and released when they are engaged creatively, "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential." The residue from this substance sticks to body of the political subject or subjects, compelling collective resistant action, encouraging a refusal of a structure of feeling defined by stasis in favour of a set of liberatory affects and attachments. What is felt affectively in the moment of engagement goes on to create the impulse for transformation which becomes the driving force for forms of social transformation.

I note how classical Marxism has long neglected other dimensions of human existence outside of the economic structures that define social relation. As a fiction writer with a critical Black feminist consciousness, the struggle of every creative and/or research endeavour has been how to represent *both* of these aspects in my work and in doing so, reshape the solitary role of the writer in our culture into a conduit for relational existence, materialist resistance and shared expression. I turn to the imagination because it has preoccupied my artistic and political endeavours for almost a decade. Rather than simply concede that the imagination belongs only to the realm of embodied knowledge and individual cognition, this thesis uses affect to make an argument for rethinking the imagination as a substance with materialist consequences. What can an analysis of the affects produced by the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential reveal about the imagination's use and function at any given time? I draw out the imagination's fundamentally relational features, its uses, and location in order to theorise it as a material substance best engaged with collectively. This thesis aims to prove the value of the imagination to forms of political struggle and mobilisation by arguing that collective processes of imagining are key in enabling the reproduction of forms of resistant action.

## The edge of crisis

The genesis of this project's intervention arose from a general investigation into what Raymond Williams (1961) terms the "structure of feeling" which defines the contemporary political landscape in the United Kingdom. I define the "contemporary political landscape" as the last fifteen years, beginning in 2010 with the formal introduction of economic and social austerity measures by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, led by David Cameron. This period emerged as a post-financial crash ideological consensus building project from 2008 onwards, a project Akwugo Emejulu and Leah Bassel (2017) argue, finds its origins in the liberalisation of finance in the 1980s which introduced "synthetic financial institutions" (2017, 10) that "separated investors decision-making from their associated risks" (2017, 11). For Nancy Fraser, this period continues a state-managed collapse of the capitalist order, in which, "debt is the instrument by which global financial institutions pressure states to slash social spending, enforce austerity, and generally collude with investors in extracting value from defenceless populations" (Fraser 2016, 112).

I write from this context in which a decade of austerity politics consolidating the introduction of neoliberal statecraft from 1979 onwards and presented as a "logical outcome" of the 2008 financial crash has destroyed infrastructures of social care, securitised everyday life and concentrated wealth from the working class upwards. Indeed, real terms pay fell at the fastest rate for twenty years at the end of 2022. 2022 saw the steepest decline in real terms pay for workers in the last 20 years[3], with the labour of public sector workers unable to meet the daily requirements for subsistence. The state continues to expand the use of carceral power, through increasing criminalisation, prison and secure school expansion[4(.6)], as well as an increased emphasis

[3] Richard Partington, "Real-terms UK pay fell at fastest rates for 20 years at the end of 2022", *The Guardian*, January 17, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/17/real-terms-uk-pay

[4] Corporate Watch's investigation of prison expansion in the United Kingdom titled "Prison Island" examined The Prison and Estates Transformation Programme, a prison expansion programme proposed by then Justice Secretary Lizz Truss in November 2016 through the Prison Safety and Reform White Paper. In 2016, the Conservative Government stated their commitment to creating 10,000 new prison places across England and Wales. This included the construction or redevelopment of six prisons for men and five new "community" prisons for women by 2020. Corporate Watch's report includes information on the potential building of prisons for "non-binary" persons by the Scottish Prison Service.

[4.1] Corporate Watch, "Prison Island," *Corporate Watch*, August 2018, 4-8, https://corporatewatch.org/

[4.2] The Prison and Estates Transformation Programme was scrapped in summer 2019. The 2020 spending review reassessed the goals of TPETP, stating that it would spend £4 billion delivering 18,000 prison places across England and Wales by mid-2020. The 2021 Spending Review stated that the Conservative government would spend an additional £3.8 million to provide 20,000 prison places comprising of the 18,000 new prison places

on counter-terror measures under the PREVENT duty[5(.3)]. The protection of private capital drives the engine of state policy, bolstered by an intensification of the border[6], policing and offshore detention schemes. Austerity has had many consequences for local communities, such as the closure of domestic violence shelters across the country which have effectively halted safe routes for those seeking to escape gendered violence[7], the introduction of a two-child

promised in 2020 and 2000 additional temporary places.

4.3 Jacqueline Beard, "The Prison Estate in England and Wales," House of Commons Library, June 29 2023, 20-23, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/.

4.5 Mayor's Office, "Mayor earmarks additional £151m to support the Metropolitan Police and keep Londoners safe," *London Assembly*, February 14, 2024, https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre.

4.6 Corporate Watch, "NEW 'SECURE SCHOOL' AS PART OF A WAVE OF NEW CHILDREN'S PRISONS." *Corporate Watch,* November 16, 2018. https://corporatewatch.org/new-secure-school-as-part-of-a-wave-of-new-childrens-prisons/.

5 In 2015, the Government expanded the scope of the PREVENT Duty to legally mandate public sector workers to have "due regard to the need to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism."
UK Government, "Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015," *Legislation.gov.uk*, 2015.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/part/5/enacted.

5.1 What constitutes 'terrorism' is broadly defined by the Terrorism Act 2000 as "the use of threat of one or more actions below: serious violence against a person; serious damage to property; endangering a person's life (other than that of the person committing the action); creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; and action designed to seriously interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system."
Crown Prosecution Service, "Terrorism," *CPS,* n.d, https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism.

5.2 The Islamophobic impact of emphasis on counter-terrorism strategy is noted by Tahir Abbas, Imran Awan and Jonathan Marsden in their mixed-methods survey of 152 self-selecting Muslim university students sampled across a range of higher education institutions across the UK in late 2019. The authours found that 94.9% of respondents agreed that "Muslim university students are more likely to be *wrongly* referred to the channel prevention programme."
Tahir Abbas, Imran Awan and Jonathan Marsden, "Pushed to the edge: the consequences of the "Prevent Duty' in deradicalizing pre-crime thought among British Muslim University Students," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 26, 6 (2021): 719-734. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.2019002.

5.3 Rogers, Alexandra, "First deportation flight to Rwanda 'booked' as landmark bill becomes law," *Sky News*, April 25, 2024, https://news.sky.com/story/rishi-sunaks-controversial-rwanda-bill-becomes-law-after-receiving-royal-assent-13122622.

6 The introduction of Theresa May's "Hostile Environment" policy ushered in a new stage in the intensification of United Kingdom's borders in 2012. The policy introduced administrative and legislative measures designed to make remaining in the UK untenable for so-called "illegal migrants." This policy included the creation of the "Inter-Ministerial Group for Migrant Access to Benefits and Public Services" which united the Home Office with ten other government ministries to discuss how to reduces rates of migration to the United Kingdom. Proposals from the coalition formed the basis of the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts which implemented new barriers to safe and legal migration.
Source: Corporate Watch, "The UK Border Regime: A Critical Guide," *Corporate Watch*, 2018, 145-200, https://corporatewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/UK_border_regime.pdf.

7 Women's Aid's 2021 report "Fragile Funding Landscape" found that "59% of local authorities implemented a real-time cut to their domestic abuse funding in 2019/20." Shrinking local authority budgets have resulted in a funding crisis for the domestic abuse sector, leaving refuge services under-resourced and currently unable to meet demand. In November 2020, there was a 24.5% shortfall in the number of refuge spaces available.
Maia Samuel, "Fragile Funding Landscape, The extent of local authority commissioning in the domestic abuse refuse sector in England 2020," *Bristol: Women's Aid,* 2021, 13, https://www.womensaid.org.uk/.

benefit cap[8], which has subordinated women back into the nuclear family unit and deadly cuts to universal credit[9]. The trade union sector has been continually undermined by governmental antagonism.[10] The cultural production from this decade long devastation has been preoccupied with catastrophe, stasis and at times, an uncritical fatalism. At the edge of cyclical crisis, individuals are affectively trapped inside social landscapes in which they feel that no meaningful political interventions can be made. This stasis calcifies into melancholia. In her essay, *Resisting Left Melancholia,* Wendy Brown notes, "the irony of melancholia, of course, is that attachment to one's sorrowful loss supersedes any desire to recover this loss, to live free of it in the present, to be unburdened by it" (Brown 1999, 20).

This thesis responds directly to this invocation, refusing to prioritise the individual's attachment to sorrowful loss. It argues for a reconceptualisation of history, temporality, and the imagination in order to reinvigorate the social movements on which the left depend. The thesis argues that a reconceptualisation of the imagination as a tangible material substance best accessed collectively through engagement with cultural objects and an attendance to the liberatory affects it produces is capable of solidifying political attachments to emancipatory world-building projects. It notes how experiences of immobility and despair from political organisers, cultural workers and artists are insufficiently remedied by liberal commands *to hope*, to simply *have faith* that conditions with improve or to merely *believe* that the world can be different. It does not attempt to eradicate despair or melancholia as key modes of relating to a deeply exploitative social landscape, understanding that these affects are produced through capitalism's alienating function, what Beverly Best characterises as "the subject's inability to recognise [their] own agency as the creative source of the object world that oppresses [them]" (Best 2011, 499). Marx's theorisation of alienation provides firm ground for understanding the constitutive force of

[8] Eleanor Lawrie, "Two-child benefit cap: Every month is a struggle," *BBC*, 31 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67999028.

[9] In March 2024, *Disability News Service* reported that the Department of Work and Pensions was accused of destroying evidence showing it weakened guidance on when to investigate the suicide of benefit claimants. The DWP has been indirectly linked to the deaths of thousands of benefit claimants who died as a result of cuts to benefits by the department.
Source: John Pring, "DWP 'destroyed evidence' on secret investigations rules, in latest 'cover up,'" *Disability News Service,* March 28, 2024, https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-destroyed-evidence-on-secret-investigations-rules-in-latest-cover-up/.

[10] The Trade Union Congress blog notes that in 2022, eleven unions launched a judicial review of "anti-worker" regulations put forward by the Conservative government that undermined the right to strike. They launched a legal challenge against government regulations allowing agency workers to fill in for striking workers and break strikes. Trade Union Congress, "Unions launch legal challenge against government's 'strike-breaking' agency workers regulations," *Trade Union Congress*, September 20, 2022 https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/unions-launch-legal-challenge-against-governments-strike-breaking-agency-worker-regulations.

political immobility. Best goes on to argue that capitalism's force is related not only to the arrangement of modes of production but to its representative value. She argues,

> the emergence of capitalism *necessarily* entails (among other things) the displacing of the image of the collectivity at the centre of the collective imaginary by the new 'modern' image of the individual at the centre of the collective imaginary (Best 2011, 500).

This new image, exaggerated by neoliberal social and economic policy depends on a severing of the bonds of connectivity that were once the basis of the social world before the introduction of the wage relation. This thesis adds to a body of work that seeks to break the representational value of capitalism by changing the perceptions of individual subjects under capitalism, using cultural objects as a conduit. I argue that the attainment of freedom on earth for political subjects is inseparable from the material destruction of the wage relation and other forms of capitalist production. Theorising the role of the imagination in this task is not meaningful unless it is coupled with attempts to destroy the structuring principles of capitalism through principled and strategic action. The representational value of capital, the way it seeps into the minds of individuals, alienating them from their labour and from one another, is a process that might at least be remedied through denaturalisation. This project's interest in cultural objects is rooted in their ability to disrupt the affective normalisation of capitalist order. Indeed, this project holds that it is *abnormal* to exist in a world based on three basic claims:

1. That capitalism is the inevitable structuring force of the social world.

2. That time is linear (the progressive movement from A to B with the past/present/future appearing as distinct temporal regimes).

3. That the imagination speaks only to the realm of subjectivised cognition.

It holds that there is some affective charge contained in resistant cultural production that might enable us to touch the past, to experience it, in order to produce a capacity to approach the contemporary moment with a renewed energy in order to aid the constitution of freedom.

**Beyond hope**

In his book *Against the Carceral Archives: The Art of Black Liberatory Practice,* a meditation on what he calls the "carceral archiving project" through engagement with the archival material of prison abolitionists held at the Southern California Library, Damien Sojoyner argues "Specifically, the

carceral state must make illogical the life-affirming social visions emanating from Black communal epistemes" (Sojoyner 2023, 7). I understand the imagination as the engine of such life- affirming social visions, the consequences of which are often dismissed as utopic, chaotic, impossible and unserious. I am interested in how the imagination acts as an engine for what Black Panther Huey P. Newton called "survival pending revolution" (Newton 1972, 104). Ruth Wilson Gilmore reformulates this phrase in relation to abolition, calling the work of the present, the many ways in which individuals and collectives attend to the "disorder of centuries" as "survival pending abolition" (Gilmore, 2020). I suggest that serious engagement with the imagination fortifies the days, weeks, months and centuries that create the "in-between", the time punctuated by the event of revolution. It keeps the work that produces revolutionary moments going, regardless of how long it takes those moments to appear.

In her monograph *Burnout*, Hannah Proctor (2024) criticises the fatalistic psychoanalytic description of a "burnt-out" generation unable to keep up with the speed of capitalist production, arguing instead for careful attention to the psychic experience of political defeat, in order to restore capacity to political subjects through comradely care networks capable of reviving resistant movements. Like her, I argue that the imposed inertia of political impasse should be met with a robust critique of capitalist society, specifically the processes through which the emotional states (defeat, stasis, fatigue) that crystallise in political immobility are produced and reproduced. We cannot simply "hope" ourselves out of crisis. Like Hartman, I understand "hope/optimism" without an invocation to political determination to be a vacuous and unsatisfying affective claim, as she argues, "too facile a thing" (Hartman, 2019). I turn instead to building attachments to freedom and resistance, ones that remains steadfast even as hegemonic forces narrativise the misery of the political present as inescapable. We see just political methodologies at work in the ongoing movements resisting settler-colonial occupation and genocide in Gaza, using the Palestinian notion of Sumud (steadfastness) to do so.[11] My aim is not to replace "hope" with "political determination" but rather to investigate the affective dimensions of imagination's role in the cultivation of the political impetus to resist. These affects are all necessary facets of political transformation, indeed Gargi Bhattacharya observes that "heartbreak is also what can open us to each other, washing us up in the seas of human suffering, large and small" (Bhattacharya 2023, 7). Rather than examine the structure of grief, despair or

[11] For a more detailed analysis of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, see Raz Segal, "A Textbook Case of Genocide," *Jewish Currents*, 13 October, 2023. https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide. For more on the notion of steadfastness (Sumud) in Palestinian resistance, see Nijmeh Ali, "Active and Transformative Sumud Among Palestinian Activists in Israel," in *Palestine and The Rule of Power: Local Dissent vs International Governance,* ed. Alaa Tartir and Timothy Seidel (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 71-105.

pain itself, I am interested in how these emotions are produced by discourses of crisis, how their creation consolidates a general mood which affirms the notion that nothing can be done to better our political condition.

My own position as a scholar is that this thesis does not exist absent of my own actions within grassroots political formations. Simply performing readings of cultural objects as part of a creative practice does not in and of itself constitute a form of political organising or resistance. Thinking with Joy James, who observes how "Some postmodern cultural critics are wont to redefine interrogation of texts as a form of political activism," (James 1996, 4), I clearly demarcate my project from this trend by outlining its intention to bolster and inform real life struggle, rather than substitute it. I do so as a feminist writer, organiser and political thinker actively engaged in resistance movements in the United Kingdom. I ask, how might creative engagement with the tenets of imagining produce another set affects capable of galvanising, of producing the desire to resist through materialist struggle as a means of responding to a destroyed city, that is one part of a destroyed world?

**Cultural production**

One part of the destroyed world to which this project attends is concerned with how the economic impacts of austerity and neoliberalism have seeped into the production of cultural and artistic objects in the last decade. The cultural worker is after all, still a worker. The usage of the term "creative industries" by the political elite is one such example[12] of this process, this term emphasises economism by merging the language of art and creativity with big business. Neoliberalism has resulted in the further commodification and privatisation of art, the merging of creative industries with business in the United Kingdom[13] has ensured that the ownership of forms of art acts as a status symbol for the individual dealer, business and/or collector. Natalie Heinich argues,

> what neoliberalism has indirectly produced is simply the transformation of a certain part of contemporary art (but not all of this art, of course) into a luxury product, analogous to the yachts, watches, and overpriced handbags that today serve as an outward sign of wealth for those who have

[12]For more, see Tim Lutton, "Neoliberal economics is killing the arts," *Red Pepper Magazine*, April 7, 2024, https://www.redpepper.org.uk/culture-media/art-and-museums/neoliberal-economics-is-killing-the-arts/.
[13] The 2011 merger between the Creative Industries Federation and Creative England to form Creative UK, is one such example. Creative England UK, which supports filmmaking opportunities in the United Kingdom is currently funded by private investment. For more, See Andreas Wiseman, "Creative England responds to concerns over cuts," *ScreenDaily,* March 21, 2016, https://www.screendaily.com/news/creative-england-responds-to-concerns-over-cuts/5101705.article.

> taken advantage of the financialization of the economic world (Heinich 2021, 136).

Meanwhile, "socially engaged art" and community forms of artistic practice suffer from routine cuts, lack of resources and barriers enacted by worker precarity. The effect is the production of artistic endeavour that is staid, reactionary, reflecting the preoccupations of big business and presenting no challenge to the dominant ideological framework of despair. By attempting to reconceptualise political ephemera created firmly outside the marketplace as artistic objects, I intend to counter the affects of stasis, despair and immobility produced by the economisation of culture. The material that comes under my examination in this thesis is displayed in an online digital assemblage titled, **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE.** This creative practice-based submission displays and engages with cultural objects gathered from five London based archives[14]: The Black Cultural Archives, The Feminist Library, The Bruce Castle Museum, Lambeth Archives and the London Metropolitan Archives as well as my own speculative writing, field notes, sound recordings, videos, workshop resources, online research and images taken during the process of fieldwork at political gatherings and mobilisations. The material examined in this thesis specifically focuses on cultural objects from eight groups and/or individuals: Images of members of the Brixton Black Women's Group and The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent as well their draft manifesto, (both groups were Black feminist formations in the United Kingdom active from 1973-85 to 1978-83 respectively), a film of the first OWAAD conference shot by the late radical Black filmmaker Menelik Shabazz, a poster produced by the Lesbians and Policing Project (1984-1990), a project developed by the Gay London Police Monitoring Group (1982-present), mobilisation posters for the first Black queer anti-fascist march of its kind produced by the Haringey Black Action Group and Positive Images in 1987, clippings from transnational feminist newspaper OUTWRITE produced by feminist collective The Feminist News Group (1982-1988) as well as cultural production from present-day organising formations including images of actions undertaken by feminist direct-action group Sisters Uncut in 2021 and a moving image work entitled *Towards a Black Testimony: Prayer/Protest/Peace* created by Languid Hands, an artistic and curatorial collaboration between Imani Mason Jordan and Rabz

[14] This thesis' focus on the cultural production of anti-racist and feminist organising/artistic groups from London based archives stems partly from the limitations imposed on travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic during my fieldwork process. Whilst this project had initially intended to provide commentary on radical social movements across the United Kingdom, the limitations placed on the material I could access physically required me to rethink this project's remit. I respond creatively to such limitations by highlighting, where possible, how groups that come under my examination practiced a transnational politic based on the principles of internationalist solidarity. Such connections are particularly evident in the operation of The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent.

Lansiquot. Material is supplemented by eleven interviews conducted with Gail Lewis, Stella Dadzie, Phoebe Collings-James, Nydia Swaby, Alex Kelbert, Jacob Joyce, Tej Adeleye, Aviah Day and three anonymous participants. These interviewees are involved in grassroots political and/or artistic, academic and/or cultural formations related to the relationship between capitalism, race, gender and sexuality. Each chapter opens with an observation and quote taken from an interview as a means attempting to give the reader a glimpse into the affective currents that flowed between myself as the researcher and my participants during the interview process; theoretical analysis of quotes is also embedded in Chapters Three and Five.

**THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE** developed in collaboration with engineer Agnes Cameron and architect Dr. Thandi Loewenson is intended for dialogic use in workshops, grassroots community spaces and classrooms by political organisers, artists and members of the public. It is a visual representation of the arguments explored in this thesis, a means of creative engagement with cultural objects. This landscape acts as a display of the questions engaged, creative work produced and forms of collaboration experienced as part of this research project. It is intended to be an interactive site that invites its audience into various forms of collaboration with me regarding text, archival material and conceptualisations of history, linearity/chronology and the imagination. This assemblage seeks to demonstrate the relevance of the imagination to modes of political action as well as stimulate the imagination enabling the circulation of emancipatory affects in its audience in order to push them towards political action. I define "political action" as purposeful and strategic interventions that seek to disrupt, destroy and otherwise transform violent structures of power inside of a capitalist landscape. Both my analysis and the temporal assemblage I have created focus on the affective currents of the imagination stored in cultural objects that produce the impetus for resistance. The practice-based element of this project aims to provide a liminal space through which experimental audience engagement with cultural objects produces the desires capable of building a liberatory structure of feeling, thereby illustrating that the affective environment of stasis produced by neoliberalism can and should be broken.

**Resistant objects**

I name the objects under investigation in this thesis as "resistant," meaning cultural production that represents political subjects' desire and intention to withstand, preserve and fight back via community defence against the oppressive state and interpersonal structures that govern everyday life. I understand these objects as representing attempts to subvert, destroy and survive the various levels of organisation that uphold capitalist society in the United Kingdom: the statecraft of political elites and parliamentary politics whose actions are key to the maintenance of liberal democracy. I chose resistance as a frame rather than terming these cultural objects and the groups that produce them "revolutionary" because I take seriously the distinction between formations seeking some manner of redress from the state and those seeking a complete over throw of the social order through sustained and direct confrontation with state bodies which would end in the state's dissolution. I note how the concept of revolutionary action has been co-opted by liberal forces in the cultural and academic sectors and the notion of war, as Joy James (2020) argues, turned into a metaphor. I resist naming these objects as revolutionary because I do not wish to place them into another categorial arena in which they must meet a certain threshold. Classical Marxist analysis of revolution in the Global North has tended to reinforce revolution as a stadial phenomenon, dependent on a specific and distinct set of social and economic conditions. I am ambivalent about the masculinist obsession with correctly identifying and naming the abstracted conditions necessary for revolution and more interested in the participation and felt reality of acts of resistance that clear the path for revolution to occur. My focus is on how the materiality of said objects provides structure to or produces affects firmly related to modes of struggle.

Resistance necessarily includes forms of revolutionary action, but it is also a conceptual framework capable of holding small scale, radical forms of grassroots mobilisation that seek redress from the state in some way. Rather than concede that any attempt to resist the state is always already revolutionary (it is not), for the purposes of this thesis, I understand revolutionary action to require forms of armed resistance. It pertains to political subjects that understand themselves as not only in a theoretical but *physical* war with the state, who do not trust it in its current configuration to be able to meet societal needs and whose strategy is dependent on attempts to overthrow it. Resistance I understand as a range of individual and collective acts of refusal, demand-making and political organisation which might seek redress from state bodies or the transformation of mode of social organisation at large. In attempting identify "resistant"

cultural objects, I recognise that those that come under my investigation were formed as part of an ongoing process: a political struggle that continues.

Resistance denotes the possibility of movement on multiple layers (the local, the national) occurring simultaneously in a terrain defined by oppressive force whilst revolutionary action, I suggest, is more closely defined by a singularity and specificity of condition related to political economy, the defined stages of history and temporality. I emphasise these distinctions to adequately name the objects that will come under my investigation. This distinction is particularly relevant to formations under investigation in this thesis, who whilst connected to revolutionary struggle for independence during the 1980s happening on the African Continent in places such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique, did not themselves engage in armed struggle against the British state. I note here the tensions and debates that arose for example, in the Brixton Black Women's Group and The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent related to the group's purpose, their theoretical frameworks and tactics. I note how much of the cultural production discussed in this thesis belongs to groups that were deradicalised as a result of the co-optation of autonomous grassroots formations by the state in the form of grants, funding and the incorporation of identity-based organising formations into local government structures such as the Greater London Council. As they struggled to retain their autonomy, these groups moved beyond liberal attempts at reform and demonstrated how the use of mass mobilisation, localised mutual aid, campaigning, protest, information gathering, supplementary schooling, radical study and knowledge-sharing were necessary political endeavours in securing freedom. Their critiques of state power refused the state's attempts to make illogical their life-affirming institutions and forms of organisation. The examination of their cultural production is one means of identifying the role of the imagination as a material substance crucial in their modes of resistance, specifically the creation and circulation of the impetus to enact a social vision counter to what they had been taught was possible.

In her invocation to workers to direct their energy and attention towards the goal of freedom with regard to abolitionist struggle, Gilmore writes,

> Abolition is a totality and it is ontological. It is the context and content of struggle, the site where culture recouples with the political; but it is not struggle 's *form*. To have form, we have to organize (Gilmore 2011, 258).

I understand the cultural production of resistant movements created to aid mass organisation as part of the process in which emancipatory projects gain *form*. The aim of this thesis synthesise

grassroots struggle and acts of creation, reading cultural production as part of a mass refusal to capitulate to the political impasse that defined both the past and our present political conjuncture.

**No unilateral victory**

Attempting to characterise the affective stasis that defines the present political conjuncture in the United Kingdom, my research notes the prevalence of linearity and hegemonic clock-time in conceptualisations of past, present and future as sequential temporal regimes. I argue that linear and stadial understandings of the passage of time have halted the ability of political subjects to experience the present as anything other than total and self-evident. A critical appraisal of the imagination using creative methods must occur in tandem with a reconceptualisation of temporality and a suspicion of the ubiquity of grand narratives of history. In many ways, this project situates itself against the clock. It argues against a temporality, that Françoise Vergès writes "describes liberation only in terms of unilateral 'victory' against the reactionary" (Vergès 2021, 5). It provides a critique of socialist conceptualisations of the future as something to be "won" or revolution as historically predictable, arguing that this reaffirms a binary conception in which those with liberatory social visions are constantly consigned to the losing side if they do not witness the fruition of their social vision in their lifetimes.

In arguing that creative engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential as it is contained in cultural objects from the past and present can help move political organisers through and beyond the shadow of crisis, I use multiple creative methods in this thesis stemming from a methodology based on "touch", to demonstrate the extent to which the Gregorian calendar and clock might be bent, distorted and destroyed. I do so to highlight how accessible the past is, how its residue might be traced and examined in an effort to enable us to use the imagination to constitute, rehearse and pre-figure both the present and future.

My research attempts to answer three core questions:

**-What are the uses of the imagination in the cultural production of feminist and anti-racist organising groups/artistic collectives and what are the effects of engaging with the imagination using creative methods?**

**-How does the imagination feature and in what manner is it located in the cultural production of feminist and anti-racist organising groups and/or artistic collectives?**

**- How does the deployment of the imagination by feminist and anti-racist organising groups and/or artistic collectives challenge temporal limits and shape ideas of futurity?**

I approach these questions by attempting to outline how engagement with imagination can undo the affective experience of hegemonic of clock-time. In this thesis, I use a set of creative methods based around topological distortion in order reveal the location, the purpose and the form of the imagination as represented in cultural objects. I experiment with comparative visual and discourse, create found poetry and speculative accounts through critical fabulation, in an attempt to "speak back" to an object from the past in order to constitute the future. At many points in this thesis, I play with tone and register, writing in excess of the materiality of the object or the event in order to create a new understanding of what *could have been then*, *what could be now* and *what should be in future.*

**Chapter outline**

This thesis is littered with creative fragments that intend to evidence the broad scope of my method. These fragments*, "he can't evict us without a notice!", "it cannot be left unchallenged", "what to do if the police raid" and "my capacity to love is my capacity to fight"* are a mix of critical fabulation, creative analysis, poetic writing, and other linguistic gestures, that attempt to capture my excavation of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential from cultural objects during my field work. Following the work of feminist scholars such as Sadie Plant (1997), I have also, at times, utilised the margins as a means of intense elaboration, note-taking, digression, as a space to "write before [I] think,"(Brown 2009, xiii) in order to discover what I think, as Stephen Gilbert Brown suggests.

The aesthetic decisions made in this text are an invocation to my reader to loosen their attachment to the forms of order imbued by sequentiality, chronology and linearity. Chapter One, "AGAINST CHRONOLOGY", uses Hall's (2010) notion of political conjuncture to contextualise the neoliberal effects of the last decade and a half in the United Kingdom, investigating how and why a "political impasse" that has developed as well as outlining the corrosive effects of linearity, chronology and traditional Histography on the imagination. It

defines the key terms used in this thesis related to imagining, topological distortion and cultural production. Chapter Two, "MY METHOD BEGINS WITH WHAT I CAN TOUCH" is divided into two sections, part one explores the role of affect as a methodological frame for the haptic methods employed in thesis and part two provides a critical and theoretical appraisal of **"THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE"**, as well as an analysis of my intellectual and practical theorisation of "use" with regard to this project. Chapter Three, "THE FORCE OF ENCOUNTER– IMAGINATIVE-REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL IN DIALOGIC SPACE" explores encounters with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential in a workshop conducted at the Institute of Contemporary Arts during my fieldwork, mapping the effect of the encounters that took place there onto my theorisation of the imagination, attempting to recreate and analyse the liberatory affective currents that ruptured feelings of stasis in the room. Chapter Four, "COMING BACK AROUND– RECURRANCE, IMAGINATION AND VISUALITY" performs visual and discourse analysis of four posters produced by the Haringey Black Action Group mobilising attendance to the "Smash the Backlash!" protest that took place on the 2nd May 1987 as well as an image of Sylvia Erike, member of the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD found during fieldwork in Stella Dadzie's collection at the Black Cultural Archive. It uses the notion of "recurrence" to explore the temporal distortion and imaginative consequences of attempts to "touch" this archival material. Chapter Five, "LANGUAGE AS MATTER– THE IMAGINATION AND TEXTUAL EXPERIMENTATION" uses excerpts from participant interviews to create "found poetry" as a linguistic vehicle through which the imagination is expressed and explores the dialectical consequences of such an act. Finally, Chapter Six, "THE FUTURE IS NO ONE'S PROPERTY" argues for an embrace of a radically contingent approach to futurity using the Black feminist conditional as a framework and attempts to perform a scalar visual analysis of three images; one of a gathering of Sisters Uncut organisers outside the court sentencing of a British police officer responsible for the rape and murder of Sarah Everard and two images of Issue 52 of OUTWRITE Newspaper, documenting community efforts for police accountability following the Broadwater Farm Uprisings of October 1985, triggered by the murder of Cynthia Jarret by police. This chapter attempts to draw out the strategic markers embedded in these cultural objects, arguing that such strategic principles can be "scaled up" into political ethics and used as guiding principles for present-day grassroots organising formations.

**Conclusion: feeling!**

I end on the necessity of understanding and analysing the feelings that occur as a result of engaging with resistant cultural production, the role of the imagination in the production of cultural object and the effect of the imagination in driving the resistant action that might follow engagement with them. Feeling is a constituent element of the creation of liberatory affects. In my book creatively exploring the utility of the political imagination, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise,* I wrote:

> Here is my method: above all, *feeling!* I aim, through experiments in feeling, to reveal and destroy what it is that keeps us here, what it is that stops us from deciding to leave even as the cinders mix with our hair, the smoke corrupts our lungs, the flames engulf the people we love (Olufemi 2021, 8).

This thesis refuses to capitulate to the idea that human life can be neatly defined by stages of production and the structure of events designated by scientific rubrics. Feelings always intrudes, their capture in cultural production through "Imaginative Revolutionary Potential" must be engaged with as one dimension of the arena of political struggle. This *feeling!* method, constituted by touch, is indebted to affect theory's examination of relationships between feeling, emotion and non-rational forces and intensities. I hold that creative engagement with Imaginative Revolutionary Potential can collapse time, such that the totality of the present moment falls away, enabling alternative conceptualisations of the present and future to emerge and casting off the affective weight of political immobility. I understand this thesis as part of a long-standing project to reveal and destroy the markers of the here and now, to escape what José Esteban Muñoz names as the "prison house" (Muñoz 2019, 38). The thesis does not engage with the imagination as a totality, nor does it promise to provide a detailed history of its conceptual development. Rather, it seeks, through creative engagement, to denaturalise the forces that would have us believe that no meaningful interventions can be made into the landscapes we inhabit. It refuses to aid and abet narratives of disaster. In exploring counter and anti-hegemonic affective environments, it does not simply provide a happy story to counter a sad one but aims to strengthen the determination to combat the stasis experienced by political subjects. In her 1998 lecture, *On Beauty and Being Just,* Elizabeth Scarry poses the following thought experiment,

> suppose this population were presented with this question: "In the near future, human beings can arrange things so that there either will or will not be. Do you wish there to be beautiful sky? (Scarry 1998, 82)

"Do you wish there to be beautiful sky?" is another way of insisting, as Wang does, on the luminous tree. This thesis concerns itself with the kinds of action, spurred by the imagination, that will determine the arrangement of things that either *will* or *will not* produce a beautiful sky. It asks that we not underestimate the role of culture and the imagination in the construction of that beautiful sky. I write and research with the aim of producing and reproducing the attachments, desire, and capacity to engage in material resistance. It bears repeating: another way of organising and conceptualising human life on earth is possible.

# CHAPTER ONE: AGAINST CHRONOLOGY[15]

[15] *My theoretical framework emerges from an investment in the serious possibility of total revolution and my work outside of the academy to this end. My political home is feminist, I consider myself indebted to feminist thinking and theory specifically Marxist and materialist critiques of capitalism, Black feminist conceptual notions of collective organising, communism, family abolition, radical care and fugitivity. I situate my research in a legacy of Black feminist thought, understanding this using Jennifer Nash's observation that Black feminism is "a varied project with theoretical, political, activist, intellectual, erotic, ethical, and creative dimensions; Black feminism is multiple, myriad, shifting, and unfolding" (Nash 2019, 15). Following Diane Di Prima, I allow my feminist politics to be contoured by multiple political genealogies, remaining open to changing my mind and changing it again. When Di Prima writes "NO ONE WAY WORKS / it will take all of us / shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down"(Di Prima 2007, 17) I take this as a challenge to contend and incorporate multiple, sometimes conflicting, political genealogies into my own revolutionary framework. I follow Nash in asserting a Black feminist love ethics that "rather than looking to the state for remedy… asks how affective communities can themselves be sights of redress"(Nash 2011, 15), meaning the final frontier of my politics is anchored by theories concerning relation between human beings unmediated by the state, by the nation or by institutions. Similarly, Joy James' (2020) position on revolutionary love, that "my capacity to love is my capacity to fight" animates my political commitment to building a world premised on human flourishing, on free being, devoid of the logics of capital that dictate how we currently think, move, act and relate to one another. I follow the intellectual trajectories of those thinkers who refuse to remain in a single discipline such as Jackie Wang (2018), who weaves artistic practice into her critique of capitalism and those prison abolitionists who understand their work as an integral step in the ongoing process of transformation. Poet Miguel James (2007) summarises my position when he writes "My entire Oeuvre is against the police."*

*My work continues a legacy forged by Black feminists and women of colour whose anti-imperialist, Marxist formations in the 1970s and 1980s in the United Kingdom tore open existing white, Western concepts and methods for analysing the political realm; whose political interventions, campaigns and community education schemes orientated themselves against and beyond the state simultaneously. Contemporary examples of this in the UK might include groups such as Sisters Uncut, The Feminist Anti-Fascist Assembly, Black Lives Matter UK, Workers for a Free Palestine, No More Exclusions, The Free Palestine Coalition, Communities Not Cages and Queercare. I write in the spirit of Claudia Jones, whose communist, internationalist politics reinvigorated Marxist analysis and sharpened its assessment of the position of the Black worker. In her poem to freedom fighter and nationalist Blanca Canales, she wrote,*

*It seems I knew you long before our*
*common ties – of conscious choice*
*Threw under single skies, those like us*
*Who, fused by our mold*
*Became their targets, as of old (Boyce Davies 2007, 111).*

*I use this example to evidence my own commitment to facilitating transnational political struggle, working to eschew the border and the concept of the nation. I write alongside the countless members of the Brixton Black Women's Group, OWAAD and similar formations that sought to elucidate the radical potential of anti-racist and feminist coalition building. The editors of "Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women" members of different grassroots feminist formations embrace diverse historical roots, writing,*

> *ours is a journey - a geographical, social and political journey from the present to the past, from the past to the future - shifting in space and time as required - in the hope that [...] material reality [...] be preserved and transcended for, and by, our future development (Grewal et al, 1988, 2).*

*I wish to articulate a politics in which nothing remains unchanged. A politics that touches every sphere of life, so that staunch materialists, critical Black studies scholars, utopian family abolitionists, cyber-feminists and many more may all be able to access my research and find something useful in it. Like Legacy Russell, I wish my politics to act as a viral glitch with material consequences; I want "broken ruins… punctures in the surface, a bubbling skin, all hell to break loose" (Russell 2020, 116).*

*Similarly, my work is influenced and interested in arguments for rewriting the master script put forward by Sylvia Wynter (2003), the imperative that we must abolish the existing structure of knowledge production and conceptualisations of the "human" in order to contend with our political position. Following this, I am critically interested in the strong provocations made by Afropessimist scholars, particularly relating to grief and mourning as well as the predictable, calculable machinery of Black death that sustains contemporary life. My criteria for the material I am drawn to is shaped by these theoretical preoccupations. This means that in the course of carrying out my research, I lingered heavily in specific areas, including cultural production created by Black subjects and feminism as a lens for theorising the attainment of freedom.*

*I view academic convention as a form of restriction. I understand the university under neoliberal governance to be a vehicle through which articulated desires for revolution are suppressed, defanged and repackaged. I orientate myself against it, aiming to embody a "criminal relationship"(Moten and Harney 2013, 26) to it that pierces*

*That idea that you don't know where you're going if you don't know where you've come from, which can sound like a linear trajectory, is actually a command that says – in the "now," you need to bring together something from then in service of something in the future because it's all happening in the now. What we do now is absolutely crucial and is premised on what we imagine we want for the future and trying to make it happen now, to foretell it. It's a kind of foretelling that we're trying to do. – Gail Lewis*

*If time is linear, all you do is grieve. – So Mayer*

**Contextualising crisis and conjuncture**

Marxist analysis holds that any critical approach to the present condition requires its contextualisation in history. This chapter explores how the crisis in political condition in the United Kingdom has developed and how this development enables the production of an affective stasis and immobility which shapes the *feeling* in political actors that forms of resistance are futile. I argue that these feelings develop through experiences of successive political defeat which take place inside a historiographical frame which privileges linear and chronological temporalities, reproducing political immobility. This immobility consolidates the notion of a political impasse which is hegemonic (Gramsci, 1992). The notion of political impasse becomes pervasive, forming one dimension of the ruling classes ideological dominance. I frame my understanding of the current political impasse as one consequence of a stultifying structure of feeling. Defining the necessity of art to the creation of the social character of any given historical period, Raymond notes:

> We find here a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some way passed… In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in general organisation. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance… I do not mean that the structure of feeling… is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community… One generation may train its successor with reasonable success, in the social character or the general pattern but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have 'come' from anywhere (Williams 1961, 48).

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*its project of mystification, as argued for by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013). In the worlds of possibility I seek to elucidate in my work, the university does not exist.*

Raymond sees artistic production as contributing to a general organisation of moods and cultural atmospheres which precedes articulation, which produce a sometimes compromised view that those in any given moment have of their present. A new generation reshapes a structure of feeling by "[responding] in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting" (Williams 1961, 49). Structures of feeling and the desires that constitute them permeate the air and are generated via emergent social, class and cultural formations that provide an opposition and/or alternative to dominant culture. They may also emerge in the contextual and artistic gap between official discourses, policy decisions and cultural happenings. My reliance on this notion seeks to foreground affective stasis as a flow of intensity inside a broader structure of feeling that has been defined by crisis, and is reflected by artistic production[16]. Following Raymond (1961), I argue that creative engagement with the imagination by cultural workers and artists may enable this old structure to die, clearing space for a new assessment of the cultural and political landscape as well as the creation of a liberatory structure of feeling, a mode of general organisation in which resistant action is key. The role of culture in this reassessment is crucial.

When thinking about our present political condition, I use the phrase the "drawn-out present" to indicate how governing structures coalesce to form an ideological blockage in which "now" and the violence that constitutes it, seems to prolong itself without an end in sight. This blockage produces an affective feeling of immobility, of being stuck, and unable to see through a supposed impasse.[17] My use of the words "stasis" and "immobility" to describe the affective condition produced by crisis are informed by the Disability Studies focus on the ways that the organisation of society produces immobilising conditions. Rather than reproduce a binary that equates freedom with physical movement and oppression with immobility (you are free if you can move, you are unfree if you cannot move), I instead turn my focus to the ways the present organisation of social life permits and delimits certain forms of movement, the free movement of capital for example in contrast to the violent containment of people. Vic Finkelstein's theorising of the social model of disability, which questions the normative structural orderings in "a social system where the freedom, or ability to move defines whether or not a person becomes socially alive or socially dead" (Finkelstein 1994, 1) grounds this theorising; his focus

[16] For more on austerity's impact on processes of art-making, curating and creative practice in the United Kingdom, see Kristina Kolbe, "Unequal entanglements: how art practitioners reflect on the impact of intensifying economic inequality," *Cultural Trends* 31, no. 3 (2021): 257-272, doi:10.1080/09548963.2021.1976594.

[17] The relevance of affect theory to this project is explored further in Chapter Two.

on the material and social conditions that produce social life or social death are crucial in understanding how material conditions (the realities that exist outside of individual consciousness) shape one's ability to attain freedom. When, at points in this thesis, I insist on "moving through" or "seeing through" or bypassing the impasse, I refer to enacting the social processes necessary to destroy the conditions of immobilisation.

If a crisis-ridden structure of feeling consolidates the notion of political impasse, that impasse describes a spatial and affective deadlock in the United Kingdom, a zone where resistance feels impossible. The notion of impasse is also closely related to academic forms of analysis that use critical stuckness, immobilising contradiction and other barriers as points of productive analytical departure. In other words, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the "political impasse" is a flexible zone for theorising about the nature of our material conditions, the imagination and social transformation. Even if it feels as if we are unable to meaningfully rupture this dead zone with practical action, we can still *think* about ways to do so.

Paying keen critical attention to the ways the imagination is embedded in cultural objects and utilised in the process of material resistance is one way to refuse stasis and reconstitute the political will to resist. Max Haiven's *Crises of Imagination* (2014) posits a similar theory, arguing that one dimension of the crisis in imagination ushered in by an age of neoliberal austerity is a crisis of "parochialism" at the heart of the ruling paradigm. He suggests that the narrowminded outlook of the so-called "First World" means that the imagination struggles to find purchase amongst those subjects who thought themselves immune to political rupture and economic decline. I build on this analysis by noting that the Global North's underestimation of the need to build a materialist assessment of imaginative capacity by rethinking both chronology and temporality in favour notions of progress based on stadialism and domination over historical event is a grave mistake. Broadly, this chapter aims to contextualise the contemporary political conjuncture that has emerged from overlapping forms of crisis in the United Kingdom as well demonstrate the theoretical basis for my conceptualisation of the imagination, cultural production and affect.

**Neoliberalism**

In the United Kingdom, the production of affective atmospheres of immobility emerge from economic conditions of austerity which shape structures of feeling with regard to the

possibilities of resistance and conceptions of the future. This project holds that anything constructed can be deconstructed and made anew; feelings of immobility have been bypassed by political subjects throughout history. I trace the origins of the current crisis which produces an affective stasis using Hall's notion of conjunctural analysis. Hall defines a political conjuncture as,

> a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape…A conjuncture can be long or short: it's not defined by time or by simple things like a change of regime – though these have their own effects. As I see it, history moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis… Crises are moments of potential change, but the nature of their resolution is not given. Gramsci, who struggled all his life against 'economism', was very clear about this. What he says is that no crisis is only economic. It is always 'over-determined' from different directions (Hall and Massey 2010, 57).

If as Hall argues, conjunctures are always "over-determined" from different directions and never merely economically driven, I turn my focus to the range of forces that define the production of immobilising affects in our present political conjuncture. Rather than tracing only its economic drivers, my interest lies in the social, political and creative ramifications of a social landscape defined by crises brought on by neoliberalism and austerity. Crisis, is as Tithi Bhattacharya (2022) argues, an immediate threat generalised to a local community that is played out on a global scale. We can see the ways this crisis is at play in the multiple threats to life that define current modes of social organisation in the United Kingdom. I argue that a series of immediate threats have been constituted by the emergence of neoliberalism in the United Kingdom which culminated in post-financial crash austerity. I define neoliberalism using Bhattarcharya's (2020) formulation that it is merely an new way of organising capital accumulation and not at all novel, another phase in the extension of a capitalism intent on "trying to recover and maintain profits" through the prioritisation of market competition, the valorisation of the individual, the concentration of wealth amongst the ruling elite, destruction of state infrastructure and the gendered and racialised displacement of social reproductive labour.

The current neoliberal crisis is an inherited result of Thatcherite governance from 1970-1990. Margaret Thatcher's post-war consensus was built on a fundamental rollback of state funding and infrastructure. This austerity laden politic was expanded and brought to bear by the 2008

financial crisis and subsequent 2010 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition led by David Cameron. I suggest that the introduction of austerity politics under a Thatcherite government continues to reverberate in present moment and has been extended by successive Conservative Governments.[18] From 2010 onwards, the social and political production of worker's alienation has emerged as a result of the decimation of state infrastructure, cuts in public funding and the concentration of wealth in private companies, all whilst average wage declines and the so-called "cost of living" rises exponentially[19]. My argument is that these patterns of dispossession continue to blunt imaginative faculties. This blunting is evidenced by increasing calls for a reasoned and depoliticised approach to capitalist crisis by the parliamentary left[20], disdain and governmental crackdown on forms of direct-action and a general distrust of informal, grassroots movements. Bassel and Emejulu trace the onset of latest iteration of austerity to the consequences of the 2008 financial crash which has been "misrepresented" by financial elites, they note,

> the policies of austerity – deficit reduction through tax increases and cuts to public spending – are typically framed as the painful consequence of out-of-control state spending rather than as the result of states rescuing irresponsible financial institutions. Consequently, austerity has been represented by institutional actors as the only viable economic policy in order to get states' 'fiscal houses in order'. As Clarke and Newman (2012: 300) argue, institutional actors and financial elites are undertaking 'intense ideological work' to reframe how the public thinks about the causes of the crisis and to win the public's 'disaffected consent' for deeply unpopular austerity policies (Bassel and Emejulu 2017, 11).

The ideological power of neoliberal austerity has been absolute and a racialised, gendered form of statecraft. Consistent cuts to funding for vital services, local authorities, housing and education have created large-scale ruptures in the fabric of British social life, crushing labour movements and entrenching poverty amongst the working-classes.[21] My aim in briefly contextualising the economic landscape of the last decade and a half is to give much needed attention to the environment in which the notion of political impasse has developed. If it *feels* as if contemporary grassroots organisers are constantly fighting fires, battling precarity and

[18] I define "the present moment" as related to events and ideological emergences in the last decade and a half 2010-2024.
[19] For more on the neoliberal crisis, see Grace Blakeley, "How Neoliberalism Broke Britain," Tribune, 24 October, 2023, https://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/10/breaking-britain-neoliberalism.
[20] For more on strategies proposed by the parliamentary left, see Ed Miliband, "Britain rejected Labour in 2019. Let's learn the right lessons," *The Guardian*, June 18 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/18/labour-report-ed-miliband.
[21] For more, see Vickie Cooper and David Whyte, eds. *The Violence of Austerity* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

unable to make a dent in a large and constantly shifting political environment, this feeling arises in part because of a huge shift in material conditions in the UK in the last two decades. My theorisation of the imagination responds to the structure of feeling that emerges from these conditions, the ways in which this crisis is "overdetermined in different directions." I note that feels of immobility which arise from these conditions continue to reproduce themselves, placing limits on conceptions of possibility and blunting resistance movements.

**The impasse has been felt before: a case study**

The effects of this ideological move in the UK are also historically situated. That is to say, the impasse which I have attempted to elucidate above has been felt before, only in a different temporal location. I refer to a specific example to demonstrate how the economic, social and political environments created by governments have blunted the autonomous power of resistant organisations. In her article, *Race, Neoliberalism and Welfare Reform*, Fisher (2002) traces how the state institutionalisation of Black feminist collectives formed at a grassroots level in the 1980's turned once radical, informal grassroots collectives into service providers, severing their ability to express a radical politic. Organisations that began as autonomous political consciousness raising and mutual aid projects by and for oppressed political subjects were slowly inculcated into the state's remit[22] through funding apparatuses and became dependent on this funding for their operation. This introduced new layers of bureaucracy, producing alienation amongst group members and a generalised feeling that the radical potential of the political moment had been compromised.[23]

Fisher notes this process by tracing the history of the Black Women's Action Group which became the Southwark Black Women's Centre. The Black Women's Action Group should be understood in the context of groups such as The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, The Brixton Black Women's Group, The Haringey Black Women's Centre and Abansindi Collective. These groups and collectives provided community care, campaigning support and political education to fellow Black and racialised women using the principles of

[22] For more on these processes of inculcation, see Julia Chinyere Oparah, *Other Kinds of Dreams: Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[23] In our research interview, Stella Dadzie notes, "Post-Scarman, Post-81, I characterise it as 'If it moves and it's Black, throw money at it', and there was no training, no one was taught how to do the bookkeeping or how to do the accounts, so you end up with this endless succession of scandals around the misuse of money and the misuse of resources. You also had a spate of Race Equality and Women's Equality units arising which sucked away some of our best people because suddenly there was a job for what you'd always done free and in your own time and there were also routes into politics, through the GLC or through local government" (Dadzie, 2022).

mutual aid which emphasised self-identification, self-sufficiency and autonomy. Groups campaigned for better housing and educational provision as Marxists, were prominent in the Black Parents Movements establishment of supplementary schooling, provided support for those experiencing domestic violence, organised against the so-called SUS laws, reproductive justice and in favour of squatter and tenant's rights[24]. Fisher notes,

> the SBWC's story begins in the early 1980s, when a small group of working class, single mothers in their mid-to-late twenties decided to meet independently. Originating from St. Lucia, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Nigeria, they were initially part of an informal community group of concerned African, Caribbean, and black British women and men in London's borough of Southwark… Most of the charter members frequently met in a member's council flat (apartment) located on the Aylesbury Estate (Fisher 2002, 142).

Established in 1983, the group was the recipient of funding from the Greater London Council who ring-fenced funding for Ethnic Minority and Women's issue-related campaigns through local councils. Fischer notes "Seed monies from Southwark Council and the Greater London Council enabled the organization to lease and renovate a house." (Fisher 2002, 143). She then describes how a neoliberal policy agenda which saw a decline in social services, abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986, a tightening of resources and overall restructuring of the welfare state under Thatcher turned a once independent grouping of women who organised together against racism and other forms of state violence into a state funded entity totally reliant on seed money from Southwark council. Fisher recounts how one member notes,

> the organization changed its name to Southwark Black Women's Centre to shed its supposed association with militancy and feminist ideals. Several members concurred and suggested that the name Black Women's Action Group might have turned people away. (Fisher 2002, 145).

The interviewee argues that the name change was an attempt to remain relevant under a neoliberal policy context. The eventual demise of the organisation due to the gutting of funding is evidence of how the shift toward service provision under successive neoliberal governments curtailed the ability for grassroots organisations to make radical and potent demands from the state or understand their conditions as ideologically constructed. Fischer proves that the reliance of said organisations on state funding effectively removed autonomy and agency from collective

[24] For more on the activities of Black and racialised women feminist movements in Britain see Tracy Fisher, *What's Left of Blackness: Feminisms, Transracial Solidarities and the Politics of Belonging in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

resistance. She notes that the groups transformation under the neoliberal policy environment into a "self-help" and empowerment service provider for Black Women was a noticeable transformation from its more radical ideological and political position during the hey-day of the Greater London Council and the existence of a left local state. Contemporary grassroots feminist and anti-racist formations in the UK emerge from this policy context. An arena in which the state's co-optation of identity-based modes of organisation reduced groups' ability to pose a threat to capitalist order. Many, including academic Gail Lewis and educator Stella Dadzie have reflected on how the deradicalisation of grassroots organising groups by state co-optation and the disbanding of groups like OWAAD and The Brixton Black Women's Group created an affective void which signalled the fragmentation and effective end of organised forms of Black feminist resistance in the 1990s. I suggest that these post-Thatcher years mark the beginning of the creation of a structure of feeling in which "political impasse" and immobility became central. In the ruins of what was, it became harder to revive the notion that resistant movements were capable of transforming the social landscape in the United Kingdom. The same alienation and/or immobility is felt by anti-racist and feminist organisers today who contend with a terrain in which neoliberalism has been fully entrenched. So much so that the social infrastructure that benefitted resistance movements in the past no longer exists.

**Organised abandonment**

I situate the contemporary iteration of political immobility in an environment of what Gilmore (2008) terms "organised abandonment." She radically repurposes Peter Drucker's definition of organised abandonment as the way in which businesses must be prepared to, "[abandon] the established, the customary, the familiar, the comfortable, whether products, services and processes, human and social relationships, skills or organizations themselves" (Drucker 2011, 51) to note the ways that, in times of manufactured crisis, states elect to manage populations through the purposeful neglect of life-affirming institutions that provide resource, shifting this responsibility to private and corporate bodies in order to increase their profits whilst deserting whole populations (Olufemi, 2024). Applying this critical framework to the UK is crucial in assessing the contemporary moment because it points us towards the reasons *why* a political impasse has developed. Fifteen years into an organised governmental regime of austerity, funding and resources for services is at an all-time low and this is reflected in the ways groups operate. The fire of anti-fees, anti-cuts movements, expressed through the 2010 students

protests has all but dwindled.[25] Feminist direct action group Sisters Uncut, who come under my examination, emerged in 2014-15 in direct response to austerity, attempting to pressure the government into funding vital domestic violence services. A decade later, the group's shift in focus from merely defending service providers towards advancing an abolitionist agenda marks an attempt to reignite deadened political imaginaries.[26] This shift demonstrates the scale of the changes in political environment in the United Kingdom; welfare cuts can no longer be understood in isolation but must be read as wider part of the United Kingdom's rightward shift, represented most acutely by increased criminalisation and securitisation of the border and crackdowns on migration in recent years.[27]

I tentatively situate the social, ideological and economic landscape that has emerged due to austerity alongside Mark Fisher's notion of capitalist realism. He describes capitalism realism as, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher 2009, 2). Written on the eve of austerity, Fisher aptly captures a social and cultural feeling that lingers to this day. I suggest engagement with cultural production unleashes forms of Imaginative Revolutionary Potential that provide an affective antidote to capitalism's ability to subsume every aspect of human life. An impasse has developed, precisely because, as Fisher argues, "capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics" (Fisher 2009, 4). In the ruins and the relics, it is easy to understand why narratives of crisis and defeat abound – my belief in the power of the cultural object is not a belief in its ability to remedy this political conjuncture but rather a sustained interest in its capacity to break the affective stranglehold of a socio-political environment in possibility has been eroded. This thesis makes a direct link between historically constituted policy decisions and feelings about the impenetrability of governing structures that they produce. My suggestion is not that the imagination alone is capable of shifting material conditions but rather that the cultivation of a collective imagination through engagement with cultural production might produce resistant affects capable of combatting the experience of political stasis and encouraging

[25] For reflections on the development of the student anti-fees movement, see Matt Myers, *Student Revolt: Voices of the Austerity Generation* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[26] For more on the group's shift towards abolitionist politics, see Aviah Day and Shanice Mcbean, *Abolition Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2022).
[27] For more on the securitisation of the UK border, see Cristina Saenz Perez, "The Securitization of Asylum: A Review of UK Asylum Laws Post-Brexit," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 35, no. 3 (October 2023): 304–321, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eead030.

resistance. What's in a feeling? History. But perhaps most importantly, the ability to understand the relationship between material conditions and what feels conceivable.

**A critique of history**

The notion of political impasse which develops from experiences and discourses of political defeat is also closely related to perceptions of history as linear. By "history" I refer to wide range of historiographical approaches that seek to sequentialise human life. My investigation of the purpose and uses of the imagination is premised on a critique of linearity, I suggest that the affective stasis produced in our present conjuncture emerges partly because of an overreliance on chronological and progressivist narratives of History. I situate my work against Georg Hegel's (1894) conception of the world historical and the linearity that gives hierarchies of development coherence. I understand linearity as an organising logic that seeks to impose progressive reproduction which serves narrative teleology. Victoria Browne's analysis of the Hegelian notion of world history, which is bound up with a unidirectional teleological idea of time and dependent on the existence of nations which find themselves hierarchically placed on a scale of "advanced" (Browne 2014, 8) and "underdeveloped" (Browne 2014, 8) is of particular importance to this project because of this scale's guiding ideological influence in the development of modernity. Such theorisations, dependent on linearity, require that our understanding and analysis of events, encounters and affective structures rely on notions of incrementality, proportionality and forward movement which are based on ideas of cause and effect. Immobile affects circulate and create feelings of stasis that preclude political action precisely because political subjects conceive of themselves as part of a linear history that travels in a singular direction toward a future that remains obscured and beyond reach. Immobile affects compound this singular directionality, increasing experiences of alienation.

This research project situates itself against chronology, the linear arrangement of events and dates in "order" of their occurrence. To situate oneself against chronology as a means of research enquiry is to become a critic of the historical timeline; a critic of the idea that it is possible to create and reproduce a total picture of historical events. My approach queries the necessity of understanding history via narrative reconstruction. In her landmark work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhai Smith (1990) argues that history is a modernist project developed to consolidate imperial beliefs about "the other," assembled around an interconnected belief system established by colonizers and imperialists.

Smith hints at the notion that historiography is a product of ideological narrative construction which is utilised by oppressive power. In his study of the omission of the Haitian Revolution from historical account, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes,

> the general silence that Western Historiography has produced around the Haitian revolution originally stemmed from the incapacity to express the unthinkable… The silence is also reproduced in the textbooks and popular writings that are the prime sources on global history for the literate masses in Europe (Trouillot 1995, 97).

Like Smith, he acknowledges that historiography renders specific events *unthinkable* and therefore impossible, omitting them from the record. For Trouillot, in some sense, Western historiographies are the result of general silences, reproduced through omission in textbooks and educational material. This analysis informs my critique of historiography in relation to the uses of the imagination and temporality. In my assessment, traditional forms of histography also produce a chronological understanding of historical events which confirm a world-historical story of imperialist domination and subjection, removing the possibility of the movement of time in multiple directions at once. The relationship between history and temporality is co-constitutive; Bonnie G. Smith calls temporality "the concept by which humans confront the experience of duration" (Smith 2016, 973). This experience of duration is ordered sequentially through a unilateral unfolding of events of the past. Historiography, the methodology that confirms this unfolding, creates a framework called "History," that is reliant on an understanding of temporality that is neat and ordered. Traditional historiography, faithful to sequential record, is founded on an authorised account of events, an account which emerges through engagement with archival material from which narratives of progress are constructed by those with power. Here I understand "power" to appear in the relation between the governing structures that organise human life and the ability of those with authority (granted or otherwise) to impress and reinforce those structures on large groups of the human population. Hartman calls the official archive that contains scraps of the lives of enslaved women,

> a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history (Hartman 2008, 2),

her use of critical fabulation compromises this authority, allowing other critical examinations of history to emerge. In examining the centrality of the afterlives of slavery to the cruel calculus of life and death which defines the statist political terrain, she provides an opening to critique the

"grand narrative of history" for what it is: a story, an invention, a myth that emerges from a temporal regime defined by hegemonic clock-time.

Hartman's (2008) intervention broke open the impasse facing archival studies by recognising that the archive is more a sight of injury than of rescue. But she is not alone in a recognition of the centrality of power in the construction of historical narrative. When Marx and Engels write "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels 1992, 31) they indicate that the battle for ownership over one's labour and as they understand it, the dignity of one's life and relations, is the product of an ongoing class dispute, rather than a self-evident record of events which constitute history. For Marxists, class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie is the central site of this dispute, for others scholars, it is race. For example, Moten (2003) critiques Marx's theory of value, a mechanism invented to pinpoint the nature of the worker's relationship to goods and services, arguing that it does not anticipate the possibility of the commodity's speech. In his work on black performance, Moten suggests "The history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (Moten 2003, 1). I include his observations here to illustrate the multiple contested arenas of power in relation to the material of history. For a number of feminist scholars, these sites of dispute are co-constitutive and cannot neatly be parcelled out. In her decolonial scholarship, Wynter (2003) critiques the concept of the "Human" via an exploration of Man1 and Man2 as defined by violently exclusionary European conceptions of humanity. For her, this quandry is the most significant arena in which the fight over one's ability to define their reality and thus, history, takes place. I highlight the multiple terrains of this dispute to make a point about how "the grand narrative of History" turns the contest for and over power into a fabula which is reaffirmed through citation, curricula and a number of other historiographical processes.[28]

Bolstered by chronology, historiography methodically tracks inquiry into a static past, inquiry into the being and doing of an "Overrepresented Man" following Wynter (2003). Historian Marc Bloch's assessment that "Misunderstanding the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past," (Bloch 1992, 36) exemplifies the centrality of chronology in traditional

[28] This project does not argue that the practice of historiography is meaningless or that historical analysis must be abolished in order to produce liberatory affects. Rather, it notes how conservative historiographical methods produce an adherence to linearity that sequentialises resistance into a series of events. This produces affective immobility in political subjects who find themselves trapped in the narrative history has produced. Breaking out of this paradigm requires reengagement with conceptualisations of temporality that favour multi-directional and rhizomatic routes of travel. This thesis argues that this is best achieved through creative engagement with cultural objects, using a framework that takes seriously the notion that the past and present are not distinct temporal regimes.

versions of historical encounter. The present is defined by the past but the actions that constitute the "past" and the "present" are hermetically sealed. There is no space to understand how the past bleeds into the present or vice versa, only how "man's" actions are derived from an ignorance of it. That is to say, knowledge derived from the past touches the present in so far as it stops the repetition of foolish mistakes but aside from that, the temporal regimes are distinct. Chronology in the context of this project's argument, refers to an understanding of events and processes preceding one another to form a linear and numerical narrative of progress. Such a narrative traps political subjects in a forward moving political state, experiences of defeat and worsening material conditions which prevent forward movement then compound the notion of loss, producing political immobility and impasse. Chronology places events and objects in an order and in doing so, gives each thing a role and a purpose in the construction of a timeline of ontology. That order inscribes meaning. It gives substance to being. From that order, hegemonic clock-time emerges. Clock-time substantiates an order of continuity (Wilkie, Savransky and Rosengarten 2017) in which the present prolongs itself through a temporal regime which advocates that nothing outside of the order dictated by the clock and Gregorian calendar exists. I note the time as I am writing this section of my thesis, it is 4:31pm, I understand a change to have occurred when I look at the clock and it is 4:35pm. I structure activities and meals around this regime. The clock tells time; time is dictated by the clock. Nothing outside of this widely understood order exists. This might be called an overreach of enlightenment era philosophies that attempt to make sense of the world by dispelling the possibility of conflicting temporal and affective regimes in favour of deductive and abstract reasoning.

**Other valences: topological framing**

Using a Black feminist theoretical framework, this thesis approaches questions related to the purpose and utility of the imagination in cultural production by first asking, what if time is not a unitary march forward but a circle that meets itself at the end even as it begins again? It is first necessary to interrogate linearity in order to create the conditions through which Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, explored in detail elsewhere in this thesis, can emerge. I view Hartman's (2008) method of critical fabulation and what Sharpe calls "Beauty is a Method," the ability to "carry beauty's knowledge with us and make new worlds" (Sharpe 2023, 79) through an attention to black aesthetics, as valences through which linearity can be distorted. Such approaches do not overrely on the materialist notion that the social world always appears as a

self-evident totality. They approach the non-rational with curiosity, utilising memory, sense, and aesthetics to produce affective ruptures in space-time that propel their readers beyond the here and now. Against the strictures of chronology, there are multiple possibilities for understanding movement from one moment to the next but also to understand that this kind of movement can exist multi-directionally: happening backwards, sideways and upside down. This matters if we are to contend with and take seriously the complexity of imaginative thinking, which seeks to break open the prison walls of colonial modernity, to clear space for reckoning with the limits of this world and the crushing weight of the present political conjuncture. Michel Serres and Bruno Latour suggest that,

> it matters whether we think of time as extending over a metrical arrow of progress, or whether we engage with it, for instance, in the manner of a handkerchief, to be spread, crumpled, forming a topological image of time. (Serres and Latour 1995, 60).

This project advocates for an understanding of time that allows it to be scrunched up, rumpled and twisted. Deformities in temporal regimes offer more space for possibility than the metrical arrow of progress; they allow for a reassessment of the present moment considering how temporal distortion can transform our sense of what is possible, fundamentally rewrite the sequential events and historical record that produce affects of immobility, alongside the seeming materiality of spaces, objects and cultural production. Underpinning my research practice then, is a commitment to a topological frame.[29]

To understand topology and its relevance to my research questions, it must first be situated in the context of my interest in what Vilem Flusser (2007) terms the "Crisis of Linearity" as well as methods that favour alphanumeric means of translation. Before outlining how an emerging photographic approach to data processing via cameras and the Internet has begun to call linearity into question, Flusser first sketches out a path that enables us to understand the emergence of linearity. He notes that the alphanumeric code, the Western desire for the enumeration of images via language (namely alphanumeric code using letters and numbers assembled in lines) was a response to the ontological insecurity of the imagination (Flusser 2007). He argues that to understand that images and objects as we perceive them are not enough and to wish to signify them through language, moreover through a code that follows specific

[29] This commitment is evidenced by the use of topology as a guiding principle in the creation of the creative practice element of this project, a digital assemblage titled **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**. The framework for this assemblage is explored in detail in Chapter Two.

rules, is an attempt to distance ourselves from the unknowability of the object which becomes an image in our mind. He argues that the alphabet "teaches us to speak clearly and only then it teaches us to critique our imagination. It teaches us to think un-mythically and to act un-magically"(Flusser 2007, 20) suggesting that in order to understand the connotative image and to justify its ontological existence via linear writing, all other modes of perceiving, thinking and engaging with the world must be impoverished. The mental revolution that followed the alphabet included the creation of a terrain in which,

> time no longer circles above to order everything, but it now streams and forcefully carries all things with it. The world of objects is no longer scenic, but historic. Every situation becomes the result of causes – and the cause of results. Nothing in the world repeats anymore, but each moment is unique (Flusser 2007, 20).

Taking Flusser's observations as a starting point, I view the Crisis of Linearity as an opportunity to make visible the relationship between alphanumeric code (language) and fixed temporal regimes. What appears "natural" (the linear passage of time) is instead a construction that evolved from the suppression of the imagination via specific orderings: language, concepts of night and day and so on. My own practice involves the use of critical fabulation and digital aesthetics which seek to compromise linear temporality by visually and linguistically representing the cross-temporal moments of connection, how the past and future intrude in the present moment. Despite the seeming contradiction, this project experiments with alphanumeric code to expose the limits of alphanumeric code. A political impasse has developed in part because language of history dominates our conceptions of the past and places the future firmly in front of us. It conscripts us, in the present, into an "order" in which the past is inaccessible, time no longer comes back again (thus enabling us to understand our resistance as cyclical, as an interconnected liberatory iteration) but streams past us, leaving us in despair as we are left behind, defeated. The practice of historiography and its progressivist consequences emerges partly from this linguistic coding, which can and should be challenged, without compromising the necessity of understanding the economic and antagonistic power relations that produce historical event and rupture.

Topology is a frame through which this project takes shape; an insistence on muddying the linear relationship between the past, present and future by approaching historical and archival material as if it were possible to deform the temporality that produces them. By deforming temporality and approaching cultural objects without immediately placing them in a temporal

region via the inclusion of dates, the resuscitative dimensions of the imagination are ignited. Here it is crucial to note that Western spatio-temporal orderings are not universal and that Indigenous knowledge practices, indeed indigenous critiques of coloniality and of knowledge as an extension of colonial power have significant implications for my project. Linda Tuhai Smith's outlining of Indigenous scholarships critiques of history,

> the idea that the story of History can be told in one coherent narrative: This idea suggests that we can assemble all the facts in an ordered way so that they tell us the truth or give us a very good idea of what really happened in the past (Smith 1999, 31),

demonstrates that a desire for orders of time, spacing and land arrangements for the basis of linear cohesion are suppressive acts bound up with the violence of colonial modernity.

I want to rediscover temporal repetition, the chaos of patterns and relations and loosen the weight of history and its attendant methods, so that we might be able to reassess our capacity for resistance in the present and harness the imagination as represented in archival material. This instinct is not born out of a desire for a whimsical utopia unmoored from the devastating consequences of capitalist reality. This thesis argues that by abandoning the linear code and interrogating the production of political impasse "other abilities… come into play that we have not yet utilized" (Flusser 2007, 21). Those abilities simultaneously bolster the resistant actions that respond to governing force whilst "advancing realization of virtualities contained in this chaos... progress[ing] from surprise to surprise, from adventure to adventure, jointly with others" (Flusser 2007, 21). My insistence on a topological frame then, is born from the desire to take advantage of the Crisis of Linearity that Flusser identified in 1988 and illustrate, through deformity and temporal play with cultural objects, what new ideas and strategies for political liberation and resistance abound when the imagination is unmoored from linearity.

Even so, topology is a term laden with meaning determined by discipline. Widely understood as a mathematical study of the properties of geometric objects that remain the same even when/if those objects are deformed, topology has been used as a method of critical appraisal to understand mapping, networks, and space. Instead of merely assessing spatial discourses, Rob Shields argues that a critical topology of space seeks to "to ask how different formations or orders of spacing might coexist and not succeed but modify or warp each other" (Shields 2013, 1). He cites Bruce Morrissette, who argues that topology is "the primary intellectual operation capable of revealing the modalities of surfaces, volumes, boundaries, contiguities,

holds and above all the notions of *inside* and *outside*" (Morrissette, 1972, 47). Spatial topology then, is the understanding that within the context of a social field there are social, political and geographic organisations of particular networks. Not to be mistaken for topography; which refers to geographic arrangements of natural and or artificial features in an area, topology provides an generative starting point for thinking about how this project intends to warp temporal order.

If topology is a warping, what does this project propose to warp? Following Gilles Deleuze (1988), I understand hegemonic clock time, a byproduct and representation of the chronological ordering of events to be a core part of "the diagram," the field of relations of power that *precedes* oppressive governing structures. The diagram is the abstraction of relations to their pure function, the plane on which notions of stadial History are constructed. Shields writes, that according to Deleuze's topology, the diagram, like a plan, is a "plane of consistency" or of immanence, presenting the "distribution of the power to affect and the power to be affected" (Shields 2013, 128). Deleuze contends that the diagram "is a map, or rather several superimposed maps" (Deleuze 1988, 44), an understanding of relations of power and their constitution through discursive and non-discursive manifestations. Jakub Zdebik argues that the diagram "describes the flexible, elastic, incorporeal functions before they settle into a definitive form"(Zdebik 2012, 2). Those functions refer to what makes the distribution of power possible, what engenders specific types of behaviour and social organisation. For example, the diagram precedes capitalism and colonial modernity because it is the schema that makes those relations of power possible or that actualises them. Deleuze calls it, "a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field," (Deleuze 1988, 37) a framework that begins to shape and determine life, the map that precedes the territory. If the prison or panopticon are institutions of surveillance inside of capitalist landscapes, as Zdebik (2012) argues, the diagram determines the *feeling* of being watched, the relationship of control between guard and prisoners, the function of technologies of control. The diagram determines the function of the prison for example, surveillance. The function of surveillance can be abstracted from the prison and superimposed onto other institutions. I understand the stultifying effects of clock-time and the chronological framework of history to be another abstracted function from the diagram, a mechanism of control that orders relations of power that is then mapped onto the structures and institutions that govern human life. The abstracted function of order produced by chronology precedes material reality contributing to the creation of a political impasse and affective stasis.

A topological approach to time, a warping and deforming of linearity, necessitates the question: *What would happen if we folded the clock?* How might a different orientation to temporality reveal the multiple modalities and dimensions of the imagination in relation to cultural objects? How might it break the notion of political impasse? Following Glissant (2020), this project funnels deformity and fragmentation through creative practice in order to build relationships to archival material that disrupt time. These are best demonstrated by the FRAGMENTS that punctuate this thesis and remain on display in the creative practice submission for this project, **THIS IS TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**. I contend that if time unfolds inwards, outwards and in multiple directions at once, then political subjects are not merely prisoners to the whims of history or inserted into its durée. They might rediscover their imaginative capacity and agency to resist forms of immobility by using cultural objects to fortify resistant affects. In attempting to evade chronology, this project also utilises Édouard Glissant's (2020) notion of "trace thought," a mode that one uses to connect cultures, people outside notions of land and territory in the field of relation, to make connections, discover overlaps and synthesise the past(present/future)——the present(future/past)—— and the future(past/present), displacing linear temporality. I want to demonstrate how these three temporal regimes encroach on one another, so that, to tell the story of the past means telling the story of the present which is already where the future resides. Glissant (2020) writes,

> trace thought enables us to move away from the strangulations of the system. It thus refutes the extremes of possession. It cracks open the absolute of time. It opens onto these diffracted times that human communities today are multiplying among themselves, through conflicts and miracles. It is the violent wandering of the shared thought (Glissant 2020, 11).

In doing away with possession, I challenge the narrative totality conferred by history and historiography. Using trace thought, I aim to unsettle a key component of bourgeois ideology: the conservative world-historiographical account of temporal linearity on which it is based. By stretching and expanding temporality, eschewing the authorised account of events in favour of a feather light and playful tracing of the effects of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential as stored in cultural production, experience and encounter, this thesis highlights the role of the imagination in political struggle and seeks to build a zone outside of the weight of history for individuals and communities to re-engage with it.

**Mapping desires: conceptualising liberation**

The theoretical framing of this project draws on a number of cartographic discourses, especially in the visual design elements of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**. Whilst this visual assemblage, explored in further detail in Chapter Two is not a "map" per se, it uses aesthetics to represent new formations and orders of spacing that "deform" the temporal locations from which the cultural production explored in this project emerges. Radical approaches to mapping and cartography have been crucial in the production of my creative practice. Kitchin and Dodge (2007) dislocate the ontological security of the map inherent to scientific cartographic method by arguing that the map does not represent anything solid or pre-existing, nor does it simply create the space it intends to reflect back to an audience. They suggest that the map is not a stable product, it is "brought into the world and made to do work through practices such as recognising, interpreting, translating, communicating" (Kitchin and Dodge 2007, 5). The map is a process of becoming; it, like the imagination, brings that which did not previously exist into being as it seeks to solve a relational problem. This might be understood as a problem of navigation, or the problem of representing data for the sake of policy, for example. Kitchin and Dodge argue,

> as these relational problems make clear, maps are the product of transduction and they enable further transductions in other places and times... solving relational problems such as how best to present spatial information, how to understand a spatial distribution, how to find one's way (Kitchen and Dodge 2007, 11).

They include several vignettes that evidence how a map is simply *coloured lines on a page* until it is transformed through contextual use. In other words, a map is a map only because it helps us solve the problem of how to get from point A to point B.

I expand Kitchin and Dodge's (2007) notion of "relational problems" to understand how, for the purpose of my research, machineries of exploitation held together by capitalism's force, diagrammatic design and chronology are also relational problems to which the imagination attends. My research responds to the relational problem of a world structured on the social, political and economic dispossession of oppressed people. Where Kitchin and Dodge insist that the map exists to solve relational problems, I want push against solution-based thinking to argue that this research project provides a theoretical and aesthetic stylisation of the multiple facets of

resistance and their representation via cultural objects. It uses cartographic discourses to identify a relational problem and to attempt to transform the project of resistance into something more than merely coloured lines on a page. The creative and analytical elements of this project intend to provide the aesthetic tools to understand and respond to the relational problem of "power" and the hegemonically sealed order of "time," not my positing a solution per se or by imagining that a performance or representation can end or even unsettle governing forces, but by opening a space where the imagination reconstitutes the affective and political will to refuse and resist. My use of aesthetics in this regard, follows a long tradition of feminist attempts to politicise aesthetics for the purposes of understanding its relationship to capitalism and to enliven the production of counter and anti-hegemonic practices of freedom. I follow bell hooks, who argued,

> aesthetics is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty, it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming… In one house I learned the place of aesthetics in the lives of agrarian poor black folks (hooks 1995, 65).

I too, take my theoretical understanding of the "organisation of beauty" from the racialised working classes for whom aesthetics is inextricably linked to the material conditions that would enable beauty to flourish. I contrast this with Theodor Adorno's theorisation of the paradoxical nature of the artwork in light of Modernism, he states "For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole" (Adorno 1997, 1). I suggest that aesthetic theory should begin from this vexed starting point rather than lamenting it as Adorno does by asking *what kinds of artwork or aesthetic practices does "the perennial unfreedom of the whole" make im/possible*? How could such an order be different? Through experimentation, this project attempts to create, a "particular location" (through creative method) in which the artistic dimensions of processes of resistance through cultural are analysed, explored and re-engaged with in order to rebuild the affective connection between feeling and action. This project rejects the requirement to "map out" the past, present or future. Instead, it traces these temporal zones using creative methods to access the intangible, watery and non-rational aspects of the imagination as contained in archival material.

Following David Graeber's (2004) approach of utopian extrapolation, my understanding of the purpose of mapping is rooted, in contrast to traditional cartography, in the necessity to evading the capture of realms of possibility. Rhiannon Firth's (2014) work on critical cartography as anarchist pedagogy tightens my conceptualisation of liberation. I take from anarchists the

principle that a critical cartography should go beyond merely "counter-mapping" hegemonic forces toward an anti-hegemonic stance that does not wish to influence state power. The political impasse described in the opening of this thesis is, in part, constituted by attempts by political subjects to simply counter state power through a seizing of parliamentary democracy. This thesis synthesises strands of anarchist pedagogy into its construction of liberation and the imagination, arguing that the imagination shores up notions of affinity, relation, solidarity, alerting us to fact that outside of processes initiated by the state, individuals and communities have the capacity to keep each other safe. I suggest that liberation is glimpsed in the moments, memories, atemporal "sites" through which political affinity, relation and solidarity are practiced. In refusing to simply provide a "counternarrative" to state power, the creative elements of this project move toward the anti-hegemonic by actively encouraging others to "bring new worlds into being through transgression and active creation." (Firth 2014, 161). This thesis challenges what Althusser (2014) terms the "Ideological State Apparatus," the ideological matrix of institutions who maintain the false consciousness of the proletariat through the reinforcement of bourgeois ideology, by helping to foster a critical approach to the present by outlining the role of the imagination in materialist struggle.

Theorising the relationship between the imagination and desire is crucial to this project's argument. Lauren Berlant describes desire as, "a state of attachment to something or someone, and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object's specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it" (Berlant 2012, 6). This project exists inside a politicised cloud of possibility, the space between the specificity of the object (liberation) and the needs and promises projected onto it from the present. It seeks to reproduce that "cloud of possibility" for others, arguing that engagement with cultural production ignites the imagination which strengthens a desirous attachments to the material conditions of freedom and acts of resistance, these desires in turn help to build a liberatory structure of feeling and prompt action, breaking the stranglehold of political impasse. By tracing a series of intangible flows, echoes, intensities throughout this thesis using discourse analysis and creative engagement, I intend to unlock further states of attachment that make it possible for readers of my work to conceive of the world using a generative and emancipatory posture, to "reignite" their imaginative capacity through explorations of affect. Firth (2014) borrows from Alejandro De Acosta and Nigel Thrift to describe affect as,

> an intensity of experience that exceeds individualised emotions and feelings, drawing attention to the ways in which desire flows through and

> changes multiplicities including peoples, groups and the spatial environment (De Acosta 2006, 28; Thrift 2004, 60; Firth 2014, 160).

Affect is a core principle in this work; its relationship to my method is explored in detail in Chapter Two. Theorising the imagination as a process that brings that which does not previously exist into being that depends on a distortion of linearity using a topological frame, I pay close attention to the role of desire in this process. At different points in this thesis, I utilise my creative practice to explore my own personal attachments to the visual signs and discourses embedded in cultural production as well as experiences of cultivating desire and attachment that took place during the processes of collaboration and workshopping that marked my fieldwork. I argue that a politicalised desire, a formalised state of attachment to liberation, is constituted by the imagination but also reproduces processes of imagining through its existence in cultural production. Cultural objects are both the products of and the initiators of imaginative processes, containing the desires and flows of intensity that marked their inception.

This thesis asks both what political actors desire and what they struggle against. For my purposes, "liberation" or "a liberatory set of social relations" names an ongoing state in which the global means of social organisation are fundamentally collective and communistic in nature without symbolic or actual borders *or* forms of containment. Landscapes in which private property and business have been abolished and the flow of capital ended, a condition that recognises that human beings are essentially and ontologically, social beings whose needs can and must be met socially through radical institutions and networks of interdependence. In the semi-structured participant interviews conducted during my fieldwork[30], I asked interviewees to define their understanding of three key terms: freedom, liberation and revolution. My own conception of liberation is drawn from theories emergent from national liberation struggles[31] as well as the transnational black radical movements of the 20th century[32], especially from feminist figures who stressed the importance of critical attention to the economic subject position of women workers. Whilst "liberation" is not a condition or site that can be neatly defined – instead

[30] The theoretical and methodological grounding for these interviews is explored in detail in Chapter Two.
[31] By "national liberation struggles," I refer to the theories, processes of decolonisation, resistance movements and anti-colonial struggle that took place across African countries such as Malawi, Kenya and Ghana emerging in part from the influence of the seven Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1994. For more, see George Padmore, ed., *History of the Pan-African Congress 1903-1959: Colonial and Coloured unity, a Programme of Action.* (London: Hammersmith Books, 1963).
[32] By "Black radical social movements" I refer to the advent of the Black radical tradition across Europe and America, as represented by radical participants of The Black Panthers and various Black Feminist and queer grassroots formations whose Marxist, anti-imperialist analysis of race, class and gender created a new paradigm for understanding the nature of resistance.

a shifting and malleable political goal, a material condition that emerges through fierce debate, global struggle, dissent, riot, vanguardism, armed struggle and united-front organising – I follow Claudia Jones in her assessment that, "big capital accelerates its reactionary ideological offensive against the people with forcible opposition to [Black] women's social participation for peace and for her pressing economic and social demands" (Jones 1950) and thus an assessment of the position of Black and racialised women workers is crucial to any liberation struggle. I follow Richard Bernstein in his assertion that for Fanon, the aim of any liberation movement is to "destroy cycles of violence and counterviolence" (Bernstein 2013, 124). I understand liberation then, as a relational condition in which such cycles of violence, initiated by capitalism, have been destroyed. To follow Kimarley Chevannes, liberation is, "ongoing struggle. Its finality lies in its activeness" (Chevannes 2022, 76). A condition that has been fought for using multiple, overlapping and sometimes opposing political methods. It might emerge at different places on the earth at different times, its asynchronicity is a key feature.

It is also possible to name a "liberatory posture" or "orientation" in which individuals and collectives are driven to address the problems caused by racial capitalism. I understand "racial capitalism", the phenomena that political actors in this project oppose or desire against, using Gilmore's (2020) assertion that it is "not a thing, but a relation," one that names the differences between those who own the means of production and those whose labour is exploited to maintain this ownership as, following Cedric Robinson (2000), a specifically racial practice. I expand Robinson's notion using Bhattacharya's 10 theses on racial capitalism, in which they argue that racial capitalism,

> is a way of understanding the role of racism in enabling key moments of capitalist development – it is not a way of understanding capitalism as a racist conspiracy or racism as a capitalist conspiracy… What we seek to understand is the place of racialisation in particular instances of capitalist formation and most of all when those instances are now (Bhattacharya 2018, IX).

I note that it is possible for one to orientate themselves against racial capitalism without providing a roadmap for liberation. Much of the material I analyse in this thesis emerges from campaigning groups whose focus on local issues did not include an outline of their conception of a liberated condition. But their efforts might still be understood using the notion of a liberatory resistant posture, rather than mistaken for liberalism. I read their efforts in light of Black Studies scholar Charisse Burden-Stelley's insistence on the necessity of joining

revolutionary organisations as a means of building affirming mass struggle against capitalistic forces of violence. She writes,

> one of the questions I am asked most frequently on social media, in course lectures, and during question & answer sessions is some variation of "what is to be done?" And, my most fervent response is to join an organization, contribute to that organization, and strive to embody and concretize its ethics and principles (Burden Stelley, 2022).

My theorisation of "liberation" is inseparable from the numerous modes of materialist struggle (historically and geographically bound) that enable and have enabled the articulation of political demands from the masses. In this thesis, I suggest that if liberation is an ongoing state, then its drivers and markers are present in the here and now and that shoring up imaginative capacity in the face of political impasse is one means of cultivating a sensitivity to those markers, of exercising the desires that might enable political subjects to engage in resistant action.

For my purposes, I also define "revolution" as the processes which constitute political transformation through strategic planning or spontaneous revolt, such processes have occurred throughout history and in the present and are not contained by stages, cycles and other straightforwardly linear frames. "Revolution" would seek, as communist philosopher Søren Mau argues, to

> [bring] basic conditions of the life of society… under democratic control. The state would be abolished, all private companies would be dissolved, and all privately owned means of production—land, buildings, machines, etc.—as well as the wealth of the upper class would be expropriated (Mau, 2023).

It would require, as George Jackson notes, "an analysis of both the economic motives and the psycho-social motives which perpetuate the oppressive contract" (Jackson 1990, 185). This thesis argues that such conditions do not and will not unfold neatly and have been fought for by political subjects since time immemorial. In crafting a multi-valent understanding of liberation and revolution, as a feminist thinker and scholar, I infuse these assertions with the (dismissively labelled) "utopian" assessments made by my feminist contemporaries: abolitionist Sophie Lewis for example, whose Marxism is contoured, rightly, by an insistence on the queer, pleasurable, loving, and sensuous elements of social life that a profit-driven, neoliberal age denies. In response to the "collective turn-off" reflected in mainstream discourses regarding sex and sexuality under capitalism, she writes,

> axiomatically, a basic condition of possibility for the collective turn-on would be communal luxury, which is to say, the manifestation of the principle 'everything for everyone': prison abolition, universal leisure, free abortion on demand, no borders, liberation from the wage relation, and ecological abundance (Lewis, 2020).

These notions provide a starting point for understanding that neither revolution nor liberation are fixed states defined by a clear set of parameters. In terms of defining "freedom," Rinaldo Walcott's conception of freedom provides firm theoretical guidance for the term's usage in this project, he writes,

> freedom resists guarantees of comportment. I define freedom as ways of being human in the world that exist beyond the realm of the juridical and that allow for bodily sovereignty. I argue that freedom marks an individual and a collective desire to be *in common* and in difference in a world that is non-hierarchical and nonviolent. It marks, as well, the social, political, and imaginative conditions that make possible multiple ways of being in the world (Walcott 2021, 2).

I follow his persistence in defining freedom beyond judicial limits and beyond the terms of the world as it is currently organised. Walcott's notion of a collective desire to be *in common* is of particular importance to my theoretical frame as it emphasises that a core pillar of liberalism, the notion of "individual freedom", is a contradiction in terms. Collaboration and attempts to be and remain in common have been central to the completion of this thesis, and are explored in Chapters Two, Three and Five as well as this thesis' conclusion.

Finally, the central phrase in this thesis is resistance. At multiple points, I refer to "resistant movements" and "acts of resistance." I use this term understanding the vexed debates about the replacement of "revolution" (read: united-front struggle sustained over long time periods) with "resistance" (read: localised, spontaneous, 'everyday' forms of change) as a means dampening oppressed subjects' capacity to radically change their conditions. Whilst I find this argument compelling, I reject the formulation that the use of the term resistance compromises the revolutionary subject. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, I use the term to demarcate revolutionary action, action that tries to overthrow dominant power from action that simply enacts a refusal against dominant power. I understand resistance using a Gramscian frame of counterhegemony; resistance names individual and collective acts of opposition in which acts of civil and organisational disobedience form part of what Gramsci calls the war of position, the struggle to produce a counter-hegemonic influence through collective, indirect, everyday

and diffused forms of power (Gramsci, 1992). Wars of position exist alongside revolutionary forms of violence via direct confrontation which he calls, wars of manoeuvre (Gramsci, 1992). In this formulation, revolutionary forms of violence form one part of a wider strategy for resistance, there are multiple tools available to the political subject in the process of attaining freedom. My aim in briefly defining these terms and tracing their theoretical grounding is to demonstrate that materialist political demands related to the conditions of life must work in tandem with an understanding of the role that desire and affect play in the iterative approach and multiplicity of strategies, actions, frames and forms of critical analysis that will constitute liberated conditions.

**Defining the imagination: purpose, potential and prefiguration**

It is near impossible to provide a single taxonomy of the imagination. Because of its boundless scope, it is by nature, theoretically elusive. Peter Strawson (1978) argues that the terms "image" "imagine" and "imagination" make up a diverse and scattered family, the members of which cannot be easily identified. In common parlance, the imagination is understood as the process of conjuring that which does not exist – presently or subjectively. It involves an engagement with the facets of the mind, a projection of futurity that is made possible by creativity. Historically, the imagination has been theorised as a form of escape (a necessary endeavour in a world with structural limits) or as a fundamentally human activity; a type of thinking that is proof of ontology. Scholarship about the imagination spans a number of academic fields, each with their own understanding of the relation between the self and mind, the "real" and the "not real" and the social, historical and biochemical stages involved in the process of imagining. Amy Kind and Peter Kung note that for David Hume, the imagination was *the* representational faculty, for him, "most kinds of thinking, including reasoning and understanding are aspects or features of the imagination." (Kind and Kung 2016, 9). Other Enlightenment and rationalist thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza and René Descartes developed imagistic conceptions of the imagination, arguing that the process of imagining was tied to the creation of mental images which made objects present to the subject (Kind and Kung, 2016). For them, the imagination was not a source of knowledge as it stood in opposition to the primacy of rational insight, opposed to logic and reason. Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) distinguish three types of imagination: *the creative* (an unconventional combination of ideas), *the sensory* (the act of perceiving in the absence of stimuli) and the *recreative* (the ability to think about the world in a different way than is presented). Kind and Peter Kung (2016) suggest the irreconcilability

between a transcendent use of the imagination, which enables the individual to escape reality and an instructive use of the imagination, the ability to learn about the world as it has been presented to you. If the imagination is the abstract site in which imagining occurs, it is a vehicle for *doing*. It is this *doing,* imagining as an action and process that I wish to turn my attention to.

This thesis understands the imagination as a psychosocial site in which the process of bringing that which does not previously exist into being is enacted and as a teleological pool from which cultural producers, artists and organisers draw on for a variety of purposes. By "teleological" I mean to suggest that the imagination can only be defined by its purpose or usage. To the extent that this thesis attempts to "define" the imagination, it does so through an investigation of its usage by political subjects. I name those members of the Brixton Black Women's Group and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, as well as present day organising formations such as Black Lives Matter UK and Sisters Uncut as four examples of individuals and collectives who continually draw on this teleological pool, whose use of the imagination to shape political demands gives it both purpose and definition.

To concretely define the imagination is to place a limit on its potential to shatter, change and reshape meaning. I am less interested in a firm definition of what constitutes "imagining" than the purpose and consequences of imaginative thinking and the purposes it serves in resistant movements and the material they produce. I instead aim to pinpoint the exact location of what I have tentatively termed, "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" as it resides in cultural objects. By this phrase, I mean the process of the imagination being utilised for resistant or revolutionary ends; when the imagination meets the seriousness of politicalised desire for transformation. The word "potential" here is intended to indicate the boundless, expansive nature of prospective and as yet unrealised futures. So that, "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" is the vehicle through which political actors generate the capacity to conceive of liberated futures, this capacity is contained inside the cultural objects they create in the process of resistant action.

Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is an affective phenomenon that results from the synthesis of the imagination and politicised desire. By "politicised desire" I refer to individual and collective states of attachment to a set of material conditions that might bring about liberation, revolution and or/ freedom. For example, a political actor might be "galvanised" "motivated" "moved" by forms of radical cultural production, forming a state of attachment which creates the impetus for them to make a resistant intervention inside an oppressive social landscape. In

the process of that material resistance, they might themselves produce cultural objects using their imagination (a manifesto, a placard, a video, a visual work) intended for a number of purposes: political education, the expression of strategic goals, the expression of feelings in relation to the process of resistance. That cultural object bears traces of the imaginative processes (the flows of intensity) that created it. "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" might be expressed through content, form or style; through the smallest detail of a cultural object, for example, its use of language and phrasing. The creative elements of this thesis as well as the chapters that critically analyse cultural objects intend to examine and showcase the affects released when cultural objects are creatively engaged as well as investigate the use and purpose of the imagination in the creation and reception of those objects. I suggest that engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential produces and reproduces the impetus to resist oppressive material conditions as well as aids the creation of a liberatory structure of feeling against the notion of political impasse. It is both a driver of (the constitutive *force* of creation) and a result of (the *consequence* of creation) forms of radical cultural production. This thesis argues that engaging with the affective framework that Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential provides might help bypass affective immobility and stasis by warping and distorting linear temporality.

Understanding Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential means understanding cultural objects as the result of the contexts in which they were birthed; so that a manifesto, a party programme, a diary entry, a placard, a sign – several of the forms of archival material that come under my investigation in this thesis – contain in them the specific strategic, transformative, political goals and "hopes" that defined their inception. On the question of hope, José Muñoz' work alerts us to the centrality of hope in queer futurity. Expanding on Ernest Bloch's distinction between abstract and concrete utopias, he writes, "Concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential…. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope" (Muñoz 2019, 42). Muñoz's hope is grounded, strategic, requiring a commitment to enduring indeterminacy. Though this project remains critical of frameworks of hope, Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is related to a method of sustained political determination underpinned by the affective power that critical hope offers, a concretised method for accessing the impetus to resist even when a one-time victory over the oppressive forces that govern social life is not promised.

I suggest that the relationship between the imagination and resistance is one of co-constitution;

resistant demands arise from the process of imagining and the imagination helps to shape and contour resistant demands. By "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" then, I also mean a substance that is closely linked to utopian thinking. When Robin Kelley writes,

"Call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds," (Kelley 2002, 2) he suggests that the Freedom Dream emerges from a desire for more than the present moment can offer. So too does Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, which might be understood as a cousin to the freedom dream. Whilst revolutionary dreams "erupt out of political engagement" (Kelley 2002, 8), Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is birthed in the planning stages of transformative collective action, it challenges the diagram that precedes oppressive structures (as defined by Deleuze) in the planning stages. It is the capacity that caused the action or thought (captured in archival material) that intends to bring about a new set of transformations and/or political evolutions. It can be tapped into or creatively engaged by spectators, other organisers, researchers. From it, we can launch an investigation of the aims, methods and intentions of resistant actions and movements.

In his assessment of the Black radical imagination, Kelley (2002) goes on to state, "sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imagination inert" (Kelley 2002, 11). I share this concern as a researcher, that the mundanity of the everyday, the totalising nature of the quotidian under capitalism turns the imagination into a phenomenon to be denigrated and mystified as immaterial and fantastic. I mean to draw the substantive connection between the imagination and resistant acts which attempt to improve material conditions to emphasise the possibility of liveable life. This project breaks with conservative theorisations of the imagination which relegate it to a consequence of the physic life of the individual in order to clarify its position in political struggle and to understand it as a phenomenon with affective consequences: as a fire which continues to burn despite all attempts to extinguish it.

**Cultural production as a marker of freedom**

In her essay, *The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labour*, Marina Vishmidt traces the ways artistic autonomy has become a "style" that positions art as a refined "consumption of objects and social relations, whose relationship to art's heteronomous

conditions of existence must be disavowed" (Vishmidt 2020, 68). That is, forms of cultural production, are no longer read as a consequence of labour, turning the "artist [into] a figure exempt from the relations of exploitation that obtain elsewhere in society" (Vishmidt 2020, 68). Vishmidt argues that the exemption of the artist in this way serves the "automism of capital as engine for accumulation and self-valorisation that both includes and expels 'alien' labour" (Vishmidt 2020, 68). I follow her assessment of the aesthetic subject and their production – this thesis' focus on cultural production attempts, in part, to remedy this trend by recognising cultural production as the result of imaginative and physical labour initiated by artists, cultural workers and organisers. I suggest that a theorisation of the uses of imagination in cultural production is impossible without a recognition of the artist/cultural producer/organiser as a worker whose labour is not exempt from or elevated above oppressive material conditions. It also requires a reconceptualisation of what counts as an art object which I attempt in this section. This thesis orientates itself against a definition of art through what Vishmidt calls, "the heteronomy of the market" (Vishmidt 2020, 68) towards the study of cultural objects produced in the process of resistance as artistic objects with explicit insurrectionary intent.

My research places a great deal of faith in the capacity for non-human objects to generate action. This is because it is primarily interested in the object's relationship to the political subject. In suggesting that engagement with cultural objects produces liberatory affective resonances, throughout this project, I theorise cultural objects as agential phenomena with materialist consequences. By "materialist consequences" I mean that the affects co-produced by the encounters and other zones of contact between a cultural object and an individual or collective, lead to, or else, aid the reproduction of forms of critical analysis that elucidate the workings of oppressive material conditions and facilitate real-world resistance to them. They provide an engine for a dialectical approach in which the internal contradictions of a social landscape are made more apparent by virtue of how the individual or collective in question understands themselves in relation to the cultural object. It is not that merely "touching" an object brings an individual closer to the forms of Imaginative Revolutionary Potential stored inside it but that a specific orientation towards the object; a mode of engagement that views the past, present and future as cotemporaneous and the object itself as capable of "speaking back" reshapes a structure of feeling that has been negatively defined by crisis.

Analysing feminist material culture, Bartlett and Henderson (2016) create a feminist system of objects that seeks to highlight the significance of "activist objects" to resistance movements

against gendered violence. Following Baudrillard's (1996) system of objects which identified the way in which objects are organised into a system of meanings based on their technical, subjective and ideological aspects under consumer capitalism, they categorise the four types of feminist object: "corporeal things, world-making things, knowledge and communicative things, and protest things" (Bartlett and Henderson 2016, 162). They argue that feminist objects are intrinsically activist objects, writing "the women's movement remade and invented objects to make feminist things happen" (Bartlett and Henderson 2016, 159). I follow their belief in the political agency of *things* and the notion that the things we use and create in the process of resistance tell us something about our own intentions, beliefs, desires and political visions. I follow Gell (1998) in the assertion that artifacts are social agents and that objectification in artefact form is how social agency manifests and realises itself via the proliferation of human fragments in the things we create. Objects tell us about ourselves, we need them. Parts of us are projected onto and imprinted in them. What we create in the process of resistance contain the affects and Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that ignited that process. This project holds that objects have the ability to disrupt orders of continuity produced by traditional historiographical account and linear temporality, producing affective encounters that enable a perception of the world in which individuals are free and interconnected, needs are met socially and autonomy and self-determination are crucial.

To break with Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) scientific classification of the production of meaning via art, I understand "cultural production" to extend beyond simply fields of art, visual culture and literature. Whilst I follow his idea that cultural production emerges from fields of power defined by capital and its relationship to consumption, my own understanding of cultural production is more broadly interested in the notion that cultural production refers to processes of making that play some role in the creation of social meaning. By "social meaning," I am referring to the public arena of culture that relates to the non-scientific aspects of human life. In the *Field of Cultural Production,* Bourdieu does not disqualify political material from the scope of the cultural field. He writes,

> the space of literary or artistic position-takings, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field - literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements. manifestoes or polemics, etc. - is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital (Bourdieu 1993, 30).

Here he points out that forms of cultural production exist in relation to fields of power that are defined by small-scale and large-scale production. In short, art and literature are not transcendental "cultural" forces, they are firmly situated in a socio-economic space that produces their meaning and dictates their importance and relevance at any given moment. By utilising a broader understanding of cultural production, I extend my analysis beyond the scope of art and literature and the cultural spheres that define them toward forms of direct action, pamphlet writing, placards, posters, manifestos, and so on as social processes that might not otherwise be understood constituting the cultural field or register as artistic. The goal is to provide a theoretical framework that is capable of reading political action as artistic practice, redefining "art-making" for my purposes to relate to *any* socially based small and large scale production that attempts to cultivate material freedom. Though this thesis focuses on archival emphera, I note that direct-action and other politicised undertakings are also forms of cultural production. The value of this approach is the refusal to reify a distinction between "art" and "politics" and instead to focus attention on how the amorphous notion we call "culture" is made up of several categories. I summarise this position in my work, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (2021) in which I state, "put simply, political organisers are art-markers; they work in search of other temporalities, unrestrained existence; they have sworn allegiance to fecundity" (Olufemi 2021, 115).

I have chosen, almost exclusively, to interview participants engaged in political organising, including direct action and respond to material that takes up questions of political struggle, freedom, liberation and revolution through critiques of the state because the imagination exercised in these instances (ephemeral and otherwise) is concerned with actively reconstituting social life rather than simply merely wishing that it could be different. My area of interest is in cultural production that lays its political intentions bare and is made with the express purpose of galvanising, teaching or facilitating agency in political subjects in a world that strips them of it.

**Commonality and interdependence**

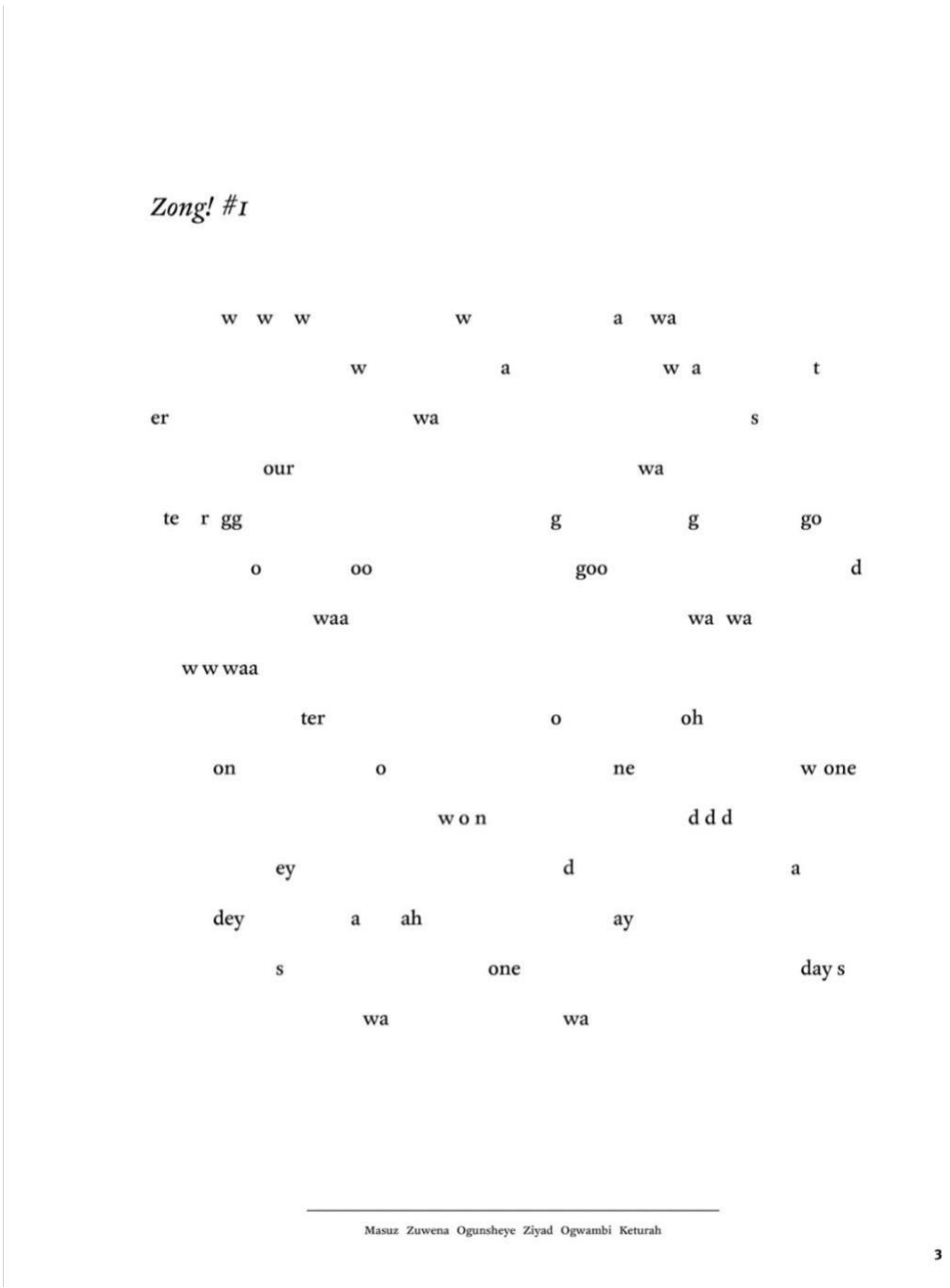
Throughout this project, including the final chapter, concepts of commonality and interdependence are evoked as an analytical frame for thinking about the role of the imagination in sustaining resistance to capitalist crisis. I aim to create zones of contact that demonstrate how comparative analyses of cultural objects and the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in

them can highlight the interdependence of political claims across temporal borders. My method, explored in detail in the following chapter, is centred on touch. I do not want this to be an individual act performed by researchers who work in isolation. To touch is to place oneself in contact with something else for the purposes of discovery. A desire for relation creates the impetus to touch and collaborate and to be, as Walcott (2021) suggests, in common. In their work, *The Force of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind,* Judith Butler (2020) attempts to make the case for a new bodily ontology, an understanding of a collectively shared bodily condition, which becomes vulnerable when violence is enacted upon it. They use this conception to strengthen calls for non-violence. I vehemently reject non-violence as a political framework but utilise this theorisation of the ontological to situate my understanding of interdependence for the purposes of this project. Interdependence marks the lack of possibility of the self without the other, arguing that the two are connected and fundamentally necessary to sustain life. I argue that this new understanding of bodily ontology is cultivated through the processes of resistance which are constituted by the imagination. In resisting, (purposefully creating opposition between the shared self and the external, economic, political and/or social threat), a sense of the shared body is affirmed. As part of the interviews, forms of visual and discourse analysis, critical fabulation and the creative practice submission that forms the basis of this project, I have tried where possible to work in common and to invite others to respond, challenge and expand my political and creative practice as a way to rehearse inhabiting a collective body.

**The text as object: the role of experimentation**

As my own creative practice relates specifically to narrative, this thesis provides the opportunity to evidence my subversion of alphanumeric code as well as temporal and disciplinary boundaries through form. In playing with aesthetic representations of text on the page, in writing in the margins, colouring pages, embedding creative writing between chapters, (putting words where they otherwise do not belong) I aim to make visible and bypass the conventions that dictate the presentation of ideas in academia. NourbeSe Phillips' *Zong!* (2021), a book-length poetic meditation on the violence inherent to enslavement, Anne Boyer's *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* (2018) a book of fragmented creative non-fiction pieces which interrogate time, love, morality, and worker's movements as well as Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* (2023), a compendium of quotidian notes on memory, loss, pain and care provide the impetus for my stylistic choices. To engage with Sharpe, Phillips and Boyer's work is to recognise how the deliberate choices they make with regards to form add affective texture. Phillips' work is

haunted, it refuses to engage with the traditional performances of legibility that make a text a text. Boyer's fragments rearrange history into a series of isolated musings whose politicised sincerity elevate them beyond aphorism to dictum. Sharpe's use of fragmentation, her tracing of etymological ruptures, her love-laced recalling of familial memories refuses the tyranny of totality at every turn of the page. I take from all three writers the notion that there are endless possibilities for the presentation of a text on the page. I aim, where possible, to transform this thesis into an art object by playing with form, spacings, and aesthetic formation as a means of conveying information and critical analysis.


Zong! #1
w w w w a wa
w a w a t
er wa s
our wa
te r gg g g go
o oo goo d
waa wa wa
w w waa
ter o oh
on o ne w one
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ey d a
dey a ah ay
s one day s
wa wa
Masuz Zuwena Ogunsheye Ziyad Ogwambi Keturah
3

Figure 1.

# No

History is full of people who just didn't. They said *no thank you,* turned away, escaped to the desert, lived in barrels, burned down their own houses, killed their rapists, pushed away dinner, meditated into the light. Even babies refuse, and the elderly also. Animals refuse: at the zoo they gaze through Plexiglas, fling feces at human faces. Classes refuse. The poor throw their lives onto barricades, and workers slow the line. Enslaved people have always refused, poisoning the feasts and aborting the embryos, and the diligent, flamboyant jaywalkers assert themselves against traffic as the first and foremost visible daily lesson in *just not.*

9

Figure 2.

NOTE 114

It is 1928. In the photograph my mother is five years old, and she is dressed for Halloween. The photographer was her stepfather. It is my mother's hands in the photograph that constitute what Roland Barthes called the punctum—that detail, "*that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).*"[114]

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Figure 3.

My use of critical fabulation, interspersed throughout my thesis, aims to draw on archival material in order to rearrange narrative, explicate moments and quotidian occurrences that aim to expand imaginative capacity, unsettle temporality and produce desires for liberation. In *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman examines the presence of Venus in archives related to Atlantic Slavery, she proposes critical fabulation as a means of mediating this presence, writing,

> the method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation. "Fabula" denotes the basic elements of the story, the building blocks of the narrative. A fabula, according to Mieke Bal, is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. (They are not necessarily human.) To act is to cause or experience and event." By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by representing the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardise the status of the event, to displace the received or authorised account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done (Hartman 2008, 11).

I situate my work in this stylistic legacy, rearranging the events of history related to key figures and political organisations engaged in resistance, in order to displace the received account (the linear and historiographical account) in favour of an affective account – one that moves my reader toward resistant action through its utilisation of the imagination. The rationale behind the fusion of creative writing with academic investigation is to fully display the range of literary methods that one might utilise for the purpose of imaginative thinking. Here, I am tentatively guided by Keats' notion of "Negative Capability", that is, "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 1958, 22). The displays of critical fabulation in this thesis resist the desire for order, fact and reason, emerging from the somewhat unknowable dimensions of creativity. I intend to illustrate how material from the archive might be tampered with, elaborated on and disrupted via the use of fabulation for the purpose of displacing the authority of oppressive force and the linear temporality it replicates. I aim to describe the stuff of the future using elements of the past. In the space created in these moments, in the sharp juxtaposition between theoretical analysis and creative transmogrification, a temporal break occurs. I open up a space for the reader to float, to remain suspended in timelessness. This temporal break might also point to the power of cultural objects to transport us. I want to ask, not only what would happen if we, following Campt, "[recalibrated] vernacular photographs as quiet quotidian practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects" (Campt 2017, 5) but also what forms of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential might be unlocked if we used them as creative prompts.

My use of critical fabulation emerges from an interest in the generative nature of speculative approaches. When justifying the speculative mode as practiced by Saidiya Hartman (2008), Tavia Nyong'o (2019) writes,

> such black feminist and posthumanist acts of speculation are never simply a matter of inventing tall tales from whole cloth. More nearly, they are the tactical fictionalizing of a world that is, from the point of view of black social life, already false (Nyong'o 2019, 6).

Indeed, the premise of my research builds on the idea that to engage with the possibilities of imaginative thinking is to recognise the condition of social life, the current temporal moment and the linear narrative of history as a falsity. This clears space to understand that the fabula (the sequence of events that makes up a core narrative) of historical record is not an absolute truth. From this, a myriad of alternative narratives are ready to be born. Neither seeking to counter

existing narratives or replace them, fabulation offers the ability to use fiction to expose what Nyong'o, borrowing from Tracy Chapman argues is, "the fiction in the space between, the lines on the page and memories"(Chapman 2000). Nyong'o takes from Bergson to argue,

> more nearly, fabulation engages the philosophical position, identified by Henri Bergson among other modern theorists, that the irreversibility of the flow of time is the paradoxical source of freedom. Fabulation points to the deconstructive relation between story and plot (Nyong'o 2019, 3).

Nyong'o uses Bergson's notion of "duration" to ground his understanding of what he terms "Afro-fabulations." Afro-fabulation participates in duration or "tenseless" time, in which the space between the present and the future is opened up for the purposes of fugitivity and rebellion. Nyong'o's Afro-Fabulations via performance studies are another grounding force in my own research. His analysis reminds me that fabulation needn't be sequestered to the realm of the literary; it might be enacted via quotidian performative gestures, "queer shade" and other actions or processes that act as experiments in resistance from Black and minoritarian subjects. We might, for example, understand forms of political action – direct action which seeks to intervene in capitalist landscapes, as a type of fabulation. A reinvention of the old order.

Henri Bergson's (2004) conceptual investigation of the "real" and the "possible" also shapes my deployment of critical fabulation and my desire to play with the presentation of my thesis. Bergson critiques the philosophical notion that there is less in the idea of "possibility" than there is in the "real," introducing the notion of the virtual to counter this via an examination of memory. Bergson's analysis suggests that temporal moments are not simply successive processes but rather exist contemporaneously. Indeed, he argues that there is more in the concept of the "possible" than that of the "real" and that the "real" is deferred to simply because, as Bluemink argues,

> we conceptualise the negation of the real and project it into a past where the real did not exist. The real, therefore, is mistakenly seen as the possible with the additional quality of existence, implying that the real has more in it than the possible (Bluemink 2020).

Deleuze (1997) expands this following Bergson, arguing that virtuality is opposed to the actual, just as possibility is opposed to the real. Virtuality is an ideal aspect of reality that is not actual (concretely existing) but real. Deleuze builds a critique of philosophy's real-possible distinction, arguing that this distinction suggests that everything that is real must be possible and provides no answer for why that which is possible has not come into existence. He suggests that whilst

the virtual and the actual are fully real, the "possible" is not real. My attempts at critical fabulation in this thesis are situated in the realm of the virtual rather than the realm of possibility, the events I will conjure are "real" and yet not actual (concretely existing). I am interested in how grounding my writing practice in the virtual might expose the limits of political demands in our current landscape. A linear order based on the idea that everything that is real must also be possible dismisses that which it deems "impossible" as not real. To stay with impossibility aesthetically through fabulation and attempt to recreate ideal aspects of reality is to suggest that the impossible is still real even if it is not yet actual (concretely existing) and that it is a substance we can use to build on in order to actualise our political visions. I wish for my experiments in fabulation to reaffirm the existence of other temporalities, desires and political demands I will explore as real *and* as capable of being actualised. Bluemink (2020) suggests that "Actualisation is therefore not the becoming-real of possibilities, but the becoming-actual of the virtual which coexists alongside it." My use of critical fabulation seeks to temporarily materialise the unreal, demonstrating that it is not, in fact, impossible.

**What are we attached to?**

I end this chapter, which has attempted to elucidate the theoretical framework of this project with regard to neoliberal crisis and conjuncture, history, temporality, topology, capitalism, political movements, aesthetics, the imagination and Imaginative-Revolutionary potential by reflecting on my theoretical attachment to cultural objects. I characterise the cultural objects that come under my analysis in this project as fundamentally responsive. They represent forms of production that are preoccupied with alleviating urgent material crisis and theoretical queries about the world as is. They seek to open up new spaces to consider the question: *what do we do with a world built on dispossession, misery, extractive labour and coercive forms of violence?* Embedded inside them are forms of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that make known collective dissatisfaction with structural power and more urgently provide direct opposition to it where possible. In many ways, the artists and organisers that come under my analysis are breaking the contract that keeps them bound to this social world.

Berlant's (2011) writing on optimistic attachments to objects of desire that are not good for us is crucial to this analytical observation. They note how many people cling to conceptions of the "good life" that are actually mired in crisis because severing their optimistic attachment to this promise might cause them harm. These relations of cruel optimism are actually "an obstacle to

one's flourishing" (Berlant 2011, 1). Their concern is the role of fantasy as a delusion that sustains attachments to promises that might never come true. They note,

> why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies—say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work—when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds? Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealising theories and tableaux about how they and the world "add up to something." What happens when those fantasies start to fray—depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash? (Berlant 2011, 2)

I use Berlant here to signal how the cultural production I analyse breaks with cruelly optimistic attachments and the fantasies that sustain them. They actively embrace the "fray" and answer their question about what comes next – grassroots political organisation and artmaking. Whilst Berlant seems to make no moral judgements about the aftermath of the severing of cruel attachments, I am interested in expressly political responses to the dissolution of said fantasies. What happens affectively and aesthetically when the "good life" is abandoned, and groups begin to make their way towards a different understanding of the present moment? Berlant notes how an interrogation of the production of the present is crucial in any analysis of how it comes to be understood as a drawn-out process of "animated suspension"(Berlant 2011, 5), "*Cruel Optimism* turns toward thinking about the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on" (Berlant 2011, 8). Whilst they believe fundamentally that all attachments are optimistic and that attachment is the structure of relationality, they argue that the imposition of temporal genres in the process of historicisation extinguishes the potential for events to unfold in multiple directions, thus cruel attachments to the way things are emerge. This is a central question in my own research. In attempting, elsewhere in this thesis, to contextualise the political environment of Thatcherite governance (1979-1990) as well as the decades defined by austerity (2010-present) in the United Kingdom, I have tried to give my readers some sense of *how* the present moment is being continually reproduced such that it becomes impossible to see through. My commitment to temporal disorder in allowing "past" material to meet the "present" is an attempt to bypass the exceptionalism embedded in the concept of impasse and lubricate temporal genres. If it feels as if we are at an impasse presently, hasn't this always been the case? Are we the only people to have lived through a drawn out present? In attempting to define and locate Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, I am interested in Berlant's idea of living on despite an ordinary that is shaped by crisis. One question marks

my analysis: how is cultural production evidence of a certain kind of persistence in the face of crisis? How does the imagination serve as an engine for this persistence? How do we, "those people you would think of as defeated" (Berlant 2011, 10) go on living, resisting and keeping each other alive *in spite* of the violence that abounds?

# CHAPTER TWO: MY METHOD BEGINS WITH WHAT I CAN TOUCH[33]

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[33] ***Notes on the qualitative***

*1. My embrace of qualitative methods, punctuated by critical fabulation and creative analysis reflects my belief in what Aimé Césaire (1990) calls the power of "poetic knowledge." The language and register of my analysis skirts the non-academic in order to engage the poetic knowledge that gives theoretical intervention its force. I relinquish an academic register and reach for other creative modes of communication, using aesthetics to represent my attempts to warp and deform linear temporality. A topological approach acknowledges the power of poetic knowledge. It uses creativity to modify the diagrammatic nature of clock-time by embracing the ameliorative potential of fabulation, dialogic process and unconventional analysis, resulting in the ability to map anti-hegemonic desire across time. Césaire proposes that "the poetic process is a naturalising process operating under the dementia impulse of the imagination" (Césaire 1990, 55). I want my work to be infused with this naturalising process, for my methods to bring forth and cultivate the grandeur of the imagination, aesthetically and textually. I wish to elucidate nuance, colour, as well as the intangibility of desire and feeling. It is impossible to seriously engage the faculties of the imagination by adhering to the grammatical, presentational and methodological conventions of academic writing.*

*2. I follow Jack Halberstam (1998) when he critiques quantitative methods in relation to the study of sexuality. He writes, "At least one method of sex research that I reject in creating a queer methodology is the traditional social science project of surveying people and expecting to squeeze truth from raw data" (Halberstam 1998, 10). I do not wish to extract truth from data or attempt to create anything approaching a general or scientific overview of relevant material related to my research questions. My critique of quantitative methods is that they purport to provide a total picture but remain incomplete in their ability to represent "the dementia impulse of the imagination" and related concepts (Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential). At every juncture, these concepts resist totality in favour of fragmentation and rhizomatic representation. It is impossible to access the imagination quantitatively; this chapter proposes that the imagination can only be engaged using methods that infuse theoretical analysis with forms of creativity; this infusion through touch as a methodology.*

*Césaire writes,*

> *In short, scientific knowledge enumerates, measures, classifies and kills… But it is not sufficient to state that scientific knowledge is summary. It is necessary to add that it is*

> *poor and half-starved… to acquire the impersonality of scientific knowledge man-kind depersonalized itself, deindividualized itself (Césaire 1990, 42).*

*As a writer and curator, I refuse to depersonalise myself or those I research. I began this process, driven by Paul Feyerabend's provocative slogan articulated in his critique of traditional scientific methods – "The only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes" (Feyerabend 1993, 14). I read this, as Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vaden do, as the "ultimate recognition that things must stay open and potential" (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2014, 5). If my method appears intensely personal, it is because it has been shaped by my personal-political concerns in relation to the real possibility of liberation for human beings, personal concerns that I refuse to present as "objective." I began building my methodology around the belief that I need not over-justify my intuitive engagement with archival material and the research findings that emerged from archival visits, interviews and experiments with fabulation in order to appease the neoliberal university.*

*3. Qualitative methods incorporate space for failure and mistake. Where an error in quantitative terms is enough to render entire sets of data useless or unusable; qualitative methods produce results (transcripts, fiction, visual and textual landscapes) that embrace error and "wrongness," leaving room for surprise. They create the possibility for endless iteration (the ability for the artist-researcher to build on the error and produce playful experiments.) I linger here to emphasise that methodological failure and mistake are crucial in unsettling stabilised temporal regimes and enabling the imagination to expand. If the imagination and the methods for its cultivation and critical analysis cannot be exhausted, then my method is always evolving, using failure and mistake as the basis for new interventions.*

*3. The necessity of presenting my artistic process in a clear and concise methodological frame has placed significant limitations on this project and stands in opposition to the boundless nature of the imagination. I situate myself as an artist-researcher working inside the imperial core with specific experience of the British Higher Education System, the violent legacies of which cannot be ignored. This location has shaped the preoccupations with resistance that guide this project. My methodology develops from a critique of institutions as a Black feminist and communist. I understand the imagination as one resource that might be drawn upon to confront the strictures and ideological framing imposed by the university.*

*4. Finally, I emphasise the use of a qualitative approach to challenge the notion that "personal" methods (methods that are derived from the researchers personal/political/artistic interest) cannot be replicated by future researchers as easily as quantitative methods. Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden argue that the artistic-researcher has three jobs,*

> *first, they need to develop and perfect their own artistic craft, creativity and conceptual thinking by doing art and thinking (conceptualizing) art, that is, developing a personal vocabulary for speaking about art and its world. In addition, they have to contribute to academia and return something to their academic colleagues by proposing an argument in the form of a thesis, thus assisting in constructing the not yet very strong academic communities around artistic research. Third, they must communicate with practising artists and the larger public, performing what we could call 'audience education' (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2014, xi).*

*I take these articulated responsibilities seriously. It is in the conceptualisation of my artistic practice through the notion of touch that I intend to demonstrate how future researchers may also take up this method, amending it to address their own political and artistic concerns.*

Figure 4.

**Part One: Moving Towards**

*The point of an archive isn't just to be religious to the document and the fonds and the subsection; it's how do we use it, how does it function in the world? – Tej Adeleye, Interview Participant*

In crafting an approach to the archive to gather materials for this project, I performed an ambivalence to its supposed authority. I wandered into the archive with no preconceived notion of what I would find. During my fieldwork, I visited five archives based in London: The Bruce Castle Museum, The Feminist Library, The Black Cultural Archives, The London Metropolitan Archives and Lambeth Archives to gather material related to resistant anti-racist and feminist movements, without a specific time period in mind. I selected material related to the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (1978-82), communist/socialist community organisers Olive Morris and Sylvia Erike, The Lesbians and Policing Project (1985), OUTWRITE, a newspaper created by the Feminist News Group (1982-88), The Haringey Black Action Group (1987) a grassroots campaigning group for racialised queer people, The Brixton Black Women's Group (1973-85) and various grassroots organisations initiated by Guyanese Marxists Jessica and Eric Huntley. I collected images of over one hundred documents related to various groups and ad-hoc formations, intending to contrast them with the cultural production of present day anti-racist and feminist organising and artistic formations such as Sisters Uncut, curatorial duo Languid Hands as well as interview transcripts from eleven participants explored in detail in this chapter.

This thesis focuses on organisations, collectives and individuals based in the United Kingdom because the impasse which produces the affective environments of stasis to which this project responds is geographically anchored. I am interested in why the feeling of possibility seems so devoid from organising formations inside the United Kingdom (London specifically) as opposed to other social landscapes such as The United States and Latin America, in which, despite capitalist violence, resistance movements grow in strength and number. What is the specific condition of the United Kingdom's "carceral geography" – a term I borrow from Dominique Moran (2015) to denote the connection between oppressive material, spatial, and affective dynamics inside of any given place – that produce the feeling of political immobility? Despite my focus on the United Kingdom, the material that comes under my investigation demonstrates the transnational bonds that were and continue to be core to organising formations in the United Kingdom. As is explored in *FRAGMENT: "my capacity to love is my capacity to fight"* groups like OWAAD and The Brixton Black Women's Group operated using an explicitly transnational and solidaristic ethic which aligned workers struggle in the imperial core with the struggles of a growing wave of anti-imperialist struggle in Mozambique, Angola, Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Guinea-Bissau from 1970-80. Rather than narrow down the scope of this project, focusing on organisations whose politics defied the border helps further emphasise

how the imagination is concerned with the fundamental interdependence of people regardless of geographical location.

This chapter is split into two parts, part one examines the rationale and criteria that formed my methodological approach based on touch, including an investigation of the importance of affect theory to this project. Part two focuses specifically on the aesthetic logics behind the creation of my creative practice submission, an online assemblage entitled**, "THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE."** It demonstrates how the conceptual basis of touch as a methodology has informed the creative practice-based elements of this project and elaborates on its rationale. It is important to note that the scope of my research was narrowed by limitations that occurred because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. My engagement with archival material was shaped by political processes: for example, the systems of value that determined what kinds of material exist in any archive and my geographical and temporal location (material was gathered from archives in London in the present) as well as the organising forces of the border, capital, health and institutional barriers.

Rather than use archival material to build a narrative of resistant social movements from past to present, my methodological approach explicitly rejects modes of classification that seek to make archival material coherent through sequential ordering. It takes the notions explored in Chapter One: the need for an embrace of topological approach which distorts and warps spatial and affective orders, the necessity of engagement with what Deleuze (1997) termed the "virtual" (the real but not actual) and the questioning of linear temporality and incorporates them into a methodological frame. "Touch" requires a theoretical revaluation of the driving forces behind any appeal to order, it aims to scatter, seeking instead a mode of critical appraisal based on creative engagement with fragments from the archive. Rather than collapse material into a linear teleology, touch approaches the historical order imposed on archival material through a synthesis of non-rational registers of engagement: forces, resonances, extra-linguistic charges. Touch aids an investigation of the imagination because in line with my research questions, the enactment of the methods it encompasses (visual and discourse analysis, fabulation, workshopping, sound recordings) enables me to identify the visual and textual features of "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" and locate it in the cultural object. The enactment of a multi-dimension method allowed me to determine how the imagination is utilised to conceive of long and short term political demands of a group and the future. I crafted this method to

connect materialist cultural analysis of cultural objects with a topological and affective approach that bypasses the ordering force of history. I enact this methodology in subsequent chapters and *FRAGMENTS*. I approach and present material in no particular order, choosing instead to move from one temporal location to another through analysis of images, posters and cultural objects.

**The dimensions of touch**

As an official vehicle for the advancement of linear histories, institutional archives[34] are always already a political failure because their construction relies on procedures and processes resultant from state power. The narrative totality conferred by the archive presents a "version" of history that has been made whole via institutional legitimisation. My methodological approach seeks not only to undermine these processes but to bypass narrative totality through a focus on the fragmentation and scattering that results from touch. My method begins with what I can touch. What I can touch relates not only to what is within my physical reach, the cultural objects I can hold in my hand, touch is also a haptic register of affiliation: it alludes to material which in their style, form, content and aesthetic positioning, contain resonant forms of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that defy their temporal origins and articulate a desire for liberation. Touch moves beyond the materiality of physical encounter with archival material, it names a deeply politicised and creative *mode of engagement* that is dependent on the theoretical interests and embodied experience of the researcher. It can be initiated by the physical act of connecting one's hand with the cultural object, but it needn't always be initiated this way. Touch is enacted through the creation of a zone of contact between the researcher and cultural object(s) which enable forms of analysis (creative and theoretical) to take place using language, visuality or other methods pertinent to the researcher. In this thesis and the creative practice-based submission that accompanies it, "touch" occurs through discourse and visual analysis, critical fabulation, workshopping, interviews, the creation of an online visual assemblage and sound experiments. It is also enacted when cultural objects rub up against one another, enabling the researcher to conduct comparative analysis that draw out contradictions, strategic lessons and personal/political reflections.

In crafting a methodological approach to the archive then, I have chosen to "touch" because

[34] I define "institutional archives" as organisations specialising in the storage and maintenance of archival material that are subsidised by or receive public funding from the state and its funding bodies.

the act of touching belongs to the curious, wilful, unmanageable[35] – those who seek to destroy and resist forms of governing power. I take from Sedgwick the notion that,

> touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap or to enfold and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object (Sedgwick 2003, 14).

Following her, I note how touch muddles binary approaches with regard to the classification of cultural objects as agentic or non-agentic, extending their dimensions by demonstrating the complex life of the object. Touch as a haptic register does not assume that the object is in and of itself self-evident but instead notes the "other people or natural forces" that have produced it. This project's theorisation of touch as a radical approach centred on scattering and fragmentation as evidence of topological distortion also offers a more expansive understanding of the archive. As madison moore argues in their work on the relationship between queer nightlife and the archive, "perhaps a more capacious understanding of the archive would be one that includes those dark, unruly and unlikely sites that trade in voluminous and messy pleasures, fun and excess" (moore 2021, 191). Touch facilitates a more capacious understanding of the archive by treating the material it contains as oozing with pleasures, fun and excess that become visible through creative modes of engagement. I argue that touch and its effects can be a site of political transformation and temporal play through a serious engagement with affective possibility and Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential which alerts us to the use, purpose and location of the imagination as contained in cultural objects. My proclivity for touch emerges from an interest in examining the capacity for human beings to experience the effect of a force that emanates from objects. I wish to situate the cultural production that comes under my analysis in this thesis as one part of a forcefield of relations. These relations impact our understanding of the world, its limits, and its possibilities. I attempt to elucidate this forcefield to demonstrate *how* and *where* Imaginative Revolutionary Potential is stored.

[35] It must be noted that touching also has a long history as a haptic gesture which has aided and abetted spectacle, colonial encounter and violence. I do not mean to imply that touch is always emancipatory. I note Rizvana Bradley in her critique Sedgwick's notion of "texxture," and queer theory's naivety around the haptic, in the question she poses: "A question at once animated and omitted by queer theory's inquiries into touch: how to theorize *texxture* with regard to a history of bodily wounding occasioned by touch, when it is *texxture* that is seized upon by the various proxies for touch that willingly or inadvertently redouble racial fantasies of violation?" (Bradley, 2020). See Rizvana, Bradley, "The Vicissitudes of Touch: Annotations on the Haptic" *Boundary2*, November 21, 2020 https://www.boundary2.org/2020/11/rizvana-bradley-the-vicissitudes-of-touch-annotations-on-the-haptic/.

All the material gathered and "touched" in the process of fieldwork, explored in subsequent chapters in this thesis, were the result of chance encounters. I approached the archive without a preconceived idea of the material I wished to find; chance encounter enabled me to dwell on material without a criterion and to understand the affective structures at play when I was *moved* by it. When thinking about processes of encounter, I note the reappearance of this word in Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* (2023) which tracks several expected and unexpected confrontations – some violent, some resuscitative. Encounter was not only the process through which material was selected for this thesis, it also provided the architecture for several affective ruptures and experiences that defined my engagement with specific cultural objects. I experienced, like Sharpe at times, the politically restorative dimensions of encounter; I came across material that refortified my attachment to freedom, liberation and revolution and therefore, my imaginative capacity. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to restage these encounters through the recreation of zones of contact, performing singular or comparative analysis of material gathered, reading them in isolation or against one another. I name my approach to the archive as both ambivalent and non-reverent arguing that it is this framework that enabled chance encounters to take place.

**Touching: a relational mode against hegemony**

"Touch" as a methodological approach situates itself using Barney Glazer and Anselm Strauss' (1999) grounded theory, which responds to the overwhelming positivism in qualitative research by deriving theoretical constructs from qualitative analysis, formulating concepts and collecting "data" concurrently. Rather than utilising a logical-deductive approach, which generates hypotheses from already-existing theories for empirical testing (Cullen and Brennan, 2021), touch enables the development of theory through the enactment of creative methods, allowing for the emergence of ideas through the study of the interrelation between people, cultural objects and social interaction. It reveals the necessity of a flexible hypotheses which responds to research findings, rather than using research findings to prove an already-existing set of theories, assumptions or ideas.

To become tactile with material under the watchful eyes of institutional gatekeepers (archivists), was to learn carefulness. The zones of contact established in my fieldwork were shaped by ways that material was carefully guarded, the use of gloves and pencils, the strict instruction to *handle with care*. The tomb was well guarded. In "touching" material then, I sought to inspire disorder

by leaving remnants of the present on material from the "past." My analysis, contained in zones of contact, also sought to analyse why specific cultural objects can create an emotional turn in those who engage with them. In *Cruel Optimism,* Berlant writes that their method seeks, "to track the becoming general of singular things, and to give those things materiality by tracking their resonances across many scenes, including the ones made by nonverbal but still linguistic activities, like gestures" (Berlant 2011, 12). If touching is a gesture, then this gesture can help us rethink the boundaried temporalities that encase material, unleash Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential and change the way we perceive the current political conjuncture. My own engagements with archival material have been marked by emotional responses that have stretched my capacity to conceive of what is possible. When visiting the Black Cultural Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, The Feminist Library and Bruce Castle Museum[36] in particular I was continuously moved by how the act of physically holding protest posters, meeting notes and photographs reshaped my ability to conceive of the political strategies necessary to break through the contemporary structure of feeling defined by impasse. What spurs on my methodological interest in touch is the effect that cultural objects can have on individual desire. As a mode of relationality that seeks to emphasise connectedness and refuse isolation, I argue that touching is one means of understanding the interdependence between the past and present; as well as the emotional landscapes and structures of feelings that produce it. In his theorisation of structures of feeling, Raymond (1961) leaves a space open for the emergence of resistant thoughts and actions under oppressive conditions and so do I.

I note here the importance of recognising the posters, pamphlets and meeting notes I analyse as forms of propaganda that seek to challenge hegemonic power. Gramsci (1992) extends Marx's (1992) theory about the cultivation of power, using ideology to maintain false

[36] Whilst the Black Cultural Archives, The London Metropolitan Archives and Bruce Castle Museum receive money from local councils, Arts Council England as well as private funders – the Feminist Library is a grassroots archive and community space staffed by volunteers. Beginning in 1975 as a community endeavour to collect material relating to the Women's Liberation Movement in the United Kingdom, it has been maintained through the unremunerated labour of members of the public for decades. I have worked as Volunteer Coordinator at the library for half a decade. Though it has been partly funded by occasional Art Council grants, it has never been officially state-funded. I make these observations to note the difference in my ability to "touch" and engage with cultural objects depending on their location in "official" and "unofficial" archival institutions. In the Feminist Library, cultural objects were not locked behind walls or special casing. I did not feel the stubborn eyes of archivists over my shoulder. As a community member, I was trusted to engage with material without supervision. I was able to become tactile with it in ways that were impossible inside the Black Cultural Archives, The London Metropolitan Archives and Bruce Castle Museum. The image that opens this chapter was taken at the Feminist Library during my working hours as an employee. Though the archive has been theorised as a site of freedom, its close alignment with the state in many instances and its incorporation of forms of surveillance for the sake of protection limit the forms of creative engagement that can be enacted there. The public-facing elements of this thesis and project are concerned with asking, what would be it mean to release cultural object's from the state's many tombs?

consciousness. He understood civil society as a battleground of ideology, in which ideas justify, legitimise and extend political society's rule by force. Gramsci (1992) suggests that the extent of the government's manufacturing of consent via the permutations of media, culture, education and religion is a key determiner of the success of any attempted revolution or revolt. My aim in engaging with archival material creatively is to ensure that it continues to circulate as part of a cultural discourse that resists governmental statecraft, aiding a journey to critical consciousness for others. I wish to add to a legacy of thinkers who have contributed to the production of anti-hegemonic sentiment in culture. Following Gramsci (1992), I note that knowledge is nowhere neutral and that the purpose of my attempt to theorise resistant imaginaries is to produce a counter-hegemonic[37] intervention that challenges structural orderings. I situate myself as a researcher in a reactive space, responding to the violence that constitutes my position under racial capitalism. I seek to undermine the authority of the markers of civil society by elucidating the connection between the imagination and resistant action through touch. The aim in doing so is to aid the project of grassroots organising in gaining concessions from a bourgeois state and establishing liberatory and communal modes of social relation. I place my work in conversation with both Raymond (1961) and Gramsci (1992), who take seriously the affective dimension of life lived under oppressive conditions by examining the complexity of consciousness and its relationship to how political subjects conceive of their own existence. Touching loosens the temporal orderings and institutional strictures that define archival record, it introduces a haptics that jeopardises linear narratives and in doing so, opens space for serious engagement with the imagination.

Outside of feminist scholarship, forms of knowledge derived from emotions and affective encounter have long been dismissed as either apolitical or insipid. The history of feminist thought teaches us that subjectively experienced emotions, which come to be organised into a

[37] I understand counter-hegemony, in the Gramscian tradition, as a process that challenges or critiques normative ideas about political and social life for the purposes of opposing and resisting state power. I acknowledge the critique of this notion by anarchists, who reject counter-hegemony in favour of anti-hegemony. Anti-hegemony is characterised as a complete rejection of state power in which individuals and collectives seek neither to take nor influence it. My understanding of "resistance" is situated in a Marxist framework which seeks to destroy economic and social relations of domination and is cautiously sympathetic to the need to engage with the state in some capacity, whether through challenging its power and remit or seizing control it. My approach pays close attention to how the cultural objects that come under my investigation are evidence of groups creating and sustaining anarchic bonds of affinity, solidarity and radical change-making that are in essence anti-hegemonic whilst also engaging in counter-hegemonic forms of political organising. I welcome this. My intention is not to wade into a debate about the merits of either approach but rather to understand their value and to signal that my conception of resistance is expansive and fluid. See, Rhiannon Firth, "Critical cartography as anarchist pedagogy? Ideas for praxis inspired by the 56a infoshop map archive," *Interface: A journal for and about social movements* 6, no. 1 (2014):156-184 for an outline of such debates.

specific set of affects, are critically important to political life and constitutive of political action. In her essay *Poetry is not a Luxury*, Audre Lorde writes,

> our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualisation of any meaningful action (Lorde 1984, 37).

*The conceptualisation of any meaningful action*. Here Lorde draws a connection between affect and action, that what we feel (the presence or absence of desire) is one of the driving forces for what we do. Lorde's heretical call is often divorced from her own legacy of materialist political action. In her analysis of the centrality of poetry in political process, she notes that in the dismissal of the poetic form: what we dream, desire, *long for* is ideologically severed from what we do, enact and build together. Lorde (1984) calls our attention to the necessity of understanding the connection between feeling and our conceptualisations of action. That is, action is impossible without a heretical and/or liberatory desire for a different set of social relations, a desire that is constituted by the imagination. In the face of political impasse, those desires can be formulated through engagement with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in cultural objects.

I am interested in the role of the imagination in helping researchers, scholars, artists and grassroots organisers manufacture a politicalised desire for freedom via the cultural objects they create for themselves and others. The cultural object created by the researcher using touch as a methodological framework should be read alongside the cultural objects that emerge from anti-racist and feminist organising groups in the process of resistance. If, as Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2008) argue, it is possible for the ruling class to manufacture consent through the political economy of mass media, my concern is how one manufactures a materialist political desire for resistance that moves around the discourses of stasis that plague contemporary politics. To treat the imagination seriously, one must turn their attention to the power of affective response in providing an impetus for resistant action. In his work on activist ethnography, Graeber notes,

> once we stop thinking of the imagination as largely about the production of free-floating fantasy worlds, but rather as bound up in the processes by which we make and maintain reality, then it makes perfect sense to see it as a material force in the world (Graeber 2009, 523).

like him, I understand the imagination as a material force that is crucial in the creation of resistant cultural production as well as a force that emanates through creative engagement with

cultural production. I intend for my method to trace and connect the operation of the imagination across temporal borders, allowing the desires that *were then* to reshape the desires that *are now*.

**The archive, affect and ambivalence**

I began this chapter by noting my performance of ambivalence with regard to the archive. This ambivalence emerges from this project's experimentation with affect. Touch as a methodological practice is interested in the emotional aftermath of quotidian encounters with archival material, with the "accumulative beside-ness" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2) that affect theory intends to elucidate. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) argue that at its most anthropomorphic, affect theory relates to a "force" or forces of encounter. Sara Ahmed writes that "affect is what sticks, what sustains and preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects" (Ahmed 2010, 29). I take seriously her attempt to theorise positive affects and the skill with which she clarifies the power of being moved. I situate my work in affect theory because numerous experiences during my fieldwork illustrated the centrality of the forces moving between people and objects in any theorisation of the imagination. Cultural objects have the potential to shape human desires by transforming the emotional location that individuals and collectives find themselves through affect. Ahmed notes "We are moved by things and in being moved, we make things"[38] (Ahmed 2010, 33). Here she summarises the scope of my interest; the relationship between being moved by encounters with cultural objects and this experiences effect on our desire and capacity to materially resist violent conditions. I am interested in the rhythms, forces and modalities that come to define encounter and their consequential impact on the body of the researcher or the person who engages with said material. In my fieldwork, the physical act of touching and the creation of zones of contact in which critical analysis took place enabled access to a set of liberatory affects which generated imaginative capacity.

Affect theory seeks to give name to the range of murky intensities that operate beyond the realm of emotion. It tries to materialise instances of relational contact that pass between and beyond the body, intensities that permeate the air, creating resonances that shape social relations and that act on the body as it moves through the social world. In his writing on the emotional situation determining the capacity for worker's resistance in a post-Fordist economy, Virno

[38] See Sara Ahmed's essay, "Happy Objects" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-51 for an in-depth analysis of positive affects.

(1996) writes about the need to recognise the emotional modalities of opportunism and cynicism in relation to the project of worker's rights as fundamentally ambivalent. He attempts to characterise the fields of emotion and feeling that create the desire for assimilation and the desire for revolt in workers. Virno (1996) argues that these ambivalent sentiments of disenchantment are equivocal and that the politics they sustain can either be stultifying or liberatory depending on the context; context is needed to discern which route the worker will go down. I paraphrase Virno's argument here in order to contextualise my own interest in sentiments of disenchantment, to name why, when moving towards the archive, I performed an ambivalence to its supposed authority. This thesis argues, like Virno, that when mobilised in certain contexts (for example, in institutional settings), ambivalence has radical potential. A politics sustained by an ambivalence to the authority of institutional structures refuses the performance of obedience to that institution's rules, unspoken laws and codes of conduct. In other words, rather than heed the institutional warning to approach material as if it were sacred, unconnected to my own political context and too fragile to be handled, I as Sedgwick (2003) writes, reached out, fondled, hefted, tapped, enfolded it. I touched it. I entered several archival institutions with this deviant intention; the act of touching prompted a range of emotional experiences: recognition, affinity, familiarity and enabled the identification of the presence and constitutive force of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential in cultural objects. I chose ambivalence from a range of affects to enable this process because in an institutional setting, it required irreverence and an active subversion of state power. "Touch" depends on an ambivalent approach that enables researchers to break the rules and established norms of engagement with material inside of archival institutions, foreshadowing forms of critical analysis that will break the diagrammatic hegemony of linear temporality and traditional historiography.

Grounding my method in affect theory means I aim to access, give meaning to and categorise the general structure of forces and intensities, (all that which "sticks" to cultural objects) in order to understand their political and cultural utility in confronting political impasse. An ambivalent approach enables the researcher to remain unsurprised by the archive's failures so that they may contend with what it *can* offer. My ambivalence emerges from Sianne Ngai's belief in the criticality of ugly feelings and the ability to rediscover their "critical productivity" (Ngai 2005, 3). I understand ambivalence (the state of having mixed or contradictory feelings) as an "ugly" feeling with productive value because it introduces nuance and complexity with regard to the subject at hand. In using this frame to approach the archive which is both a site of injury and rescue, rather than reliance on a pre-determined plan of action, I entered each archive,

selected and engaged with material with the aim of unearthing its critical productivity rather than its *historical* productivity. In this way, "ambivalence" served not only as an approach but as a dialectical mode of assessment, allowing me to contend with multiple and sometimes opposing discourses and feelings in order to arrive at my argument about the location and purpose of the imagination as it was expressed through the cultural object. Like Ngai (2005), I frame ambivalence as a method of critical appraisal; approaching the archive without strategy, allowing material to reveal itself to me and lowering my expectation in its revelatory capacity.

Ambivalence is an affective space that enables the researcher, (especially the racialised researcher) to move around the stultifying discourses on historical "erasure" that their rummaging in the archive supposedly remedies. An ambivalent approach produced the critical ability to forgo the task of using archival material to fill in the "gaps" that inhere in historical narrative. If the story conferred by the archive is already a lie, the task of recovery is null and void. An ambivalent posture enabled me to ask a different set of questions, namely, within the constraints that have produced this material in this place and at this time, what potential remains? I asked this question with Hall's dynamic approach to archiving in mind. Hall insists that the diasporic archive is a living, discursive formation that should resist boundaries, termination or "the fantasy of completeness" (Hall 2001, 91). Hall suggests that every archive must be understood in the context of the "prehistory" that it is attached to,

> the activity of 'archiving' is thus always a critical one, always a historically located one, always a contestatory one, since archives are in part constituted within the lines of force of cultural power and authority; always one open to the futurity and contingency - the relative autonomy - of artistic practice; always, as we tried to define it earlier, an engagement, an interruption in a settled field, which is to enter critically into existing configurations to re-open the closed structures into which they have ossified (Hall 2001, 92).

This chapter intends to make an interruption into an already settled field by elaborating on touch as a multi-pronged method which begins in the archive but refuses to take for granted that the archive is a contested space. Future researchers adopting this method can choose, at any given moment, to accept or reject the authority of the archive. Nydia A. Swaby and Chandra Frank have noted the "extra-textual" (Swaby and Frank 2020, 5) nature of recent archival scholarship; messiness is a core concern for a new generation of archival scholars. I place myself firmly in this legacy; neither mounting a defence of the archive or a wholesale disavowal of its potential. The archive is more than just a theoretical construct, under exciting and rigorous

methodological conditions, what is obscured begins to move to the centre, upsetting prescribed temporal arrangements. As Achille Mbembe notes,

> archives are a kind of tomb, which stop the dead enacting disorder in the present: The best way to ensure that the dead do not stir up disorder is not only to bury them, but also to bury their 'remains', the 'debris' (Mbembe 2002, 22).

My interest in the archive then, is not to settle a score for the dead or simply to exhume the fragments that remain. This thesis enables the past to intrude in the present, facilitating a disorderly lingering that brings imaginative capacity to the fore. The stated purpose of eschewing a historiographical approach is utilise topological methods of assessment for archival material, stretching and deforming this material where possible.

**Against criterion**

The criteria for the selection of material for examination in this thesis evaded the clock. Material was assembled without strict adherence to the historical periodisation of social movements. Such an approach would be counterintuitive, given my virulent critique of temporal boundaries. The guiding criteria for the selection of material was instead politically and affectively motivated; seeking material related to "feminist" and "anti-racist" organising and creative endeavours which explore, promote or encourage participation in a struggle for freedom and resistance against governing structures. My attention was drawn to material that sought to think beyond the limits of the state, the nation, race, gender, capitalism and all other political and social modes of restriction.

I define "feminism" as a political methodology used by individuals and groups to make political demands for their freedom and the freedom of others (Olufemi, 2020) which is based on critical analysis of gender and gender relations under capitalism. I recognise, as Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah do that, "the oft-repeated linear division of feminist thought into first, second and third waves elides the complex geographies and travelling theories within feminism itself (Bhandar and Ziadah 2020, 5)." My reliance on a specifically broad definition of feminism intends to signal that I do not wish to limit the purview of feminist thought to "women's" lives. I acknowledge and actively encourage the links between feminism as a radical political genealogy and other political traditions that supplement and enrich it, such as the communist, anti-imperialist and Marxist traditions. My book *Feminism Interrupted* (2020), implores individuals to,

as bell hooks argued, "come closer [so they] will see: feminism is for everybody," (hooks 2000, x) arguing that feminism is a robust political method, rather than merely a moniker for a set of practices. Feminism's method is primarily concerned with the transformation of life via the destruction of all forms of oppressive power and decidedly linked to proletarian struggle. I seek, where possible, to remain attentive to its multiple contested histories and genealogies. The material explored in this project is identified as "feminist" on this basis, though its authors may not explicitly position their cultural objects in this legacy, this thesis understands their work in Marxist and communist formations for example to be inseparable from the radical feminist tradition.

I use "feminism" and "anti-racism" to signal sets of radical, coalitionary politics, which might be practised by a wide range of people and often succeed and fail in reproducing effective and enduring forms of solidarity. "Anti-racism" names a broad coalition of groups and historical movements concerned with ending white supremacist violence and fascism, borders and nation states whilst maintaining a critique of racialised capitalism, racial hierarchy and race science. I situate the definition in the long history of "Black"[39] writing on the contours, strategic goals and

[39] In this usage of the term "Black," I refer to the theoretical tradition initiated from the 1970s onwards which attempted to identify political subjects with a shared history of British colonialism into a coherent group for the purposes of political demand making. This term was a geographically contingent marker of common experience, used in grassroots campaigning as a means of self-titling racialised subjects whose material conditions were determined by the legislative violence of the post-war era of the British Commonwealth. In the United Kingdom, its usage included those from South Asian and Latin American backgrounds to promote a unity in diversity, as noted by Oparah (1998). There have been several theories about the origin of this rich tradition, Nydia Swaby (2014) situates its gendered emergence through Clifford's (1994) notion of diaspora consciousness, "Black" as an exclusionist term reappropriated to form political alliances between those from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. However, form me, the most interesting usage of this term emerges from its connection to a Marxist politics which foreground the necessity of creating a collective consciousness between political subjects. In our research interview, Gail Lewis notes,

> the radical transformation of the signifier "Black" at that time was like breathing air for me. It won't be the same for everybody of my generation at all, but for me it was like breathing air because it absolutely both disconnected race from phenotypes or whatever bodies are called. It spoke to Kwame Ture/Hamilton idea of "Black" and Black consciousness in South Africa (Lewis, 2021).

In this context, "Black" became a signifier of a shared set of resistant politics. In her writing on Black women's organisations, Oparah notes how her research revealed that "blackness is not the natural preserve of any set of actors. Neither is it likely to be embraced by all members of the diverse communities of African and Asian descent in Britain" (Oparah 1998, 118). She does not shy away from the fact that even at the time of its usage, the notion of a political Blackness was contested by African, Caribbean and South Asian people. It remains contested to this day and has lost its power as a unifying principle due to internal debates and the enforcement of sanitised state-mandated racial categorisation, which has given way to the equally unsatisfying term "BAME" (Black and Minority Ethnic). Whilst the last two decades have seen a myriad of useful debates waged regarding the effectiveness and utility of Political Blackness, a desperately undertheorised element of its usage is its proponents stated desire to build coalition across difference whilst deemphasising the singularity of phenotypical difference. Such a principle is core to anti-racist organising and to building radical mass movements. In a neoliberal age, in which the atomisation of the self and identity becomes central, dangerous biological and

priorities of the anti-racist movement and the Black radical tradition in Britain from writers and community organisers such as Leila Hassan, Gerlin Bean, Claudia Jones, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Stella Dadzie and institutions and collectives such as The Race Today Collective, The Institute of Race Relations and the Black Unity and Freedom Party. I follow Sivanandan when he states that racism changes, "shape, size, contours, purpose, function – with changes in the economy, the social structure, the system and, above all, the challenges, the resistances of that system" (Sivananadan 2002). I maintain serious critiques of the liberal co-optation of this term in the present moment, particularly given its critical history in the United Kingdom. Though I have no strong connection to its usage, I am wary of how the liberal depoliticisation of "anti-racism"[40] repositions the responsibility for ending racism onto individuals through a requirement to redress microaggressions and confront "whiteness" rather than end, what Gilmore terms "the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2007, 247). "Anti-racism" is not interchangeable with the Black radical tradition and/or Black cultural production which I understand as specifically related to movements concerned with African and Caribbean sites of creative, political and diasporic struggle as well as an analysis on the economic and social consequences of slavery and the emancipatory legacy of slave rebellion. When engaging and selecting material, I paid close attention to the terms through which political struggle was conceived and have tried to be as specific where possible: referring to the work of African and Caribbean cultural workers as "Black cultural production" and using the terms "Black and racialised peoples" or "Black and South Asian" or "anti-racist" to describe artistic and political endeavours initiated by a coalition of racialised people identifying and examining the material effects of racism and struggling against it.

essentialist conceptions of Blackness steeped in eugenics are returning and analysis of race as a socially produced phenomenon in the context of capitalism continues to decline. I trace the rich debates around the term in order to make three ambivalent observations; the first, that language is not capable of accurately representing the unity and disunity necessary to resisting racial violence and never will be, second, that it is possible to explore the singularity of racial condition and also work in coalition with others and third, that whilst the term is no longer political viable and many argue never was, the solidaristic foundations of its usage must be urgently rediscovered by a new generation. For an overview of contemporary and historic debates, see, Nydia Swaby, "Disparate in Voice, Sympathetic in Direction: Gendered Political Blackness and the Politics of Solidarity," *Feminist Review*, no. 108 (2014): 11–25, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571917 and Oparah, *Other Kinds of Dreams: Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformation*, 110.

[40] For my purposes, "anti-racism" is an insufficient moniker, but as previously stated, I am under no illusions that language can fully articulate the capaciousness of radical political demands nor do I wish to create new terms to enter into the realm of contestation.

**Scavenging: a critical appraisal of methods**

Following Halberstam (1998), I craft a methodology that prioritises interdisciplinarity. My method floats between several humanities disciplines and includes comparative discourse and visual analysis, critical fabulation, workshopping, interviews with research participants, sound recordings and the creation of a digital assemblage. Halberstam writes "On account of the interdisciplinary nature of my project, I have had to craft a methodology out of available disciplinary methods" (Halberstam 1998, 9). I too have opted to craft methods from the already-existing structures located in literary studies, cultural studies and visual culture. I recognise that a strict adherence to discipline leaves little space for surprise, for encounter or affective experiences with text or image as a means of knowledge production. My methods enable intellectual curiosity that defies totality by stealing elements from multiple research practices rather than adhering to a specific and singular practice of critical analysis which is bound by geographical and temporal location[41]. Rather than remain neatly and firmly tied to the strictures of academic discipline or scientific criteria, I choose instead a queer methodology, that "attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and [...] refuses the academics compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam 1998, 13). This tendency is perhaps most obvious in the structure of this research document, which purposefully veers from straightforward analysis into wayward modes of engagement with cultural objects found in the archive using critical fabulation and critical analysis, as well as the creation of a temporal landscape which pushes the project into digital space.

If the linear construction of historical knowledge omits certain forms of information, my methodological response is to eschew the baggage of disciplinary obedience in favour of wilderness, of not knowing, of uncontrolled and generative speculation. To meet totality with fragmentation. I allow myself to be led by material, to follow Hartman (2018) in having a deep experience with the archive and in doing so, displace the geographical, temporal and historical domination of a singular vantage points. In her work on Black women's geographies, Katherine McKittrick writes,

[41] I note, for example, how Literary Studies is bound to periodisation and fixed notions of temporality in its critical analysis of the development of the canon or how sociological analysis necessarily depends on the strict categorisation of political thought. This project, which seeks to unsettle the fixity of temporal regimes, can only be achieved through an interdisciplinary synthesis of available methods.

> 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 (McKittrick 2006, 16).

My methodology refuses to see or understand archival material from a singular vantage point, supplementing critical analysis of archival material with creative engagement, challenging the unjust imposition of order on material that it analyses. By tracing resistant desires as expressed through Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential across time in order to contest grand narratives and disrupt normative thinking, my aim is to reveal the working and stultifying effects of hegemonic clock-time. Understanding the pervasive immobility that defines the present political moment, attempting to find ways of moving, traveling and theorising that open up new space for political intervention, requires an engagement with how a separation of the past/present/future shapes and produces siloed spatial and social landscapes. Following Sharpe who writes,

> I am interested in how we imagine ways of knowing that past, in excess of the fictions of the archive, but not only that. I am interested, too, in the ways we recognize the many manifestations of that fiction and that excess, that past not yet past, in the present (Sharpe 2016, 178).

My engagement with the archive via a scavenger methodology seeks to explore the possibilities inherent in the "past not yet past." This treatment of the past is dependent on a critical method which embraces the speculation. I hope to demonstrate a rejection of strictures of "legitimate" knowledge, in favour of understanding how experimental engagement with material might reveal and the location and purpose of the imagination in specific cultural objects. I reject anticipatory modes of analysis; the future is not "to-come", it is now, it was then.

Halberstam goes on to note, "a queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (Halberstam 1998, 13). The material that was "touched" as part of this research project was obtained using a scavenger methodology. I scoured archives to find cultural objects for visual and discourse analysis, obtained documentary footage, created a digital assemblage, conducted interviews with participants involved in grassroots political organisation and/or feminist and anti-racist artmaking, made sound recordings, engaged in several public-facing dialogic exchanges with

other creative and academic practitioners[42] and collected research notes on a public workshop facilitated by myself at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

In crafting an argument for a collective usage of the imagination, participant interviews allowed for a space to explore the granular details of individual conceptions of imagination, time and resistance in order to arrive at a general conclusion about the role of the imagination in our current political conjuncture. In loosely structured conversations, I spoke with eleven participants engaged in anti-racist and feminist grassroots political organising and/or artmaking ranging in age and experience about the role of the imagination in their work as organisers and/or cultural producers. I asked them to conceptualise their understandings of ideas core to this project: the imagination, revolution, freedom, liberation, temporality, blackness, anti-racism and feminism. My intention was to stage a dialogue between myself as a researcher and participants, enabling them to reflect on the relationship between the imagination and cultural production. I broke down the "researcher"/"interviewee" paradigm by framing these conversations as part of an exchange between peers, utilising feminist method of reflexivity, what Helen Callaway and Linda Finlay call "a continuing mode of self- analysis and political awareness" (Callaway 1992, 3; Finlay 2002) to acknowledge my own power as a researcher to produce knowledge from these conversations. As part of cultivating this political self-awareness, I tracked the affective experiences that shaped conversations[43]. In line with feminist methods, I rejected what Anne Oakley calls the "textbook paradigm", (Oakley 1981, 33), the idea of the interviewer as an objective manipulator, who must be "friendly, but not too friendly" (Oakley 1981, 33) in favour of a dialogic exchange which recognised,

> the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship (Oakley 1981, 41).

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[42] For examples of such dialogues, see Lola Olufemi and Jay Bernard, "In Conversation," Youtube, March 9 2021, **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-zh3spqvhc** and Lola Olufei and Languid Hands, "Radical Topologies," Youtube, 20 November, 2020, **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_9BXEUjoOw&t=1s** and Lola Olufemi and Françoise Vergès, "A Decolonial Feminism," Youtube, April 20, 2021, **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE9FR1jfo5U**.

[43] Evidence of this reflexivity is available in the poetic reflections displayed on **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE.**

Many of the interviewees were known to me, either as artists or organisers. Our conversations were modelled around a joint investment in liberation that required a continual expansion of my theoretical framework as a feminist scholar. These exchanges were multipronged and expansive; they were hour long, meandering conversations that revealed the conceptual dimensions and properties of the imagination as well as its relationship to desire. In displaying the interview transcripts that resulted as part of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE,** my aim is to again restage these encounters for the general public in the hope that the reflections included in them help to challenge their own political immobility and awaken their imaginative capacities. By including them as part of the creative submission for this project, the interview transcripts become cultural objects which are imbued with their own Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential which demands to be engaged.

During the process of interviewing participants, I attempted to undermine the power differentials inherent to the research process by staging conversations in non-academic, familial settings, often their homes or places of their choosing. I follow Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland's (1999) idea that emancipatory methodologies treat knowledge as negotiated between researchers, subjects and epistemic communities and Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Denise Leckenby's (2003) argument that feminist research must be marked by an openness and fluidity and flux around the research question, allowing the question to be informed by shifting power relations. These semi-structured interviews were developed with these principles in mind, exchanges were crafted with participants interest in mind, they remained subject to change and were conducted without a specific goal. At several points during the interview process, participants remarked that engaging with cultural objects (a book, an image, a sound for example) reaffirmed their desire to take part in radical struggle. The use of this method is consistent with the elements of my practice that are concerned with dialogue and processes of exchange as a means of communicating radical ideas about the reorganisation of social life to a general audience[44]. Here I linger to note the importance of my methodological intention to share

[44] I note the many debates regarding public and socially engaged forms of artmaking amongst artist researchers, namely that publicly funded art can often reproduce the oppressive power dynamics it seeks to confront. Socially engaged art can just as easily be made for consumption rather than critical engagement by a general audience. This project is publicly funded through the Arts and Humanities Research Council but it seeks, as Catherin Schoberl (2023) notes as she reflects on her yearlong course, "Commissioning and Curating Contemporary Public Art" to prioritise "process-oriented and decelerated strategies that continually [incorporate] new insights and inputs as counter-models to the conventions of public art." It favours "smaller, diverse interventions over grand gestures" as explored in more detail in the second part of this chapter. For more, See Catherin Schoberl, "School Watch: Publicness as Practice: 'Commissioning and Curating Contemporary Public Art at HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design," *e-flux,* February 28, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/education/features/521017/publicness-as-practice-commissioning-and-curating-contemporary-public-art-at-hdk-valand-academy-of-art-and-design.

these interviews using a public platform. Whilst such interviews cannot be used to make a total claim about the operation of the imagination, they provide a guide for tracing the contradictions, affective resonances and complexities that imagining conjures. Using interviews as a form of qualitative exchange, I sought to analyse and compare how participant's conceptions of the imagination and of temporal regimes manifested through language specifically. I explore this notion in greater detail in Chapter Five.

As explored in Chapter One, my use of critical fabulation is grounded in the work of critical theorists Saidiya Hartman (2008) and Tavia Nyong'o (2019). I use Hartman's question: "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?" (Hartman 2008, 3) to ground my use of critical fabulation as a means of narrative redress, to find out what I do not and could never know, whilst being aware, as Hartman is, that no aesthetic method is capable of remedying the gaps in historical narrative. I understand critical fabulation as a method which challenges the naturalising qualities of historisation; a means of creating new and alternative ways of communing with the dead and those not present through a manipulation of the structure of historical event. The two examples of fabulation in the appendices of this thesis, *he can't evict us without a notice!* And *what to do if the police raid* emerged from attempts to use language to stay with the "gaps" in historical narrative ("the gap" referring to all the missing information that inheres in the cultural object). In crafting them, I refused to treat the objects on which these short narratives were based as if they were self-evident, instead using acts of fabulation to remove the temporal signature of the objects and play with the momentary and quotidian occurrences that produced them. In both instances, I asked myself – what happened before the image was captured or created, how did these political actors end up in this place, at this time? What were the personal and political processes (loves, heartaches, wants, needs, convictions) that produced the cultural object I was touching? I weaved characters from the object's contextual clues – incorporating what I could never know with what the archive's historiographical record insisted was the truth.

I situate critical fabulation inside of the realm of speculative methodologies, methods which reject the totalising realism of the present. I note the usage of speculation in the work of Jackie Wang who notes in relation to violence of carcerality, "the prison is a problem for thought that can only be unthought if we refuse to capitulate to the realism of the present" (Wang 2019). A speculative approach orients itself against what is calculable, against what can be foreseen. Isabelle Stengers calls speculation "a war against probabilities" (Stengers 2010, 17). When we speculate, we are agreeing that there is more that we do not know. To think alongside Deleuze

(1997), speculation reorders the realm of possible, plausible and the probable. It works against a diagrammatic grand design. It affirms the existence of novel events, ways of being, thinking and feeling that we have yet to understand as possible. As argued by Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky and Marsha Rosengarten (2017), it sees the present as brimming with unrealised potential and orients itself against everything we have been told about the stagnancy of the present moment. In adopting this stance, I mean to make clear that my methodological approach is concerned not with securing the future or with pinpointing its practicalities but rather with locating the form of its potential markers in the objects of the here and now. In line with this projects interest in topology, speculation is the context in which the deformity in linear historical narrative produced by critical fabulation takes place. I take Savransky's claim that there are futures that the present could never anticipate, and these already inhere in it as (im)possibilities to be actualised (Savransky 2016), seriously, seeing the imagination as a force, a possibility to be actualised that must simply be identified rather than conjured.

Alongside speculation, the analytical dimensions of this thesis utilise discourse and visual analysis in various registers to analyse the resonances of image, text and posters in order to locate the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential and assess its purpose. Sara Mills expands on Foucault's understanding of discourse stating that it refers to "all utterances or texts which have meaning and effects in the real world" (Mills 1997, 7). If as Mills goes on to argue, discourse is "the production and circulation of rule-governed statement" (Mills 1997, 9) then the analysis in this thesis aims to investigate the effects of rule-governed statement in archival material on structures of feeling as well as individual and collective desires in relation to the imagination. I approach this analysis using a Black feminist approach which remains attentive to the role of discourse in maintenance of racial capitalism and other structures of power. I understand visual analysis, using Gillian Rose's invocation to develop a critical visual methodology which thinks about the visual,

> in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging (Rose 2001, 3).

The visual is a portal into another kind of knowledge which requires a deciphering and decoding based on looking and seeing, rather than textual comprehension. In this thesis, my use of discourse and visual analysis is also closely related to Charles Sanders Pierce's theory of

semiotics, attempting to complicate the seemingly straightforward relationship between sign, object and interpretant. Pierce writes,

> I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the later is thereby mediately determined by the former (Pierce 1998, 478).

I aim to perform elucidatory readings of texts and images to reveal not only their visual and textual details, but to broadly understand them as signs with specific meanings related to the imagination. I synthesise Pierce's scholarship with the generative frames for looking and seeing explored by more radical scholars such as Sharpe (2016) and Campt (2017) and Ariella Azoulay (2015). I am indebted to semiotics in so far as I attempt to read images or photographs and their details as signs but I take seriously the notion that the violence of racial capitalism or the complexity of identity, for example, cannot be neatly packaged into a sign/object/interpretant relation. In utilising Pierce's triadic approach, I place specific emphasis on the role of the interpretant in creative engagement with cultural objects. I do this to highlight how the effects of signification are capable of creating liberatory affects that shape a different orientation towards the present condition in political subjects. I use semiotics and discourse analysis to produce new ways of looking and engaging with cultural objects, challenging the rules of normative understandings, which might simply glance over the details of a photograph or refuse to engage with the multi-layered nature of a political text or slogan. My aim is to understand what these cultural objects can offer to political theorisations of the imagination and their role in loosening attachments to capitalism and strengthening attachments to liberation. When approaching archival material related to political organising, I am specifically interested in how discourse and visual analysis reveal their ideological and strategic dimensions as well as the desires and flows of intensity that produced them. Marrying this analysis with a recognition of the artistic qualities of the cultural object also aids my interrogation of the imposed divide between art and politics. In tracing the textual and visual cues embedded in archival material, I aim to demonstrate how the imagination is a crucial driving force in the creation of said cultural objects and the cumulative result of engagement with them.

Walter Rodney's instructions on guerrilla intellectualism, explored in greater detail in Chapter Three provided the theoretical framework for three public workshops conducted as part of my methodology at The Institute of Contemporary Arts, Toynbee Hall and The Bush Theatre. As part of the fieldwork process, I conducted public workshops and used archival texts and poetry

to examine the role of the imagination in the production of material resistance and resistant cultural production with a diverse range of participants. I did so with the explicit intention to expand this project's remit beyond academia. Rodney argues that the Guerrilla Intellectual must find ways of breaking with the class legitimacy bestowed upon them by the institution and reject it in order to cultivate a legitimacy borne from radical struggle. Only such a struggle is capable of producing social transformation (Rodney 1990).

As an early-career academic, I followed his instruction, using the perceived legitimacy of academic scholarship to secure venues, public funding and other resources in order to create "zones of contact" outside of academic settings that enabled the discussion and circulation of radical political thought. Workshops took place in art institutions or community centres, were free at the point of use and made as physically and materially accessible as possible. These workshops utilised Jen Tarr, Elena Gonzalez-Polledo and Flora Cornish's notion of "liveness" (the necessity of continually cultivating flexible and inventive research methods), which does not locate the "meaning" of workshops in art-based research in data collection (output) but rather in "the experience of participation, in difficult-to-record phenomena of affective engagement, ambiguity, or discomfort, whose traces [are] recorded in experience, memory, or skill development" (Tarr, Gonzalez-Polledo and Cornish 2018, 37).

Workshops incorporated various political writing exercises, they were spaces for the examination of cultural objects and the development of new cultural objects that could form part of a wider structure of feeling which orientated itself against political impasse. These were spaces in which liberatory affects were produced through conversation, collective reading and freewriting – desires were fortified and the relationship between feeling and action investigated. An audio recording from a workshop conducted during fieldwork at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 2021-2022, explored in detail in Chapter Three was transformed, in collaboration with writer and audio producer Tej Adeleye into an experimental soundscape using my voice and research reflections, displayed on **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE**. In crafting my methodology, it is important to note how methods often bled into one another, with research findings collected in one element being used to inform the shape and design of another. The importance of sound to this project follows the radical and sensuous methodologies of poet and academic Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020) and academic Tina Campt (2017) who alert us to the necessity of remaining attuned to other sounds, frequencies and pathways of knowledge. For my purposes, sound is a sensory experience. In her work, Gumbs (2020) senses the earth,

basing theoretical and methodological strategies on those of marine life, we must listen to the scale of our own breathing, she instructs. Campt (2017) follows Gilroy (1993) in defining sound and music as crucial modalities in the politics of transfiguration, she argues that because sound can not only be listened to but *felt*, it should be theorised as "a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact" (Campt 2017, 6). The soundscape of field recordings made in collaboration with interview participant Tej Adeleye includes readings of poetic works, (attempts to note the scale of my own breathing and theorisation) and aims to add texture, dimension and another layer of haptic engagement to my theorisations of the imagination, so that my audience is able to engage on a number of different sensory registers.

**Imagination and archival becoming**

In Chapter One, I used the term "Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential" to signal the wide, various and scattered nature of the imagination and its residual traces in cultural objects. My intention is to demonstrate how Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is unleashed through the act of touch. But this thesis not only touches archival material, it rubs material from the "past" and "present" against one another through comparative analysis in order to generate a friction which reveals the similarities and differences in the desires that constituted material as well as the practical strategies utilised by their authours in the process of resistance. These actions form part of a process of "archival becoming" in which archival ephemera is no longer considered static and cosigned to history but an active participant in the research process. In her writing on sociology's methodological relationship with "make-believe," Mariam Fraser writes,

> the archive is always, necessarily, in the process of becoming itself differently. All the 'participants' in the research process – the archival documents and objects, the forces which act on them (such as the law), and on which they act, the researchers/readers/archivists who work with them – are constituted by and transformed through their relations with each other (Fraser 2012, 88).

When touching material, I did not shy away from the ways I was constituted by it, how my notion of what is possible expanded by coming into contact with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential during my fieldwork. How these experiences affirmed an understanding of time as non-linear and liberation as multiplicitous. In her analysis of photography, Azoulay notes,

> for the most part, imagination is neither wild nor cramped, neither breaks boundaries nor works particularly hard to reinforce them. Imagination mostly functions as part of our structure of consciousness. It is activated

> routinely, and it forms part of every communicative act. We do not consciously experience it for what it is—the activity of the imagination. Imagination enables us to create an image on the basis of something that is not accessible to the senses. We call on imagination constantly (Azoulay 2015, 14).

Cultural objects are involved in the communicative act that makes imagining possible. When approached using a non-conventional method, the material contained in the archive can reshape the desires that form the basis of a collective structure of feeling. In this context, desires are no longer simply subjectively amalgamations of feeling and emotion, they are critical in sustaining materialist resistance. They can and should, therefore, be expanded and scaled up for the sake of fortifying a collective imaginary. If the imagination requires, as Azoulay (2015) argues, a constant activation, then such an activation takes place through the methods central to this project: critical fabulation, discourse and visual analysis, workshopping, interviews, soundscaping and digital assemblage. These methods attempt to manufacture possibility and develop a theory of the imagination concurrently. Perhaps most crucially, in the foregrounding of dialogic process and exchange, they activate the public dimensions of the imagination, which remove it from the realm of the subjective mental cognition and place it in the public domain.

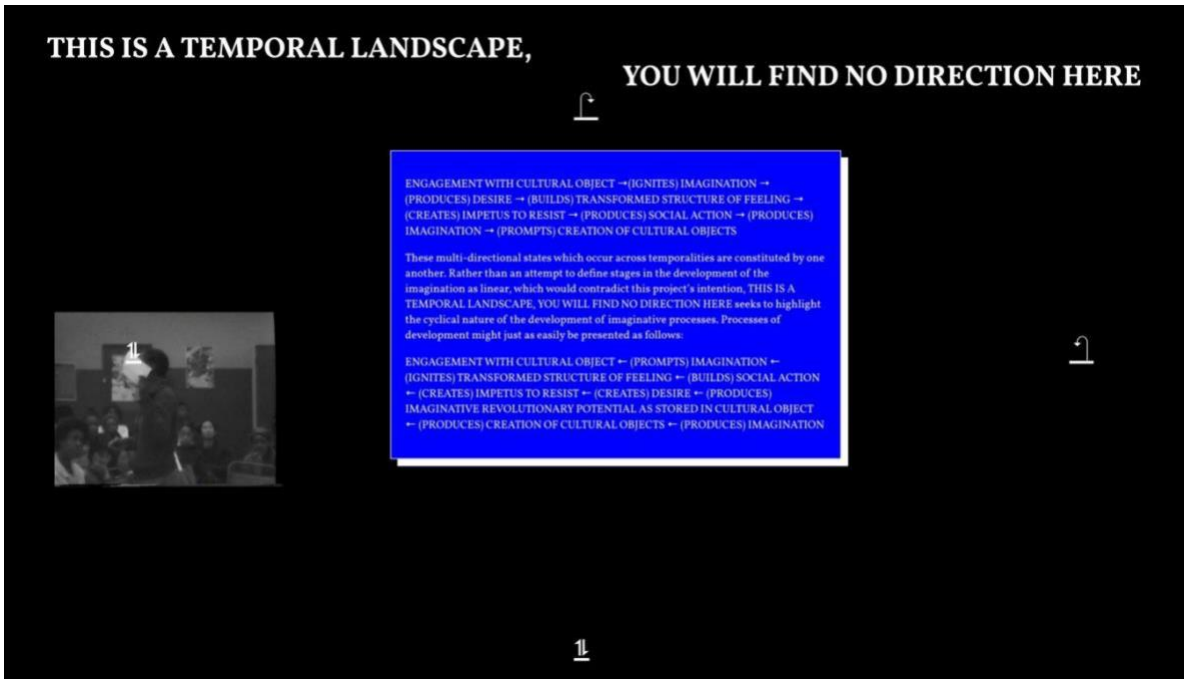
## Part Two: THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE

As part of the enactment of a multi-pronged methodology, the cultural objects engaged with during my fieldwork have been gathered and displayed in a digital assemblage titled,

**THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE (TIATLYWFNDH),**

which extends the zones of contact established through touch into digital space for a public audience. TIATLYWFNDH aestheticises the core arguments of this thesis forming part of the evidence of my creative practice. Intended to be utilised as a creative and educational tool for individuals and communities engaged in grassroots political organisations, this digital landscape invites viewers to consider the uses of the imagination in forms of resistant cultural production, enacting topological distortions which challenge the hegemony of linear temporality. It attempts to simulate engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential experienced in the archive in order to contribute to the establishment of a liberatory structure of feeling. This simulation is achieved through its design elements, which were established in collaboration with engineer Agnes Cameron and architect Thandi Lowenson. Following Deleuze's (1988) theorisation of the diagrammatic as a non-discursive relation of power to affect and be affected which I elucidated in Chapter One, this landscape responds to the violence of diagrammatic political technologies: the state, the prison, the border and other manifestations of capital by providing an interactive digital space which seeks to fortify the desire to resist in political subjects. This landscape provides reflection on concepts that have been core to my theoretical exploration: history, linearity, revolution, racial capitalism, anti-racism and feminism. TIATLYWFNDH uses trace thought to explore connections between the imagination, desire, structures of feeling, political determination and the impetus to resist. The title screen of the assemblage features images related to historic and present-day social movements which fade in and out of view surrounded by distorted, multi-directional arrows that navigate users across the space. The user is given no introduction to the navigation of the assemblage.

Figure 5.



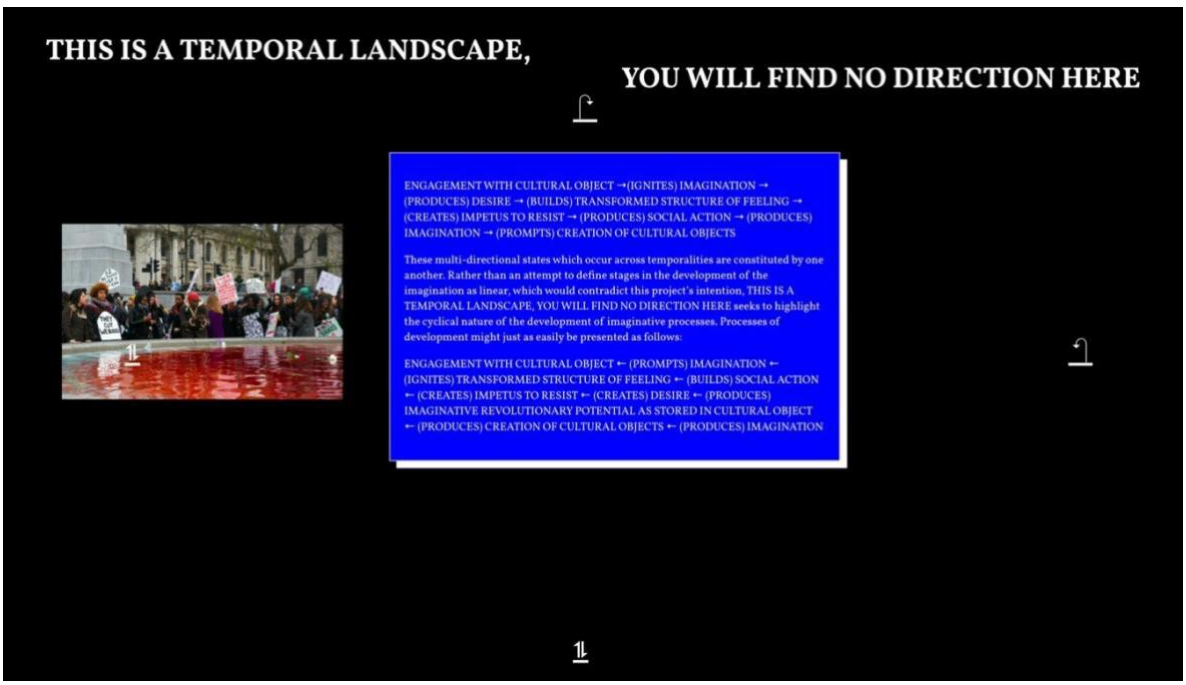




Figure 6.

The landing page provides the following framing,

**ENGAGEMENT WITH CULTURAL OBJECT ➔(IGNITES) IMAGINATION ➔ (PRODUCES) DESIRE ➔ (BUILDS) TRANSFORMED STRUCTURE OF FEELING ➔ (CREATES) IMPETUS TO RESIST ➔ (PRODUCES) SOCIAL**

**ACTION ➔ (PRODUCES) IMAGINATION ➔ (PROMPTS) CREATION OF CULTURAL OBJECTS**

These multi-directional states which occur across temporalities are constituted by one another. Rather than an attempt to define stages in the development of the imagination as linear, which would contradict this project's intention, TIATLYWFNDH seeks to highlight the cyclical nature of the development of imaginative processes. Processes of development might just as easily be presented as follows,

**ENGAGEMENT WITH CULTURAL OBJECT ☒ (PROMPTS) IMAGINATION ☒ (IGNITES) TRANSFORMED STRUCTURE OF FEELING ☒ (BUILDS) SOCIAL ACTION ☒ (CREATES) IMPETUS TO RESIST ☒ (CREATES) DESIRE ☒ (PRODUCES) IMAGINATIVE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL AS STORED IN CULTURAL OBJECT ☒ (PRODUCES) CREATION OF CULTURAL OBJECTS ☒ (PRODUCES) IMAGINATION**

The process of imagining as it relates to cultural production is a multi-directional cycle which at different stages requires the circulation of affects to strengthen attachments to a state of freedom which requires resistant action to actualise. Without providing direction, TIATLYWFNDH encourages those who engage with it to take part in the process outlined above by engaging with cultural objects gathered from the past and present in order to create the liberated conditions of the future collectively.

Following Hartman, TIATLYWFNDH respects the limits of what cannot be known which "rather than leading to pessimism or despair…must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future" (Hartman 2008, 13). The visual material contained in the digital assemblages signals what is absent, the "gaps" in historical narrative. These gaps are confronted using a range of creative methods, not for the purpose of amending them but in order to expose the limits of linear temporality. TIATLYWFNDR includes the methodological elements explored in part one of this chapter: interview transcripts, workshop resources, a soundscape, critical fabulation, visual and discourse analysis as well as research notes, questions and instructions for the user. It also includes videos of dialogic exchange with artists, poets and critical scholars that I was invited to partake in as a writer during the fieldwork process. It invites its audience to consider the power relations that determined what kinds of archival material was available to me as a researcher and under what circumstances and conditions my engagements with said material occurred. It also prompts reflection on the forces that condition our knowledge of the past, the moments, memories and

potential that cannot be neatly rendered. The title of this project illustrates its core principle – that the aesthetic presentation of cultural objects and speculative engagements attempts to displace the authority of the historical timeline by eschewing direction. The temporal landscape offers no guide as to how one might engage with its contents, nor does it recreate a sequence of historical events using archival material. Rather than "directing", it attempts to disrupt temporal categorisations of archival material as belonging to the past/present/future by overlapping them on the screen, presenting multi-functional arrows that have been "warped" and randomly navigating the user to different parts of the assemblage. The middle of the digital assemblage displays a moving collage of images of archival documents taken during the process of fieldwork. It is intended to replicate the experience of engaging with multiple archival documents laid out in front of the researcher in the archive. Visual overlapping represents the ways the past, present and future encroach on one another. All dates related to archival material (when material was created and/or deposited in the archive) have been withheld. The "FRAGMENTS" embedded in this thesis which play with the order of events and punctuate theoretical analysis with forms of aesthetic and narrative experimentation are displayed on the edges of the digital assemblage. They act as another arena in which to present and explore the non-linguistic force of cultural objects.


Figure 7.

TIATLYWFNDR grapples with the impossibility of total narrative cohesion by enacting temporal disorder visually and organisationally, challenging the hegemony of linear thinking. The ability to drag, drop and move objects across the screen replicates the haptics of touch. The assemblage is constructed with distinct zones related to text, sound and image which replicate the "zones of contact" established in the process of fieldwork. These zones overlap and bleed into one another with images linked to interview transcripts using associative indexing on the basis of cross-temporal affinity across the site. This design element was prompted by reflection on Walter Benjamin's essay "On the Concept of History", in which he argues against the safety of historicism in favour of a materialist approach which is brave enough to explode the continuum of history (Benjamin 2006). As a researcher, touch, which muddles dualistic thinking as identified by Sedgwick (2003) is one way of exploding this continuum. It allows individuals or collectives to play with, rearrange and disrupt the timeline of "facts" and "events" that constitute History. Clicking on random material or arrows prompts text, image or sounds to appear. Users are asked questions as they navigate the temporal landscape and provided with workshop materials to enable political education; they are encouraged to think of themselves as more than just a passive receptacle for presented material.

A number of the design layouts and features embrace chaos. Users can scroll, click and zoom in any direction, text moves when engaged with, mimicking the fluidity of exchange. I understand these visual design choices as a representation of the topological distortion that forms a key part of this project's theoretical framework. I visualise this distortion, playing with surfaces, modalities, insides and outsides – deforming and reshaping spatialities by enabling users to move, flip and change the size of objects on the page. These design choices also incorporate elements of anarchic cartography, utopian extrapolation and performativity. They follow Rhiannon Firth's use of critical cartography as a participatory pedagogical method for working with autonomous social movements. Like her, I understand that "maps make reality as much as they represent it" (Firth 2014, 158). Though not strictly a map for reasons I have detailed in Chapter One, this temporal landscape attempts to reproduce affects that would sustain a belief in the possibility of liberated reality and the potential of resistance against the violent markers of the present. The dialogic elements of the assemblage encourage the audience to make connections between the demands expressed in cultural objects and contemporary political demands, to examine the connection between those demands and the creation of the future. TIATLYWFNDR does not claim to materially change the organisation

of social life, rather it fortifies the desire to do so, intending to make the likelihood of autonomous political organisation more plausible for individuals and communities.

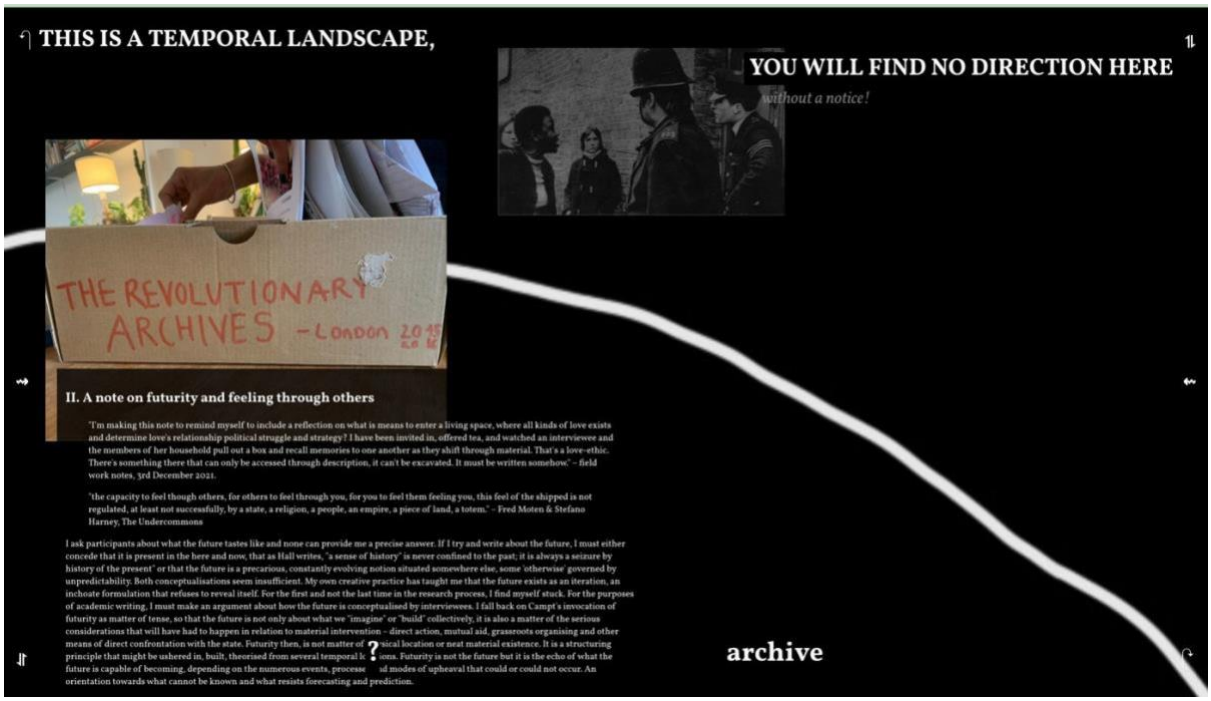



Figure 8.

TIATLYWFNDR is a temporal zone based on participatory arts methods; that is, methods that invite engagement and participation from an audience. In keeping with the prioritisation of dialogic exchange, the digital assemblage invites users to send their thoughts and reflections to the researcher at thisisatemporallandscape@gmail.com. It also provides one hundred workshop prompts which users are encouraged to share in workshops and spaces of political education. It nudges its audience to take up the task of critical thought and develop an awareness of the levels of political consciousness raising necessary in order to sufficiently attend to the complexity of the present historical conjuncture. Rather than seek redress by providing a counter history or counter narrative to state violence, this landscape follows Lorna Finalyson in her elucidation of anarchist pedagogy which moves away from the notion that political subjects must gain "freedom from" specific restraint towards the notion that they must be able to express a "freedom-to" (Finlayson 2016). It focuses on the notion of freedom as agentic, defined by what *is* permissible, what *can* be built and to borrow from Lenin (2018), what is to be done. This anti-hegemonic framing is consistent throughout my creative work and is a core component of my experimental writing. Traditional historiography is merely the sequential ordering of events by

those with power. TIATLYWFNDR utilises creative methods to speak back to the limits of historicisation. This temporal landscape stays with absence, it asks – what affects, crucial in the creation of the actions necessary to build another set of social relations are buried deep in cultural objects? What time- bending methods might we use to reveal and fortify them?

In *Unruly Visions, The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora,* a work that uses aesthetic practice to connect diasporic intimacies and challenge the hegemony of national borders, Gayatri Gopinath states,

> my goal is to arrange and position these works so as to identify a shared queer visual aesthetic that mobilises new ways of seeing both regions and archives, and that puts into play, through an affective register, an intimate relation between the two (Gopinath 2018, 5).

Similarly, the temporal play that TIATLYWFNDR encourages is intended to enable users of the assemblage to forge an intimate relation with material that has been defined by its chronology as well as geographic and temporal location. In the process of navigating the landscape, the creation of intimate relations based on emotion, feeling and affect through associative indexing for example, enhances the political claims denouncing capitalism, borders, the nation and the state which are evidenced in archival material. Specific design features increase the affective potency of material and enable trace thought, following Glissant (2020), to move the user away from the strangulation of the system. It is of course impossible to resist any and all forms of narrativisation in the visual and spatial representation of this project, particularly when dealing with material that has been neatly categorised by state-sanctioned archives. But, TIATLYWFNDR uses visual elements of the digital space to enact resistance to an overreliance on chronology, in order to refocus attention on the forces which can constitute a liberatory structure of feeling.

Hall writes that popular culture is "not where we go to find out who we really are, the truth of our experience" (Hall 1993, 113) but rather it serves as a "theatre of popular fantasies" (Hall 1993, 113) in which wishes and desires are played out. Thinking through this provocation in relation TIATLYWFNDR, I note how it acts as a digital playground for the proliferation of resistant culture. As an extension of Sadie Plant's (2000) coinage of the term "cyberfeminism," I am interested in the creation of fantasy realms that reaffirm belief in the possibility of materialist resistance. Realms that intend to change social relations through a strategic use of the internet and digital space. If as, Plant argues, cyberfeminism represents "an insurrection on

the part of the goods and materials of a patriarchal world" (Plant 2000, 274) then TIATLYWFNDR situates itself as part of the legacy of digital endeavours that seek to demonstrate *what could be*, how the destruction of patriarchal and other oppressive modes of social organisation would allow people to taste the future. Through a deconstruction of the technologies of capital, race and gender, a questioning of temporality and a reaffirmation of a politics of desire through cultural objects, the aim of this playground is simple – to produce a fantastical space that explores the possibility of liberation. A space that stimulates the affective desires which produce the imagination as well as the psychological impulse to yearn, wish, long for that which has been deemed impossible.

My desire to experiment digitally follows the call from the Second Cyberfeminist International Meeting held in Brazil in 2018. The event brought together anonymous radical feminist organisers and movement leaders interested in the separation of digital space from the grips of commerce and capital. They demanded a "promotion of the commons on the internet, for widespread access to culture and knowledge, through free sharing (copy left) and actions aimed at promoting and recognising collaborative and collective means of creation" (Cyberfeminist International 2018). Actioning the commons in digital space requires the researcher and/or artist to refuse the rubrics that enable the archive's confinement of information. In displaying images taken in the archive in a free, publicly accessible manner and performing the deference to archival authority required to gain the necessary permissions to display such material, I fuse the principles of guerrilla intellectualism, as defined by Rodney (1990) with the aspirations of cyberfeminists. I aim to create a digital commons which evidences my political preoccupations with collectivity and organised forms of resistance.

Whilst touch is the guiding methodological arch of this project, in digital space, it is intimately related to texture. Sedgwick states "Texture, in short, comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organisation hovers just below the level of shape or structure" (Sedgwick 2003, 16). In assembling material using a speculative, non-linear rationale, I display one of texture's core dimensions, evasion. By hovering just below the level of shape and structure, the texture of objects on the screen, which overlap and bleed into one another so much so that the "user" must pull them apart, evade the legibility necessary for them to be temporally placed. Through a visual representation of the enactment of multiple creative methods, I produce a textured effect that Sedgwick writes, immerses my audience "in a field of active narrative hypothesising, testing and re-understanding how physical properties act and are

acted upon over time" (Sedgwick 2003, 13). Evasive textures give objects back their agency by shifting the responsibility for their narrativisation away from historiographical forces back onto the individual or collective who determine their meaning. **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE** instructs its audience to understand the affective potential of cultural objects by disorientating their sense of where they belong in history. By refusing to provide an overarching temporal schema that neatly places archival objects in a timeline and therefore gives them ontological security, this speculative project aims to give objects back the ability to *move* us with their signs and messages. It calls on us to remember that objects act, speak back, demand.

**A Black feminist assemblage**

I name this temproal landscape as a Black feminist assemblage because it gathers material in order to create designs, layouts, arrangements that, as Jasbir Puar argues "de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing" (Puar 2012, 57) and treat matter it as if it were an actor. Assemblage, from Deleuze and Guattari's "agencement" names an arrangement of relations and patterns (Phillips 2006, 108). It exists as what Red Chidgey calls "constellations of heterogeneous forces: people, objects, technologies, images and practices that contingently coalesce to give certain ideas prominence at a particular time and place." (Chidgey 2018, 42). As a visual strategy and methodological principle, assemblage helps to codify the scavenger methodology on which this project rests. The Black feminist application of assemblage is evident in my intention, as a practice-based researcher, to generate other forms and ways of knowing that run parallel to and critique dominant knowledge systems produced by traditional academic approaches. Rather than continue this overreliance on traditional modes of knowledge and the methodologies that produce them, I have chosen instead to enact a method that is not only countercultural but that refuses to answer a violent world on its own terms. Black feminism is an explicitly political analytic mode for assessing resistance to capitalist power which seeks to answer the question of how individuals and collectives can seek freedom and encourages the synthesis of liberatory knowledge.

Black feminism has sought the cultivation of forms of cultural and artistic freedom, which extend beyond the limits of political analysis. This has resulted in a number of radical approaches to text, image and visual presentation, including the work of Rizvana Bradley in *Anteaesthetics: Black Aesthesis and the Critique of Form* (2023) and Tina Campt in *Listening to Images*

(2017), from which my own use of digital space take direction. I am interested in the notion that outside of a material body that is actualised through identity claims, there are also several coeval affective forces acting on us at any given time. In creating a temporal landscape built and experienced online, I aim to push my creative practice beyond language, using visual experimentation and forms of spatial design to represent my engagements with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, archival material and temporal disruption. I have chosen to transform assemblage, a concept which holds that matter is an agent, into a mode of presentation to demonstrate my interest in the non-tangible, non- linguistic dimensions of the imagination and its role in the production of material resistance. I utilise digital assemblage in order to collate, trace and expand affects, what Eric Shouse calls the "pre-personal, non-linguistic forces" that go on to shape feelings or "biographical sensations" (Shouse 2005). Assemblage produces affects because it takes seriously the idea that force is not constituted by the body alone. By collating and displaying archival material in this manner, I aim to highlight how engagement with the non-human (cultural objects) produces flows of intensity that can help determine responses to any given political condition. Digital assemblage continues affect theory's questioning of the distinction between human and non-human bodies, TIATLYWFNDR aims to reproduce resonances that orientate users towards a transformational politic. My concerns are threefold: to evidence the role of the imagination in the production and reception of cultural objects, to use affect to produce resistant desires and contribute to creation of a liberatory structure of feeling by triggering imaginative thinking in political subjects.

**Rationale and politics of assembly: what's the use?**

I situate my work in the digital realm to maximise its efficacy as an educational tool. In a so-called "post-pandemic" political environment in which the movements of disabled people have been curtailed, public health measures have all but ceased and responsibility for health has been thoroughly individualised, the non-invasive and dialogic capacities of digital technologies are crucial. In a moment where the prospect of gathering in person remains compromised for large groups of people, I aimed to create a work that could be accessed "at a distance," using archival material that working class people might otherwise be unable to retrieve. Having produced experimental writing that questioned books as commodities, the use of a display format that does not require physical space, travel or cost money to purchase is the logical next step in removing barriers to engagement with my creative practice, a longstanding preoccupation of mine as an artist researcher.

In *Health Communism*, Artie Vierkant and Beatrice Adler Bolton (2022), trace how under capitalism, certain abandoned populations are designated surplus by the state when they can no longer be used as fuel to extract profit. These populations (including the disabled and welfare claimants) are cut off from access to resource, healthcare and creative freedom. This analysis of the present political condition informs my crafting of a creative submission that attempts to free resource from capital. Digital space is a prime location for the creation of liberatory affects because it is not site-specific, it can be engaged with in a variety of locations and at different times. Engagements with the landscape can be thoroughly personal or collective: participants do not have to engage in processes physically initiated by myself to explore the ideas inherent to this thesis with others or to experience an affective shift.[45] The display, collaging, and speculative elements of this temporal landscape might introduce users of this web-assemblage to forms of theory, archival material and information gleaned via interview transcripts that would not otherwise have been available to them. Situating this temporal landscape in an online space enables my creative practice to become mobile and itinerant – capable of being built on, responded to and expanded across a variety of forms. In the same manner as the *Itinerant Languages of Photography Project* (2013) initiated by Eduardo Cadava and Gabriela Nouzeilles which began with the axiom that photography can never remain in a single place or time, I have chosen a format that keeps movement at its core. Such a format does not treat photographs and other forms of archival material as if they are static and seeks, above all, to pose a new set of questions to its audience.

I outline the rationale and the politics of this project's assembly in order to link them to a central notion in this thesis, the question of use. This thesis investigates the uses of the imagination in resistant cultural production. I argue that one such "use" is the creation of the impetus to resist through the fortification of attachments to liberatory desire. TIATLYWFNDH was conceived with this use in mind, it is intended to be used to move political subjects towards material resistance. In *What's the Use?* Ahmed writes that "use" is a way to touch things that both is and is not related to the function of an object. She notes, "Use is a relation as well as an activity that

[45] Though physical access to computers is also determined along class and racial lines, the internet is still the location that would enable TIATLYWFNDH to be accessed by the greatest number. I note for those internet access in their homes, the assemblage could be engaged with in free public spaces such as libraries or community centres. At several points during this project, I have grappled with the impermanence of the internet, making plans to secure a domain main in order to ensure my project stays online for as long as possible. In order to properly grapple with the notion that the internet is not forever, I will devise a means of publicly displaying and presenting this research project using video to document the website's existence project so that it may it may also be accessed by an in-person audience guided by the researcher.

often points beyond something even when use is about something: to use something points to what something is for" (Ahmed 2019, 23). The history of use is, in part, a history of signalling the function of objects. Ahmed's interest in the biography of ordinary objects and what their uses signal about them animates the logic of this project. The intended and unintended uses of the imagination by anti-racist and feminist organisations, collectives and artists signal that the function of it is intimately connected to political demand and the liberatory reorganisation of social life. As stated previously, these uses move the imagination beyond the realm of individual cognition towards an understanding of it as a socially produced phenomenon which might be cultivated for specific purposes. I return to the question of use in subsequent chapters. My intention as a writer and researcher is to produce artistic material that moves its audience toward political transformation. However, this digital assemblage does not need to achieve this grand ambition to be *useful*. TIATLYWFNDH emerges as an artistic object that has, as Ahmed states, "been shaped by the requirements of use" (Ahmed 2019, 26). Its function is determined by the audience, whose interactions with will shape its requirements of use. Over the next five years, the website will continually be made and remade, incorporating feedback, ideas and questions from various audiences, it will continually respond to requirements established by those who engage with it. In this way, it will become more useful through its dialogic function over time.

**Collaboration**

The creative practice element of this research project is intended for educational and pedagogic purposes. I wish for it to be collectively accessed by political actors and creative practitioners as a political and affective consciousness raising tool. Throughout this thesis, I argue for collective uses of the imagination which are capable of producing thoughts and action that confront the complexity of the current political conjuncture. It would therefore be hypocritical for me to have produced the creative elements of this project alone. A theoretical understanding of collaboration adds new dimension to my analysis of the imagination. Reflecting on their decade long collaboration as thinkers and artists, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2021) suggest that "sharing" is both a condition and a practice that heightens *responsiveness* and causes a general increase in sensitivity and affectability. In taking the importance of emotional landscapes seriously through a detailed analysis of affect, I suggest an increase in sensitivity with regards to each other and the world around us is one way political actors reignite imaginative capacity. I tried to recreate such sensitivity in the creation of TIATLYWFNDH. If to be sensitive means occupying a heightened state of awareness, this mode of being is strategically useful in a set of

social conditions that seeks, above all, to numb us to the pain, suffering and exploitation necessary to facilitate the flow of capital. Refinding sensitivity via modes of collaboration denaturalises capitalist structural orderings by allowing us to reveal our social needs to one another in the knowledge that they can be met communally. My belief in collaboration follows June Jordan's statement that she, as a Black radical, had to "invent the power [her] freedom [required]" (Jordan 1985, 65). I understand collaboration as a strategic attempt to cultivate the collective power necessary to respond to a drawn out present. Collaboration is one way of refusing a neoliberal logic that valorises the individual and stipulates that we become actively suspicious of one another. Jordan gives name to environments of (un)possibility that permeate under oppressive conditions. Like her, I believe that "writing back is not the same as fighting back" (Jordan 1985, 65) but for the purposes of this project, writing back *with others* brings one closer to the ability to fight back materially.

TIATLYWFNDH could not have been actualised alone. This digital assemblage emerged from an ongoing collaboration between myself and website designer Agnes Cameron and a one-time collaboration with architect Dr. Thandi Loewenson. The process of collaboration was defined by workshopping topological design elements and sharing theoretical and creative resources in reading groups. Topics discussed included the many dimensions of the imagination, traditions in design aesthetics, software and hardware coding and Black feminism. Myself and Agnes Cameron held in-person sessions planning the landscape's logic and functionality, collaging images and engaging jointly with critical theory related to cyberfeminism, assemblage and cultural objects. This included research on the principles of associative indexing and anti-anti-aliasing which spaced the look and feel of the site.[46] In order to create TIATLYWFNDR's dialogic function (the capacity for the exchange of ideas, affects and forms of analysis between two or more persons), collaboration also had to be embedded into the creative practice element of this project. TIATLYWFNDR was conceived through relational processes of exchange. Whilst the material displayed in the assemblage is my own work, both collaborators were instrumental in the development of the conceptual basis that underpins it as well as its digital construction. The temporal landscape was constructed jointly by myself and engineer Agnes Cameron, whose work is focused on designing, building and maintaining software and hardware in collaboration with artists and researchers. Together we attempted to produce a feminist art

[46] For more on anti-anti aliasing as a design principle as well as cyberfeminist design methods, see Mindy Leu's teaching portal. Mindy Leu, "Teaching Portal," Website accessed June 14, 2024 http://designforthe.net/workshops/antiantialiasing/ and *The Cyberfeminist Index:* Mindy Seu ed., The Cyberfeminist Index (Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2022).

object that plays with progressivist narratives by disassembling them and removing recourse to linear navigation, pushing those who engage with TIATLYWFNDR to refocus their attention on the role the imagination in materialist resistance. Collaboration remains an essential element of my creative practice and is implied by the relational dimensions of touch as a methodological practice – one rarely touches alone; one always comes into contact with something else in the act of touching. In arguing that the imagination be rescued from the realm of subjective cognition, I could not design a landscape for engagement with cultural production in isolation. At every point, this thesis has argued that the affective experience of political immobility that plagues the present moment requires a collective response. My attempts to model this throughout the research process has required me to defy the notion of singular ownership in an academic context and to find others to imagine with.

**Display and curation**

In their experimental and provocative text*, The Computer is a Feeling*, Omar Rizwan and Tim Hwang write,

> 1. The computer is a feeling, not a device.
>
> 2. By this we mean that what makes a computer a computer has nothing to do with commands, compilers, or even machines. For us, computer is the specific feeling of artifacts that allow for intimate systems of personal meaning.
>
> […]
>
> 18. Making "computer" mean computer-feelings and not computer-devices shifts the boundaries of what is captured by the word. It removes a great many things – smartphones, language models, "social" "media" – from the domain of the computational. It also welcomes a great many things – notebooks, papercraft, diary, kitchen – back into the domain of the computational.
>
> 19. The agenda is to expand our understanding of what makes the computer-feeling (Rizwan and Hwang 2023).

In the construction of TIATLYWFNDR, I reproduced "computer-feeling" by replicating engagements that took place in the archive aesthetically; for example, attempting to reproduce what it felt like to rummage through physical documents spread on a table by overlapping images or reproducing the experience of exchange with an interviewee by placing text excerpts

side by side. I emphasise the representation of these processes because digitisation can flatten the sensory and haptic, lessening their experiential quality. I attempt to bypass this flattening in order to replicate touch through a screen. I follow Rizwan and Hwang (2023) in the notion that computer feeling must be cultivated through a use of digital space that attends to the "intimate systems of personal meaning." In this instance, that meaning is my own physical excitement, anticipation, curiosity, and desire for freedom. I initiated a process of collating material that consolidated and affirmed these feelings, organising them so that they could be shared with others in order to shatter the perceived political impasse. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton's argue that the word curate is akin to "caring for" (Lehrer and Milton 2011, 4). I acted as a curator; selecting and layering image, text and video. I *cared for* cultural objects by endeavouring to find their connections to the present and future. As a feminist artist-researcher, my curatorial practice is driven by an ethic of care which Tina Campt defines as a "temporal loop of durational presence… a refusal to look past one another's precarity" (Campt 2022) and Sarah Marie Hall defines as "labour, care is labouring" (Hall 2023, 31). I laboured, assembling archival material as one part of a wider project of resistance that sought to strengthen the collective ability to refuse to look past one another's precarity in an environment of crisis. The display and curation of this project seeks artistic modes of relation that sustain life against the forces that wish to extinguish it.

In the process of curation, I assessed material's legibility, its value to racialised working class communities and thought about creative ways to explain and encourage engagement with the assemblage. Such concerns are reflected in the decision to avoid abstraction where possible in the presentation of the landscapes conceptual basis. I curated material in the hope of making liberatory arguments and affects more freely available, reshaping the current structure of feeling and prompting audience curiosity about the possibility of coalitional politics. I aimed to be *careful* with cultural objects without treating them with undue reverence. My curatorial practice is driven by an interest in radical Marxist and feminist/communist traditions, which begin with a critical analysis of labour exploitation under capitalism and the development of forms of collective struggle amongst the working class. These concerns are represented curatorially through the selection and display of material related to the acquisition of rights and freedoms for workers, an end to austerity measures and racialised violence, a subversion of the national border and critical support for armed anti-colonial resistance across the world.


Figure 9.

**Conclusion: who touches?**

Lastly, touching is a queer method. Whilst the sensuous elements of touch are obvious, I situate touching as a queer method because it signals the curiosity necessary to cultivate non-normative engagement with the world. When one reaches out a hand to touch in this context, they might not know what they will find. Queer theory emerges from a curiosity that is borne from a rejection of the strictures of heteronormative society, a longing for another set of relations. Queers touch because they are dissatisfied with what is, because they are always in search of something more, some other form of social relation, a place that is not here. Touching locates the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that circulates in and around cultural production because it is a disorderly action steeped in longing. In my movement between disciplines and insertion of creativity and temporal chaos into the methodology for this research project, following my own queer curiosity, I have failed to render a total history to my audience. Such a failure has resistant potential and I hope its centrality to my method reveals a lack of allegiance to historical convention. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam writes,

> we can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the

> unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities (Halberstam 2011, 88).

I embrace failure in the way my methods appear scattered and various, refusing to sit comfortably in a disciplinary tradition. Touch is an umbrella term for a multi-pronged means of methodological engagement, a framework for the mobilisation of a range of methods in this thesis: critical fabulation, interviews, soundscapes, workshops, digital assemblage, as well as discourse and visual analysis. As a digital assemblage, TIATLYWFNDR proposes an alternative creative method for engaging with research findings which animates and recreates the process of scavenging through archives during the fieldwork process. In refusing an overarching temporal logic in digital place; explicitly eschewing direction, contextualisation, and narrative in the presentation of cultural objects, I shift the users focus away from how cultural objects are situated in a historical timeline towards what they can *do*, their relationship and ability to produce a set of liberatory affects. TIATLYWFNDR is a space for engagement with the objects of the past *sans* history, a challenge to refuse the legibility that chronology affords to the past, present and future. Though rebellious, this queer method is still rigorous. I do not disavow the importance of methodological practice, this project simply seeks to, as Matt Brim and Azim Ghaiziani argue, "recognize what in the world is not academic: the ongoing struggles for survival that exceed our methods, our countermethods, and our antimethods." (Brim and Ghaiziani 2019, 39).

I situate my method halfway between the requirement to surrender to the language of the academy and a purposeful failing of its conventions. My method begins with what I can touch and a desire for collective social action borne from the imagination. My methods seek to uncover the relationship between cultural objects found in the archive and the crucial expansion of desires which solidify a liberatory structure of feeling that, in turn, cultivate the resistant action necessary to produce free being. My attempt to organise and explain this rationale through a set of methodological processes is not containment, I do not wish to locate the imagination and export it. Research is a fundamentally extractive process; a process that this thesis both succeeds and fails at avoiding. The subversive qualities of the imagination implore us to understand that to touch does not mean to capture. In touching cultural objects then, in facilitating disorderly lingering's, I return to my belief that all those invested in imagining, enacting and strategising towards liberated existence must first loosen their attachment to the narrative totality conferred by history.

Figure 10.

# *FRAGMENT: "He can't evict us without a notice!"*

[47] Photograph of Olive Morris, black communist squatter and cofounder of the Brixton Black Women's Group, confronting police officers. Text excerpt from Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (London: Hajar Press, 2021), 20.

'He knows he can't evict us without a notice!' Olive screams. She hates that the pigs assume she doesn't know the ins and outs of squatting law. Where is Liz? Why has she left her to deal with them on her own? Olive gets real close to the officer's face, makes sure she covers him with her saliva, just to show him she isn't afraid. That's one thing they said at the meetings: never let the pigs know you fear them. If they know you fear them, you are easier to kill.

The police officer is giving her this smug look like he knows something she doesn't—it makes her stomach turn. They come by every week just to make sure Olive and Liz know they're being watched. They didn't treat the women's centre squatters like this; that level of contempt is always reserved for black women and members of the Panthers. The white women just stand there, looking on. Someone takes a photograph as the crowd gathers; it makes her feel a little safer. She knows that if anything happens to her, there will be witnesses. She wants to make the two of them feel small; she is convinced that the superiority conferred by the uniform is inseparable from the men's sense of self. They have chosen to aid the state in its project of dispossession; they have sworn allegiance to destitution, to watching the homeless suffer, to bullying and killing the working class.

She feels like a performer in a circus, explaining to these white men that her home cannot just be ripped from under her feet—and for what? So a landlord can increase his monopoly on housing in Lambeth, when she knows women who have never had a place to call home, whose lives depend on the good will of the next person who lets them sleep on their couch? The flats lie empty, day after day. When Olive and Liz decided to move into 121 Railton Road, they didn't know it would become the site of one of the longest-running squats in London's history, or that Olive would end up on the cover of the Squatters Handbook. They just needed somewhere to stay, and it was easy enough to get in through the laundrette windows and secure the outside. They'd spent many nights there together, planning and plotting. Letting the Panthers and BASH use the space to figure out how to escalate their campaigns against the SUS law. That's when she felt the purest kind of contentment, surrounded by comrades in the struggle, friends in arms. That was what made the harassment bearable – coming back to a house full to the brim with sound, with all the rejects of this world who wanted to build another.

She wanted to talk to Liz about a space specifically for black women's organising. Olive knew that beyond accusations of division, the black woman's position could tell them something specific about the worker and racial capitalism. Every time they were dismissed in the meetings, something inside her broke. The movement was falling apart. But it was women that kept things alive on the ground–they worked with the lawyers to get brothers out of prison, to stop deportations in action; they ran the mutual aid networks, stocked the bookshop, facilitated the meetings. Yet their strategies were picked apart, their ideas whispered between brothers' speeches.

She didn't understand how everyone else slept so soundly at night, with so much wrong with the world. Sometimes the sky in London would settle into a black so thick, so dense, it was impossible to see through. Watching it roll over the city, she would think of the global chains that connected her to other anti-colonial movements across the world. She'd never felt more power than as a squatter, firmly in the centre of an organised, relentless communist movement. They were showing the people that things could be had for free. This world wasn't about how much you owed, or keeping your head down to avoid trouble. She remembered Lenin: So long as the state exists there is no freedom; when there is freedom, there will be no state.

Still, this life was not without its indignities. Never knowing if this would be your last night in the building, whether they would send dogs in to chase you out. Olive knew they could rely on support from burgeoning anarchist movements, but the relationship remained uneasy. They didn't organise together because their visions of freedom didn't always align. Some days, she didn't know if she would come home to find that Liz had been taken to the police station again; it was exhausting, nobody spoke about how humiliating the struggle could be. Yet Olive knew resistance held no promise of an easy life. Every day she got dressed considering her commitments to her comrades and to the movement. Today, she was committed to showing these police officers just how far she could throw her contempt.

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# CHAPTER THREE: THE FORCE OF ENCOUNTER – IMAGINATIVE-REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL IN DIALOGIC SPACE

*But then these guys were like: "Oh right, you've got the Communist Manifesto on your computer yeah?" And so, we read it together, but it was that kind of sociality that gave me the comfort to be like, no, actually I'm going to read this and this is important. And so, from there it became more than affirmation. It became about what possibilities there are, what radical possibilities there are in this space that I just did not imagine were possible at all. – Anonymous Interview Participant*

Encounter names the space that is created through a meeting premised on exchange. During my fieldwork which took place from 2021-22, I conducted three workshops at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Bush Theatre and Toynbee Hall, a community centre in East London, aiming to explore the use and location of the imagination in resistant cultural production. I turn towards an analysis of encounters that took place in one workshop in particular at the Institute of Contemporary (ICA) in London on April 14th 2022 with fifteen participants. This workshop, titled "What Does The Future Taste Like?" was advertised as follows:

> This in-person, interactive workshop for young people will use collective readings, free writing and discussion-based elements to explore and unearth the potential of our political imaginations. It will ask young people what the purpose of imagining is, what they understand temporality to mean and what the connections between political struggles can teach us the moment we find ourselves in. It will ask them to identify the enemy and think about what is needed to defeat them. *What Does the Future Taste Like?* is a workshop designed to create a space of provocation, questioning and reflection about our current political moment, the worlds we seek to build and the strategies we must employ to bring about liveable conditions (ICA, 2022).

I focus my attention on encounters that occurred inside this space in order to analyse the impact of the imagination in transforming the felt texture of social relations, in producing resistant desire through affect. This chapter uses encounter as a framework to describe and analyse the uses of the imagination in workshop spaces and track participants engagements with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential. My attempt to recall these encounters follows Dionne Brand's (1990, 2006) poetic practice. Brand's meticulous noting, inventory and fragmentary

recollections of event and encounter in revolutionary political contexts codifies these occurrences between people for and against the public record. In *No Language is Neutral,* she addresses poems directly to those she met and struggled alongside. To Phyllis Coard, the Minister of Women's Affairs in the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada (1979-83), Brand writes,

> Phyllis, when you sit down and explain
> the revolution, it did sound sweet and
> it did sound possible (Brand 1990, 11).

Following her memorialisation of various encounters and her insistence on capturing the fleeting moments in which resistant desire circulated, this chapter investigates the encounters with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that emerged through dialogic processes initiated during my fieldwork. It attempts to map the voices, forms of relation and affective charges that flowed between participants and myself as the researcher. Workshop spaces were devised to generate the exchange of politicised information as a means of cultivating a critical and creative understanding of our current political conjuncture. In the workshop that took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, participants[48] were young people aged 16-25 from a diverse range of backgrounds, individuals with an interest in building or expanding their critical consciousness outside of educational institutions and those who had attachments to left political thought. As the workshop began, participants remarked on their lack of access to radical material from the past due to institutional gatekeeping and not knowing where or how to access material. They reflected on how their status as working-class people prevented them from engaging with the markers of cultural capital. The encounters that took place during the workshop reinforced the importance of collaboration by inviting others to think alongside myself as the artistic researcher. Participation was anchored by an exploration of the artistic *and* political uses of the imagination, further eroding the enforced binary between "art" and politics.

To return to Glissant's (2020) notion of "trace thought" which refutes the extremes of possession and calls on researchers to enable the development of shared consciousness amongst peoples, my facilitation focused on cementing connection between participants. I staged various dialogic processes of encounter: asking participants to introduce themselves, their work, their political ethos, desires and relationship to the world as the starting point for relational exchange. Allowing threads of possibility to unfold from points of encounter involved contending with

[48] I refer to individuals who took part in the workshop as "participants," meaning very literally "a person who takes part in something" rather than to invoke the statistical language of data collection.

the different and sometimes competing desires and perceptions of social reality which stemmed from differing subject positions and political ethos. I used encounters and experiences that occurred in the workshop shape as a basis for questioning the force of linear temporality and examined how interactions with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential changed participants understanding of the present political conjuncture. This included a discussion on the thoughts and feelings that archival material from the "past" (as designated by European historiography) sparked in participants and how they felt it related to the present moment. What did consigning material to the "past" do to our ability to connect with it and extract strategic principles? What were the specific qualities of cultural objects that sparked in us the desire to resist? What was different about *now* that made texts feel more or less relevant? The act of speaking and listening, exposing productive tension and contradiction through relational exchange mirrored the dialectical processes that can birth new paradigms and modes of assessment with regard to political action and the imagination. Workshops conceptually removed the imagination from the realm of individual cognition and subjectivity by encouraging participants to let their imaginations and political desires meet, mirror one another and expand the realm of political demand.

In the workshop space, we began by contextualising the present political moment, defining for ourselves the features of neoliberalism which had shaped the last fifteen years and what we understood by the notion of political impasse. We then read about and discussed the principles of Black and racialised women's feminist organising from 1970-1990, focusing on the operation of groups such as The Brixton Black Women's Group (1973-89) and The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (1978-83). This included a discussion of an excerpt of the late Menelik Shabazz' recording of the first National Black Women's Conference which took place in London in 1979. We identified theoretical and affective groundings that marked the work of these groups: including their commitment to transnationalism, feminism, anti-imperialism, Marxism, their practice of Political Blackness and broad-based coalition building across left organisations at the time. Discussion included reading these groups' demands in light of our present conditions under capitalism and a reflection on how cultural objects from the archive produced and reproduced the imagination. We read the OWAAD Manifesto against an excerpt of Jackie Wang's poem *The Coral Tree* (2021) to identify differing representations of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential. This was followed by a free-writing session, where participants were asked to respond to the ideas provoked by the workshop using language.

The workshop was often characterised by moments of collective realisation, sighs and identification with political demands which I explore in more detail in this chapter. These emotionally driven gestures produced the circulation of affects that renewed a sense of commitment to defeating the current feeling of political immobility that plagues the present conjuncture. Individuals expressed a critique of how neoliberalism and the increased privatisation of social life in the form of cuts to youth services, benefits, legal aid, financial and educational resources had resulted in communities devoid of central meeting spaces and other processes that would aid the development of a communal critical consciousness. By producing a tactility with cultural objects, presenting it to participants via slides, worksheets and images, I facilitated a shared critical appraisal of the uses of the imagination in resistant cultural production. The workshop offered an enclave in which forms of radical thought, meeting and encounter were possible, inside of a decaying social landscape. It encouraged people to replenish their affective reserves through creative exercises, to study the structure of political desire and develop conceptualisations of the imagination by making connections between themselves and political subjects situated in the "past" by tracing the changes and continuities in material conditions. My framing of the workshop, explored below, offers a specific critique of the hegemony of European histographies that separate and dominate the events of space-time rather than understand them as cotemporaneous.

**Workshop framing: the guerrilla intellectual**

By encouraging workshop participants to think with and against archival material and to name openly the affective resonances and echoes that resulted from their touching of said material, my facilitation created a space in which feeling took primacy. The workshop began with a series of framing rubrics and prompts: one being that our use of language regarding "politics" should always be rooted in a materialist analysis of social conditions. I asked participants, *how does what we say matter in the struggle for transformation?* What desires can our language produce? This framing took place alongside a critique of historiographical accounts which sequester political organisations and the movements related to them into neatly packaged historical periods. My critique and attempted disruption of the affective consequences of European historiography inside the workshop space was enacted following Rodney's elucidation of the role of the guerrilla intellectual, who he argues must "come to grips with the initial imbalance of power in the context of academic learning" (Rodney 1990, 111). I followed Rodney's elucidation of the role of the guerrilla intellectual in compromising the symbolic power of the academe as well as the art and cultural institutions that legitimise it. In his analysis of Rodney's principle, Tunde Adeleke notes the three steps that the guerrilla intellectual must undertake.

> first, the GI should vigorously attack those distorted ideas within his discipline that are used to legitimize European domination and hegemony. Second, the GI should transcend his disciplinary focus and challenge the dominant social myths in society, particularly those that are used to mask the ugly realities of society. Third, the GI should fully commit himself to the masses by getting closer to, and grounding with them, gaining useful insights into the true character of society (Adeleke 2000, 41).

Notwithstanding the political context of this principle, borne from anti-colonial struggle for independence from colonisation in the Caribbean and on the African Continent, I view guerrilla intellectualism as a radical pedagogical approach that is concerned with cultivating an insurrectionary orientation to the neocolonial state and its institutions. I utilised encounter, "groundings" or meetings between the masses (the general public) and myself as a radical scholar for the purposes of expanding a collective political consciousness. As radical Black feminist situated inside imperial core, I endeavoured to incorporate the instruction he provided into my pedagogical and collaborative approaches with participants as an artist-researcher.

In attempting to enact this pedagogical framework, I frequently asked myself - how might a challenge to the "distorted ideas of [my] own discipline" be incorporated into creative tasks given to participants? How might creative methods embedded in the workshops: freewriting, collective reading, discussion, engagement with images for example, be a vehicle for topological *and* disciplinary distortion? By focusing on the limitations of European historiography, clock-time and chronology, these workshops critically analysed the ideological value of capitalist societies advocating a strictly progressive approach to temporality. My approach asked how we might evade this violent framework in our speech, language and action, utilising cultural production in the process. Challenging the "distorted ideas of my own discipline" meant first denaturalising them; posing questions and prompts that enabled participants to recognise that the features of the way we live are purposeful constructions rather than mere coincidences. Posing these initial deconstructive questions allowed participants to expand their thinking further; naming the ways in which institutions, cultural forms and taken-for-granted social structures such as the nuclear family, liberal democracy, national borders, heteronormativity, the university, and the state are intimately connected to the temporal division of event-time to maximise labour exploitation under capitalism.

To "get closer to" the masses and challenge dominant myths with regard to the imagination, I removed all barriers to entry, making the workshop free whilst specifically encouraging participation from those not engaged in university study. I emphasise my intention to cultivate pedagogical spaces outside of academic institutions precisely because I recognise how their presence imposes a symbolic, physical and material order onto the actions that take place inside of them. However, two of the three workshops that took place during my fieldwork were held in artistic institutions, which are not exempt from the reproduction of symbolic and material power/violence. Art institutions differ from community organising spaces or community centres as they are more intimately connected to the global processes of exploitation that produce contemporary art and publicly funded art. I approached the use of these sites following Vishmidt's plea for a movement away from institutional critique (a circular critique in which the artist is pitted against the institution in isolation) toward an infrastructural critique that would enable a

> move from the institution as a site for "false totalizations" to an engagement with the thoroughly intertwined objective (historical, socio-economic) and subjective (including affect and artistic subjectivization) conditions necessary for the institution and its critique to exist, reproduce themselves, and posit themselves as an immanent horizon as well as transcendental condition (Vishmidt 2017, 267).

Refusing to substitute art for capital by overestimating capitalism's reach, I utilised institutional art spaces to make visible to participants all the processes, the "labor markets, corporate power and property development" (Vishmidt 2017, 267) that framed our meeting in that specific place and at that specific time. In addition, understanding the workshop space and the activities contained in it as an incubator or rehearsal space for radical forms of relation, knowledge production and critical thought about the past, present and future meant breaking down the perceived hierarchy between myself as a facilitator and participants, creating affective environments where participants felt able to share their thoughts. This was achieved by framing the workshop using certain political and emotive values: collectivity, intimacy, intellectual generosity, solidarity, and relation. This enabled me to *become involved* in the workshops myself and not merely guide them.

These workshops focused on the serious and disciplined attainment of freedom and the material forms of grassroots organisation necessary to achieve this. They enabled participants a vocabulary to think critically about and to challenge elements of bourgeois culture as well as the institutions they were embedded in. In crafting this chapter, I have included analysis of several

brief moments of encounter in which the imagination and politicised desire came to the fore to demonstrate the fleetingness of these affective charges. The experience of facilitating the workshops proved to me that the creative practice of those who are interested in embodying the principles of guerrilla intellectualism must be fluid, multi-pronged and strategically framed. It must not be entirely dependent on institutional support must be capable of existing outside of state and institutional frameworks.

**Thinking together: what is the role of culture in the revolution?**

Workshops enabled fierce debate and discussion about how the current structure of feeling is mediated through aspects of culture. Any analysis of the social is underpinned by the distributional categories of profit: capital, land and labour. I understand culture using Raymond William's analysis of it as an ordinary fact of human life, expressed through "institutions and in arts and learning" (Raymond 2014, 2). Culture is, as Williams argues, comprised of two aspects – "the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to and the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested" (Raymond 2014, 3). If culture is a site in which new meaning is constantly evolving, then it is fertile ground for rethinking affective attachments to notions of freedom, revolution and liberation. This thesis stays with the power of arts and learning as a testing ground that challenges the hegemony of social aspects of capitalism and provides new understandings of the past, present and future that can be disputed and tested through dialectical processes.

Understanding the workshop space as a microcosm for this arts and learning meant understanding how it might aid the development of culture by enabling participants to reflect on the structures, systems and processes that shaped their ordinary human existence. Politicising culture through the examination of texts and cultural objects provided a framework for the expression of affects: dissatisfaction, ambivalence, longing, impatience and frustration with the tenets of this world. It moved participants towards an "otherwise" mode: a mode that required them to use their imaginations to engage differently with the world and perhaps most importantly, re-examine the relationship between theory and practice. This was achieved, for example, through a freewriting exercise at the end of the workshop which followed a reading of the OWAAD manifesto (explored below) and a rigorous discussion about the sensuous properties of a liberated future: what the future would feel, taste, smell, look and sound like. Before the freewriting exercise began, I informed participants that they could write without a

specific form or genre in mind, and they did not have to edit their writing for style. They were free to use any or all of the following words; **FREE WORLD, STRIKE, HOLD THE LINE, BREAK, CHAOS, PANIC, ALWAYS, BRIGHT.** The large room had grey linoleum floors; the table was arranged in an L-shape in the middle of it. Outside, light shone through the window, dappling participants with a range of colours at different angles. I looked around the room and saw furious note-taking and states of concentration. I allowed this to continue for 10-15 minutes. At the end of the freewriting exercise, I asked if any participants would be open to sharing their reflections. Silence descended on the room. I waited with an encouraging smile and reminded them that there were no wrong answers. One participant, Izzi Blain, slowly raised her hand and read out the following,

*Care, always*
*Even if all the forces acting upon you forbid it, or disallow, or disavow it*
*Respond with care. Strike back with care.*

*Before a programmed reaction takes hold [tune in/return/switch back] into your instincts of care,*
*And compassion,*
*Nothing needs to be the way that it is,*
*Right now —*

*History is yet to happen - it is taking shape, emerging,*
*So it is right to care about tomorrow*
*And yesterday*
*In all the ways that you can*

*Nothing and no one is simple, or pre written,*
*And there may always be violence and chaos.*

*But there will always be care,*
*Somewhere.* (Blain 2022)

The room fell silent once again. I witnessed other participants share looks with one another, perhaps moved by the sincerity and vulnerability of the piece and Izzi's willingness to share it. In the creation of the cultural object, her use of the poetic form to capture the encounters, resonances and ideas discussed in the workshop space made visible the process of deconstructing temporality, *"History is yet to happen"* and engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential *"Nothing needs to be the way that it is*." In the poem, she theorised care as a multi-pronged methodology from which forms of resistant action can be birthed. For Izzi, care, as expressed through resistant action: riot, mutual aid and so on, stood in opposition to the "*violence*" and "*chaos*" that defines social relations under capitalism. By sharing her writing with others and reading it aloud, she enabled the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained

in it to circulate in the room. She evidenced the flow of intensity, driven by the imagination, that constituted the poem. "Touching" cultural objects from the past enabled her to enact a temporal loop, reintroducing their affective charge back into the room through her own analysis of the present political condition. The charge transformed the register of relational contact; suddenly participants who did not previously know one another, analysed each other's work and visions for liberation as friends and comrades. This reproduction was affirmed in comments expressing affinity following the reading, "Thank you for articulating this," one participant said. Izzi's intervention gave a number of other participants the courage to share their own pieces. This might not have been possible without a space to interrogate the temporalities that precede articulation and define the parameters in which revolutionary thought and action occur. In attempting to challenge the chronology and sequentiality that define hegemonic clock-time as a component of linear temporality, the workshop space enabled what Butler (2024) identifies, the flow of counter-imaginary. This counter-imaginary fortifies an affective framework capable of attending to the scale of violence in the present despite the despair and stasis violence produces. This affective current, driven by the imagination, is relational phenomenon which emerges from creativity. Creativity foregrounds an inventive, experimental and curious orientation to the world, producing the feeling that resistance is indeed possible, despite all evidence to the contrary. This affective mode acts as scaffolding; an imperceptible structure that sustains resistant action. Participants left the room expressing that they felt, "another world was possible."

**Dialogic space**

In building a dialogic creative practice that prioritised exchange through the written word and spoken language, I utilised Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical approach to dialogue, ensuring that the workshops remained open to the possibility of hybridisation, polyglossia, exchange, disagreement and the flow of information (Bakhtin 1981). The study of textual cultural objects from the archive was an attempt to stay attentive to the "aliveness" of material regardless of its temporal location. A Bakhtinian approach to dialogue argues for the concretisation of spaces where multiple voices enter relationships of inter-illumination, where languages change as they come into contact with one another (Bakhtin 1981). The notion of dialogic space emerges from Bakhtin's observations of literary form, his argument for learning through the augmentation of various differing and sometimes opposing perspectives. I applied this to the workshop setting by ensuring that the slippages between the past and present made possible by "moments of

encounter" between participants and cultural objects (from which the imagination was ignited) were enriched by processes of exchange in which inter-illumination through discussion took place. In the room, we didn't always agree, we held visions for the present and future that did not align. For example, the question "what does the future taste like?" was marked by tensions birthed from different conceptualisations of revolution and the differing perspectives on how it might come to pass. Participants who over-relied on liberal notions of social change in which the figure of the individual took prominence expressed their conceptualisations of revolution through personalised mantras such as "rest is revolutionary" and "existence is resistance." These mantras were met with fierce ideological challenges from those whose conceptualisations of revolution emerged from the Marxist tradition. The latter understood revolution as an event or series of events produced by the violent tension of two classes, as a necessity for the establishment of communism and an end to hierarchal social management. The former were often left stuck by the demand to connect collective notions of freedom to their individualised perceptions of revolution. Such ideas were expressed with differing levels of sophistication, but I witnessed, several of what Paulo Freire called "acts of cognition" (Freire 2005, 79), moments in which the cognisable object (the concept) intermediated the cognitive actors (myself and the participants), resolving the "teacher-student" contradiction which Freire argues is necessary for liberating education. As a result of these processes, participants became conscious beings, entire paradigms shifted, new forms of critical thinking incorporated themselves inside of a framework. Participants left the room changed.

Rupert Wegerif (2016) argues that the value of dialogic space is the development of internal and external voices that shape perception and perspective on any given subject and perhaps, most crucially, the processes of relation between individuals. Whilst his work has been utilised in pedagogical frameworks, Bakhtin's theories focused on the value of language and dialogue with regard to literary form. I amended the Bakhtinian approach for my own purposes, facilitating processes of inter-illumination and exchange in the workshop space helped generate imaginative responses based on materialist analysis from participants. They solidified intimate bonds with one another, strengthening each other's attachments to liberatory world-building. In their work on intimacy, Berlant (2021) repurposes the concept as a way of rethinking the public/private divide and devising a new language through which to stress the importance of relation.

> Let's not talk about public and private anymore; let's talk about intimacy, which transects public and private. The intimate is everywhere: you bring it everywhere and it circulates everywhere. It registers as intensities of attachment and recognition, inferred and explicit, that pass across people,

> groups and movements. At the start, I wanted to locate myself in a feminist and Frankfurt School tradition of thinking about the domestic in the world: that you begin in relation and in an atmosphere of responsivity (Berlant 2021).

I follow Berlant in this concern, attempting to synthesise their claims with those of Bakhtin. It was through the creation of intimate relations; the vulnerability required in reading together, exchanging creative work as well as outlining political visions, that the imagination crystallised itself in the affective charge of a counter-imaginary, which followed us inside and outside of the room. This charge stuck to us. Intimacy established the tone for this zone of contact. Speaking and listening enabled affects which enlivened the imagination to multiply; to move through and alongside groups and individuals, reconstituting desires that pushed them towards action. Participants remarked that after the workshop, they wanted to engage in forms of protest, social action, riot, rebellion. The workshop space is/was an incubator for a wider affective project which asks, how might we build a materialist resistance movements whose affects are capable of withstanding capitalism and its realities? Workshopping enabled acts of cognition and relational exchange which primed the development of radical ideas and concepts, fortifying a liberatory structure of feeling. In the next section, I recall the workshops engagement with The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent's manifesto, specifically, how we teased out where and how the imagination was located in it.

**The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent's** m**anifesto:**

I will bring you into the room with us. I ask participants to collectively read and discuss an early draft of the OWAAD Manifesto, found in Stella Dadzie's archive at the Black Cultural Archives. The document has no date but we can assume it was written around the time the group was founded, 1978. The text does not have a single author. I explain that I came across several versions of the document, each with hand-written annotations, markings, corrections which illustrated how it had been poured over by many hands, contested, approved, collectively built.[49]

[49] The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, an umbrella organisation set up in 1978 was initially named The Organisation of Women of Africa and African Descent. Its name was changed to The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent six months later following internal debate to, as Nydia Swaby argues, "reflect the continued project of Afro-Asian unity (OWAAD Draft Constitution, nd)" (Swaby 2014, 16). In the archive, I come across the group's draft constitution. On the booklet, the word "African" has been redacted with Tipp-Ex. The word "Asian" has been written over it with a pen. A whole dissertation could

Inside the room, I tell participants how I stumbled across the text and became preoccupied with it as a record of a charged political moment, the birth of a new "Black"[50] feminist formation. It is as if the unknown authors anticipated its discovery more than two decades later. They detailed their own political conditions and theorisations not only to keep record but to communicate across temporal zones. Having discussed the continuities and discontinuities in statecraft between the present (2021) and the recent past (1970-1990), I move us towards affective engagement with the document to engage its Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential through collective reading.

I begin by explaining the principles of the task, asking participants to prepare (if they wish) to read a sentence or multiple sentences from the text. I instruct them that this reading will not follow a prescribed order, participants will read out loud at random with the hope of finding a collective rhythm as the text is read from beginning to end without pause. I ask them to remain attentive to the non-tangible elements in the room, to the use of their voices. I ask them to try and establish a connection with one another and to take the text seriously as an art object, to approach it as one would a poem. This kind of collective reading requires participants to remain responsive to one another which is crucial in the creation of any counter-hegemonic space. I ask them to use their voices to build towards an embodied reading that implicitly instructs them to collaborate, asks them to notice details in the room: the speed at which the text is being read, the style and tone of the language used, the subtle intonations of other readers for example. This mode of reading builds an intimacy through sound, a future image of freedom in which a cacophony of voices stands as a symbolic representation of the principle of collectivity. I push participants to understand that in the process of reading together, a new dimension of the text is unlocked. Another modality of relation, one of transfiguration through sound, comes into being. I follow DJ Lynee Denise (2023) in her many invocations of the importance of critical engagement with sound as a means of understanding the details of a person's life and the environments in which they live. Though we are not making music, in the creation of a somewhat singular voice through collective reading, details began to unfold into the space. Many participants share with me that they have not read aloud in this manner since secondary school.

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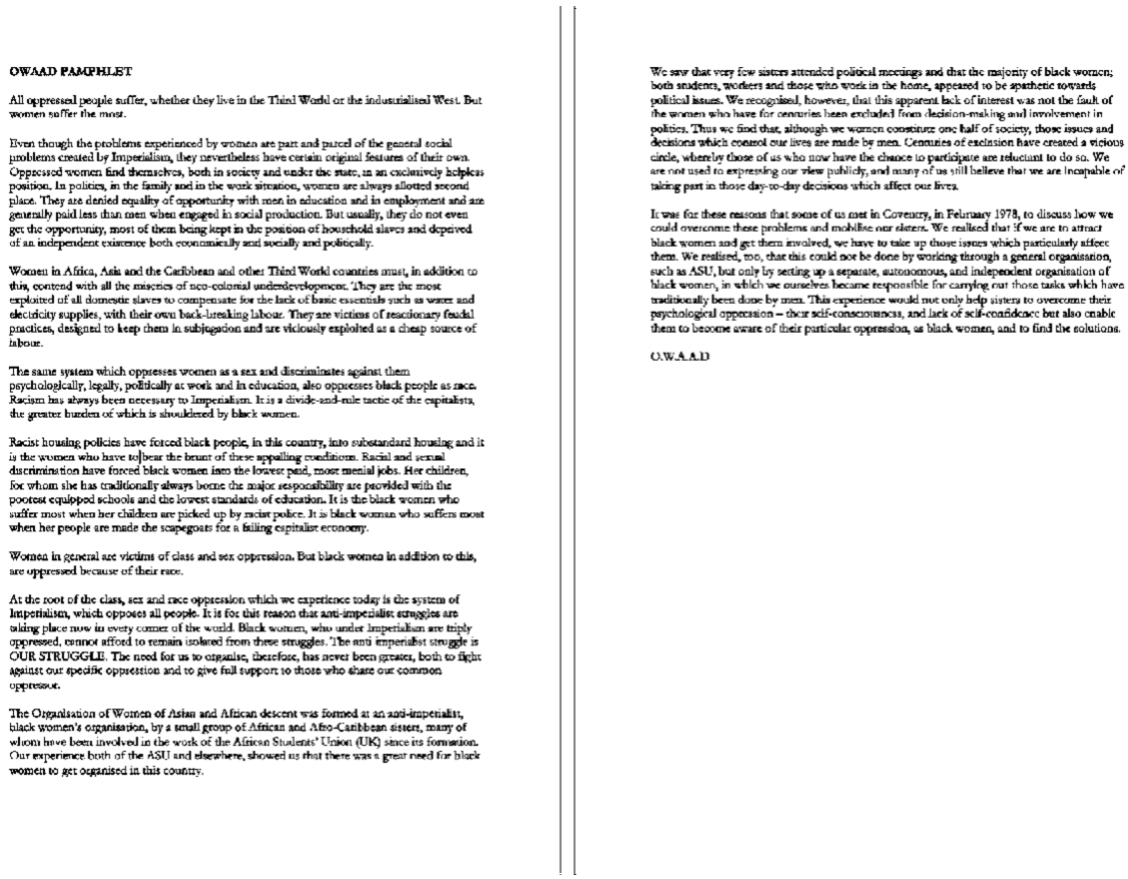
be written about the implications, complexity, consequences and signification of this textual gesture. See, Swaby "disparate in voice, sympathetic in direction: gendered political blackness and the politics of solidarity," 11-25.

[50] Here I refer to political Blackness, explicated in footnote 39.

Others note that they value the way collective reading forces them to be attentive in the moment, to anticipate pauses, hesitations and interruptions. Some respond that reading the text together gives them a renewed sense of determination, they can see now that others have broken through the inertia of capitalist relations and the same is possible for them too. They are moved when they read the plain defiance of a phrase such as "The anti-imperialist struggle is OUR STRUGGLE" (OWAAD 1978). They claim it as their struggle. The text is no longer a passive object which they receive and digest, reading aloud activates the provocations tucked away in the cultural object's form, it reveals the force of the motivations for the object's creation.



**OWAAD PAMPHLET**

All oppressed people suffer, whether they live in the Third World or the industrialised West. But women suffer the most.

Even though the problems experienced by women are part and parcel of the general social problems created by Imperialism, they nevertheless have certain original features of their own. Oppressed women find themselves, both in society and under the state, in an exclusively helpless position. In politics, in the family and in the work situation, women are always allotted second place. They are denied equality of opportunity with men in education and in employment and are generally paid less than men when engaged in social production. But usually, they do not even get the opportunity, most of them being kept in the position of household slaves and deprived of an independent existence both economically and socially and politically.

Women in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean and other Third World countries must, in addition to this, contend with all the miseries of neo-colonial underdevelopment. They are the most exploited of all domestic slaves to compensate for the lack of basic essentials such as water and electricity supplies, with their own back-breaking labour. They are victims of reactionary feudal practices, designed to keep them in subjugation and are viciously exploited as a cheap source of labour.

The same system which oppresses women as a sex and discriminates against them psychologically, legally, politically at work and in education, also oppresses black people as race. Racism has always been necessary to Imperialism. It is a divide-and-rule tactic of the capitalists, the greater burden of which is shouldered by black women.

Racist housing policies have forced black people, in this country, into substandard housing and it is the women who have to bear the brunt of these appalling conditions. Racial and sexual discrimination have forced black women into the lowest paid, most menial jobs. Her children, for whom she has traditionally always borne the major responsibility are provided with the poorest equipped schools and the lowest standards of education. It is the black women who suffer most when her children are picked up by racist police. It is black woman who suffers most when her people are made the scapegoats for a failing capitalist economy.

Women in general are victims of class and sex oppression. But black women in addition to this, are oppressed because of their race.

At the root of the class, sex and race oppression which we experience today is the system of Imperialism, which opposes all people. It is for this reason that anti-imperialist struggles are taking place now in every corner of the world. Black women, who under Imperialism are triply oppressed, cannot afford to remain isolated from these struggles. The anti imperialist struggle is OUR STRUGGLE. The need for us to organise, therefore, has never been greater, both to fight against our specific oppression and to give full support to those who share our common oppressor.

The Organisation of Women of Asian and African descent was formed as an anti-imperialist, black women's organisation, by a small group of African and Afro-Caribbean sisters, many of whom have been involved in the work of the African Students' Union (UK) since its formation. Our experience both of the ASU and elsewhere, showed us that there was a great need for black women to get organised in this country.

We saw that very few sisters attended political meetings and that the majority of black women; both students, workers and those who work in the home, appeared to be apathetic towards political issues. We recognised, however, that this apparent lack of interest was not the fault of the women who have for centuries been excluded from decision-making and involvement in politics. Thus we find that, although we women constitute one half of society, those issues and decisions which control our lives are made by men. Centuries of exclusion have created a vicious circle, whereby those of us who now have the chance to participate are reluctant to do so. We are not used to expressing our view publicly, and many of us still believe that we are incapable of taking part in those day-to-day decisions which affect our lives.

It was for these reasons that some of us met in Coventry, in February 1978, to discuss how we could overcome these problems and mobilise our sisters. We realised that if we are to attract black women and get them involved, we have to take up those issues which particularly affect them. We realised, too, that this could not be done by working through a general organisation, such as ASU, but only by setting up a separate, autonomous, and independent organisation of black women, in which we ourselves became responsible for carrying out those tasks which have traditionally been done by men. This experience would not only help sisters to overcome their psychological oppression – their self-consciousness, and lack of self-confidence but also enable them to become aware of their particular oppression, as black women, and to find the solutions.

O.W.A.A.D

Figure 11.

Watching these silent negotiations in the room signals the emergence of "otherwise" modes of relationality, the simple act of reading a political text aloud together temporarily suspends the individual self-image that is central to capitalism's domination. Participants soften, they smile and laugh nervously, as they approach the end of the text; an unconscious rhythm has been established. They are feeling with and through one another, remembering their bodies are porous, practicing bonds based on collaboration despite their differences. Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is located in the document via its political demands which produce a

specific discourse. The words on the page are utterances that have meaning and effect in the social world. What Mills calls the "rule-governed statements" (Mills 1997, 9) of the text are bold and declarative in their understanding of oppression and liberation, OWAAD's social vision is expressed through the sharp analysis of the Black and racialised woman's position in freedom struggles. Lines such as,

> it is for this reason that anti-imperialist struggles are taking place now in every corner of the world. Black women, who are triply oppressed, cannot afford to remain isolated from those struggles (OWAAD, 1978),

do more than provide a descriptive account of the condition of freedom. They hint towards what must happen in order for liberation to occur, calling on the imagination as a collective infrastructure that must sustain resistant action. What are the "anti-imperialist" struggles taking place, what do they look like, how are they shaped, what is their relationship to the present moment? These questions emerge from a critical analysis of the document's phraseology, they prompt a usage of the imagination that moves the political subject towards the necessity of action as a means of closing the gap between what is being stated (the necessity of anti-imperialist struggle) and what is being hinted at (the possibility of liberation). The reader infers that members of OWAAD envisage a world in which anti-imperialist acts (of confrontation, reclamation and emancipation of the nation's land, labour, borders and social relations) across the world will produce the conditions for their liberation. The imagination is thus, a vehicle for the expression of political demand but it also inheres in the document through an analysis of Black women's material conditions and a grand visioning of *what could be*.

In justifying his concern with diaspora and displacement in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora,* Stuart Hall writes, "if the paper seems preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narratives of displacement, it is worth remembering that all discourse is 'placed', and the heart has its reasons" (Hall 1990, 258). All discourse is placed, meaning that the political discourses which form the basis of the manifesto are strategically positioned to enliven specific elements of one's imagination and consequent desire. The features of the imagination in this instance, exist in the realm of the affirmative. The document *affirms* the necessity for action "the need for us to organise, therefore, has never been greater," (OWAAD 1978), it implores those in the present to take up an analysis of their own condition, to "give full support to those who share our common oppressor" (OWAAD 1978). The collective voice in the text is enraged and precise, clear eyed in its analysis and unsparing in its contextualisation of political demand. The textual qualities of the document have social effects; they pierce and reshape the structures of

political impasse and immobility, producing affects which shape emotional responses in readers, severing their attachments to impasse and melancholia and moving them towards emotional experiences of affinity, intimacy, longing, familiarity, as well as the desirous object – freedom. Here we note how the uses of the imagination in this document not only communicate a political vision, they also demand the fruition of that vision across time. If the analysis in the document belonging to 1978 has not been remedied, then those of us engaging with it in the room, are prompted to take up the task. The imagination extends the legacy of political struggle, striking the emotional core of the critical reader.

Approaching the archival document as a group, rather than attempting to penetrate it through individual study and contemplation rewrites the rules of engagement, ensuring that the imagination becomes a social object that is shaped by many hands. Our collective reading is followed by a discussion of the text's core tenets, framed by the following questions:

**What are the formal and linguistic features this text, what does it do and how does it make us feel?**

**How is the imagination being utilised in this text – how does it shape the demands being made?**

**How are the political arguments being made in this text relevant to the present political moment?**

**How does this text feel when read aloud? What ideas, memories, emotional resonances and affects are produced when we read it?**

I start the discussion by encouraging participants to make the connection between the text's assessment of material conditions and the politicalised tone of its discourse. The text's urgency is not coincidental. This urgency signals the use of the imagination as a bridge, connective tissue, a vehicle for a means of articulation. In understanding the imagination as an ongoing process of bringing that which does not previously exist into being, I ask participants to consider how it precedes its articulation. How it remains in the document they are holding, waiting for engagement in order to be unleashed. In response, participants make connections across time between the structures of power that constitute a lived experience of race, class and gender

which are emphasised in sentences such as "Racist housing policies have forced Black people in this country into substandard housing" and "It is the Black woman who suffers most when her children are picked up by racist police" (OWAAD, 1978) and their own experiences. They have also felt how racist housing practices and police brutality are two of the defining features of a neoliberal social landscape in Britain. They have felt the dispossessive arm of the state because of their identity and position in a hierarchal class structure. The uses of the imagination here are multiple: together we identify that the imagination is both the driving force in the creation of the text and the reason we can make a connection between the conditions described "then" and what is happening now. "This feels like it could have been written today," one participant whispers. Such statements are evidence of the breakdown in distinction between the past, present and future (initiated by a critique of western historiography) which pushes participants to understand themselves as living, working and struggling alongside those in the "past", rather than succeeding them in a temporal order. The effect of this realisation clarifies the scale of the task of transformation, to continue to struggle against forms of domination that warp and morph but remain, fundamentally, the same in their effects. What makes a text like this possible in 1978? Could a text like this be possible now? What would need to happen to create it? Here we see the imagination at work; as a modality which through which political demand is furthered. Such a theorisation of the imagination emerges through encounter, relational exchange, and action. Our task is to discover ways to think alongside the living document whilst responding to the political challenges in our own temporal location.

**Suppress, exhaust, tire, alienate**

After identifying the features of political writing and discussing how these features manifest in a variety of texts, I ask participants to list the processes, structures and interpersonal relations that, **SUPPRESS**, **EXHAUST**, **TIRE** AND **ALIENATE** them.

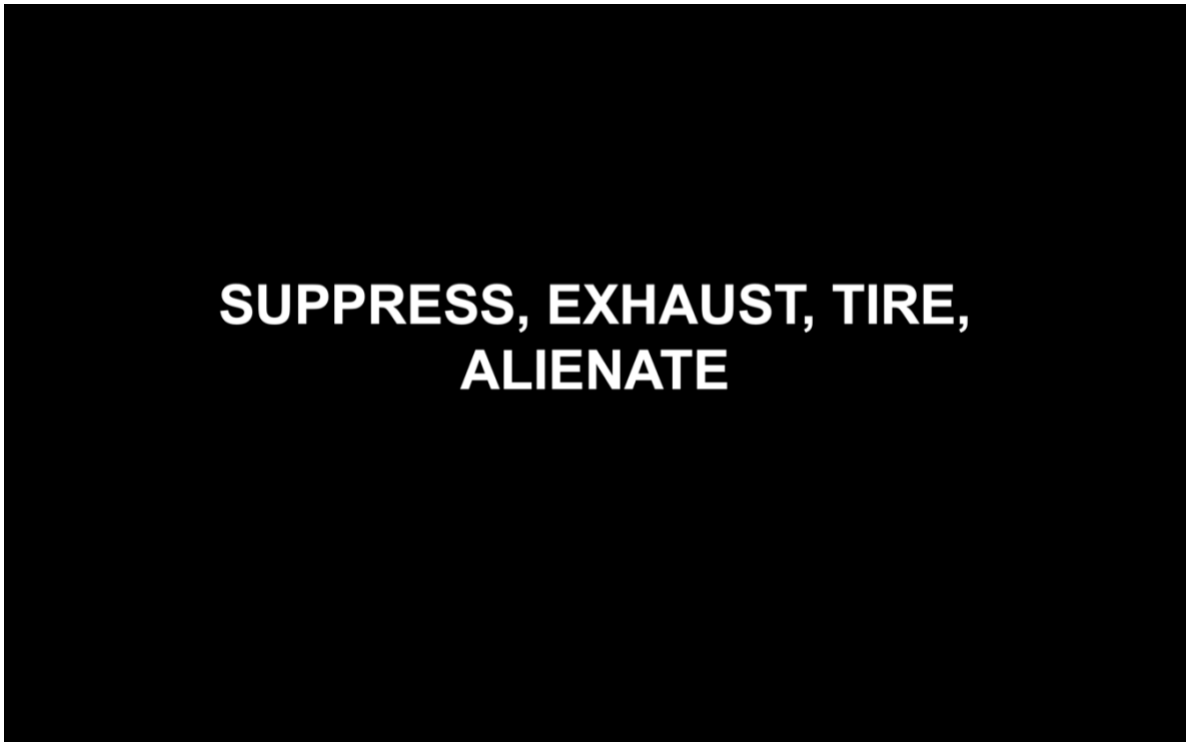



Figure 12.

I do so to denaturalise the seemingly "everyday" nature of capitalist relations, which include violent processes of gendering and racialisation. Participants interpret this request in a variety of ways, often leaning towards listing interpersonal disagreements or anxieties instead of structuralist analysis. Through discussion, I begin to ask the group to link these seemingly unconnected interpersonal occurrences to wider power structures that determine human interaction. If, for example, work tires, I ask them where the necessity to sell one's labour comes from and how relations might be structured differently in its absence. If they express feelings of alienation, we discuss how the market determines the worker's lack of power, control and fulfilment in relation to the commodities they produce which inevitably shapes their sense of self. If anxieties about ecological collapse are hinted at, I ask them to question their understandings of "catastrophe" as a singular event rather than a repeated, ongoing condition of being that requires planetary response[51].

[51] Bedour Alagraa's (2021) work on the necessity of rethinking discourses of catastrophe as a political category shapes my facilitation at this crucial moment. She cites Sylvia Wynter (2015) to argue we must "delink from our 'prenuclear way of thinking' concerning our planet's lifespan, i.e. delinking from the overdetermined biojudicial and econometric lenses that have been deployed to understand our quandary." Rather than concede that an indefinite collapse on a planetary scale is inescapable, I move participants towards the notion that the political impasse affectively felt is not a fixed reality. I encourage participants to interrogate and abandon their prenuclear

The development of a critical consciousness through writing and discussion is one of the key methods through which the workshop space operates. My aim is to enable participants to develop an analysis which recognises that capitulation to capitalist clock-time (giving in to those forces that **SUPPRESS**, **EXHAUST**, **TIRE** AND **ALIENATE** them) requires a severing of the imaginative potential that is crucial to transform material conditions. The purpose of the listing exercise is to enable participants to create their own resistant cultural production through free writing. After the lists have been created and discussed openly, I ask them to "write back" to these systems/structures/ and instances, taking into account what the formal features of political writing are and should be. The act of "writing back" is a task that requires them to channel an affective response to the otherwise naturalised markers of an oppressive landscape. They imbue their own writing with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential in the process; trapping inside it the intensities, resonances and attachments which constitute their desire for another set of material conditions.

Artist Hannah Black writes about the desire to break with convention, how artistic spaces enabled her to "write with complete freedom" (Black 2020). In the same way, my facilitation of the workshop space aimed to encourage a disobedience to convention by removing parameters relating to the style, tone, purpose and circulation of texts in order to allow the recreation of a free condition. My continued interest in the creation of dialogic spaces is their morphological quality. To meet the needs of participants, workshops remained open, malleable, and imposed as few rules as possible. They changed depending on the observations and encounters that I observed as the artist-researcher. The future researcher who adapts this method must remain flexible and responsive in their facilitation and structuring of workshops. The workshop space is at once a creative space in which textual experimentation and play is permitted and a space that instructs participants to build a fidelity to the duty of political resistance in times of crisis. By actively linking participants interpersonal worries, fears, anxieties, and stresses to the structures that produce them, a new opening emerges for considering the multi-layered of resistance. Such resistance must begin by understanding how base (productive forces) and superstructure (the ideological maintenance of elite power through institutions) work in tandem

thinking. For more, see Bedour Alagraa, "The Interminable Catastrophe," Offshoot Journal: Lecture/Seminar, March 1, 2021, https://offshootjournal.org/the-interminable-catastrophe/#easy-footnote-bottom-3-248.

to organise social life. Identifying these structures allows a clearer understanding of what is to be done to emerge, combatting fatalistic attachments to defeat and surrender.

**Conclusion: a return to use**

The workshops initiated during my fieldwork were spaces of intentional and unintentional encounter. This chapter traced a set of encounters that occurred in a workshop entitled "What Does the Future Taste Like?" at the Institute of Contemporary Arts to note how the affective consequences of the session produced a cascading and kaleidoscopic trail of imaginative connections, relationships, affirmations, commitments, bonds and promises. Inside the workshop, participants identified the many uses of the imagination as: a vehicle for the expression of political demand, a connective bridge or tissue which linked political legacies across time and a means through which to build a renewed structure of feeling. The imagination featured in workshops in language, in affective currents that permeated the air, through relational exchange and in the traces of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in cultural objects that participants engaged with *and* created themselves. The profound impact of witnessing and facilitating such encounters affirmed the importance of exercising your desires for freedom as fiercely as you would train yourself for physical political intervention.

Workshops spaces used creative methods to attack the immobility conferred by crisis and instead helped participants adopt an affective orientation to the present moment that helped them maintain the belief that it was possible for them to make meaningful interventions with their bodies, creative practices and language. Encouraging participants to create a relationship with textual cultural objects by teasing their emotional and affect consequences emphasised how the way they *feel* is inseparable from the actions they choose to undertake. To return to Ahmed, use, "brings things to mind" (Ahmed 2019, 6). If use relates broadly to the function of an object, then the "uses of the imagination in dialogic space" aided the development of a politicised relation to the world in participants through acts of reading, writing, speaking and listening that cut across temporal divides. Through engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, a sense of possibility was reproduced in an environment of foreclosure. Treating the imagination as a modality that links the materialist concern of the collective body with the realm of affect, emotion and desire broadened its use beyond the subjective and demonstrated that it is substance best excavated and engaged with collectively.

The question of use also brings to mind how the imagination eschews a reformist project, it does not simply amend the pre-existing but demands the creation of new interventions, actions and modes of relation. Here enquiring into the "uses" of the imagination enabled a reflection on the ways that encounters in workshops: between human beings, between human beings and cultural objects were marked by infinite possibilities. The workshop setting defied an environment of foreclosure, enabling counter-imaginary affects to circulate, highlighting the process through which new ways of being, hearing, speaking and recognising each other politically could be synthesised with political strategy. I watched how, as sessions ended, participants stayed to mingle and make connections, to build spaces for political consciousness raising and sign post one another to direct action groups and other forums for political mobilisation. The imagination contained in textual documents from the archive had begun to proliferate, building the beginnings of a transformed structure of feeling right there in the room. The poems, fragments, and reflections which emerged from the session were stuffed into pockets and bags, ready to be shared with others. The workshop space created a ripple effect. The Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained in cultural objects attached itself to bodies who, in the process of confronting political impasse, would pollinate it elsewhere, knowingly and unknowingly prompting resistant actions in the social world.


Figure 13.

# *FRAGMENT: What to do if the police raid*[52]

[52] Image produced by the Lesbians and Policing Project (1984-90), found in the Haringey Vanguard Archive based in Bruce Castle Museum. More information about the project can be found here: https://archive.womenslibrary.org.uk/the-lesbians-and-policing-project-lespop

The year she came to power, a man in a Brompton hospital dies of AIDS. At first, it feels like a series of random acts but all neglect stems from somewhere. The raids begin shortly after. More and more people are picked up on vexatious charges. They use the Offences Against the Person's Act to put venues under surveillance for suspected drug use. On the dancefloor, I hear people trading tips on the best place to hide, how to make it out without attracting attention, the underground parties where you can go to use in peace.

The clubs are cool because you communicate using your body. The flitter of someone's eyes tells you the difference between a flirt and a gossip, you forget where your body ends when it meets other people's. What passes between you is silent but you know more about someone by moving with them. A familiar face behind the bar wakes you up. But slowly and surely, the police make themselves known in a way that reminds you that you not supposed to be here. They harass you on the way in or they follow you home. We're always finding ways to take the sting out of the intimidation. Creating makeshift signals, signs and sounds to alert each other to their arrival or departure, resisting arrest wherever possible, learning under what power they can expel and detain us.

Shops on the high street have started closing, there is more talk of family values and getting rid of perversions. I spend a lot of time with Ira, walking around South London because I can't afford to get the bus. We're both on the dole, but Ira is thinking of starting a course in carpentry, mainly so she can start charging for work the dykes make her do for free. I sit in parks a lot, waiting for pretty girls to walk past. We try to imagine the turn of the century; it doesn't feel like the world is ending but we do think that something big is coming. We get the occasional FAG shouted at us or something more colourful if they're feeling inventive. Somebody told me that the feminists are meeting in local community centres and planning campaigns. I know Sylvia is part of the group but I'm too scared to go alone because I don't know enough. I also heard that lesbians weren't welcome, especially the Black ones. Apparently, they can't seem to make sense of us using Marxism. Well, what's new? We don't make sense anywhere. Not in the family, not on the streets.

The year she comes to power, when all my friends of friends start to disappear and nobody can tell me why – apparently, we don't know anything about capitalism or police violence or

international uprisings, so we aren't welcome in the meetings. They still have the nerve to talk about sisterhood. Now we've started to meet on Kentish Town Road. Gemma says that why shouldn't lesbians count as political subjects? She's part of GALOP – The Gay London Police Monitoring Group. A group of voluntary lawyers and public sector works who formed to provide support for queers experiencing harassment and surveillance and educate communities about their rights. Gemma says no matter who you are, a worker is a worker. She's always trying to get us to join her reading group. Every young person I know is talking about the government or the council and the pain it causes – I've seen it. The first time I was roughed up I couldn't tell whether it was because I was a lesbian or black. I do remember a police officer laughing in my face. So, if getting together to think and talk about it seems to help everyone, why don't we join in and start making some demands?

One thing we can all agree on – the groups run by men are a nightmare. I made the mistake of trying to go to one by myself. The girls are expected to make sure everyone has a plate during the break, they don't want to hear what we have to say about anything, particularly strategy. They treat knowledge like it is something to owned. Mostly, they can't stand the dykes and so, in Kentish town, I am grateful to be in a room with other women who don't look at me as if I am something they have heard about but never seen in real life.

Before the local meetings, all the conversations were happening in universities. I don't want to have to enrol just to take part. What's good nowadays is that you can just wonder in and watch someone talk about the state of things for free. I've learnt a lot this way, about the struggles happening on the African Continent, about the importance of socialism and communism and the power of the people who make the goods and produce the value. She's come to power with the intention of starving us out, taking away all the benefits that have helped people survive up until now. I go to the free university talks to try to learn things I can take back to our meetings and to convince the students we don't bite. At first, I was rubbish at speaking to anyone new but now confidence is up and I've event gotten into a couple of fights with the anarchists. In the meetings, I'm good at setting the agenda, deciding what we will discuss that day. I keep saying it's important that we create resources to share so other people know where to find us, especially the people on the estate that can't or won't come to these meetings because they hate dykes or they think it has nothing to do with them.

The meetings, Kentish Road, 7-9pm every other weekday, start off as spaces to share: to find other lesbians, to run into your ex whilst she introduces herself to the group about how she's just come out of a relationship. But this is getting repetitive and without a structure, it can be easy to forget the reasons why we are here in the first place– so I suggest we start reading political dyke books to help us refocus. Ira insists on taking the notes at every meeting because she's too scared to say anything. I'm grateful for this –it's hard to keep track of everything that is said. I don't know what we'll do with the notes yet, I haven't thought that far ahead. One day, I say *Here we were, a bunch of dykes scattered around London but what about the dykes in Kampala, or the ones involved in the Mau Mau uprising?* We must at least care about other gays and lesbians across the world, *we have to imagine ourselves as part of the struggle*, even as they insist that we were never there. It doesn't make sense that we aren't in the History because Annette, Kris and Shiva could get more done in an afternoon than any of the other women I know. Shiv singlehandedly got everyone on the estate to chip in for a weekly food shop, most of which went to the old ladies who didn't have any kids or grandkids to check up on them. We start with *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* which has been causing a stir ever since it was released. The dog-eared copy I bought is constantly on loan, being passed around North London. I don't think any of us have ever read a text by another Black lesbian with other lesbians. It's a good place to start because it reminds us that feminism is not about ownership or power or which group can lay claim to any way of being; it is a way of thinking about how the world has come to be and how we can remake it.

The meetings grow via word of mouth and all kinds of women start showing up: women whose kids have been taken from them by the courts, women who are trying to help their sick friends navigate the shame of AIDS, women who are being attacked in the street or having their homes raided by police, women who are seeking refuge in the UK because their lives are in danger back home. They start pouring in, sometimes we're speaking to a packed room of angry people who are looking to us for help, for information about where they could go to find cheap childcare or a decent lawyer. It's hard to cope. We make sure there is always food at the meetings and that people know they can stay as long as they want. Sometimes, women come in bruised, trying to leave husbands and partners who abuse them, with no way of surviving on their own. Our meetings have given us a sense of the scale of the problem. What she has done is having ripple effects everywhere.

I start to connect the dots. The poorest women I know are either single mothers or dykes. All my friends are more worried about losing their jobs because someone saw them coming out of the Compton Arms than being 'accepted.' Gemma says: they present us as a danger to children because we have the capacity to make them question everything they take for granted. She says that we can create an offshoot of GALOP specifically for lesbians. We must produce knowledge *for* lesbians *about* lesbians to keep each other safe. If we don't, they will use our sexuality as another stick to beat us with. We intend to carry out research that will help educate other people – not just us dykes. A lot of what we find out about how policing operates, what the laws are, what powers police have to arrest you apply to everyone. Kris suggests that we create an easy resource that includes a section for people to store a solicitor's number, about what to in a police raid. Most women don't feel confident asserting themselves in front of officers because they don't know how to resist arrest. Translating the guide will help more people know their rights during a raid. We set about planning – Ira and Cathy will do the research; it turns out Kris works as an illustrator and is happy to create something that is simple enough to be understood but still grabs people's attention. To maintain our anonymity, we create a name for ourselves, so that people can trust the information being shared. We call ourselves THE LESBIANS AND POLICING PROJECT because we believe this to be the simplest summary of who we are and what we will do. We agree to make a version of the poster in Punjabi because some women in the group want to be able to pass it on to their family members, cousins and extended family members who do not speak English. We decide in this moment to make sure all our resources are translated so they have a wider reach.

The main things we want to communicate are:
- WHAT POWERS POLICE OFFICERS HAVE DURING A RAID WITH OR WITHOUT A WARRANT
- WHAT POLICE CAN LOOK FOR, TAKE AWAY AND SEARCH FOR DURING A RAID
- WHAT INDIVIDUALS SHOULD DO IF THEIR HOUSE/PREMISES IS BEING SEARCHED
- THE "LAWFUL" REASONS POLICE OFFICERS MIGHT CARRY OUT A RAID/SEARCH
-WHAT CONSTITUTES ARREST AND WHAT CONSTITUTES MERE INTIMIDATION

As soon as the idea is suggested, everybody in the room gets to work. With Ira and Cathy, half of us decide to establish our group using a public manifesto that outlines our aims and objectives. This will take many weeks to refine but we have to begin somewhere. We talk about what kind of relationship we would like to have with GALOP, where our aims align, how we intend to distribute the posters and who can print them for us on the cheap. The room gets bigger. A strong energy enters the space and it clears away all of our doubt and fear. I start to feel differently. There is a pit in my stomach that loosens, I feel real excitement for the first time in a long time. I become convinced that I have a duty to stand up for myself and everyone in the room. We are undertaking a course of action we have decided on together. That togetherness exists when I look to my right and see members of the group shuffling toward one another, hunched over a piece of paper, debating wording, titles, placement, and colour. Ira is on the phone booking a library slot for the research. I can feel our power growing. We want to share the kind of information we know will help someone else resist the violence we have been subjected to all our lives, we're not even thinking about the future.

# CHAPTER FOUR: COMING BACK AROUND – RECURRENCE, IMAGINATION AND VISUALITY

*"I've never seen somebody that looks like me in an archival picture from the Caribbean like that. The way that person is sitting, holding their hands and all of their art around them, it feels very familiar to me, it feels super familiar. It feels like I recognise it, I recognise the space." – Jacob Joyce*

## Coming back around

In Ordinary Notes, Sharpe writes,

> NOTE 114
>
> It is 1928. In the photograph, my mother is five years old, and she is dressed for Halloween. The photographer was my stepfather. It is my mother's hands in the photograph that constitute what Roland Barthes called the punctum– that detail, 'that accident which pricks me, (*but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'* (Sharpe 2023, 173).

If I am to examine my own preoccupation with archival images collected in the process of fieldwork, I must ask myself not only *why* I am drawn to certain photographs, but what they signify to me as a researcher. What is that *accident which pricks me*? Like Sharpe's commentary on her mother's hands, this chapter intends to tease out the affects, gestures and details of images that recur, examining how visuality and recurrence are related to the imagination. The analysis in this chapter engages with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in images in order to make two key arguments. First, to prove through analysis of the experience of affective recurrence prompted by the imagination, that the perceived distance between political subjects positioned in the "past" and "present" is a falsity. This analysis will emphasise how the deployment of the imagination challenges temporal limits and muddies chronology. Second, to argue that the imagination comes to be expressed through various signs in images that can reveal a political group's strategic goals. I focus on five images; Figure 14, an image of Sylvia Erike, a member of the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD found in Stella Dadzie's archive hosted in the Black Cultural Archives and Figures 15-18, posters from the Haringey Black Action Group formed in 1987 found in the Haringey Vanguard Archival collection hosted in Bruce Castle Museum.

I frame this investigation using the notion of recurrence because it denotes a *coming back around* or going back to a subject in one's mind. Recurrence is one framework for understanding the expression of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, it indicates that a point of contact has triggered a calling back of some affective aspect of the cultural object that remains unmoored from its temporal location. Recurrence is often mistaken for repetition, which refers to the sameness of an iteration of a subject or process. The distinction here relates to temporal trajectory, a recurrence might be understood as some aspect of the past returning, reproduced in some aspect of the present or future. A recurrence travels forward and backwards. Repetition on the other hand, implies only forward movement, that the object in question is reproduced in a manner separate from the original and *ahead* of it. Soren Kierkegaard's notion of repetition as "recollecting forward" (Kierkegaard 1941, 33), a non-identical reproduction that is a projection into the future seems to confirm this. If the simulacra is never identical to the original object of repetition but merely a realisation of some ideal aspect of it in the future, then repetition differs from recurrence in its directional trajectory. The seeming impossibility of a "backwards repetition" shapes my interest in thinking about the aspects of imagistic cultural objects that recur and thus solidify a relational affinity. A researcher or individual who "touches" a cultural object experiences recurrence because the act of looking has opened a window to that object's Imaginative Revolutionary Potential, all the desires, forces, intensities that constituted it. This engagement initiates an affective reorientation which allows the viewer's imagination to challenge some aspect of linear temporality.

Recurrence between disparate objects, places and things might appear as a feeling of affinity, familiarity, or connection. It names the accident in which, I pick up an archival image or object and feel a sense of familiarity to the person in the image. Why, when I look at pictures of Gerlin Bean, Olive Morris or Sylvia Eryke[53], do I feel like I know these women, when such a thing is impossible? I use the of recurrence to think about instances in the fieldwork process where images stuck to me, followed me through my everyday life, *came back around in my mind* at certain key moments. I felt I was the keeper of a secret or a political promise in my engagement with certain photographs. I describe the experience of being struck or pricked and suggest this feeling is made possible because my engagement with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored

[53] Olive Morris and Sylvia Erike were members of the Brixton Black Women's Group (1973-1989). Gerlin Bean, often referred to as the "Mother of the Movement" was a Jamaican community organiser, feminist and one of the earliest members of the Black Unity and Freedom Party in the United Kingdom (1970-1999). For more on Gerlin Bean, see A.S Francis, *Mother of the Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2023).

inside the cultural object produces a cross-temporal affective current, a current I experience as recurrence. My attempt to name this experience takes seriously the non-rational, embodied relationships that have shaped the creative engagement that is core to this project's method. I ambivalently follow Charles Sanders Pierce (1992)'s theory of semiotics, to understand that photographs are signs which reveal their objects through processes of interpretation. If the triadic sign/object/interpretant relation produces meaning, critically analysing these signs is crucial to those studying the imaginative and political dimensions of cultural production produced by resistant formations past and present. However, Pierce's theory is not wholly satisfying as is based, in part, on scientific deduction. It is unable to account for the violent absences constituted by racial capitalism that elude signification, I therefore attempt to synthesise Pierce's theoretical grounding with more nuanced and complex visual analysis following the contributions of Black feminist cultural scholars through the frame of recurrence. Recurrence is as framework for analysis of signification with regard to visual material as well as a mode that challenges the orthography of violent social landscapes by accounting for strange and disorderly lingerings and cross temporal affinities that should not otherwise exist. This chapter argues that the imagination is involved in the production of meaning at every stage (the creation of the sign, the object and the interpretant) as well as core to challenging the linear notions of temporality that recurrence disrupts.

My focus on recurrence is also related to this thesis' intention to disprove the notion that the drawn-out present or political impasse created by neoliberalism in the United Kingdom is unique. In Chapter One, I argued that the feelings of immobility that create affective stasis emerge from an obedience to a linear temporal logic that separate past, present and future, causing the present moment to appear unmoored from a past in which political actors felt and experienced the same things. This logic simply reproduces another set of negative affects which stultify. However, if time *comes back around* again, if it causes images to recur in a way that is circular, then analysing images through the affects this process produces in the present moment enables us the ability to project emancipatory knowledge or information into the present and future. Properly engaging with the visual power of images – to become attuned to what Campt calls their "unsayable truths," (Campt 2017, 45) through the act of listening might better shape our orientation towards ongoing crisis or political impasse by reminding us that movement and fluidity is always possible, that the past forever intrudes and that not even cultural objects remains static.

The notion of recurrence embraces the possibility of other kinds of knowledge that reject the primacy of rationality and scientific deduction but nevertheless remain useful for material struggle. Perhaps most importantly, these other ways of knowing operate from a place of agency. They are concerned with questions relating to what *can* be done, what interventions *can* be made – not spurred on by hope but by political principles of determination, duty, and an ethics of relation. Feminists have long argued that there are a plurality of ways of seeing and knowing that open relationships otherwise dismissed by Cartesian dualism. In her work on the hauntological and the role of ghosts in sociological enquiry, Avery Gordon writes,

> and so we are left to insist on our need to reckon with haunting as a prerequisite for sensuous knowledge and to ponder the paradox of providing a hospitable memory for ghosts out of a concern for justice (Gordon 2004, 60).

Gordon's concern for justice also drives my investigation into recurrence, it animates my desire to use modes of creative and speculative enquiry to resuscitate an otherwise sunken theoretical landscape so that it is able to contend with the complex relationship between the imagination and cultural objects as well as identify their role in materialist resistance.

**The imagination and the punctum**

To consider how an image recurs, one must reflect on how it endures in places it otherwise does not belong. Taking the power of cultural objects seriously, coming to terms with the agentic quality of a text or image reinvigorates materialist politics. In this instance, images of feminist formations from the past found in the archive, cling. They are increasingly relevant to the present political moment despite their temporal incongruity. A preoccupation with recurrence grounds the investigation of several Black and racialised feminist scholars such as Hartman (2006; 2019), Campt (2017; 2019), Sharpe (2016; 2023), Anjali Arondekar (2009; 2023) and Gayatri Gopinath (2018), whose engagements with the past have ranged from attempts at redress, rescue, circumnavigation and speculation on the intimacies of Black and South Asian being (diasporic and otherwise) in violent landscapes of dispossession. They have variously asked what the social purpose of an image is, what to do with images exhumed from the state archive for which no reliable context exists and why the image signals a theoretical quandary or acts as evidence of the silent aftermath of political violence and other world-historical events. In working alongside these thinkers, I too understand images as receptacles for information

whose significations make themselves known when touched or shaken, physically and theoretically.

If I, like Sharpe, have been pricked, and this pricking leads to an experience of recurrence, then my interest lay in analysing the role the imagination plays in the creation of the punctum and its significance to resistant movements. The punctum is not merely a happy accident or a coincidence of affinity, it is evidence of the powerful relationship between cultural objects, visuality and Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential. Roland Barthes writes that the punctum breaks the studium, which he describes as a general interest in a photograph which produces "an average affect… not study, but application to a thing, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment of course, but without special acuity" (Barthes 1981, 26). For him, what makes an image striking is the copresence of the studium and the punctum, the latter which disturbs the former and produces a stinging, a hole, a wound. The punctum pierces average affect. This piercing occurs because of the imagination which is activated by the process of looking. The viewer's engagement with the objects Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential brings that which did not previously exist into being, locating the dynamic relationship between the sign, object and interpretant located in the visual, causing the image to puncture. The imagination is part of the reason that images recur, why they *come back around* again and remain in temporal locations they do not belong in. We might read the punctum not as a special feature locked into the image but as part of a relationship established between the viewer and image in the moment of looking and/or touching. Looking and/or touching enables a topological warping to occur through the creation of a zone of contact, the past meets the present through recurrence which the viewer experiences as an affinity to the image's object. To think reciprocally is to note that the viewer of the image is not merely a passive recipient. They produce an understanding of the sign/object relation, making them an active participant in the production of meaning that occurs as a result of both pricking and recurrence.

In my reading of a picture of Sylvia Erike below, I attempt to identify and understand the photograph-as-sign, describe its punctum as well as my own experience of recurrence that resulted from engaging with it. By reading the details of the photograph, I demonstrate the process through which engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential triggered my own imagination, producing a punctum which challenged temporal order through recurrence. In the second section, I analyse the conjunction of language with the visual, performing analysis of posters from the Haringey Black Action Group in order to investigate what they indicate about

the group's long and short-term political demands as well as the role the imagination played in the creation of the cultural objects. I also comment on how and why these posters recur. These readings intend to shatter what Azoulay calls the "privacy of the imagination" which she suggests is ruptured "in every act of communication with others" (Azoulay 2015, 12). I consider the act of writing this chapter a form of communication with others, alongside my attempts to create dialogic spaces for discussion and engagement with cultural objects, explored in previous and subsequent chapters. For Sharpe, her mother's hands are a detail that form part of a sign. This sign is specifically what Pierce (1992) calls, the icon, a representation with a close physical resemblance to what it signifies. Her mother's hands are a basic unit of communication. An examination of that detail tells us much about Sharpe's relationship to her mother, her experiences of early childhood, the context of familial aspiration to propriety. The ability to read an image is not merely a question of the researcher or viewers personal relationship to it but a way of understanding its representative value as a sign, what it signifies and, in this instance, that significations relationship to political demand. The basic units of communication excavated in this chapter are also forms of contextual information that can inform present day and future forms of resistance. Before moving on to visual analysis, the next section briefly explores the nature of the images that come under analysis in this chapter.

**Quotidian images, protest images**

I analyse images related specifically to political organising, for example, images in which political actors engage in forms of direct action or we catch them in the moment of theorising because these images have produced the most visceral experience of the punctum for me as a researcher. The punctum occurs because the images in question break with a cultural hegemony which dictates the classification of artistic images as distinct from political ones. Reading an image of a poster which aims to mobilise communities to protest for example, making the case that this is not only a political image but an *artistic* one by examining its aesthetics denaturalises the divide between the cultural and the political. Thinking of the political actors who produced this image as artists breaks with bourgeois conceptions of the role and function of the art object and affirms the place of cultural production in the struggle for freedom. It pulls back the curtain that shrouds the art object in mystery and gives it a clear purpose. Hall (1997) argues that cultural studies seeks to examine the context of social relations and the organisation of power than underpins them. I read these images with this legacy in mind, as a means of revealing the social relations that determine atmospheres of material dispossession and atmospheres of liberation,

with a view to finding out how they might help reveal the contours of both. I position the images that come under my investigation in this chapter as evidence that cultural objects are not isolated from the structures that determine their production.

Unlike what I will term "quotidian images" (images presented as apolitical observances of everyday life), explicitly political images resonate with me because they carry an overt intention. I will not enact a false distinction between the "political" and the "quotidian" as no such distinction exists, rather I aim to explore how the cultural status of specific images delineates where they exist and how they can be accessed. Quotidian images are understood as artistic representations which circulate through mainstream cultural arenas or the art market, confirming their status as artistic objects. I argue that explicitly political images are also artistic representations though they often defy the rules of the art market and mainstream circulation. They are artistic representations of perhaps the most creative process on earth, the struggle for freedom. Here I follow Silvia Federici's insistence that we broaden are conception of what constitutes creativity. She writes, "at best, one of the most creative activities is being involved in a struggle with other people, breaking out of our isolation, seeing our relations with others change, discovering new dimensions in our lives" (Federeci 2020, 56). I treat the images in this chapter as visual evidence of this invocation. The struggle for freedom produces perhaps the most visually interesting and satisfying artistic representations, precisely because the act of looking triggers the imaginative process of recurrence.

I began with Sharpe (2023) noticing her mother's hands, a quotidian detail, because I am certain that the same appraisal of the ordinary, the attention to detail given to the quotidian, might be applicable to protest images. My intention is not to downplay the importance of "the everyday". Ordinary images and relations carry meaning and relevancy, especially with regard to affect; indeed the development of my interest in political images arises from various analyses of what Kathleen Stewart calls "ordinary affects", an "animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes, and disjunctures… a kind of contact zone where the overdeterminations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place" (Stewart 2007, 3). Stewart asks, what provides the capacity to effect and be affected in everyday life, what keeps the days moving? In the same register, I aim to explicate processes of contact with political images that do not treat their meanings as obvious, that identify the affects that exude from them and demonstrate how recurrence occurs, pushing political subjects toward action. I contextualise my focus to illustrate how my interest is grounded in an application of materialist

analysis to cultural objects. I am interested in the ways images shape social relations, their role in the development of an analysis of the conditions of those who resist and their ability to reflect how people across time have refused state violence. I do this because I believe freedom is not an abstraction but a tangible site that must be fought over. Images and other visual representations play a key role in this fight.

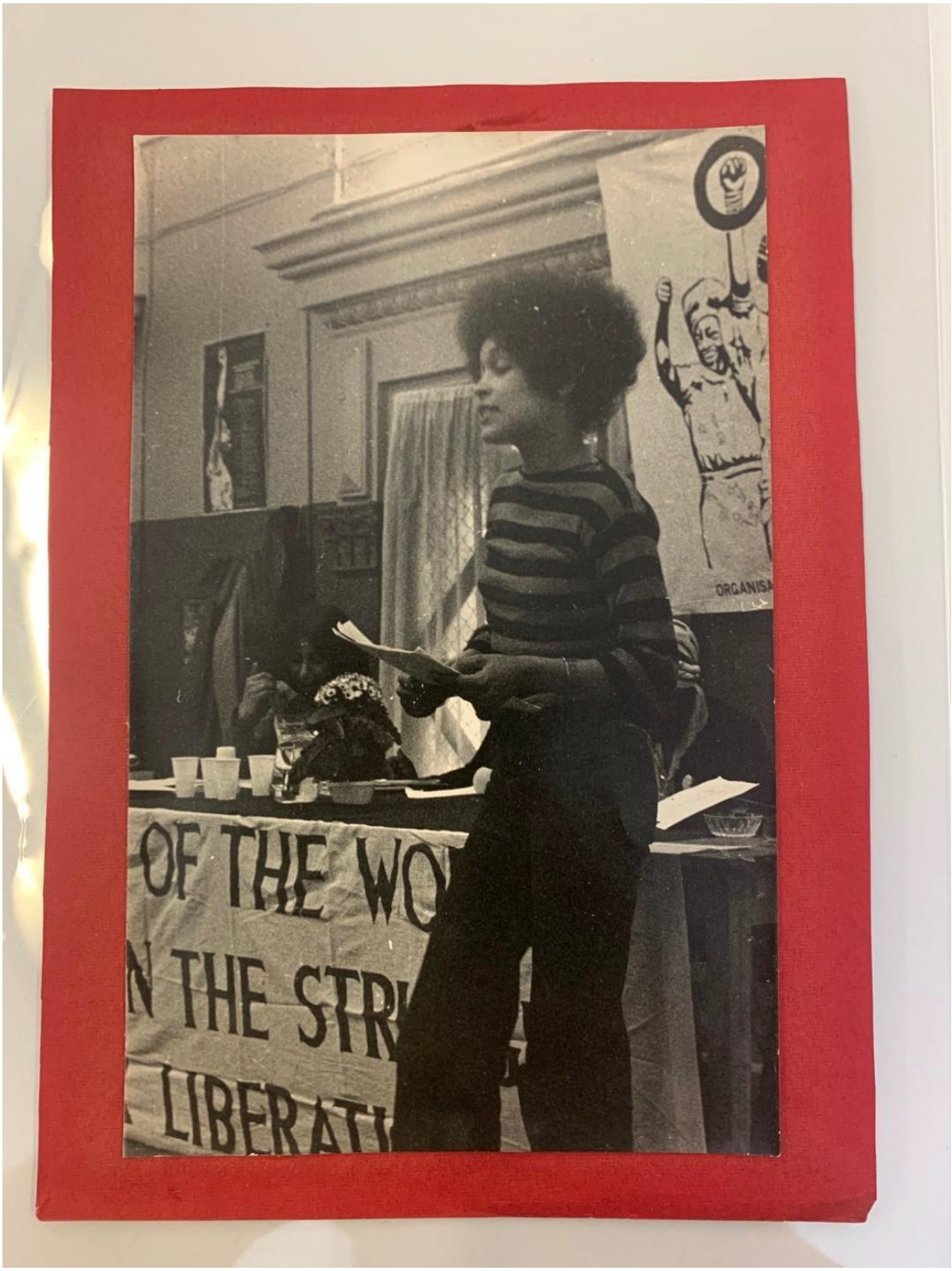



Figure 14.

**Everything I know about Sylvia Erike**

Everything I know about Sylvia Erike, I have learnt through implication or memorialisation. Her name is spelt differently across a plethora of documents. I come across it early on in my research about Black and racialised women's feminist formations in Britain but unlike the names of Olive Morris, Gail Lewis, Melba Wilson, Gerlin Bean, Suzanne Scafe, Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, Julia Chinyere Oparah and countless others, there isn't an obvious record of her intellectual contributions or actions as member of the Brixton Black Women's Group and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent. In *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in* Britain, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe and Beverley Bryan dedicate their work "to Olive Morris and Slyvia Erike, who were true sisters in struggle" (Bryan, Dadzie, Scafe 2018). In the BBWG Newsletter, *SPEAK OUT!* Members of OWAAD memorialise her on 5th December 1983, writing,

> she was a sister who felt the injustices of this world so deeply that she gave everything she had to the struggle – her tremendous energy, her sharp, intelligent mind, her heart and her soul were dedicated to the cause of black people (OWAAD 1983, 255).

They note her consistency, her willingness to volunteer her skills as an academic and researcher and her attempts to build spaces for public education inside Black working-class communities via day schools which focused on the necessity of solidarity amongst oppressed peoples. At coffee shops, events and speaking engagements, as an older and younger generation of Black feminist thinkers gather, several living members of the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD hint at her struggles with addiction and imply that homophobia, expressed from peers through an inability to reconcile queerness into a revolutionary socialist framework, shrunk her world and the worlds of so many others. The difference between what is proclaimed openly and the information that circulates privately, in looks, gestures, whispered exchanges, gossip and ordinary affects is palpable, it speaks to the many absences present in the fragments that memorialise her, it speaks to what we cannot know about her "private" struggles.

Figure 14, an image of her giving a paper at the first OWAAD Conference in 1979, continues to circulate on the internet. It is one of the few archival images entered into public record via the benevolence of the Black Cultural Archives. In the excerpt memorialising her in *SPEAK OUT!* I learn that her paper "Black Women and the State" was delivered in such a way that it

was "engraved in her [comrades] memories forever" (OWAAD 1983, 255). At first glance, the image is shrouded in a haze. To reveal its many layers, basic facts must be established. The average viewer might, from clothing and other gendered markers assume Erike is a woman, that she occupies some position of authority and that she is engaged in the act of sharing knowledge to (by the attentive looks of the figures who sit behind her) people who know her. To a viewer that knows nothing about the context of Black and racialised women's feminist struggle in the United Kingdom, this image may conjure up a specific association with the Black radical aesthetics of the 1980's. Before the image begins to "speak" for itself, aspects of it, such as the monochrome photography and Erike's afro begin to communicate. Viewers might assign her to an epoch in which a swell in forms of grassroots and revolutionary organising from Black radicals, third world feminists and anti-imperialist movements threatened to destroy the legitimacy of Western states and their so-called democracies. Her afro might conjure comparisons to other Black radical figures, whose images circulated across the world as symbols of resistance during this time, figures such as Angela Davis. Beyond this superficial and counterproductive reading which merely *assumes* a shared politic from aesthetics, Erike appears as an anonymised figure, who we find engaged in the work of sharing or theorising. Her surroundings tell us little to nothing, other than that she seems to be occupying a public space supported by colleagues and comrades, who sit behind her at the table. To glance at the image without historical context is to become engaged in guesswork, using basic details and context clues that situate the image for the purposes of legibility. This work precedes the punctum, before one can be moved by any detail of the image or be truly interested in what its details attempt to communicate, the viewer must first strive to make sense of what they are looking at.

After a basic comprehension of the "facts" of the image, my gaze begins to focus. I cannot see the audience to which she speaks but I feel by the way her weight is shifted slightly on her back foot, her mouth slightly ajar, that Erike is addressing more than one person. We meet the political actor in the middle of an act of communication, we can assume this act is driven by a fierce commitment to freedom. Her body angled away from the camera; it is unclear whether she herself was even aware that the photograph was being taken. The words that leave her mouth, words I cannot possibly know – are landing somewhere in a room full of other people. She appears seasoned in this posture; Erike has been here before, perhaps in her short life, she spent many hours imparting forms of knowledge to others. The shuffled papers in her hand imply a level of detail and a depth of research that might have informed her remarks.

The "accident which pricks me" (Barthes 1981, 27) is a basic detail; the positioning of her body.

The slightly self-conscious distribution of her weight signifies that Erike is aware of the eyes on her. This stance becomes poignant to me. If I attempt to understand it using the sign/object/interpretant relation, it is as if her stance anticipates not only the eyes in the room but the many eyes that will come across this image almost twenty years after it was first captured. The meaning I give to the sign (the image), is mediated through Erike's posture as its object, this is how I seek to understand her. Whilst I cannot know Erike's intentions, this detail, perhaps evidence of slight nervousness, indicates how consumed she is by the act of speaking. My relationship to the image is mediated by the significance of the action in question (public speech of a political nature). The affective charge of the image, the non-linguistic forces that shrouds her posture and her stance outwards meets me in the act of looking. When I, the researcher, look at the image – it feels as if Erike could be speaking to me, that despite my temporal distance, I am *included* in her address and that, if only I could hear her speak, I might also benefit from the words being shared. My own imagination consolidates a relational affinity between us. This image "recurs" because some aspect of the past (Erike's speech) returns to me in the present, I imagine I can hear the words she is saying. The image pricks me precisely because the affective current produced by its Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential pierces the distinction between the past and present. This results in an interpretation of the relationship between the object (Eryke) and the sign, (the image) that prompts connection to my own condition as a political subject in the here and now. It has recurred because I feel an affinity to Eryke, even though I do not know her or the facts of her life. I try to conjure the forcefield of relations that defined this moment: the looks, sighs, gestures, nods that accompanied the act of listening to her speak. I try to imagine her unique quirks and mannerisms, the tenor of her voice – her thoughts immediately prior to speaking and immediately after. This image indicates how time has *come back around* again – for researchers engaged in the study of grassroots political organisation, it recalls the many speeches, papers and spaces for critical analysis that political actors take part in for the sake of their lives and to, as bell hooks argues, "understand what [is] happening around and within [them]" (hooks 1994, 59). The image emerges as a theoretical text, rich with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential precisely because it offers the researcher a way to work through a set of similar problems in the present. In this instance, the imagination works reciprocally; I utilise it in the process of looking and this utilisation meets the traces of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential left behind in the image from the moment of its capture.

The existence of the image demonstrates that others have sought to work against conditions that were determined to crush them, by gathering, and positing methods of survival. Its affective charge is one that insists that we too can and must engage in these resistant activities, that there

are indeed a set of processes, methods and actions that we can use to combat stasis. Making this connection illustrates the unbroken legacy of resistance to the machinations of the state and its effect on the lives of working-class women across temporal regimes. The act of looking solidifies is legacy because it does not assume the image is self-evident. Looking is a form of extended engagement. In the process of fieldwork, I came back to Figure 14 multiple times to identify its punctum. The relational affinity produced by this mode of engagement is not a guarantee, it occurred because I chose to engage with the image imaginatively (that is, by prioritising the non-rational, by seriously believing that information could be garnered through visual analysis). This information relates to what we might infer about Erike's political desires, orientation to others, modes of address and personality, from the synthesis of pre-existing and fragmentary information found in the details of the image.

In rejecting a passive orientation towards the image, the viewer not only engages their imaginative faculties but demonstrates the central role the imagination plays in enabling a reciprocity between them and the image (enabling the image to speak back beyond temporal borders through recurrence). If as Berger (1997) argues, looking and seeing are not neutral or passive activities but ones informed by structures of power and the prior knowledge conferred by History, seeing might also alert us to strategic markers embedded in cultural objects that can help inform our strategies in the present. In order to become privy to the types of knowledge that visuality harbours, researchers must prioritise the non-rational, allowing aspects of the image to *come back round again* and using the imagination to attend to absences, make connections and tease out the affective force of the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored inside it. The punctum then, is evidence of the imagination's operation. A researcher capable of being pricked is one capable of engaging in material resistance, using the visual to connect this resistance to actions undertaken by political subjects for the sake of their freedom in the past.

Figure 15.

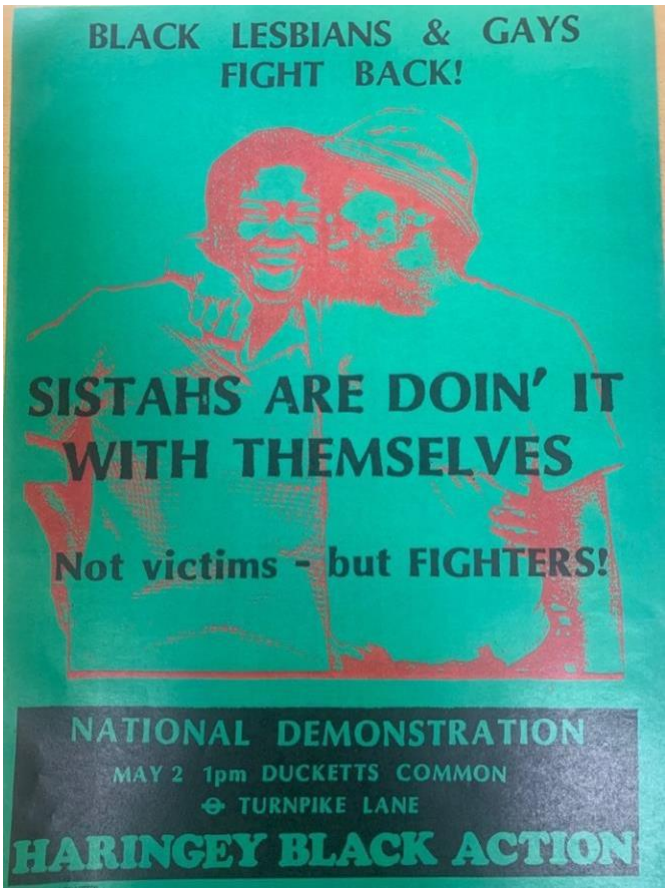



Figure 16.

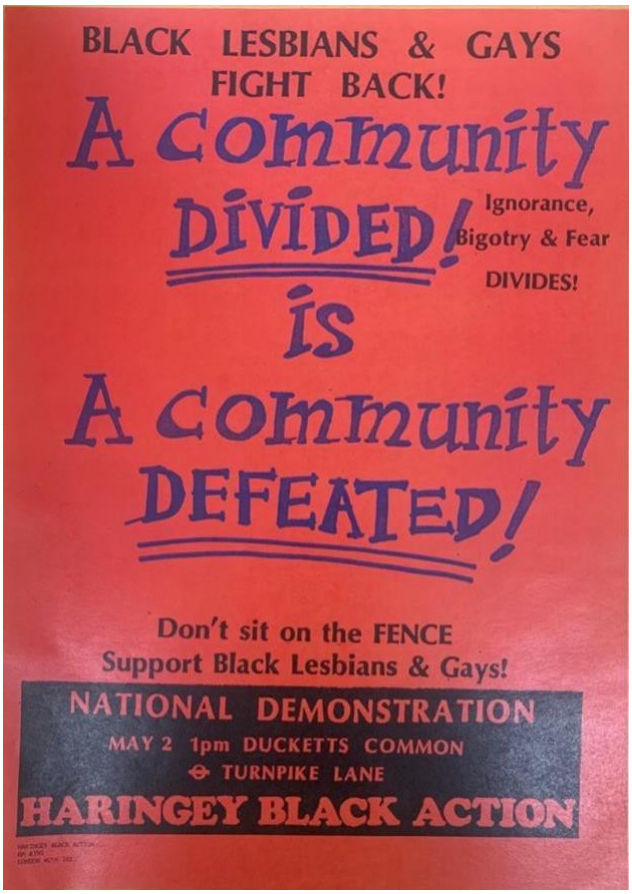



Figure 17.

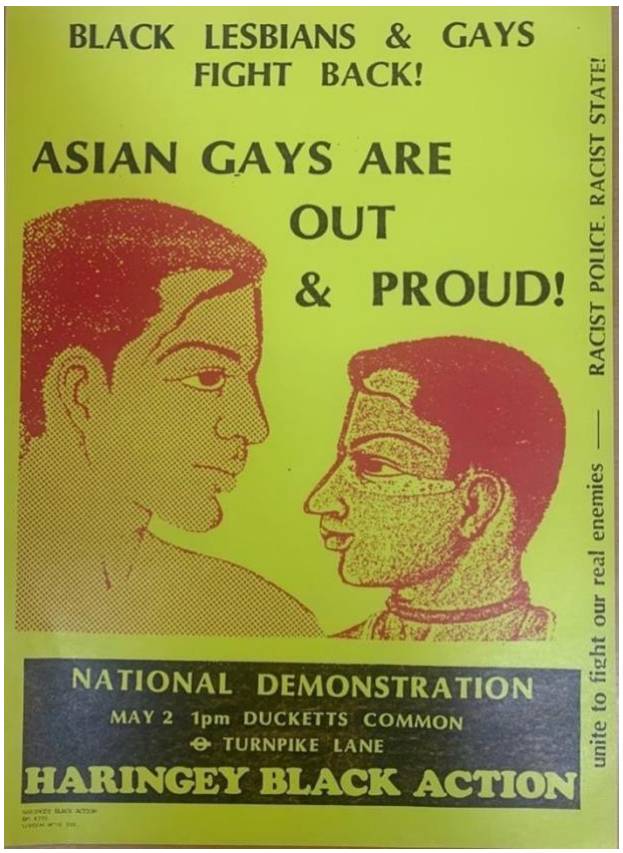
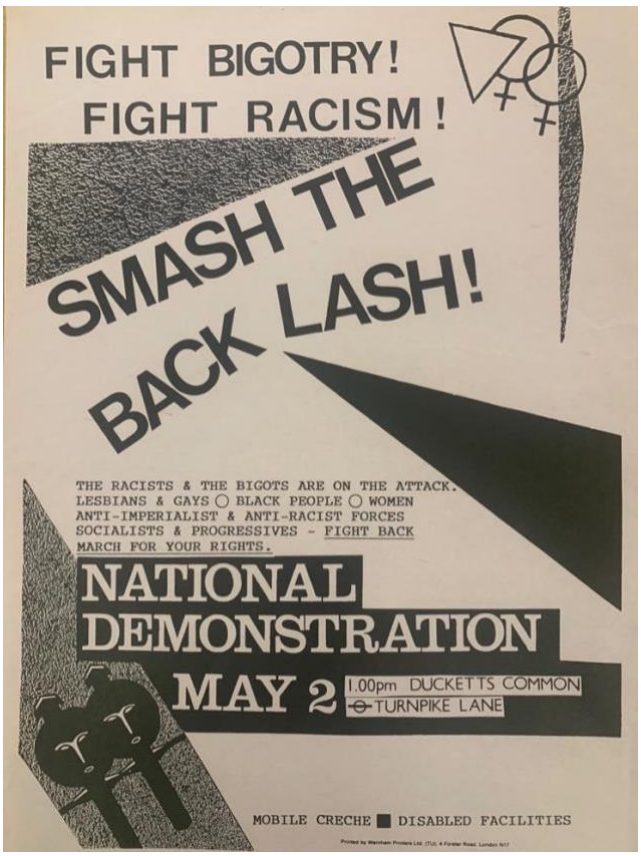



Figure 18.



**The Haringey Black Action Group:**

Figures 15-18, gathered from the Haringey Vanguard Archive in North London, detail attempts by Black and South Asian queer communities to resist the threats to life established by the state and fascists in the 1980s by encouraging attendance to the "Smash the Backlash" protest organised against far-right and queerphobic forces on May 2nd 1987. The Smash the Backlash protest was the first of its kind to focus on the lived experiences of racialised queer people in the United Kingdom. Bob Cant argues that the queer organising that took place in Haringey during this period "has the potential to be a case study for a historically significant moment for modern sexual politics" (Cant 2014). As a bio-phantasmic threat to the heterosexual nuclear family (what Thatcher called the "moral energy"[54] of society), the AIDS crisis shaped the reactionary and expulsive policies of the British state from 1979 onwards. The crisis became a powerful symbol for post-war Thatcherite governance which sought to consolidate the notion of citizenship by marking racialised and queer "others" as a threat.[55] In this section, I investigate how experiences of recurrence differ when engaging with posters that combine image and text, comment on the cause and effect relationship between cultural objects and the imagination and attempt to use analysis of archival material to identify the long and short term political demands of the Haringey Black Action Group as well as their theoretical conceptualisations of resistance.

Alongside visual cues, language can be a trigger for *coming back around*. Here, the affective pull of such texts is not necessarily connected to what is communicated by the image's object as with Erike, but the arrangement of letters, words and phrases. These arrangements produce affects that are solidified in feelings experienced by the viewer. I ground my discursive analysis in the notion that when individuals in the present read and engage with Figures 15-18, the language used triggers a relational affinity through recurrence. The viewer experiences affinity because the use of language creates a theoretical framework for the recognition of the presence of the same threats (in this case, the far right and homophobia) in the present moment. In this context, recurrence is not merely recognition of some aspect of the past in the present but the ability to identify the continuity in forces of power that produce both the "past" and the "present." The punctum describes the experience of recognising this continuity across temporal

[54]See Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Conservative Party Conference," transcript of speech delivered in Blackpool October 9, 1987. Accessed December 1, 2023, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941.
[55] For detailed overview of race relations under Thatcher, see Zig Layton-Henry, "Race and the Thatcher Government," *In Race, Government and Politics in Britain* ed. Zig Layton-Henry and Paul B. Rich (London: Palgrave Macmillan 1986), 73-97.

borders, it breaks the surface of the cultural object, revealing the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored inside it.

Applying the principles of recurrence to cultural objects where a human subject is not immediately present brings us back to the importance of language and the necessity of finding a logic that determines the organisation of text and image. I understand language as a sign, a core component of the discourses that Mills argues "structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity" (Mills 1997, 15). I follow discursive analysis in its assertion that language is a system of signs based on the operation of power which can meaningfully shape forms of action. In short, what we say, the language used to communicate political aims can *create* and *destroy* realms of possibility. Language might also determine how cultural objects circulate and in what manner they are received. The imagination plays a significant role not only in the creation and design of Figures 15-18 analysed below but also in the decisions made regarding how they display information. In this instance, the words used on posters by the Haringey Black Action Group reveal how the group understood themselves (the construction of their identities) in relation to state power. From these images, we can discern the long and short term demands of this organisation but also get a clearer sense of the group's political strategy and analysis of the state. If, as Campt (2017) argues, images exhumed from the state archive can emit a quiet frequency which reveals the aspirations of subjects, then it might also be worth applying the same method to textual protest imagery in the hopes of accessing another dimension of said frequency.

**Don't sit on the FENCE / ASIAN GAYS ARE OUT & PROUD!**

My interest in Figures 15-18 is their loud and confrontational visual language, their use of aesthetics to communicate political desire and intention. They emit a specific demand related to the organisation of social relations, one the calls on state and institutional entities to redress the violent material conditions of Black and South Asian queer people. Gail Lewis names racialised and gendered struggles for autonomy in the UK as a kind of space-making and place-holding that survives the ravages of time. For her, space-making is "the disruptions to the orthodoxies through which racialised people have been named and made intelligible in the logics of governance and regulation by state institutions and media alike" (Lewis 2023, 68). In understanding these cultural objects as a continuation of this space-making project, I am particularly drawn to how the visual style of Figures 15-18 enter commands into public space. "Don't sit on the FENCE" Figure 16 reads, "ASIAN GAYS ARE OUT & PROUD" Figure

17 proclaims. These linguistic provocations are short, sharp and direct. The words used, as well as the use of grammar and punctuation, communicate the urgency of these speech acts. As readers, we are made to feel the position of subjugation from which these demands are made, called to witness Haringey Black Action's antagonistic relationship to state entities. These images survive the flattening quality of linear temporality, they recur precisely because their visual language creates a counter-force capable of jolting its viewer from the security of the present whilst forcing them to make connections between "then" and "now." When we look at the posters, the confident and solidaristic linguistic invocations highlight the persistence of the systems of power that the group seeks to eradicate. Recurrence occurs in the recognition that demands or instructions, "SMASH THE BACKLASH!" (Figure 18), "Not victims- BUT FIGHTERS!" (Figure 15) could be used by oppressed subjects in the present. The force of such a realisation from the viewer produces a relational affinity to the object in question which overcomes the temporal logic that would place in the image in the "past." The use of graphic design and case sensitivity, "Back" and "Lash" are partly intercepted by a triangular object, "FIGHTERS!" appears in upper case, are stylistic choices intended to represent, in the case of the former, the outside threat to community cohesion and in the case of the latter, communicate urgency and the strength of a coalitionary politic to the viewer. If we are to imagine the viewer of these cultural objects not only as a passive receiver of information but as a political subject that brings their own projections, insights and political beliefs into the act of viewing, then the "spark" of counterforce is derived from the exchange of information that takes place between the viewer and the cultural object. The viewer looks at the poster, reads its demands and brings with them the weight of their own political reality. The viewer becomes a custodian of the political demands being made, despite their temporal location.

An examination of language and the discourses it produces enable the viewer to engage with what Renu Bora (1997) calls the object's "texxture." [56] For example, the firm use of identity-based markers "Black" and "Asian" articulate a theoretical position which understands as Gilmore (2020) argues, how racism enshrines inequality. The object calls on the viewer's imagination to produce not only relational affinities but theoretical connections which identify the forces of dispossession in the present. The naming of members of Haringey Black Action as oppressed subjects, both racialised and queer, is a powerful linguistic marker. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick argues that "texture" is densely packed with information "about how,

[56] For more on "texxture," see Renu Bora, "Outing Texture," In *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 94-127.

substantively, historically, materially, [the object] came into being" (Sedgwick 2003, 14). Renu Bora extends this analysis, noting the difference between "texture" and "texxture" with regard to material culture. He defines the latter as the "pragmatic, medium, inner level of the stuffness of material structure" (Bora 1997, 99). I argue that the inner layer of which he speaks is comprised of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, which survives the object's physical movement and confinement inside the archive. Bora distinguishes "texture" from "texxture" by arguing that the former "signifies the surface resonance or quality of an object or material" (Bora 1997, 98). In order to reveal the "stuffness" of material culture and explore its inner layers, the viewer must break the surface. The punctum (the accident which pricks me) experienced as a result in the posters confrontational language penetrates their surface, revealing the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained in their inner layers. Here, the imagination plays many roles: it is first and foremost, the driving force in the production of the cultural object. The cultural object emerges through an imaginative act of creation by a group engaging in material resistance. This act of creation is represented by the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential they leave behind in it. Decades later, the viewers imagination is ignited in the act of looking at the posters, this looking produces a flow of intensities, foregrounding the creation of theoretical connections in the present vis-à-vis the object's subject matter. The punctum, as experienced as a result of some detail, breaks the surface of the object, revealing the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential from which it is constituted and producing a relational affinity in the viewer. In this ongoing process, different forms of the imagination meet, the force of which topologically distorts the temporality that foregrounds the space between the viewer in the present moment and those individuals who created the object in question. Their interdependence is forged via the linguistic act of demand-making which initiates a commonality, a shared set of ethical, moral and political principles that, through the circulation of affect, pushes the present-day viewer beyond the discourses of stasis that plague the contemporary moment towards resistant action.

**Positioning is everything: contextualising the image**

Whilst there is no clear record of how these cultural objects were physically assembled, one might imagine that they emerged from a process of collective deliberation in which, design styles, typeface and image were debated and decided upon collectively. It is important to contextualise these images in a time-period in which forms of identity-based grassroots organisation flourished, grounded by a Marxist and anti-imperialist analysis of capitalism. In their analysis of left and right critiques of identity politics, Michael Richmond and Alex Charnley

explain how in the 1980s, rather than working around an abstracted subjective notion of identity, political organisations formed to "[trouble] identity in order to think about different forms of exploitation and oppression through concrete examinations of everyday life. The best observations were grounded in historical critiques of colonial relations" (Richmond and Charnley 2022, 14). Rather than read these posters as evidence of a myopic, inward looking and simplistic demand for various forms of representation, I read them in light of the material and concretised analysis they make which stem from an understanding of race, class, gender and sexuality as co-constitutive political categories and structures of power.

The importance of ascertaining Haringey Black Action's political orientation in order to investigate what the cultural object reveals about their long and short term political demands is linked to this thesis' interest in Marxist theories about the development of history. Specifically, the notion that history is constituted by class struggle. After all, my own experience of the punctum and the relational affinities it produces is in part constituted by a theoretical interest in the qualities of cultural objects that critique, expose and analyse racial capitalism. What can Figures 15-18 reveal about the nature of class struggle during this period? The value assigned to the cultural object, the ability to engage seriously with the information stored inside it, is dependent on an understanding of the role and function of culture in the battle over interpretation. In his reading of cultural texts related to race and gender in the 1980s, Kobena Mercer observes that,

> in matters of war, positioning is everything. What was going on was not only conflict on the streets of civil society, but a struggle over the way in which events were understood and interpreted. What was a "riot" in one discourse, was a rebellion in another (Mercer 1994, 7).

In reading the cultural as a product of history and history as shaped by the development of cultural objects, I wish to emphasise how much cultural objects can reveal about the mood, tone and political sentiments that defined any given temporal period (in this instance, 1980s Britain) as well as the strategies deployed by political organisations to resist encroachment by the state. I read Figures 15-18 as evidence of class antagonism. In attempting to contend with the markers of the social world, the cruelty of state governance and the enforced isolation of minoritarian groups through mass protest, Haringey Black Action Group exposed the way Black and South Asian queer struggle is read as both a threat to the nation by fascists *and* as incongruous with

socialist ideals and principles.[57] The Smash the Backlash March and the material that emerged from it analysed the co-constitution of race, class, gender and sexuality in the lives of Black and South Asian queers and attempted to mobilise a united front against the forces on the far right. Following the astuteness of this analysis, we might also read the posters as evidence that members understood themselves as workers in a capitalist system; that demands made on the basis of race were also *inherently* informed by class analysis.

In response to fascist mobilisation, "THE RACISTS & THE BIGOTS ARE ON THE ATTACK," Figure 18 maintains the necessity that "LESBIAN & GAYS, BLACK PEOPLE, WOMEN, ANTI-IMPERIALIST & ANTI-RACIST FORCES, SOCIALISTS & PROGRESSIVES – FIGHT BACK," forming a coalition in order to protect one another. The '&' indicates not only these groups relatedness but the ideological linkages between them. The arrangement of language on the poster suggests that Haringey Black Action refused to think of queer life as separable from race and gender. The positioning of different but interrelated groups indicates that they understood the power structures that dispossessed various groups as somehow connected. We might read this analysis in light of what Patricia Hill Collins defined as "the matrix of domination,"(Collins 2009) which refers to the organisation of power relations a society which organises the oppressive effects of class, race and gender, consisting of four domains: the structural, the disciplinary, the hegemonic and the interpersonal. Such a paradigmatic shift in analysis from the working-class, required the building of broad-based coalitions across difference against a common enemy borne from an understanding that systems of power across domains were interlocking. This logic is represented in the cumulative phrase, "FIGHT BACK – MARCH FOR YOUR RIGHTS." The assumed subjectivity of the "I" of various listed identity groups collapses into a possessive determiner YOUR – which implies *we*, a collective. The possessive here indicates not only a claim over what the groups listed have in common (as well as the possibility of synthesis, the reality of being Black *and* queer *and* a socialist) but a requirement that resistance to oppression be collective. Represented visually, the force of such a linguistic gathering, the creation of a collective body from which a central call

[57] Here I refer to the longstanding tensions between white and racialised members of the working class in mainstream Marxist and socialist movements in Britain. For mainstream socialist movements in particular, race is often theorised as a corollary to one's position as a worker, rather than constitutive of the position itself. In academia, "class first" analysis, which critiques what it perceives as an identarian attachment to race, dismisses the necessity of understanding how race functions in political struggle. The concept of Racial Capitalism provides a framework for understanding how race has been central to the development of capitalism and how labour exploitation occurs along racial lines. Many academic theorists and political organisers, including Stuart Hall and Claudia Jones have addressed these tensions directly. For an overview of these debates in the present, see Nikhil Pal Singh, "The Blindspot Revisted," *Verso Blog,* October 12, 2018, https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/4079-the-blindspot-revisited.

for defence against premature death incurred by racial capitalism is marshalled, foregrounds the linkages between these groups as a "class" against a ruling elite determined to push them out of the bounds of dignified existence. The text positions them as engaged in a battle against racists and bigots emboldened by the state, to think alongside Mercer, it responds to the war with a linguistic and material positioning of its own – emphasising the need for opposition to a complex web of oppressive power.

In order for the ideological linkages between the groups mentioned in Figure 18 to be drawn, a material analysis of a shared lack of access to resource, namely education, housing and healthcare, must have been necessary. The creation of commonality in the text is related to a socialist recognition of how worsening material conditions for all cuts across realms of difference. The posters are evidence of the emergence of a racialised, gendered working class able to recognise their positions as workers. Beginning from the knowledge that grassroots formations on the basis of identity situated in London and across the country during this period were often informed by analysis borne from anti-colonial independence struggle, the language of commonality is no surprise.[58] In the context of anti-imperialist movements for independence, seeking to expel colonial masters and destroy the relationships of dependency between populations and exploitative settlers spanning the 1980s; the need to build and establish a critical mass across large sections of society was clearly underpinned by a transnational worker's movement critical of capitalism. I analyse these images with this liberatory goal in mind because I read them as part of a legacy of cultural production during this period intent on providing counter and anti-hegemonic claims.[59] Phrases such as "FIGHT BACK" hint at the possibility that these movements had the capacity to define, in positive terms, forms of organisation, and governance that would enable truly communal forms of living to emerge. I emphasise their

[58] A number of groups operating during this period, including The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent and the Brixton Black Women's Group were formed in solidarity with burgeoning anti-colonial resistance movements on the African continent. Members understood themselves as *in but not of* Britain, resisting through a politicised diaspora consciousness, a global working-class, from inside the imperial core. In *Heart of the Race, Black Women's Lives in Britain*, authors Stella Dadzie, Beverley Bryan and Suzanne Scafe pointedly note that "what Somara Machel had to say about women's emancipation made a lot more sense to us to what Germaine Greer and other middle class white feminists were saying."(Dadzie, Bryan, Scafe 1985, 149). For more, see Stella Dadzie, Beverley Bryan and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race, Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985).

[59] It is important to note that the posters do not explicitly align Haringey Black Action with a radical political history, unlike, for example, The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent who clearly situated themselves inside Marxist and socialist histories of resistance. I read the poster's open-endedness on the question of the group's conceptual grounding and desired mode of social organisation as a present absence in the text. I hesitate to understand these posters as "revolutionary" – believing that this concept requires a clarity of purpose and a strategy of transformation including, where necessary, violence, direct confrontation and armed resistance. I instead investigate the political principles that are present in the cultural objects (solidarity, working across difference, a clear identification of a fascist threat) as part of a tradition of refusal of the present condition, it is these sustained acts of refusal that constitute resistance.

resistant quality in order to assert that the above figures represent the beginnings of self-actualisation, autonomous organising and critical analysis from minoritised groups during this period. In their defensive posture, Figures 15-18 do not clearly articulate their political vision for liberation. Reading the posters open-endedness on this question as a form of radicality, discursive analysis points towards an understanding of themselves as oppressed subjects who must fight against oppressive force in the short term through broad-based coalition. This short term strategy to gain greater rights and equality under the law acts a precursor to the long-term visions for freedom that were informed by theories emerging from anti-colonial struggle which included the fortification of an insurgent worker's movement which would force concessions from the state.

**Creative acts of resistance**

The Haringey Black Action Group were a local group engaged in resistance against Haringey Council and other local government authorities. There is no evidence that they positioned themselves as part of a global queer underclass. The value of this distinction is to note how the group's aesthetics speak to these priorities: a reliance on the language of community and the mention of identity-based groups that call to different sections of the British left are evidence of this focus, as well as the use of the word "Bigot," (Figure 18) a popular term used to describe the prejudiced in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the group's engagement with the state is an example of the *in and against* framework guiding grassroots coalitional politics in the United Kingdom during this period.[60] Formations worked inside and outside of state bodies and institutions simultaneously, providing support for oppressed groups whilst also establishing legal and institutional frameworks that enabled the acquisition of greater rights. In his writing on Moten's *consent not to be a single thing,* David Llyod argues that Moten acknowledges how,

> the aesthetic tradition furnishes not only, and not so much, a theory of art as a theory of freedom and of the subject, which, taken together, constitute the conditions of possibility for any modern concept of the political (Llyod 2020, 80).

Following this analysis, the aesthetic choices made in these cultural might be one way to understand not only how Black and racialised queer subjects were conceived of during this period but how they crafted an understanding of politics that enabled them to define the parameters of freedom for themselves. The visual qualities of the posters (confrontational, firm,

[60] For more on "In and Against" framework, see London Weekend Return Group, *In and Against the State, Discussion Notes for Socialists* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

bold) mirror the theoretical criticality present in anti-racist and feminist formations during this period.

The posters are concerned with rallying a large crowd as a symbolic show of strength and force against those institutions, fascist vigilante groups and local councils that designate them illegitimate. They perform a demand, *join us*. The use of colours such as red and green, are reminiscent of the visual language of radical politics, they nod towards the "red" and "green" futures often espoused by communist movements, though one cannot be sure aesthetic choices were intentional. The purpose of revolutionary aesthetics has long been debated in the field of cultural and archival studies. Part of expressing a counter or anti-hegemonic ideology is dependent on the organisation of beauty in such a way that makes alternative propositions appealing. If as, Marina Gržinić (2023) argues, aesthetics is about exposing the sensorial life of capitalism's momentum, radical aesthetics challenge dominant ideology insofar as they expose the way capitalist logics seek to organise, exploit and extinguish oppressed peoples. They should seek, following, María Del Rosario Acosta López, "to find ways of *making audible* the operations—the political actions, the creative acts of resistance—that seek to interrupt… forms of silencing" (López 2021, 148). Haringey Black Action belongs to this radical aesthetic legacy because they forcefully enter the demands of oppressed populations into the public sphere, combatting their own erasure. A year before the introduction of Section 28[61], these posters emerged from a group battling an increasingly repressive legal environment in which moral panics about the promotion of homosexuality (which threatened the reproductive imperative of the nuclear family) alienated queer communities from state resource, each other and perhaps most crucially, other sections of the British left.

In binding queer resistance to the overall health of the community and attempting to demonstrate its relationship to socialism, anti-imperialism, the women's liberation movement and anti-racism, the designers of these posters sought common ground from which to make political demands. The posters are defined by visual representations of bodies and figures from oppressed peoples as well as symbols (including the women's symbol and the pink triangle, used

[61] Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 made illegal the intentional promotion of homosexuality in schools through teaching and/or published materials as well as the promotion of homosexuality as a legitimate family relationship. For more on the effects of this law, see Anna Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

to identify "homosexuals" in Nazi concentration camps from 1933-45) that establish their presence and continued existence against social and political threats. These aesthetic decisions provide an alternative political strategy, one built on the interdependence of oppressed peoples, as a mode of thinking about how to contend with the violent material conditions of the 1980s. Rather than attempt to represent the individual contours of specific group experience, the aesthetic choices made in Figures 15-18 call for a recognition of the political, sexual and racial autonomy of groups formed on the basis of identity "SISTAHS ARE DOIN' IT WITH THEMSELVES!" (Figure 15) and the creation of a collective body capable of shielding and protecting all oppressed peoples. "SISTAHS DOING IT WITH THEMSELVES!" is a playful riff on the rhythmic tunes of women's empowerment, "Sistahs Are Doin' It for Themselves," (Eurythmics and Franklin, 1985) hinting specifically at relationships between Black lesbians. The posters encapsulate Cathy Cohen's instruction that,

> a reconceptualization of the politics of marginal groups allows us not only to privilege the specific lived experience of distinct communities, but also to search for those interconnected sites of resistance from which we can wage broader political struggles. Only by recognising the links between the ideological, social, political and economic marginalisation of punks, bulldaggers and welfare queers, can we begin to develop political analyses and political strategies effective in confronting the linked yet varied sites of power in this country (Cohen 1997, 482).

By attempting to highlight the commonality of specific struggles through an emphasis on a common enemy or a shared threat, these posters affirm what Cohen identifies as the links between "punks, bulldagggers and welfare queens." That is, the social and economic vectors shared by multiple identity-based groups and formations. Figures 15-18 consolidate analysis of how gender, race, and sexuality function also, following Hall (1980), as the modalities through which class is lived. In establishing an argument for commonality that recognises these multiple modalities, the Haringey Black Action Group illustrate how the imagination provides the impetus for the creation of cultural objects that affirm the necessity of working across difference. In identifying the imagination as the driving force in the creation of cultural objects, I note in this instance how this driving force is expressed through an establishment of interdependent relation. We might return to Walcott's (2021) notion of freedom as an individual and collective desire to be "in common." In the short term, the posters aesthetics and visual language aim to politicise the public, they call for them to stand alongside the subjects of attack (Black and South Asian queers), but more importantly, to understand that an attack on one is an attack on all. In the long term, they represent a desire for a coalitional politics based on the

autonomy of oppressed people that exceeds a rights-based framework by seizing the power necessary to fight back. Both long and short term goals begin with the identification of state repression and fascist mobilisation as antagonists.

Figures 15-18 demonstrate that radical aesthetics are not only about the communication of a specific liberatory ideal, but also act as a call to gather, a marshalling of political subjects into a space for the purposes of group organisation, connectivity and care. In the posters, we see an emphasis on the creation of a collective body through language and imagery. "A COMMUNITY DIVIDED! IS A COMMUNITY DEFEAFTED!" (Figure 16) speaks to the core notion of reflective solidarity, a concept that Jodi Dean argues "must include two moments: that of opposition to those who would exclude or oppress another and that of our mutual recognition of each other's specificity" (Dean 1997, 4). That mutual recognition is achieved through a clear naming of difference in the poster's call to various groups and a recognition of the necessity of gather together for the purposes of consolidating power. Dean goes on to argue for, "a solidarity that arises through critique and discussion, in the course of communicative engagements like those of consciousness raising yet informed by the lessons of the intervening decades" (Dean 1997, 5). Following this invocation to examine how solidarity operates across time, it is striking to note the resonances these posters might produce in the present, especially regarding how the punctum can transform structures of feeling defined by stasis. The foregrounding of a coalitionary politics carries special significance in the context of neoliberalism. The rapid onset of neoliberalism in the last four decades has prioritised and accelerated the rise of the individual, placing their needs in antagonistic relation to the needs and desires of groups. Figures 15-18 demonstrate that there was a time in the United Kingdom when groups were able to successfully and explicitly build coalitions across difference in order to face a common enemy, even if such a notion feels harder to achieve in the present. The operation of power in the present moment emerges as a generalised threat against the singular body, rather than a generalised threat that might be attended to and remedied collectively. Nevertheless, I maintain that the poster's visual language produces an affective turn capable of driving political subjects towards the reestablishment of a coalitionary politics precisely because its punctum and the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential it contains build a desire to be "in common" in the viewer. This desire is the basis of discourses, forms of creation and organisation that build a liberatory structure of feeling, in which the power of collectivity becomes central.

If the power of these posters rests on how their visual style and the arrangement of text displaces the individual in favour of the collective, an aesthetic and affective reintroduction of such a

principle against the force of neoliberalism might remedy the dissonance created by political impasse. It could, once again, ignite the imaginative impetus that makes the possibility of transformative action more feasible to political subjects. The process of engaging with cultural objects fortifies and expands the imagination of political subjects by revealing, through Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, the political and strategic decisions that brought the object into being. These forces cohere in politicalised desires that find their most poten expression in materialist action. In her critical appraisal of Black women's organisations during the 1980s, Julia Chinyere Oparah notes, following Derrida, the work of deconstruction that took place inside grassroots feminist formations not unlike Haringey Black Action which required "an interrogation of the borders between self and other, a sense that boundaries may be more porous than at first they appear" (Oparah 1998, 109). The material that has come under my investigation in this chapter points to collectivity and solidarity as practices that lead to an interrogation of the notion of the self, reigniting the possibility of resistance in times of neoliberal crisis. The posters use of aesthetics point towards the expression of the imagination's relational dimensions. If, as Adriana Cavarero (2000) argues, the self is not actually an ontological possibility but merely what is narrated through reciprocal exposure, vulnerability and engagement with others, then the solidarity expressed via these posters is a clear representation of this kind of self-narration. Figures 15-18 bring to the fore the urgency of recognising collective vulnerability as a means of transforming precarity into collective power.

**Conclusion: A multi-pronged modality**

This chapter has explored recurrence as a multi-pronged modality for assessing the uses of the imagination in resistant cultural production. It began with identifying the dimensions of recurrence as a *coming back around* of some aspect of the past that is unmoored from its temporal location. It began with the study of the punctum, a preoccupation with investigating those accidents which pricked me in the process of fieldwork. I situate recurrence as an experience of a cultural object's Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential and the punctum as the action of piercing the surface of a cultural object, revealing the "inner level of the stuffness of material culture" (Bora 1997, 99).

What *comes back around* compromises linear temporality by triggering the viewer's imagination to produce a relational affinity which challenges the temporal location of the cultural object in question. This affinity, expressed through an experience of the punctum and recurrence is topological in nature; it distorts and crumples the historical timeline, making the text or image

feel familiar. This familiarity invites an assessment of the continuity of oppressive power which determines the viewer's material condition and conditions that constituted the cultural object. In critically analysing a photograph of Sylvia Erike and posters produced by the Haringey Black Action Group, I have explored the relationship between visual and linguistic signs, their objects and their interpretants. The cultural objects that have come under my analysis in this chapter evidence the long and short term political demands of individuals and groups as well as their conceptualisations of resistance. The imagination acts as a driving force for the creation of the cultural object, carrying inside it, the political logics and that defined its inception. It is displayed in Figures 15-18's aesthetic and linguistic foregrounding of human interdependence, their expansions of the realm of political possibility and cultivation of a coalitionary politic. The imagination is also an effect of the viewer's engagement with the cultural object, pushing them toward participation in resistant action by strengthening their desires for freedom which in turn forge an emancipatory structure of feeling.

I have emphasised visuality and language in the experience of recurrence, because like Toni Morrison, I hold that "beauty is an absolute necessity" (Morrison, 1993) for political subjects who wish to stake a claim to liveable life. Similarly, my preoccupation with objects comes from a desire to penetrate their surface, to move beyond simple representational meaning, to read their details so that I may use my interpretations to demonstrate their role in political struggle. In her reflection on Michael Mcmillan's *The West Indian Front Room*, Denise Noble writes,

> objects have the capacity to facilitate memory at the individual level through the way they can stir the senses and the emotions, bringing back to the consciousness that which has been repressed or simply fallen out of mind (Noble 2018, 224).

Perhaps recurrence is an attempt to capture the political principles that have "fallen out of mind," what must *come back around* again in order to reorientate us against oppressive force in the present. Cultural objects act as containers for the myriad strategies, fugitive planning, secrets, wishes and promises that constitute the impetus to resist. To claim that it is possible to open those containers via analysis, to examine their contents and be changed in the process, re-establishes the link between what we feel, how we think and how we act in the social world. Cultivating a radical aesthetics capable of responding to governing structures, articulating the necessity of the collective body and expressing the non-rational forms of knowledge that create the desire for participation in resistant action should not be taken for granted. Photographs, posters and other cultural objects might be read as affective portals; capable of producing relational possibilities that have otherwise been foreclosed. The archive is a window into the

political economy of any given locale; it adds a cultural dimension to political analysis that remains crucial in material struggle. It is one site through which political subjects can exercise the desire to resist and fortify their political determination.



Figure 19 (Top). Figure 20 (Bottom).

# *FRAGMENT: "It cannot be left unchallenged"*

The London City Airport Expansion Project championed by then Chancellor Phillip Hammond, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and Communities Secretary Sajid Javid was a £344 million pound investment that promised, alongside greater ease of a travel via the creation of a new terminal and transport links to the airport, at least 1600 new jobs. Privately owned, London City Airport is located in the heart of the capital's financial centre, facilitating the circulation of wealth in London's economy. We can read it as more than just an airport; as a marker of the capital's financial status. The representational value of the airport, as a means of attracting investment to the Docklands, made the expansion a site through which the state continued to support efforts to privatise services across the city. Situated in Newham, one of the poorest boroughs in London, the expansion helped solidify the then coalition government's story of innovation.

Elsewhere, just before dawn on Tuesday 6th September 2016, nine Black Lives Matter UK organisers chain themselves together obstructing a runway at the London City Airport. Flights are grounded temporarily and diverted to Gatwick. *The Guardian* reports that, "flights were cancelled to Geneva, Milan, Luxembourg, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Zurich, Florence, Majorca and Malaga. Flights to Dublin and Frankfurt were showing indefinite delays" (Weaver and Grierson, 2016).

By 9:30am, police arrest seven of the nine individuals engaged in direct action. A video the group releases on Twitter at 8:19am details their reasoning for initiating a #SHUTDOWN of London City Airport (@ukblm, 2016). The video, widely circulated on social media consists of prominent Black organisers reading lines from a pre-prepared script straight to camera. The analysis names the social, political and economic consequences of climate catastrophe, using the London City Airport expansion as a case study. The speakers note the disproportionate and violent impact the expansion will have on racialised populations in Newham, trace the expansion's connection to the migrant crisis and highlight how it will contribute to the destruction of the borough's air quality. This proposed violence exists in the context of the state's disregard for climate catastrophe. The video points to the deaths of at least 3,120 migrants fleeing uninhabitable conditions produced by emissions, the adverse health outcomes for racialised communities in London and the difference in average salary between racialised workers in the borough of Newham and the average LCA flyer. The video begins with the following statistic,

**THE UK IS THE BIGGEST PER CAPITA CONTRIBUTOR TO GLOBAL TEMPERATURE CHANGE AND THE LEAST VULNERABLE.**

another still reads,

**ACCORDING TO THE UNHCR, BY 2050, THERE WILL BE TWO HUNDED MILLION CLIMATE REFUGEES.**

If, to think with Du Gay et al (1997), culture is the word given to the myriad objects, processes and forms of knowledge that create "shared meaning," then analysing resistant forms of cultural production – forms that consciously break with the hegemonic – provides a basis for examining the multi-layered elements that produce the collective refusal on display. Let us think of these initial statements as a portal

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[62] *I define cultural production as a process of creation or intervention that builds on pre-existing meaning or produces new meaning in social space. For the purposes of this analysis, I understand "social space" to relate to any arena: political, social and/or economic that is public and freely accessible to a public. I am particularly interested in forms of cultural production that are not intended to be read as artistic objects. The circulation of such material usually happens in two sites: in-person via the creation and dissemination of flyers, posters and other hand-held pieces of information that proliferate in community spaces or via social media, where the broad aim of contact with cultural production is increased engagement – for the cultural objects in question to be viewed and shared by as many people as possible in the hope of transforming social, political or economic perception. Rather than categorise archival ephemera as either artistic objects or political ones, I'm interested in how the expressed purpose of cultural production – the interventions cultural objects make into social space in order to provide an anti-hegemonic account of the world in favour of what could be – is inherently artistic. I make this claim not to argue that art objects somehow elevate the "the political" but merely to reemphasise the co-composition of these categories and assert that the political is partly constituted by aesthetics. We must therefore read the cultural production of resistant grassroots formations as art objects. In the Aesthetic Dimension, Herbert Marcuse writes,*

or route into a shared meaning. Such a meaning is based on an assessment of the threats to life under racial capitalism and an attempt to mobilise resistance against these threats by making connections between climate, labour practices and the state's racialised practices of dispossession. The video takes on a pedagogical function, it intends to facilitate the assimilation of critical thinking about the social world in its audience. Facts and statistics are punctuated with the phrase "THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A RACIST CRISIS" throughout the video. This phrasing makes explicit how the climate crisis *depends* upon racialised labour exploitation (who will construct the expansion?) and displacement (who will be pushed out of the borough or further displaced in the countries most affected by the carbon emissions it generates?). The London City Airport expansion is symbolic of the relations of unfreedom that exist under racial capitalism. As early as 2016, Black Lives Matter UK Organisers introduced a robust and multi-pronged framework for assessing the consequences of climate catastrophe that took note of how

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> *Beyond this, a work of art can be called revolutionary if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom and the rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality and opening the horizon of change (liberation).* (Marcuse 1978, xi)

*In providing an account of BLM UK's video, my intention is not to consider whether or it is sufficiently "revolutionary" vis a vis Marcuse's criteria. It is to underscore that the virtues of aesthetic transformation as Marcuse calls it, exists in several different markers of the cultural. Aesthetic transformation, the capacity to experience the "beauty" of an object, should not be confined only to objects made with this explicit purpose. Complicating this rubric reemphasises the aesthetic quality of processes of liberation. If political work is the work of artists, then the call to think materially about the necessity, role and dimensions of the imagination in political resistance becomes less preposterous. If the imagination is also related to a collective embrace of non-rational elements of human existence that includes, by virtue of their multiplicity, some degree of mystery, then beyond the mere acceptance of dry economic determinism and linear historical trajectory, there exists some other phenomena capable of releasing individuals from the affective weight of stasis. The intangible quality of "beauty" and the multi-layered aesthetic interiority of "things" might be one such phenomena, one way to rediscover the impetus to resist. This argument requires a serious engagement with the imaginative capacity that cultural objects contain as one tool to build space for collective aesthetic transformation, a process of collectively moving individuals towards resistant action. I treat this video as a work of art precisely because it displays a "prevailing unfreedom" and encourages its audience to break through a "mystified (and petrified) social reality" via an aesthetic mode (videography) that seeks to revive a political consciousness.*

racism is, as Cedric Robinson argued, not only capitalism's instrument, but its conditions of possibility (Robinson 2000).

Black Lives Matter UK's emotive appeal to their audience to make the connection between the tenants of racial capitalism and the airport city expansion is deliberate. It marks an affective refusal that is constituted by the imagination; by introducing an understanding of climate crisis that foregrounds race, I argue that in the video's creation, BLM UK brought that which did not previously exist into being. This act is not imaginative in an abstract sense, it is grounded in a conceptualisation of the imagination as a driving force for the exposure and expulsion of social violence. Here, the imagination is pre-figured in language, turned substantive in the act of creation. The Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential of this cultural object is two-fold: a phenomenon that produces the capacity to resist through direct action and a substance that is disseminated by virtue of the video's circulation – brought into the public realm, sticking to subjects and objects across time – reshaping their political consciousness.

Rather than attempting to make a straightforward appeal, the video provides an analysis of material conditions intended to galvanise its audience into an assertive position. It confronts them with the notion that their existence is marked by oppressive social relations whilst demanding they actively support those who attempt to confront these relations directly. This confrontation and demand is not made without an assumption of the video's intended audience; the speakers address everyone, those with a critical consciousness, those without, those subjects who experience forms of oppression they are unable to articulate and so on. The language used in the video is declarative, assured and offers a relational analysis that enables viewers to understand the uneven distribution of destruction under racial capitalism. If, as Marx (1970) argues, relations of domination are often socially produced and not merely abstracted or objective facts, then this this video – an educational tool providing firm analysis of the economic conditions that produce precarity and recognising the racial hierarchies that drive capitalist production – exposes those relations for what they are and attempts to provide a social response.


Figure 21.

At a key point in the video, one speaker utters the following "The London City Airport Expansion cannot go ahead because it would further decrease the quality of life for poor black people in this country. ***It cannot be left unchallenged*.**" Whilst the emphasis in the sentence is mine, the tonal shift in pronunciation of the word "cannot" in the video is slight but powerful. The auditory and visual grit of this moment of emphasis is felt palpably via the speaker's facial expression and perhaps cannot be fully translated through language. We witness the strength of conviction that props us such a statement, we experience this as witnessing an "emotion" that can be read through the speaker's facial expression. What I experience, in that moment that might not be acknowledged as anything more than a slight change in speech pattern, is the exposure of an affective circuit, capable of penetrating through digital space. This circuit cuts through the time that separates viewers in 2024 from those individuals in the video, who speak eight years prior. ***It cannot be left unchallenged*** – is both a promise and a threat, it establishes a new shared meaning premised on collective resistance, a threat that is actualised by the group's use of direct action which accompanies the video's release. We witness a cultural object able to hold the weight of both theory and practice, one that brings to light the reasons why a set of resistant actions must take place and in doing so, denaturalises the machinery of exploitation that structures the way we live. The phrase enters a "no" into public space, a demand that its audience reconfigure their understanding of what constitutes both "racism" and "climate emergency" so that racism is evident in air quality and climate emergency is a question of black worker's wages. BLM's synchronisation of an ideological intervention with a material one not only produces a "new meaning" but adds to the work of destroying the discursive and physical markers of capitalist hegemony.

What we might identify as frustration, or rage are insufficient linguistic markers for the occurrence in question. Perhaps what we view as the phrase is being uttered is the translation of the imagination through an act of resistance, a speech act producing new effects. John Langshaw Austin's (1962) classification of the features of utterance is pertinent here. In distinguishing between a locutionary act (the act of utterance), an illocutionary act (the force/purpose of utterance) and a perlocutionary act (the way in which utterance is received and the effects it produces in others) he provides a useful framework for understanding this moment. The locutionary act occurs because the imagination has produced political desire that constitutes the labour of creating the video: writing the script, gathering participants, filming and releasing the cultural object in support of the direct action taking place. The locutionary act breaks with stasis, using language to move. Language becomes not only a vehicle for information (facts and statistics) but a vehicle for the creation and dissemination of an affective charge that leaves the speaker in the locutionary act, gains a purpose in the illocutionary act (education, alerting, provocation) and settles in others in the perlocutionary act by creating a set of emotional effects in the viewer. I experience these effects through an affective current: warmth, affinity, yearning, admiration, recognition, pride, steadfastness, preparedness, courage. The affective charge produced in the perlocutionary act penetrates the viewers emotional landscape precisely because it originates from an attempt to conjure what is not currently present.

These effects are serious, even if experienced by those whose have already developed a critical understanding of structures of power and rubrics of domination. These effects have the power to shape political consciousness, simply, to change the way an individual understands the world they live in, to ignite their own capacity to imagine a liberatory mode of social organisation. All this is captured in a brief utterance. The combined effect enables the speaker to pick at the linguistic features of the state's authority, if the expansion "cannot go ahead", we are prompted, through language, to consider and actively oppose the conditions that would permit such an expansion. We are invited to consider how a confluence of power and capitalist interest has resulted in the decision to go ahead and encouraged to understand that power granted can and should be revoked through resistance. In her poetic essay on refusal, Anne Boyer writes,

> some days my only certain we is this certain we that didn't, that wouldn't, whose bodies or spirits wouldn't go along. That we slowed, stood around, blocked the way, kept a stone face when the others were complicit and smiling. And still we ghost, and no-show, and in the enigma of refusal, we find that we endogenously produce our own incapacity to even try, grow sick and depressed and motionless under all the merciless and circulatory conditions of all the capitalist yes. (Boyer 2018, 10-11).

The tendency to assess the value of direct action is routinely measured by whether the action in question

stopped the social violence it sought to oppose. I have purposefully omitted this information in this fragment to resist the urge to impose a binary conception of political history based on "wins" and "losses." I turn instead to the representational value of resistant acts as they appear in cultural objects, their role and impact in breaking through the political impasse felt in the present moment and expanding political consciousness. This is one way to claim that the simple act of saying "no" and using culture as a vehicle is an act worthy of examination on its own merits. I wager that the video in question is a visual representation of Boyer's we that "slowed, stood around, blocked the way" precisely because it connects direct action with cultural production. The cultural object carries with it the aspirations for a shared meaning premised on collective freedom.

The video highlights the principles of collectivity; in the many faces that read from a pre-prepared script, the sole author of that script has been effaced in favour of the anonymity of the multitude. The video continues to take on new meanings in the "future" of its inception. It holds relevance as evidence of the action, as a resource to be taught in schools and as a means of igniting a radical use of the imagination in others. This continued relevance speaks to the power of the "no" the video articulates. It works by explaining both the physical and ideological necessity of blocking the road. It appears as a kind of immovable object, which solidifies the wishes and aspirations of an organising formation in a particular temporal moment. By illustrating the dimensions of refusal in poetry, Boyer demonstrates the capacity of forms of aesthetic transformation to represent political concepts. In watching the video created by Black Lives Matter UK, we experience the performance of a withdrawal of consent to be exploited, governed and to experience violence by the state. This performance is mirrored by those organisers who chained themselves to the tarmac, a refusal that created ripples so affecting that it resulted in the temporary disruption of commercial airspace and halted the flow of financial capital.

Figure 22.


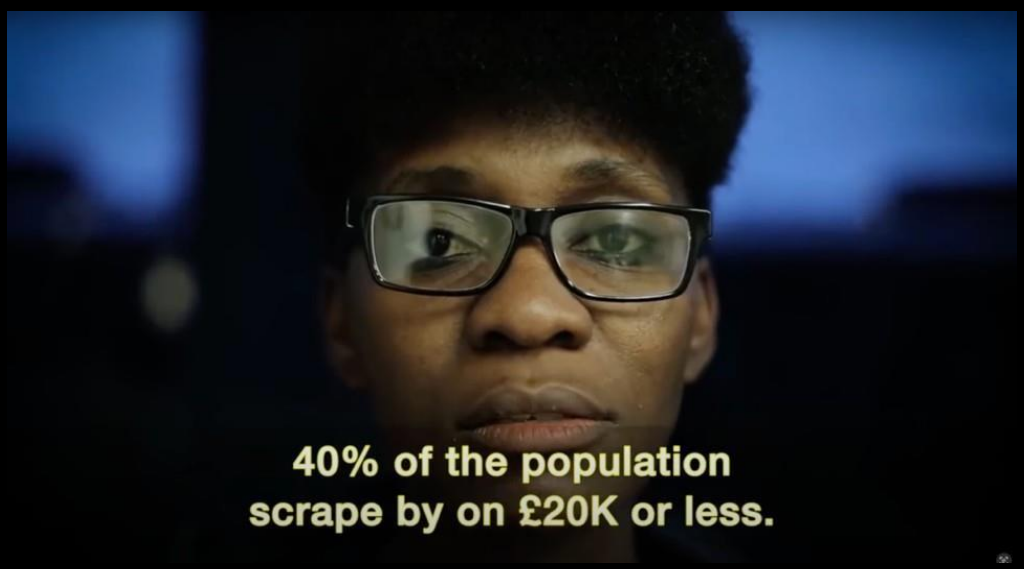


Figure 23.

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# *FRAGMENT: "We have to look for it" – Interview Reflections*


Figure 24.

Aviah Day's interview takes place inside her home in East London on 7th December 2021. Before the interview begins, we share information and organising updates about the respective organising formations to which we belong, we lament how COVID has changed the landscape of grassroots organisation in London and think through routes of mobilisation that might also protect those most vulnerable. I mention a desire to manufacture political will in the moments it seems to wane; she reminisces on what the Sisters Uncut Occupation of empty housing in the Marion Court Estate in 2016 taught her about the power of meaningful coalition. We think together about the necessity of recreating "the feeling of possibility" that seems to have disappeared in recent years defined by crisis. Before I press record, I ask her about the process of refinding momentum, how and why it is important that we do this in the present moment. She speaks of the importance of never letting go of the belief that momentum will return. **We have to look for it**, she insists. We have to create the conditions for its flourishing.

Figure 25.



Figure 26.

I interview Stella Dadzie on Zoom on September 7th 2022, as the sun warms my face from behind the curtains. She has recently celebrated her seventieth birthday. We greet each other and she updates me on the pressing need to organise her archive and the ongoing projects with young people, whose knowledge of the past continues to surprise her. I thank her for participating and she reminds me that she recognises me as one of the many Black feminist thinkers who make a strong and forceful case for a revolutionary feminist praxis in the United Kingdom. During the interview, she promises to show me a display board of badges collected

in her many years of grassroots organising and community work, beginning in her early twenties. I wonder aloud about how to include this artefact in my research as a creative monument to the many places her political desire has taken her. These badges, from the African Red Family, Brixton Black Women's Group, The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, Anti-Apartheid Campaigns, union mobilisations against cuts in secondary education, local campaigns against cuts to social welfare in Haringey, visualise the local and global scale of Dadzie's political ambition. These are the movements that birthed her. They speak to her interest in collecting – curating a political history as a means of remembering where she has been and without knowing it, where she will go. This small act of curation *cares* for the cultural object, its assembly is a means of recognising as Stella argues, the persistence of the past in the present moment. The collection reminds both of us that the future is a smorgasbord of potentialities.

**Stella Dadzie**: Well I'm a historian so I really do have a strong sense that the past is important and continues to inform and influence the present. I suppose I do buy into a sense of that fluidity, and often think of our struggles in terms of sort of two steps forward one step back, **but we are going forward, aren't we?** Discussions like this confirm that there's nothing really new on the table, that what's new is the freshness and energy that is brought to these struggles that allows us to take them forward, but it is a very changing world and it is a very challenging world. **I think there is going to be increasingly a focus on what we perceive to be our very threatened future.** How much people will be prepared to stop and take note of the past in that context remains to be seen but I do know that there's a lot of focus on the archive and there's still a process of unearthing that's going on, that is being used to inform today's priorities and influence our struggles today. In regards to my notion of temporality, I guess as I've grown older I'm more inclined to recognise that history is a long time in the making and that our impatience to see **change is a function of our youth** and all the other things that inform that. We may need to wait a long bloody time before the things that we are hoping for are realised and that makes it all the more incumbent on us to do what I perceive myself to be doing at the moment, which is having those intergenerational discussions, making sure that the archive is available to future generations, making sure that future generations have access to a version that is our own and not somebody else's. When my generation began to engage with these issues it was white male academics and they were the only ones who had ever written about anything, people like Walter Rodney and Eric Williams. Those kinds of things it was like 'Wow!', we were discovering that for the first time but that did feed that sense that **it is actually incumbent on us to pass something on that is precious** and that is uniquely our own, and hopefully that that will inform the future.[63]

**Aviah Day:** **I think it is ongoing.** What a revolutionary moment looks like. And over what length of time it exists in, I think that is up for discussion. If we look at revolutions in the past – I really take a lot from CLR James' book Black Jacobins. He is a historian that centres the little conditions that can happen along the way that blow the wind this way or that. All of those little things that can happen in 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years are part of that history. And I think that is really, really important. **Once you get to the point where the axis of power has materially started to change...** I think of that moment as both exciting and terrifying. Anyone who has ever felt it and experienced it and tasted it must feel emotions I probably can't even really understand or explain. But I imagine it would be physically and emotionally hard. We might have to do without all of the things that make life a little bit easier today with a view to making our lives so much freer and more liveable. And so, yeah, I feel like it's going to be scary. Terrifying. But worth it.

It's very important to me to understand historical processes – where things have been in the past. I've understood that in the past the movement or class struggle or anti-imperialist struggles have gone through a similar length of feeling defeated. So we're talking about neoliberalism and the demise of the left. **We're talking 35, 40 years ago and there have been periods that long and even longer where the movement has come up against defeat. And then things start to shift and things change. And suddenly the conditions for something different begin to emerge.**

And I think that from my own experience, seeing some of that kind of happening that has assuaged a little bit of my impatience. Also understanding that, I'm not the first person to feel that way. There are other people that have gone through 10, 20, 30 years of feeling as if they're in the desert and they've got no power and how are they going to get there? And then something happens, something shifts. It might not even just be one moment **It might be several moments over years and then something starts to build again. Thinking about that temporally has given me a little bit more peace.**

Figure 27.

[63] Excerpts from Interview transcripts with interviewees Stella Dadzie and Aviah Day, displayed side by side.

# CHAPTER FIVE: LANGUAGE AS MATTER – THE IMAGINATION AND TEXTUAL EXPERIMENTATION

*"The word for catastrophe is car. The word for catastrophe is boat. The state of catastrophe is exposed. The word for catastrophe is street… The word for catastrophe is news. The word for catastrophe is lumber, is factory, is field, is oil, is… now." – Dionne Brand*

**Language proliferates**

This short chapter investigates language as a vehicle for the expression of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential by creating found poetry from interview excerpts. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that recognising language's materiality is one way of contending with the imagination, of identifying its location and utility. Creative writing, discourse and speech can provide architecture for the expression of imaginative processes, forcing us to contend with the linguistic qualities of cultural objects. Language proliferates, constituting the "stuff" of pamphlets, posters, booklets, letters, created by members of anti-racist and feminist organising formations in the United Kingdom. I understand it as a basic building block for the expression and communication of political will and a driving force in the creation of liberatory and stultifying structures of feeling. It often defines arenas of political struggle whether through the narrativisation of temporality that constitutes historiography, or through the affective force of political demand. I follow Walter Benjamin, who argues that "language communicates the linguistic beings of things" (Benjamin 1996, 63). He asserts that all human activities concerned with the expression of "human mental life" (Benjamin 1996, 62) are made manifest through language, with the written word being just one form that such processes are registered. As Benjamin notes, we might also refer to a *language* of music and sculpture. If, as this thesis argues, Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is stored or contained in cultural objects and comes to be unleashed through creative engagement, then language is one route through which this engagement takes place. This chapter creates found poetry via textual experimentation using two excerpts (displayed in Figure 27) from participant interview transcripts from feminist academic and organiser Aviah Day and educator and founding member of The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, Stella Dadzie, obtained in the process of fieldwork. The side-by-side positioning of participant interviews in this context enables closer investigation and

comparison of both Day and Dadzie's conceptualisations of key concepts relating to this thesis (history, temporality, the imagination) drawing out their similarities, differences and points of connection.[64]

This thesis has so far focused on unlocking, harnessing and engaging with the imagination as it is represented in cultural objects. This chapter attempts to produce its own cultural object using research findings, in the hopes that this object bears its own traces of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential and produces resistant desire in those who engage with it. Attempting to create a material representation of an otherwise intangible phenomenon required textual experimentation. Using the principles of found poetry, a poetic tradition in which poetry is constructed from already-existing words and phrases, I demonstrate how merging participant language produces a new cultural object that is evidence of my own imagination and attempts to cultivate a renewed sense of possibility in the reader. The use of found poetry brings the researcher into contact with language at the most elemental level, mimicking the topological forces of encounter which constitute imaginative processes; i.e the moment of touching a cultural object or engaging in a dialogic process whose resonances reorder linear temporality. Lynn Kisber-Butler writes,

> whether found poetry is used as a public form of representation or as an analytic tool within the inquiry process, it will bring the researcher closer to the data in different and sometimes unusual ways that can yield new and important insights (Kisber-Butler 2000, 235).

As a writer whose practice is steeped in resistant poetics (both a refusal of traditional form and traditional modes of enquiry), I turn to language as a means of enlivening my own resistant desire. As a methodology, touch incorporates flexibility, it allows for the researcher, interviewees and participants to turn toward their own aesthetic and/or creative practice as a means of creating a cultural object from research findings. Textual experimentation acts as another register of touch because it fuses the haptic with the linguistic, picking up language, turning it over in one's hand, placing words and phrases in new orders and spacings, revealing new and important insights in the process. In this chapter, I read both Day and Dadzie's words in light of the dialectical tradition and use them to construct a reflection on the ongoing nature of resistance and the fluid nature of temporality. The poetic fragment created as a result is a refusal

[64] All transcripts recorded in the process of fieldwork are displayed on **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE** where further examples of textual experimentation can be found.

of affective stasis and the notion of political impasse that defines the structure of feeling in the present political conjuncture. I engage with language in a haptic register, as a system of signs which can be picked up, felt, enfolded, warped to produce new meaning and liberatory discourses. Textual experimentation belongs to the school of dialogic process; as well as creating a cultural object through language, this chapter also explores the value of reading found poetry aloud to initiate a process of exchanging new meanings with others. Just as my interviewees have spoken *to me* and allowed me permission to play with their words; by reorganising their words and phrases, knitting them together, tracking the relational promises inherent in them, analysing the political strategies they express, I speak back to them. I do so to contend with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential that produced their reflections and produces mine. If this thesis is preoccupied with locating the imagination and theorising its utility, then textual experimentation is one way of demonstrating the utility of language in the creation of new meaning. It responds to the question, *what does language do in the world?* By returning to Benjamin's assertion that it expresses the linguistic being of things.

**Constructing the interview space**

Both interviews from which the excerpts in Figure 27 are drawn were conducted over a one-year period of fieldwork, I conducted one-hour conversations with interviewees about their understanding of the form and structure of the imagination as it related to their academic, political and cultural work. Both Day and Dadzie were known to me as individuals I had either organised with or collaborated with for the purposes of political or public education. These previous connections enabled me to craft an informal interview space which sought to replicate a non-linear temporality by naming the power conferred by my position as "researcher" and encouraging interviewees to use tangents, memories and other seemingly unrelated thoughts to guide their answers. Rather than a detached, rationalised intellectual enquiry which reaffirmed a sense of the past and present, I situated these conversations in, to use Day's own words, "the ongoing present" (Day 2021) I met participants in person where possible, framing the interview as a relaxed exchange, a "thinking together" between those invested in liberation.

Feminist methodologies have long called to abolish hierarchal modes of relation during the research process. Yasmin Gunaratnam and Carrie Hamilton note the turn towards a method that "is always already entangled with the "objects" of research, so that space, time, scale and measurement are necessarily located and emergent" (Gunaratnam and Hamilton 2017, 3). The

orientation they propose foregrounds the principle of interdependence and instructs that as feminist researchers we not only analyse the social world but be in and with it. I include fragmented research reflections as an opening to this chapter to document my own enmeshment in the lives and political desires of interviewees and to capture the emotionality of our exchanges. This thesis is invested in synthesising feminism and anti-racism as materialist modes of analysis with the affective consequences of creative feminist methods. This synthesisation enriches theorisations of political struggle and strengthens the practice of resistant action. In my fieldwork and creative practice, I carried this attempt at synthesis with me, creating interview spaces that continually noted the influence of the past on the present and future as well as the simultaneous existence of political desire across temporal boundaries. I did so in order to perform a refusal of the temporal order that produces the drawn-out present.

Rather than ask participants to start at the beginning, I allowed memory and anecdote to enter the room, and enabled them to go where their stories took them. Dadzie recalls the political moments with shaped her involvement in political organisations during her year abroad in Germany,

> I would have been…what would I have been? About twenty-one, I guess? Yeah, about twenty-one, twenty, twenty-one. One of the people that stands out for me at that time was a political refugee from Eritrea who had literally come from the front and who would berate me if I ever went into a shop and didn't get something for one of the comrades while I was there, and I'm not talking about paying for it, and there was a kind of expectation that you would buck the system and that you would try to take back some of what had been stolen. And that, combined with an anti-imperialist perspective on the world and that in-your-face racism that I encountered in Germany brought me back to the UK a very different person, with a very huge afro and a real desire to engage with liberation politics. (Dadzie 2022)

I remember Dadzie's silence as she paused to recall the memory, the playful glint in her eye when she proclaimed "and I'm not talking about paying for it" (Dadzie, 2022). If language is a vehicle for the expression of the imagination, I must also remark on the way that its use in academic contexts flattens the embodied and tactile quality of expression. My own memory of this moment during interview, the way I witnessed Dadzie's own imagination ignited by recalling the memory, cannot fully be captured by my attempts to render it here. The informality of the interview space opened new avenues for thinking about ways to produce knowledge about the contemporary political moment. In foregrounding the connections between myself as a researcher and Dadzie and Day as interviewees, our analysis of political conditions was infused

with a comradeliness, the bonds that form between those who are politically aligned. Aviah Day situates that comradeliness by trying to make sense of the meaning of the actions taken by the political subjects that came before her,

> the war of class struggle, whatever you want to call it, has not actually stopped. We're in a period now where we've suffered losses, really big losses. Lots of different things keep me going. Even with those ambivalent feelings that occur when I engage with images from the sixties and seventies, I try to remember that they *did* get to a point of mounting a very serious and significant challenge to capitalism and imperialism. I take it seriously when I hear Angela Davis say that in the late sixties and early seventies, her comrades really thought they were five years away from revolution, they genuinely believed it (Day 2021).

Language is the vehicle through which Day expresses the productive tension required of political subjects under racial capitalism, what Antonio Gramsci called, "pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will" (Gramsci 1992, 172). Her impulse to "keep going" spurred on by the imagination is deeply connected to the ability to place herself inside of a political legacy, one grounded in the genuine belief that revolution is possible. Both Dadzie and Day's approach to politics is all-encompassing, their attachment to it colours their everyday lives. Sophie Lewis names comradely care as the work of "beautiful militants hell-bent on regeneration, not self-replication" (Lewis 2020). Indeed, it was a longing to regenerate imaginative capacity that provided the framework for the interviews that took place during my fieldwork. The conversational style of interviews centred a feminist political sensibility that asked us to remain attentive to the ways we change and are changed by each other. Because I already shared memories with both interviewees related to feminist work,[65] my methodological enquiry was unburdened by the need for objectivity. I allowed for wandering, meandering exchanges that pushed participants to think with and alongside me. Staying with the agency of objects, at key moments during our exchange, I encouraged both interviewees to reach for cultural objects that

[65] A note to future researchers on the potential importance of cultivating long-term relationships with interview participants: I first met and interviewed Stella Dadzie about her life and work, her involvement in founding The Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent and her co-authoured book, *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* as Women's Officer of Cambridge University Students Union in 2017. I interviewed her again about her book, *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance* as volunteer co-ordinator for the Feminist Library on November 7th 2020 during the COVID pandemic. I interviewed Stella and co-authour Suzanne Scafe for the Ubele Initiative's 1981: Inheriting Black Women's Resistance project in April 2023. These formal interviews have been punctuated by Whatsapp messages, chance meetings at conferences and friendly exchanges via email. The encounters have solidified a Black feminist intergenerational exchange. I met Aviah Day in 2019 as part of my involvement with Sisters Uncut and other grassroots political organisation which I refuse to name to ensure the safety of comrades. We have worked together planning and executing forms of social action, creating and disseminating political education and mobilising opposition to the UK government's increase in police power through the introduction and of Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in 2021.

would aid the retelling of a memory or that were important to their political development. I followed Mariam Fraser's assertion that researchers and by extension research subjects, are "learning, in part from the materials, what kind of relation we are in. How do I open this letter? How does this letter open me?" (Fraser 2012, 88). I remained attentive to the way conducting interviews and the found poetry that emerged from them had the capacity to shape and reshape a collective sense of possibility and revitalise political subjectivity. It is from these fieldwork experiences that the argument for this chapter arises. Language is one window for understanding the operation of the imagination; the process of textual experimentation leaves traces of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential in found poetry. These traces emerge as a result of the intensities and forces emanating from the author which constituted the object, giving it the ability to speak back and have material effects in the world.

**Side by side: a dialectical method**

I begin by placing the words of Aviah Day, academic and founding member of Sisters Uncut, a feminist direct-action group operating across the country to counter state violence since 2014, alongside those of Stella Dadzie, educator, founding member of the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent and the United Black Women's Action Group. Both reflect on the role of history in their understandings of temporality and the emotion attached to the "long wait" for liberation. Placing their words side by side represents an attempt to synthesise forms of knowledge from two political actors that are bound to "the past" (Dadzie) and "the present" (Day). I place them side by side to perform a dialectical reading of both passages that teases out their productive tensions and to use my own imagination to reshape their words to produce a new cultural object which could become one component of a liberatory structure of feeling.

In his analysis of Marx's *Capital* (1996), David Harvey argues that Marx's dialectical method, evolved from Hegelian dialectics, is an attempt to "understand processes of motion, change and transformation" (Harvey 2010, 11) an attempt to "take account of the unfolding and dynamic relations between elements within a capitalist system" (Harvey 2010, 12). Following this, the language contained in this side-by-side reading should be read as a linguistic representation of a moving and dynamic relation between different observations, ideas and desires related to political struggle. Fredric Jameson argues,

> the notion of the dialectic, with a definite article— of dialectics as a philosophical system, or indeed as the only philosophical system—

> obviously commits you to the position that the dialectic is applicable to everything and anything. (Jameson 2009, 6).

I embrace the notion of dialectics as a philosophy utilised to produce new meaning, thinking specifically about how Marxist dialectics seeks to discover the contradictions inherent to social processes in order to better understand them. To read these interview excerpts dialectically then, means attempting to identify their contradictions and merge or synthesise their observations using found poetry to create new understanding of their subject matter. I turn to poetry as a means of evidencing these contradictions because, as Amy De'Ath argues in her essay *Hidden Abodes and Inner Bonds: Literary Study and Marxist-Feminism*, "when literary texts engage the dialectics of aesthetic experience to think about the relation between sense perception and a total system, they are themselves doing a type of theorising" (De'Ath 2022, 228). The creation of a new poetic fragment from already-existing material is an attempt to capture both Dadzie and Day's "relation between sense perception and a total system," using poetry as a means of holding the dialectics of aesthetic experience. My intention is to do a type of theorising that produces new knowledge via a poetic fragment.

Though the thoughts that Dadzie and Day express are not necessarily "opposing", as is key to a Hegelian understanding of dialectical subject matter, both subject's language stand at opposing temporal junctures. Dadzie speaks at seventy years old, reflecting on her understanding of the past and present drawing on forty years of experience as a Marxist, anti-racist educator and organiser. Day speaks as a thirty three year old whose understanding of the present and notion of the "revolutionary moment" is steeped in very recent experiences of neoliberal statecraft (2010-24). The contradiction in their assessments arises from the fact that Dadzie conceptualises political transformation as a long road and singular road, with political subjects positioned along it at different points, "We may need to wait a long bloody time before the things that we are hoping for are realised" (Dadzie 2022). Day on the other hand, conceptualises transformation as the building of momentum across years that is actualised in revolutionary moments – "Once you get to the point where the axis of power has materially started to change… I think of that moment as both exciting and terrifying" (Day 2021). Though they address the same "total-system" (racial capitalism), their sense perceptions differ because of their age, experience, and general proximity to political resistance. I tease out these contradictions and productive tensions to see if they might find resolution in a poetic fragment displayed below.

The production of a poetic fragment also seeks to recognise the relatedness of Day and Dadzie's utterances; they both belong to the same radical tradition. Day's reflection on the importance

of historical process in contending with political defeat is fundamentally related to Dadzie's reflection on the fluidity of the past and legacies of radical organising. Day's approach emerges from a historically materialist tradition, foregrounding a robust understanding of historical process as an indicator of what comes next. Rather than an overreliance on feeling or abstracted notions of "hope" or "optimism" with regard to the future, she understands her own feelings of defeat by contextualising them historically.

> I've understood that in the past the movement or class struggle or anti-imperialist struggles have gone through a similar length of feeling defeated…We're talking 35, 40 years ago and there have been periods that long and even longer where the movement has come up against defeat. And then things start to shift, and things change (Day 2021).

The "shift" as Day names it, the recognition that individuals move from periods of stasis towards periods of revolutionary change, is enough to soothe an affective environment defined by political impasse, it gives her back the capacity to imagine that another set of relations is possible. Day jeopardizes linear temporality to put her own defeat *in relation* with the defeat of past movements. Her use of language is geared towards understanding the minutiae of the peaks and troughs which determine the cycle of revolutionary struggle. Dadzie too relies on a historically materialist account of history to understand the present and future. She positions the value of intergenerational conversation as the engine of an embrace of the temporal fluidity that defines how resistance struggles operate: "one step forward, two steps back" (Dadzie 2022). Her responses indicate the importance of the creation and circulation of a counter-history against the one dictated by capitalism, "which is having those intergenerational discussions, making sure that the archive is available to future generations, making sure that future generations have access to a version that is our own and not somebody else's" (Dadzie 2022). Here, Dadzie (perhaps unknowingly), emphasises one of this thesis' core claims. History as defined by the grand narrative of linear progress, forecloses the possibility of resistance from those it cannot imagine as political subjects. This narrativisation of the past produces the marginalisation and "erasure" of certain (often racialised and gendered) political subjects, reproducing their supposed silence in history books, archives and state institutions. For Dadzie, the creation of a counter-history, enabling a younger generation access to histories of struggle, is about more than just correcting the record. It is about claiming ownership over the events of the past, "a version that is our own" (Dadzie 2022) so as to increase affective attachment to the struggle for liberation. Synthesising Day and Dadzie's conceptual observations leads us to the following conclusion: the historical materialist tradition might be reanimated by a focus on

historical process *and* the creation and circulation of affective counter-histories, which produce resistant desires capable of pushing a new generation out of stasis, towards resistance.

Dan Friedman argues Hegelian dialectics holds that "Everything is connected and nothing is finished, closed, concluded. Nothing, to use a theatrical term, is resolved" (Friedman 2002, 45). The analysis above seeks to demonstrate this principle, that despite the tension in Day and Dadzie's responses, they are also connected to one another. The textual experimentation I enact in the next section aestheticises this dialectical approach to political struggle, using found poetry another mode of topological distortion to foreground the productive tension between both passages. I place Day and Dadzie's words side-by-side to extend forms of imagination expressed through language and create a cultural object whose Imaginative- Revolutionary Potential bears my signature. The intended effect is to oppose the notion that the possibility of contemporary resistance against the state has been foreclosed.

**Found poetry: a haptics of language**

Hypatia Vourloumis warns against thinking of language as an abstraction and instead instructs us to "engage with a haptics of language – language as matter, as sonic, textural and bodily performance" (Vourloumis 2014, 235). This requires researchers to engage with the materiality of language as a force in the world, registering the effects of its potency in expression and communication. Experimenting with the words produced in interviews reveals the theoretical and analytic value of treating language as a system of signs through which political organisers, educators and artists can become tactile. Vourloumis suggests,

> a haptics of language is invoked through the act of grasping signs and their non-signifying materiality as the event of communicability's being…The sign's complex existence as a manifestation always stems from the body to come to exist outside of it, necessarily exceeding both its form and function and its initial source by way of its materiality, its being in the world (Vourloumis 2014, 235).

The signs that constitute language have agency in the social world. All kinds of languages (the visual, the sonic) can *make things happen*. Language's ability to introduce thoughts, feelings, commitments and other physically experienced sensations into circulation moves us towards its centrality in processes of transformation. It can do some of the work of reshaping the reader's perception and changing relations between the author and reader as well as the reader and their

material conditions. The act of rearranging the words of others reorders as Deleuze argues, the realms of the plausible, probable and possible (Deleuze 2007) by using the linguistic components of an old story to tell a new one. This is a haptic act, one which requires the researcher to understand how the act of grasping language's materiality stems from the body. I wager that, in the creation of found poetry, the process of textual experimentation and the use of a creative imaginary emphasises the interstitial, the space between language and action. Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential fills this space, inhering in the cultural object and awaiting engagement from a political subject. Embracing the redistributive potential of language acts as another weapon in the arsenal of individuals and groups seeking to materially transform conditions; playing with language enables them to exercise the political desire to resist. The found poem below is one way to encourage thinkers to understand the potential of changing the given, of producing counter imaginaries and counter-directives through linguistic signs (as well as material action) that bypass manufactured crisis. I have created a found poem, a fragment that attempts to synthesise Day and Dadzie's differing approaches to history, temporality and the revolutionary moment. I have used the **bold** function to indicate Day's words and to separate them from Dadzie's for the sake of comprehension.

but we are going forward, aren't we?

**I think it is ongoing. We're talking,**
**35, 40,** *history is a long time in the making, there is still a process of unearthing,*
**years ago and there have been periods that long and even longer where**
**the movement has come up against defeat.** How much people will be prepared to stop
and take note of the past remains to be seen,
two steps forward one step back.
**The conditions for something different begin to emerge. That moment,**
it is incumbent
on us
to pass something on that is, *precious.* but we are going forward, aren't we?
**It might be several moments**
**over years and then something starts to build again,**
**thinking about that temporally…**
aren't we
going forward,
*aren't we?*
there is going to be a focus on what we perceive to be our,
**I think it is ongoing,**
threatened future. **In the past the movement**
**or class struggle or anti-imperialist struggle**
**have gone through a similar length,**

**of feeling,**
**defeated.**

This found poem allows Day and Dadzie's clauses to meet on the page, their connected and contradictory thoughts, anxieties and experiences of political defeat build on one another textually. The result is a charged and determined poetic utterance, one that refuses to ignore feelings of grief, pain and defeat. The creation of this poetic fragment is not merely an attempt to map similarities and differences but rather to build a dialectical textual scaffold, capable of holding the weight of the tensions in their observations of temporality and revolution. Anxieties about linear progression are represented through the repetition of the phrases "I think it is ongoing" (Day 2021) and "We are going forward, aren't we, *aren't we?*" (Dadzie 2022). Both statements are also expressions of political experience, they create an image of a speaker conflicted about their movement through a socio-temporal landscape. The poem's formal collapse, the shortening of sentences towards the end aims to mirror the breakdown of political will that occurs due to affective stasis. The punctuating refrain, *but we are going forward aren't we?* feels at time like a question, at times like a plea. Despite this, the poem ends with an attempt, following Day, to place feelings of defeat in a historical context. The reader is encouraged to situate their own feelings in the context of "the class struggle" or "the anti-imperialist struggle," reminding them they are not the first or last to experience the effects of a drawn out present. Day and Dadzie meet each other on the page to constitute a new intervention, at the level of form, word choice and phrasing, this intervention contains evidence of my own craft and political desires as a researcher in the form of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential. In merging their language into a poetic, I made stylistic choices, for example the lack of clear stanzas which allows phrases to ebb and flow across the page, to produce stylistic effects that would reinvigorate the readers imagination. In crafting this found poem, I refused to let "the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions" (Kelley 2002, 11) render my imagination inert. Discovering the text's haptics, playing around with phrases as evidence of its materiality, enabled the enmeshment of a range of desires. Against a stadial notion of temporality, in which the development of events and stages determine Dadzie as the custodian of the past and Day the face of the present and future, I allow their words to merge and in doing so, synthesise their attachments to liberation with my own to produce a cultural object that rejects immobility.

**Reading aloud**

I advocate for found poetry created in the process of synthesising research findings to be read aloud because, they are, as Benjamin argued, evidence of "human mental life" (Benjamin 1996, 62) that must be shared in order for the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential they contain to circulate. To return to the question of use, engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential finds its most potent affective consequence in processes of relation and collaboration. One use of the imagination is the actualisation of joint political demand alongside others. Reading aloud signals an attempt to use the poetic voice to find others as a precursor to demand-making. Here, "reading aloud" names any attempt to share the poetic fragment with others as a means of forming attachments, sharing the fragment with others through text, conversation, speech and sound. When thinking through the efficacy of love as a structuring principle, in an interview with Michael Hardt, Berlant notes, "when you plan social change, you have to imagine the world that you could promise, the world that could be seductive, the world you could induce people to want to leap into" (Berlant and Hardt 2011). Reading aloud is one process of seduction, of promise-making, that solidifies the circulation of emancipatory affects engaged with through acts of creation. Sharing textual and other creative interventions of this kind ejects readers from the limitations of the present. My own voice is features heavily in the sound elements of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE.** In the act of sharing or reading aloud, political subjects are momentarily displaced into a temporal location where the division of temporal regimes into past/present/future is temporarily displaced and overshadowed by a process of relation. This process of displacement encourages the fortification of political determination to resist structures of violence because the political subject feels how the affective foundations of those structures can be compromised.

The intended effect of engagement with found poetry is two-fold: to use language to reintroduce affects capable of undoing the affective stasis of the present into circulation and to allow political subjects to understand as Wilke, Savranksy and Rosengarten argue that "no matter how pervasive the impasse may be, it can never exhaust the unrealised potential of the present" (Wilke, Savranksy and Rosengarten 2017, 8). Lastly, I argue that the act of reading found poetry aloud is a relational performance that creates an aporetic space in which the fixity of linear temporality is unsettled. Aporia denotes that gap in knowledge that remains unconquerable. I repurpose Rizvana's Bradley's concept of "representational aporia" (Bradley 2019, 2) which she uses to think about how Black womanhood enters an interruption into representational

aesthetics, to identify the interruption produced by the force of language and reading aloud to linear time. An aporetic temporality – enacted when the researcher uses found poetry to explore the productive tensions in research findings and then *shares* it with others –produces a state that distorts the structuring force of linearity. In terms of my own practice as a writer, poetic fragments, made from the stuff of the past and present, reanimate a rejection of the clock, utilising the poetic as a vehicle for the exploration of the temporal and theoretical contradictions inherent to a total system. Juxtaposing the "past" with the "present" textually produces feelings of disorientation in which the reader is confronted with Dadzie and Day's shared desires. An aporetic temporality holds these disparate observations without seeking to immediately resolve them. The distortion of temporality that occurs enables political attachments to liberation otherwise disciplined and expelled by linearity to germinate. Political subjects are changed by the process of sharing, suddenly they find themselves unstuck, able to act.

**Conclusion: But we are going forward, aren't we?**

This chapter has argued that keen attention be paid to the role language plays in the expression of the imagination. It has suggested that textual experimentation and the resulting creation of "found poetry" using language from participant interviews, produces a new cultural object which contains traces of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential produced by the researcher. By "reading aloud," engaging in processes of public performance or sharing of poetic fragments, political subjects use their imaginations to reanimate their desire to resist oppressive force. This process takes place inside of an aporetic temporality which eschews the separation of the past/present/future. This chapter has demonstrated how the creation of linguistic cultural objects emerges from a dialectical means of textual experimentation that holds contradiction, refuses totality and creates new openings for thinking through affective realms of possibility in the present. Textual experimentation can be one way to represent processes in motion, to evidence the contradictions inherent to Day and Dadzie's utterances and their temporal positions. Both Aviah Day and Stella Dadzie's reflections point towards the necessity of historically materialist approaches embracing the *emotive excess* of political struggle. The found poem, created through engagement with a haptics of language, illustrates anxieties about the direction of resistant struggle, *but we are going forward, aren't we?* The role of the imagination in textual experimentation is to enable the circulation of this emotional excess and to crystallise it through aesthetic experience.

Language is a vehicle for the exploration and rehearsal of social visions. As a textual experiment, *but we are going forward, aren't we?* is constructed from political reflections made by Day and Dadzie that both respond to the present political conjuncture and break it open. In what emerges through found poetry, we are unsure of who speaks, the cascade of voices affirms the necessity to think *with* and *through* each other in the face of political impasse. In disrupting linear temporality, textual experimentation and processes of reading aloud enable a way of making sense of political environments by centring the affective, emotional and aesthetic dimensions of resistance which are inextricable from materialist political action.

*FRAGMENT: "My capacity to love is my capacity to fight"* [66]

[66] James, Joy. 2020. "Captive Maternal Contradictions: The Limits of Advocacy when "Black Women Save Democracy." Gender Studies Research Seminar, Cambridge.

The first National Conference for the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) took place at the Abeng Centre on Gresham Road, Brixton in 1979. The first conference of the newly formed umbrella organisation, which sought to coordinate the activities of a range of anti-racist and feminist organising groups established by Black and South Asian women in the United Kingdom, brought together 300 women from "places as far apart as Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, London, Manchester and Sheffield" (BBWG, 1984). The convening enabled them to strategise resistance to the violent nexus of race, class and gender as forces which determined material conditions in the United Kingdom.

Both the Brixton Black Women's Group, established in 1973 and OWAAD represent the development of autonomous organisations for Black women and women of colour during this period. The former included members who were crucial in the creation of OWAAD and developed links with a range of women's organisations across the world on the basis on Marxist, anti-imperialist struggle and transnational solidarity. In analysing any material from this period, remaining attentive to the anti-imperialist theoretical framework that drove the creation of these groups is crucial. In *SPEAK OUT! The Brixton Black Women's Group Reader*, Gail Lewis states,

> we were connected to other women's organisations fighting around imperialism; to SWAPO Women, Zanu Women's League, women's groups from Ethiopia, Eritrea, with Black Women's organisations, with Irish women's organisations. To some extent, we were also involved with women organising around Palestine and anti-Zionism (Lewis, Wilson and Gallimore 2023, 293).

Many of OWAAD's co-founders were members of the African Student's Union and involved in supporting and providing solidarity for burgeoning anti-colonial movements through political organising and friendships. The group's radical political stance began from an analysis which understood that the exploitative nature of capitalism was global and connected this analysis to histories of resource extraction from former colonies. An early version of the OWAAD manifesto names imperialism as "the system that opposes all people" (OWAAD, n.d) which the co-authors identify as the root of manifestations of class, racial and sex oppression.

Expanding the tenets of Marxism, socialism, and anti-imperialism in relation to lives of Black and racialised women in the United Kingdom, this conference provided a framework for the mass mobilisation and politicisation of working-class communities, a core goal outlined in OWAAD'S Manifesto. As a meeting point for pre-existing localised mutual aid and political

consciousness raising groups, it marked a critical stage in the development of Black feminist movement in the United Kingdom by providing a national frame for organising efforts. The conference intended to link groups to one another to create a network and index of organisations and resistant actions taking place across the country. It is crucial to note that, although OWAAD and the Brixton Black Women's Group met regularly in London, their reach was not contained to the country's capital. They worked alongside housing collectives and services for racialised women across the country, including in Manchester, Leeds, Yorkshire and Sheffield. In their editorial on Black Women's Organising in *The Feminist Review*, The BBWG (1984) note that in preparation for the conference,

> we in BBWG had made informal links with other women organising but did not imagine there were so many ready and eager to begin to organise and articulate around the specific oppression of black women. The conference discussed a wide range of issues around health, education, the law and immigration; as we saw these to affect us. The women who came were greatly inspired and went away to form Black Women's groups in their own communities in places like Hackney, east London, west London, Southall and others around the country (BBWG 1984, 84).

Both the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD sought to foster spaces for intellectual debate, discussion and critical analysis which encouraged and provided resources for the creation of localised, community-based activity that could oppose the most dispossessive elements of the state. The National Conference enabled organisations to affirm and expand a socialist analysis which considered the state's failure to allocate resources for Black children with regards to education, housing and the continued criminalisation of Black people through policing and forms of incarceration. It created an opening to think through the racialised impact of increased privatisation and the violent suppression of workers movements. On the conference floor, the women developed an analysis of the position of the Black woman worker which expanded on Claudia Jones' observation that she was "triply-oppressed." In her instructive essay, *An End to the Neglect of the Negro Woman!* (1949), Jones uses a Marxist-Leninist mode of analysis to outline a case for Black women's greater participation in the Communist Party, citing the Negro's women's position under capitalism as an oft exploited labourer. Jones identifies her unique position as the result of the synthesis of structures of domination in relation to race, class and gender,

> the most serious assessment of these shortcomings by progressives, especially by Marxist-Leninists, is vitally necessary if we are to help accelerate this development and integrate Negro women in the progressive

> and labor movement and in our own Party… The bourgeoisie is militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti- imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced (Jones 1949, 3).

Jones calls for the integration of Black women into Marxist-Leninist party structures and for an analysis of her position as a racialised and gendered worker in order to complexify Marxist analysis. More than twenty years later, these sentiments inform the demands made by the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD. We can hear Jones echo in their demands regarding Black women's self-organisation, their opposition to the fortification of the border through the Commonwealth Immigration Act, their critique of state sponsored attempts to curtail reproductive justice, their demand for the abolition of the SUS Vagrancy Law and their expression of solidarity with national liberation movements on the African continent. Affirming the radical orientation of the National Black Women's Conference is crucial in resisting its depoliticisation by mainstream feminist historiography and its reduction to a mere consequence of alienation from white dominated women's movement and the male dominant strands of Black radicalism. This framing, though pertinent, tends to cast the development of radical traditions of Black feminist thought in the UK as the antagonistic underbelly to liberal feminism. In doing so, it reaffirms the notion that Black women's cultural production must be read against material from the centre (or the mainstream) in order to be legible. Choosing instead to read the aforementioned political demands as directly connected to Jones' (1949) assessment that the mass mobilisation of Black working-class women would pose a threat to capitalist order names them for what they were: intentional, strategic and revolutionary. Understanding the burgeoning militancy of Black people in the Third World and the potential for the creation of an analysis of capitalism that attended to its machinations in the lives of their peers, the organisers of the OWAAD Conference created an autonomous space to enrich and develop the dialectical tradition.

## NOT A PRISONER OF A SINGLE LINE, AESTHETIC PRINCIPLE OR STYLE

The National Black Women's conference was documented by Black radical filmmaker Menelik Shazbazz (1979), whose pioneering influence on Black British Independent Cinema is evident in the creation of a cultural product which defied commodification. Half documentary, half narrative film, including in-depth interviews with children at the conference, his meticulous

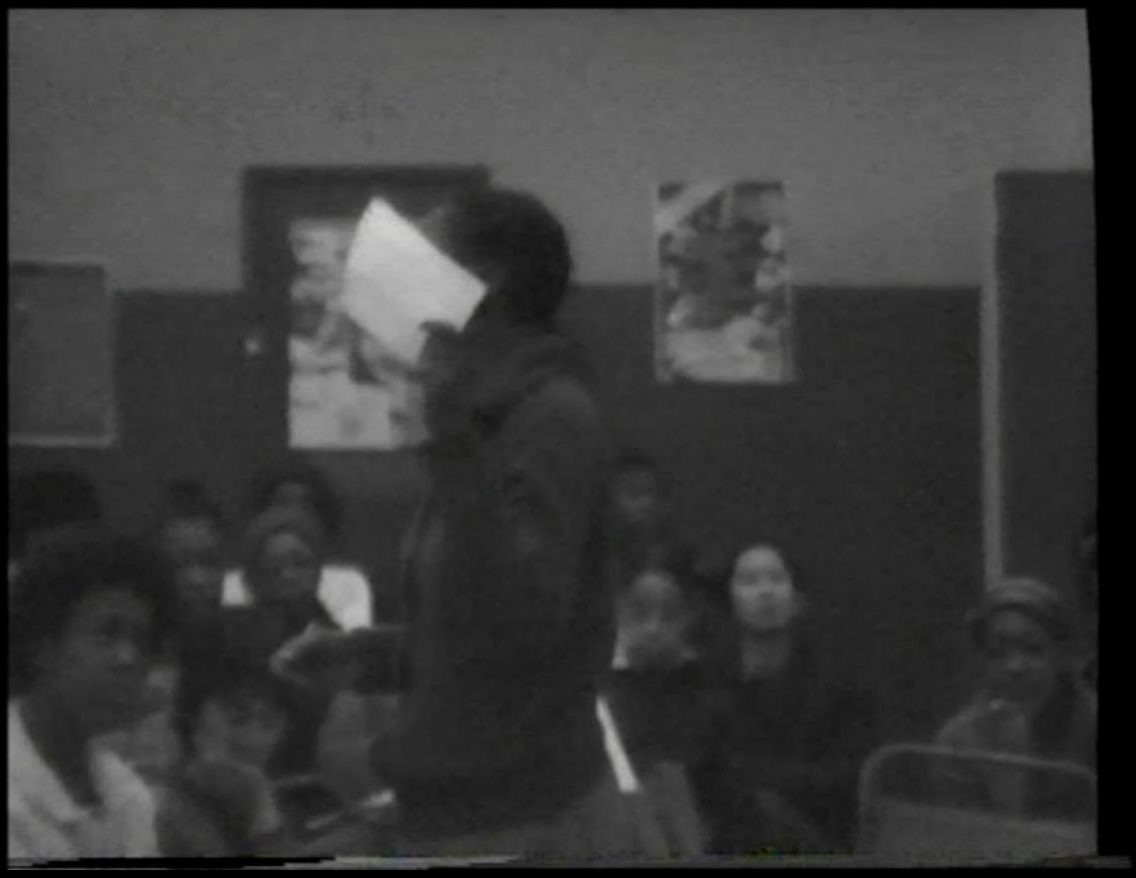
documentation captures the energy of the gathering, creating a temporal timestamp that contains the political desires of those present. Following Victoria Browne's (2013) interest in complicating linear, teleological narratives of social change; I understand Shabazz's film as a form of cultural production that prompts a process of recollecting forwards through the creation of a temporal loop initiated by an echo. This role of the echo is described in Browne's elaboration of this Kierkegaardian process,

> recollecting forwards can be understood as 'a kind of echoing which does not passively repeat but actively transforms past and present simultaneously' (Jones 2009, 13). This requires us to move away from a conception of the past as a fixed, determinate foundation—which exists as objectively 'true'—toward a more fluid and fragmentary model in which the past is ambiguous and indeterminate (Browne 2013, 912).

This definition of "recollecting forwards" enables reflection on the power of cultural production to produce a changed or altered state in viewers regardless of their temporal location. I contend that engagement with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in this cultural product has the ability to "transform the present" through a restructuring and/or reanimation of affective desire in its audience. In treating the archive not as an inert historical collection but a container of lives "past and present" and therefore of ontological possibility, I use "recollecting forward" to move further away from the past as fixed and the archive as evidence of that fixity. Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is temporally disobedient, when excavated, it prompts a rethinking of historicity and the events that produce it. Following Stuart Hall, whose approach to the archive and the material stored in it, was one that refused to treat it as if it were "prisoner of a single 'line', aesthetic principle or style" (Hall 2001, 92) I attempt to excavate the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in the recording of the Black Women's National Conference filmed by Menelik Shabazz (1979) acquired during my fieldwork by reading it against *Towards A Black Testimony* (2019) a video work of contemporary black queer curatorial collective, Languid Hands. I have chosen to juxtapose material situated on the edge of the temporal divide (a cultural object from the "past" with a cultural object from the "present") to demonstrate how the imagination stored in both cultural objects resists temporal binaries and is connected by both objects preoccupations with blackness, grief, testimony, freedom and survival. Eschewing aesthetic boundaries, I provide a reading of these objects that challenges their categorical differences through the dimensions of touch.

Figure 28 (Top) is a still from Shabazz's documentary in which an unnamed figure gives a speech to Black and South Asian Women at OWAAD's National Black Women's Conference at the Abeng Centre in 1979.

Figure 29 (Bottom) is a still from Languid Hands' *Towards a Black Testimony*, which shows Brixton Station engulfed in flames during the Brixton uprising in 1981, triggered by the shooting of Dorothy Groce by the Metropolitan Police.




VICTORIA LINE

My reading will remain unmoored and autonomous, evading the historical weight of these cultural objects and their representational value. Rather than situate them in a contextual historical timeline, I draw out the political principles that undergird their creation, highlighting the questions they ask. I aim to reveal their ambitions and enliven the political promises they hold which have been compromised by their status as archival objects and/or art objects. In meeting "past" and "present", reading the objects separately and then tracing their continuities, I will elucidate the texture of both objects and the processes of signification that have brought them into being. My intention is to perform a "touching" of these cultural objects across temporal zones, one that produces a spark and/or reveals what lay underneath the surface; the ambitions, affective frameworks, desires that have constituted them. Touching is a deeply discursive engagement which involves description; a rendering of the object to my reader and an attempt to rub them against one another in the palm of my hand. This haptic gesture is intended to mark not only what is evident to me as a researcher but perhaps, the notes and registers of possibility they contain. Moten and Harney theorise the haptic as "the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here" (Moten and Harney 2013, 98). In performing a relational analysis, I remain attentive to how the visual forms of both cultural objects signify what was, what is now and what is to come. Elizabeth Freeman argues that to "close read is to linger, to dally, to take pleasure in tarrying, to hold out that these activities allow us to look both hard and askance at the norm." (Freeman 2010, xvi) In looking for what is not immediately apparent and reading against the grain, this fragment wanders alongside these cultural objects, unsure of what it will find.

## ZONES OF CONTACT

Languid Hands is a curatorial collaboration between artist and writer Imani Robinson and DJ, curator and filmmaker Rabz Lansiquot. The artistic collaboration was borne from the Sorryyoufeeluncomfortablecollective, an artist project co-run by Barby Asante and Teresa Cisneros in 2015 which sought to develop the emergent creative practices of racialised artists through radical study, conversation and multidisciplinary collaboration.[67] The duo represent an incisive turn in Black curation in contemporary London, conceptualising their curatorial practice as a space to explicitly support and resource Black working class artists as part of a redistributive frame. The two write that *Towards a Black Testimony*,

[67] For more on Sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective, see n.a, "Sorryyoufeeluncomfortable," FRAMER, accessed December 1, 2023, https://framerframed.nl/en/organisaties/sorryyoufeeluncomfortable/

> examines Black Testimony as obscured, ignored and undermined. Drawing on archival imagery, Black geographies, and the dying declarations of Black Martyrs, it explores the complexities of truth, empathy, justice, the law, life and death for the Black Mass… Using this composition as the underlying structure for the film itself, [we] present three chapters or meditations on death and dying and consider the im/possibility of Black Testimony (Languid Hands, 2019).

Drawing on the written work of a range of Black scholarship, it charts multiple theorisations of the ontological position of Black subjects, the impacts of racialised violence and the failure of liberal frameworks: law, the state, cultural discourse and criticism to attend to the complexity of their suffering. The film takes its subtitling and aspects of the score from Max Roach's 1960 album *We Insist! Black Film* Suite (Roach 1960) and overlays camera footage of Black crowds at protests, uprisings, television broadcasts and carnivals with a performative reading of fragmented poetic writing by Robinson. Using the works of Afropessimist scholars, the performative readings are accompanied by a haunting soundscape designed to disorientate and provoke discord in its viewer. At many points in the text, Robinson's voice and the images of the screen reach a crescendo, conveying an urgent sense of pathos and unease. The project builds a meditative landscape in which viewers are prompted to reflect on questions related to the sounds of Black rage, the imperceptive hum of the anti-Blackness and its colouring effects on social life.

Produced in 2019, in the aftermath of Black Lives Matter protests and forms of spontaneous uprising and rebellion in the United Kingdom, Europe and America, this artwork draws on questions posed by political movements during this time and reflects on the anguish that follows collective moments of political consciousness that occur as a result of state violence. Namely, it interrogates the relationship between the Black subject and the concept of humanity in an anti-Black world. In the absence of satisfying frames to capture the tonality and register of Black pain in the "human" – what is to be done? The video work explores the Wynternian impulse to disentangle Man from "human" and to understand race and gender as a "genre" of being, rather than distinct, enclosed categories. Robinson opens the work with the following passage,

> If one was to consider that Black people are human subjects, then testimony is not only available to the Black, but is a prevalent mode of justice seeking that has been used by Black people to appeal to forums and a public about the violence experienced all over the world in the wake of

> transatlantic slavery and in the continuation of slavery's oppressive afterlives…
>
> But what if we were to complicate the notion that Black people both exist and experience the world as subjects? That Black Lives have inherent value as human beings is rendered somewhat obsolete and illegible by their perceived, actual and constitutive value as commodities, that is, as objects. (Languid Hands, 2019).

This opening proposition defines the tone of the text. Here is a space to rethink the value of testimony, of appeals to state structures for and by Black people in the face of untold violence. I attend to this work using Freeman's observation that, "film… creates a historically specific shared temporality, setting limits on how long the spectator can dwell on one object or experience any one story and thus socialising (or, we might say binding) the gaze (Freeman 2010, xviii)." The duo's film takes the viewer on a journey by offering up its own temporality; removing the viewer from the time-space of the here and now, into a place that is not quite the future and not quite the past. It offers three distinct meditations of testimony that demand not only the viewer's attention but their critical capacity to challenge scripts of legibility for Black subjects. To read Robinson and Lansiquot's work in this way illuminates their use of aesthetics as a portal through which to engage the viewer's imagination so that they might consider the representational function of Blackness as defined by an anti-Black world. Robison and Lansiquot push their viewer towards a reckoning with the symbolic materiality of Blackness, beyond the limits of subjecthood. Their use of aesthetics to construct a resonant space outside of the temporal logic that produce "the human being" engages the abstract and non-tangible elements of imagination that disrupt the narrativisation conferred by historiographical approaches.

The sonic reverberations in this text, as well as the harsh juxtaposition of sound with found footage reveal the dissonances inherent to resisting anti-Blackness. In his work on Sounding, Julian Henriques notes that "thinking through sound is a way of thinking, a process of knowledge, a gnosis" (Henriques 2011, 2) and that sonic bodies are "the flesh and blood of sound system crew and crowd… single and multiple… vocal as well as musical" (Henriques 2011, 1). In their work, Robinson and Lansiquot present a sonic body that opens up a new means of consideration and redirects the viewers orientation towards a gnosis that is driven by a process of grappling with the status of the Black subject as perpetually wounded. They stay with the pain and that main leads them to forms of knowledge that require engagement with feeling, the senses, the body. The resonances, registers and changing frequencies of Robinson's

readings breathe new life into static texts, remove them from their staid academic contexts and offer them to a non-academic public. The duo's aim is to sythesise the sonic and visual gaze by challenging viewers to find the connections between the provocative theoretical propositions being made and the seemingly quotidian displays of Black life that burst forth.

Rather than perform a reconciliatory reading which builds towards a stable belief in justice and redress through legal means, the duo present a complex affective field in which the desire to survive is complicated by a dissatisfaction with the terminology and frameworks for understanding Black being. Here their attachments to questions of freedom are complicated by the specificity of Black being and the needs and promises of the "human" through which all appeals for freedom become legible. Rather than producing a purely nihilistic orientation to the irreconcilable nature of this desire for freedom (there can never be freedom inside the human), the shifting considerations: texts, poetry, spells that Robinson offers with their voice creates a contemplative space to consider structures of violence and their aftermath that points to what is generative. It offers something else, another way of thinking about Black life without limit: not an ironclad theory and conceptual framework for Black people as political subjects, but a space to engage with the necessity of testimony, grief and mourning in political struggle. All that which appears in the *excess* of survival.

Languid Hands' use of the imagination intends to create new kinds of knowledge about ways of being that defy the trappings of liberal discourses. By forcing the viewers to sit with the irreconcilability of racialised violence with the myth of freedom that is built into the promise of liberal democracy, one might argue that the purpose of the artistic work is not to spark or build a political consciousness but to expand and challenge the Marxist assertion that class struggle is the constitutive force of History. Robinson and Lansiquot use race as the primary site and mode of interrogation of material conditions and in doing so, they tap into other temporalities of struggle, ushering in "unthinkable" modes of resistance. As a researcher, the film serves as a robust case study for recent debates on the racialised left about the value of Afropessimism as a political framework.[68] Afropessimist thought views slavery as the political threshold for the modern world and demands a reorientated understanding of its composition (Wilderson III et

[68] This thesis is not invested in assessing the organisational merits of afropessimism but finds the affective dimensions of its argumentation: an emphasis on the horror of anti-black violence, the permanence of anti-blackness in political structures and the impossibility of redress to be fruitful and generous frameworks to analyse forms of Black cultural production. It maintains an ongoing ambivalence to arguments about afropessimism's viability as a political strategy and instead chooses to question the notion that its claims are fundamentally irreconcilable with materialist political struggle.

al, 2017). It defines slavery not as a form of indentured labour but a process that transformed the slave into a relation of property. Its main contention is that the slave is socially dead, unable to make claims to subjecthood, which ensures that gratuitous forms of violence may be enacted on them. In tracing the ongoing aftermath of the ontological terror of race, Afropessimism argues that anti-Blackness provides legibility for Black and non-Black subjects alike and is the foremost organising principle for social life. It aims to trace how Black subjects contend with their removal from the category of "human," and provides an ongoing questioning of the reformist tendencies of Black Power and Civil Rights discourses, which it argues seek "integration with bureaucratic machinery" (Wilderson III et al, 2017). In response to the racialised terror visited on Black people in the United Kingdom and abroad through policing, surveillance and mass incarceration, Robinson and Lansiquot pose a series of questions in this vein, enquiring into how one begins to make sense publicly of this violence and where one might possibly go to seek redress. Whilst Afropessimist thought is often considered incompatible with materialist forms of analysis because of its insistence that Blackness occludes subjecthood, I juxtapose *Towards a Black Testimony* (2019) with Menelik Shabazz's recording of the National Women's Conference (1979) in order to name and explore the political drives that animate both forms of Black cultural production, to read them reparatively, without what Sedgwick calls "a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Sedgwick 2003, 124) in order to argue that despite their differing temporal locations and political orientations, there is indeed a echo, a process of *recollecting forwards* that is borne from the imagination that links the material together.

*

Menelik Shabazz's recording of the National Black Women's Conference begins with a title card displaying the symbol most famously associated with OWAAD. A traced drawing of a group of African women, fists raised. As the title card disappears, the footage follows the faces of many expectant Black and South Asian women, eyes focused towards the front of the room, listening to speeches. As the camera scans the room, Judy Mowett's *Black Women* erupts,

> Black woman, ooh, black woman
> Light me up, troubled long
> You trod one of life's roughest roads
> You get the heaviest load
> To be someone, to belong (Mowett 1979)

providing a sonic landscape for the film's opening. We see Black and South Asian women chatting to one another, laughing, busy themselves running stalls and providing information for

one another. Many are wearing headwraps, wide brimmed glasses, adopting the radical aesthetics of the late 70s and 80s. The title card reappears with the following text:

> **OWAAD CONFERENCE, MARCH 18TH 1979**
>
> **THIS VIDEO FILM WHICH YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS A DOCUMENT OF A GREAT HISTORICAL EVENT - THE FIRST NATIONAL BLACK WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN BRITAIN.**
>
> **IT WAS ORGANISED BY THE ORGANISATION OF WOMEN OF ASIAN AND AFRICAN DESCENT.**
>
> **THIS ORGANISATION WAS FORMED BY A GROUP OF BLACK WOMEN IN BRITAIN - WORKERS, MOTHERS AND STUDENTS, WHO REALISE THE NECESSITY FOR BLACK WOMEN TO UNITE AGAINST THE OPPRESSION WE FACE. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO ORGANISE IN THIS WAY BECAUSE BLACK WOMEN NOT ONLY FACE THE DOUBLE OPPRESSION THAT MANY WHITE WOMEN FACE - AS WOMEN AND AS WORKERS - BUT ALSO A THIRD OPPRESSION: RACISM.** (Shabazz, 1979)

Throughout the 50-minute film, the voices of racialised women providing materialist analysis of their lives accompany the visuals. They trace the development of capitalism from feudalism to the present day to understand their position as workers. They name the imperialist forces that are the reason for their migration, and the continued extraction of resources from African nations under neocolonial policies. They express their concern at the indiscriminate use of SUS Laws, which criminalise the movement of Black youth in Britain. They understand their unity as racialised workers under the term "BLACK", some contest this idea, but they call for a togetherness that considers how to forge collective struggle from this position as formerly colonised political subjects. They ask questions to panellists about what should be done to address the subpar education their children are receiving in schools. They present various rallying cries, in the form of speeches and appeals to their audience to understand the magnitude of their collective power and attempt to build bridges that link already pre-existing political networks for racialised women across the country.

I want to focus on the value of speech in both cultural objects and the agency one might ascribe to the political claims levied by both works. In excitable speech, Butler traces the performativity of language, arguing, after Toni Morrison's assertion that "We do language, that may be the measure of our lives" (Morrison, 1993) that,

> we do things with language, produce effects with language and we do things to language, but language is also the thing we do. Language is a name for our doing: both what we do (the name of the action we characteristically perform and that and that which we effect, the act and its consequences (Butler 1997, 8).

To this I add that language is also the vehicle through which the imagination is utilised. If language is the name for our doing and political consciousness depends on the ability to name oppressive conditions and extent of their functional operations; whether textual or through performed or recorded speech, Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential is made manifest through words, what is said, through the desires that are named and the political visions articulated. In Shabazz's recording, language: forms of text and speech, conversations, chatter, interviews permeate the cultural product, those speech acts make things happen, not only in the room, but in the hands for the researcher and anyone who comes across the cultural object. The effect of this imaginary potential, represented through various overlapping speech and unleashed when the cultural object is engaged sets loose the past into the present, transforming the affective field of "the past" into an intruder, who is able to stake a claim in the here and now.

The viewer wonders about the aspirations of the many anonymous figures in the video: where they lived, what relations they sustained, how they organised, how many are still alive, if they ever gave up on the feeling of possibility that constituted their meeting. If we are to understand the imagination as a process of bringing that which does not previously exist into being, then the speech in the film confronts us by explicating a set of attachments and pushing these attachments into the present moment. It increases our bonds to notions of freedom and struggle, closing the gap, following Berlant (2012) between us (specific objects) and that thing that we want. In using language to model an unmoored yearning and a forceful claiming of liveable life, the video alerts the viewer to the notion that they can still have what once was. The past begins to linger, showing the present-day audience that desires can be replicated across temporal boundaries. The echo or dissonance created by an engagement with the past is made durable, invited even, by the imagination which acts as a connective tissue. We watch the video and **we want what they wanted** because the cultural object has engaged our imaginative facilities, reintroducing this desire into the present and in doing so, bolstering a permissive affective landscape. This reintroduced desire, constituted by language, interacts with the current

structure of feeling: impasse, immobility, stuckness and gestures towards the notion of the renewal of the political determination on display.

The nature of Black life and how to sustain it are central to both cultural objects. The organisers at the National Women's Conference use language to scale the multiple terrains of battle against a dispossessive state that exploits the labour of working-class people in order to prop up and maintain colonial dominance. Questions about the sustenance of life are practically anchored: How should we live? How do we, as communities, reclaim the resources that are withheld from us by the state? Their desire for connection, common ground, collectivity as a mode of struggle but also of relation embodies the sentiment behind Gilmore's (2023) maxim that "where life is precious, life is precious." For Gilmore, a recognition of preciousness of life means "Being slower in how we do things, not imagining that efficiency is the most important attribute of getting things done, even though urgency is often at the bottom of what we are trying to do" (Gilmore, 2023). The quality of our lives is dependent on our ability to transform conditions and to respond to crisis but also to understand why we protect life, what makes it worth defending. The imaginative thrust of Shabazz's film lay in the consistent uses of language as a means of denaturalising governing forces and securing the ground from which to strike back, recognising the preciousness of relation. The long and short term political demands of those in the video are clear: the creation of a networked, well-resourced anti-imperialist movement by and for Black and racialised women that seeks to raise political consciousness, redistribute resources, campaign against the most violent arm of the government and provide transnational solidarity for anti- colonial struggle. The imaginative thrusts of various speech acts which consolidate this vision and are uttered during the video, fill the air in the room, confirming their necessity, fortifying the political determination of those who hear them, sending a charge that reverberates through the object, into my own analysis, more than twenty years later.

**ECHOES**

The echo that exists between the two texts is most prominent when Robinson and Lansiquot extend the argument initiated by OWAAD further, asking, what comes *after* appeals to the state for rights, services and legal recognition? Robinson and Lansiquot provide an iteration on the indeterminate past, they articulate *differently* the political demands made at the National Black Women's Conference by expanding their scope. They ask, what structures precede and succeed demands for better housing, education and working conditions? Rather than disavow political

struggle, *Towards a Black Testimony* speaks back to Shabazz's recording, fortifying the highly politicised, declarative statements made by attending to the irreconcilable feelings of being subjects exposed to violence and state abandonment. This fact, despite the objects differing temporal locations, has remained constant. In some sense, the Black subjects that Robinson and Lansiquot attend to are the same subjects that fill the space in the room in the Abeng Centre, Brixton. Rather than banish the aftermath of the pain and grief that was experienced and accumulated in 1979 and the repressive Thatcherite years that followed – grief and pain that may not fit neatly into the structure of a political speech at a conference, Robinson and Lansiquot pick up that grief and recollect it forwards, naming it as a generative site from which new ideas and forms of critical analysis might emerge. They use testimony, another form of declarative speech, to provide an alternate perspective: one that argues that alongside material political analysis, questions of survival and freedom must also attend to the complexity of subjecthood as a definitional modality and persistence of the injuries Black subjects incur when they come up against it. Rather than opposing, the arguments made by both video works run parallel to one another, poking, and prodding at each other's political declarations in the manner of a call and response. They ask the same basic question: how do we continue to resist the violence of this political moment?

Following Sharpe, whose critical analysis of Black life is concerned with "how [we are] beholden to and beholders of each other in ways that change across time, place and space and yet remain" (Sharpe 2016, 187) Robinson and Lansiquot bear witness to the political legacy of Shabazz' documentation and offer their own imaginative project to the dialectical tradition: meditations on the determination of Black subjects to persist. They stretch the field of Black resistance beyond political demand so that it enacts a reckoning with anguish and distress. They recognise that feeling forms part of the promise of abundance embedded in another organisation of social life.

In creating a zone of contact for these two cultural objects to meet, I have read them reparatively, allowing for the surprise that Sedgwick advocates for (2003), refusing to lock them firmly into political orthodoxies, resisting paralysis. Whilst I refuse to collapse their differences entirely; I have noted the ways they attend to each other's absences, despite their temporal location. To understand them as part of a continuity of imagination that resists the demarcation from the past and the present. Through a display of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, OWAAD and Languid Hands express the basic tenants of Black radicalism in different registers.

Rather than read their differing concerns as always already contradictory, I instead note how they initiate a process "recollecting forward" in which they reshape each other's works and in turn transform the viewers understanding of the social world. Language (which circulates via speech and utterance) and visual culture are aesthetic modes for a set of sometimes reconciliatory, sometimes opposing ways of knowing. They are not only a means of expression for the imagination but a vehicle for its utility.

Women gather inside a room and demand an end of capitalism's oppressive force. Two artists respond, *the struggle for freedom is intimately bound to the ability grieve*. Such a meeting enlivens the promise of liberation.

**PROMISES, PROMISES**

More than just a declaration of assurance, A promise is a secret bond I offer to you. By secret, I mean not that you disguise it from everyone else but that it is kept, safeguarded, held. The bond is sealed. Depending on its orientation, a promise can be something that expands into a gift or a threat. *I promise you that I will do X or I promise that X will happen to you.* Primarily, a promise requires the enclosure of something. The magnitude promises warrants investigation; a promise is built on desirous ground.

A final way to read both cultural objects is in light of Cedric Robinson's 2012 claim about the promise of liberation,

> only when radicalism is costumed... is there a certainty to it. Otherwise, it is about a kind of resistance that does not promise triumph or victory at the end, only liberation. No nice package at the end, only that you would be free. Only the promise of liberation, only the promise of liberation! (Robinson, 2012)

Both cultural objects as containers of a promise, which requires the imagination to unlock. Here, the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained of in each cultural object is also part of a wider recognition of that resistance does not promise triumph or reward. A promise has an affective pull, that pull might help us better deconstruct its counterweight, the negative affective pull of any given political moment, particularly, this moment. We might understand the promise of liberation as an important driving force in the constitution of resistance and the development of strategic claims to the site of freedom. Promises are the traces left behind in cultural

production, that do not merely repeat the past but instantiate how past/present/future encroach on and stick to one another. Both cultural objects discussed in this fragment present a promise, a bond – a secret (a set of affects) and offer them to me, the researcher and you, the reader. They ask you to keep that promise alive. Shabazz's documentary urges us to resist through the availability of the same methods used by the women at the National Black Women's Conference. Regardless of temporal location – collective struggle, squatting, political consciousness raising, demonstration, mass mobilisation of the working class are malleable techniques that offer no assurance that we will succeed. *Towards a Black Testimony* re-represents this concern by recollecting it forward through a focus on grief and mourning, the result is an affective spark that reverberates in multiple directions, landing in several temporal locations at once. Both cultural objects are instructions for us to recognise ourselves in a past and future that is not yet finished. They turn us into custodians of a liberatory promise, making the crisis seem surmountable. They bring that place of freedom into view.

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# CHAPTER SIX: THE FUTURE IS NO ONE'S PROPERTY

*And the future? Just that I want to see it. I don't want to die. I'm just figuring out how to be in the present, so that I get a future. – Phoebe Collings James*

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the present political conjuncture is defined by discourses of stasis, defeat and political impasse, in part constituted by linear approaches to temporality. This chapter's focus on futurity (a future time, condition or event) arises from another inclination that the experience of political impasse is a product of rigid theoretical conceptualisations of futurity. It argues against the notion that the future can be won, secured or predicted by political subjects and highlights the way these discourses mirror the logic of property ownership. It then applies a scalar analysis adapted from human geography to cultural objects found in the process of fieldwork. It argues that engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential through scalar analysis enables the researcher to draw out political and strategic principles from the past and present that can inform the creation of a future condition through resistant action. The future is no one's property but its markers are present in resistant cultural production. Using Campt's (2017) notion of the Black feminist conditional as a framework, I argue for an embrace of contingency with regard to the future highlighting how cultural objects are imbued with markers that point towards the necessity of this approach.

This chapter engages with six cultural objects retrieved in the process of fieldwork. This includes three excerpts from interview transcripts with artist Jacob Joyce, educator Alex Kelbert and academic Gail Lewis. It performs a scalar visual analysis of three images; two from Issue 52 of the OUTWRITE Newspaper, a transnational feminist newspaper produced by the Feminist Newspaper Group (1982-88) retrieved from The Feminist Library and an image of members of Sisters Uncut outside of the sentencing of Wayne Couzens, the police officer found guilty of raping and murdering Sarah Everard in September 2021. It uses the scalar metrics of detail, dimension and specificity to extract the political ethics and values contained in the images and speech acts in order to examine how they can inform the strategies of present-day grassroots organising formations.

**Claims to ownership: anxieties about the future**

History is marked by confident claims about the future: from statisticians, trend forecasters and political pundits whose ability to make such claims is based, as I have argued, on the assumed linear progression of time. Koselleck's attempt to highlight the historical structures of repetition that constituted the twentieth century, which he named "historical time," was driven by "the sense that we are being sucked into the open and unknown future, the pace of which has kept us in a constant state of breathlessness ever since" (Koselleck 1988, 3). He aimed to create a new vector of experience and expectation from which to understand the conceptual basis of multiple historical streams existing at any given time as chaotic, non-linear and surging. To follow Koselleck's (1988) invocation that the future is both open and unknown, without divorcing it from a liberatory political position; what happens if we treat the future as an unknown condition, a series of open-ended questions that is continually contested? The creation of novel or indeed critical approaches to the concept of futurity depends on a challenge to the security of knowledge produced by historiography. Rather than concede that knowledge of the past is the sole determiner of the future or that the future can be foretold in its entirety, I suggest that the future demands a radical embrace of contingency that adapts resistant action in the present as it seeks to build liberatory conditions.

As I have argued previously, history refers to paradigmatic attempts to organise the chaotic, rhizomatic and lateral events that define human life into a sequential narrative. If rethinking the linearity that produces this chronology moves us closer toward an understanding that the future does not neatly follow the present then theoretical attempts to narrowly dictate its shape, location and concerns are always already outdated, irrelevant or unable to account for complexity on a planetary scale. These attempts are compounded by claims to ownership which have increased the veracity of debates regarding futurity. In the face of polycrisis caused by capitalist accumulation, those concerned with liberation are compelled towards the forecasting of trends and predictive mapping of new layers of destruction.[69] The propensity towards discursive ownership over the future emerges from this predictive approach. As expressed, for example, by the socialist invocation that the future is ours to win, or as Bhaskar Sunkara argues, the notion that "leftists haven't just been daydreaming utopians. For both good and ill, socialists

[69] My critique of predictive approaches to the future does not undermine attempts to understand how capitalism functions in the "past"/ "present" and "future." Rather it argues that critically analysing capitalism through such clear delineations produces a temporal loop that forecloses an embrace of contingency. This foreclosure reproduces relationship of ownership and domination, restaging one of the fundamental tenets of capitalism.

won power, at various points, across much of the world," (Sunkara 2019) the persistence of conceptualisations of futurity as defined by a social movement's wins and losses is, I suggest, underpinned by a desire for mastery over the unknown events of future time. One understands why such mastery is sought after, given the desolation that abounds. But this form of masculinist theoretical proposition often approaches the future as a totality, ignoring the plurality of processes that may constitute it. Rejecting such an approach requires a materialist feminist approach, dialectical in nature, which seeks to hold and wrestle with the contradiction inherent to events of future time and synthesise a range of information that could aid the development of a contingent orientation to futurity.

There are also distinctly technological and reproductive dimensions to conceptualisations of futurity which have emerged in the present political conjuncture. In these narratives, the future is concerned with mastery over forms of technology and artificial intelligence or the use of computation and cybernetics as means of escape, fugitivity and otherworldliness. Indeed, Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism*, argues that the divide between the digital and the real is no longer clear and "through the application of glitch, we ghost on the gendered body and accelerate its end" (Russell 2020, 10). The appeal of such discourses in relation to identity is how they enable one to bypass the trap of categorical belonging which is positioned as antithetical to liberatory future condition. Anxieties about futurity are also expressed through debates regarding reproduction and the role of the family in social life. Such anxieties pertain to how to cleave the future from oppressive forms of social organisation that exist in the present. Lee Edelman critiques the overreliance on reproductive futurity as a structuring mode of relation, a relation that is expressed through sanctity of the child. For him, queerness as a form of structural (dis)order must find the courage to break with the imperative for reproduction. He writes what is queerest about us "[. . .] is this willingness [. . .] to insist that the future stop here" (Edelman 2014, 31). For Edelman, future time is defined against the assimilationist attachments to reproductive futurity.

I find James Bliss' critique of Edelman a compelling way to think about how theories of futurity are continually contested and remade. He notes how Edelman's critique provides a framework for thinking about Blackness as a structural position but neglects to understand how Black queers, by virtue of natal alienation experienced as a result of slavery, are already barred from the imperative for reproduction (Bliss 2015). Challenging Edelman's provocative claims to account for those who do not have recourse to notions of futurity reveals how its conceptual

basis is actually a threshold that many are barred from entering. I rehearse these arguments to crystallise how wide-ranging debates on futurity have become and to note how critiques are often driven by questions related to a political subject's claim to existence in the future – for example, the child or the racialised person. To break with claims of ownership entirely, to conceptualise futurity without beginning with the individual would mean a concession to the distinction between the knowledge of *what we want to happen in the future* and *what will happen in the future* and a focus on the collective, rather than singular body. Whilst it is crucial that those with liberatory politics provide a future vision of social life, I argue that this can be achieved without rehearsing claims to ownership and recognising how discursive debates about the who owns the future or which bodies represent it distract from the action required to devise it. This chapter makes the case that the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained in cultural objects bears markers of the strategic principles that guide resistant movements in the present towards a recognition of contingency and that those markers instruct us in the process devising and rehearsing any given future condition.

Claims to ownership of the future by political actors might be read as attempts, from a political vantage point, to awaken mass political consciousness by drawing a firm distinction between the misery of now and the abundance that might exist, if we fight for it. This remains a crucial task for those engaged in resistant movements, however I suggest that such a task may be carried out without the language of ownership precisely because ownership denotes a core material and linguistic marker of capitalism: property. I make this argument as a proponent of discourse analysis, which holds that language is a core building block which mediates a subject's interaction with the world. In their analysis of the production of authenticity in capitalist advertising, Jillian Cavanaugh and Shalini Shankar argue that capitalist processes of commodification rely on,

> various emerging intersections between language and commodification… Using the analytic of linguistic materiality allows us to look at how linguistic practices that work in concert with, or in opposition to, the material aspects of commodity production can show how materiality and language are connected to another and together play a part in economic systems (Cavanaugh and Shalini 2014, 53).

Language that perpetuates a property relation to the future: expressed through ideas that the world is "ours to win" or that it belongs to "us", that we have dominion over it, not only commodify futurity but cement a binaristic relation in which those with liberatory ambitions either win or lose. This orientation increases the potency of political impasse created by successive "losses" under neoliberalism. It imbues affective experiences of defeat with the

power to immobilise by exaggerating the determinative features of the present. Thus, the present appears foreclosed, no meaningful interventions can be made as radicals experience a series of lossess akin to blows. The reality is much more complex. In *Freedom is a Constant Struggle,* Angela Davis (2015) affirms that principled resistance is a lifelong negotiation with the self and others. In this negotiation, the future is constantly made and remade. In arguing that the "The Future is No One's Property", I suggest that a radically contingent conceptualisation of futurity which expresses itself using language that reflects this, i.e the use of the conditional tense rather than the language of decisive "wins" or "losses," is one example of how the imagination can aid struggles for resistance.[70] These expressions also call into question the separation between the past, present and future, forcing political subjects to rethink their own role in resistant movements by demonstrating the power of actions in the past and present to shape the future. This future evolves contemporaneously with that which came before it and that which is yet to come. This thesis has, at many points, tried to argue that conceptions of the imagination that understand it purely as a subjective experience within the realm of individual cognition contribute to its alienation from materialist struggle. In radically reconceptualising both the concept of the future and the role the imagination plays in its conception and actualisation; I aim to highlight its central role in establishing the tense of futurity through collective action. As Elizabeth Grosz argues,

> how is it possible to revel and delight in the indeterminacy of the future without raising the kind of panic and defensive counter-reactions that Foucault envisages a supervising, regulating power needs in order to contain unpredictability, the eruption of the event, the emergence of singularities, and the consequent realignments of power? (Grosz 1998, 39).

Insofar as futurity is devisable; its final form can never be neatly articulated. The arenas I have sketched out above reveal the plurality inherent to redefinitions of futurity. The only secure claim one might make about the future is that it is contested. Grosz goes on to argue that "In seeking an open-ended future… [one must] acknowledge the capacity of any future eruption, any event, any reading, to rewrite, resignify, reframe the present" (Grosz 1998, 40). If the future seems constantly in motion, being formed and reformed, then this movement presents an alternative to the determinacy of the present, the induced inability to move, the

[70]Considering such a claim in light of the material analysed in this thesis, I note that contingency does not have to be at odds with the sharp and direct sloganeering which is crucial to grassroots organisation. For example, the demands expressed in Figures 15-18 by the Haringey Black Action Group are both direct *and* contingent; they identify a present fascist threat to be opposed (implying their concept of futurity) without invoking the language of ownership and/or property.

feeling that nothing can be done. Creative engagement with cultural objects can provide political subjects with an imaginative framework for reconceptualising futurity as something human beings are constantly engaging, making and interacting with, despite an inability to name its tenets with precision. The future becomes dependent on a set of interventions made in service of freedom, rather than a pre-existing site or location that political subjects simply move towards in a linear fashion. Analysis of cultural objects aids the development of an orientation towards futurity that centralises contingency over ownership and dominance.

**Contingency**

The notion of contingency pushes against the rational dimensions of knowledge, throwing researchers of quantitative data into crisis because it affirms the notion of futurity as a threshold. Empiricists and statisticians depend on the predictability of data patterns, using this form of analysis to develop a notion of futurity that is dependent on the logical repetition of trends, global consumer culture, cycles and events (Powers 2019; Romanus, Eugenio and Goldschmidt 2024). But I suggest that this too, is another form of speculation. As briefly commented on in footnote fifty-one, in her work on the conceptual basis of catastrophe, Bedour Alagraa (2021) notes that without an investigation of the overdetermination of empirical and social science approaches to the notion of catastrophe, we run the risk of rendering theory inept to attend to the scale of planetary crisis. I apply the same approach to the concept of futurity, arguing that a wholesale break with modes of prediction and forecasting regarding the future is necessary to recognise that processes of contestation (one form of contingency) are constitutive of the future. The linguistic contestation over *what determines* the future comes to define futurity, rather than attempts to render the details of the future wholesale. The future is contestation; contestation is futurity. In my analysis, the future is less a specific site or landscape – a fixed place or location, but a continual process of definition and redefinition waged by political subjects against oppressive force. I register these processes of definition and redefinition in aesthetic and linguistic elements of cultural objects analysed later in this chapter. These processes distort linear progression by disputing predictive approaches with their own accounts of futurity which are inextricably linked to remedying the dire political conditions in which we live.

Rather than understand contingency as a threat to political organisation, which necessarily depends on a clarity of theoretical purpose to produce a workable plan or strategy, I understand contingency as a field of possibility in which multiple valences co-exist against the notion of a

singular, united and harmonious future. Contingency is a notoriously abstracted theoretical proposition with indeterminate empirical and semantic referents. In order to map the meaning of contingency with regard to political science, Andreas Schedler argues that the high level of abstraction that the concept depends on resists singular definition but that,

> the semantic columns of the abstract edifice of contingency rests upon: indeterminacy (y could be different), uncertainty (y is unpredictable) and conditionality (y depends on x)" (Schedler 2009, 57).[71]

A radically contingent approach to futurity then, recognises it is a conceptual plane of invention and intervention based on the three markers identified by Schedler. Political subjects might make a claim to what *should* be – what could be different, what is unpredictable, and what depends on X. Most importantly, contingency calls them to recognise that the future cannot be fully known or exhausted.

**Temporality and the Black feminist conditional**

As a feminist researcher, my interest in thinking about futurity is connected to the use of aesthetic methods to eliminate the distinction between the past/present/future. I aim to give the future back to those of us who occupy the here and now. In proposing a new framework for how we speak and creatively engage with temporality vis a vis a recognition of the future's contingency, I engage with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in cultural objects in order to discover the strategic ethics, values and principles they harbour that can be applied by present day resistance movements. By "touching" cultural objects, the researcher exposes the political ethics and practices of the workers who produced them and decipher what those workers desired from the time that would succeed them. I propose a reworking of understandings of futurity using the Black feminist conditional to reveal the requirement to embrace unknowability and to understand the malleability of future time.

Indeed, Black feminist thinkers have made several appeals, through poetry and political analysis, for political subjects to approach the future considering its indispensable relation to the past

[71] Whilst the semantic dimensions of contingency are useful for thinking about futurity, I do not hold that all oppressive force is contingent or cannot be predicted. Racial capitalism, for example, is extremely predictable in its effects and motivations (especially with regard to the profit-motive and drives towards accumulation.) I suggest that understanding futurity through the lens of contingency might help oppose the fatalism that arises as a response to violence or political loss.

and present. The future is not a new landscape per say but an experiment in a further iteration of *what was then* and *what is now*. If the present is marked by a set of exploitative social and political conditions and relations, then any attempt to devise the future must seek to eradicate them whilst understanding itself as merely a furtherance, rearticulation and continuance of all the attempts at freedom that have preceded it. At present, the most theoretically resonant conception of futurity for this project comes from Black feminist scholar Tina Campt, who draws our attention to the fact that the future is not about what happens but the terms (and actions) we use to conceive of it. She observes,

> the grammar of black feminist futurity that I propose here is a grammar of possibility that moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as what will be in the future. It moves beyond the future perfect tense of that which will have happened prior to a reference point in the future. It strives for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have had to happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not but must be. It's a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future now – as imperative rather than subjunctive – as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present (Campt 2017, 17).

Broadly speaking, the future real conditional describes something that might happen in the future with a condition. Linguistically, this condition is best signified using the word "if." For example: *If X happens, I will go outside.* We can better understand futurity by paying keen attention to the construction of something as minute as a sentence. Inside the structure of a sentence, the condition points back towards understanding the future as dependent on certain factors, which again denotes contingency. In Campt's analysis, the adoption of the future conditional is an acknowledgement that the future that aligns with a liberatory social vision is only possible if a set of conditions are met. Campt's adoption of the future conditional suggests that the future is not guaranteed, just as Hall instructs us towards a Marxism "without guarantees…without answers" (Hall 1983, 43). Yet her assessment of the future conditional highlights the imperative to behave *as if* the future were guaranteed by undertaking resistant action that produces the set of conditions necessary for a liberatory future to emerge. She acknowledges contingency, the "if" (uncertainty, unpredictability, dependency) of what is to come whilst at the same time shifting focus towards the actions that determine that "if." Futurity then, is not only about contestation, but also about the means and methods through which we attempt to enact *that which will have had to happen.* The future real conditional to which Campt hints describes what the

collective "we" thinks we will do in a situation in the future. In other words, she redirects us away from a conception of futurity that simply emerges without extended effort, energy, grief, loss, collaboration, dialogue, a revolutionary vanguard, dissent – and other means of establishing *that which will have had to happen*.

Rather than read Campt's invocation as an abstract theoretical proposition grounded in non-materialist "aspiration" and "belief", I allow it to shape my conception of futurity by extracting the very obvious invocation to struggle and political mobilisation. "It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realise that aspiration" (Campt 2017,17). That *should* be true. The use of the modal verb indicates how critical forms of Black feminism emanate from strong political visions that situate themselves firmly against capital and other oppressive forces toward what *should* be true: a world not constituted by violence and dispossession. Here Campt allows the modal verb to be occupied by the reader, she assumes there is a shared knowledge about the "should" of that should-be social relation. I name it here, from a Black Marxist feminist perspective, as a movement towards communal ownership of those markers of life: land and labour and therefore a claiming of the tenets of relation, togetherness and connectivity that emphasise a power of the working classes and their political demand. Campt's use of the word "impels" is significant; it highlights the necessity of structures of belief that command movement, intervention, that seek, in some sense, to formalise aspiration in grassroots organisation. I have elsewhere in this thesis argued that the imagination constitutes the impetus to resist. In the same way, I argue that its relationship to futurity is expressed not only in markers left in cultural objects via Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential but in the recognition and advancement of the aspiration of *should be* true but isn't. This aspiration fuels processes of experimentation and construction: pre-figuration, autonomous grassroots formation, theoretical study, unionising and other forms of politicised activity that create the future through contingency (an embrace of what could be different, what is unpredictable, and what depends on X) and perhaps most crucially, leave remnants of the imagination in the cultural objects they utilise in the process.

**Alluding to the future**

I again turn my focus to the role of language and its effects, this time, in the construction of futurity. I situate this interest in the field of critical feminist discourse analysis, those who are, as Michelle M. Lazar argues "openly committed to the achievement of a just social order through

a critique of discourse" (Lazar 2005, 5). I edit this statement to note that discourse analysis and the language that produces it are merely one component of a multi-pronged strategy for liberation, their singular role in establishing a just social order should not be overstated. Nevertheless, I use the Black feminist conditional explored above, the notion of futurity as contingent and the fortification of an aspiration of what *should be* true to provide a framework for analysis of excerpts from interviews undertaken as part of my fieldwork. As detailed in previous chapters, these relaxed exchanges took place over zoom or in the homes of individuals involved in anti-racist and or feminist organising groups past and present, exploring their understandings of the present political conjuncture, the imagination, temporality, revolution and the future.

Throughout the fieldwork process, I created spaces for exchange and dialogue, where relation could be practiced and explored. Language was the primary vehicle for communication of relational desires and aspirations to varying degrees. I suggest that it is also one marker through which the contingency inherent to my reconceptualisation of futurity was registered. At many points during the interviews, frustrated linguistic allusions to the future arose. Participants were often grasping for the right set of words or phrases to convey their understanding of futurity; when language failed them, they turned to metaphor or physical gesture to convey meaning. Rather than ask participants to describe the future in detail, I instead encouraged them to reflect on how they related to the future and how it was connected to the political and artistic work they undertook in the present. Inherent to our exchange was an invitation to use their imagination to think beyond the restraints of linear temporality and the limits of language to conceive of the future in the present moment. Responses linked back to the cycles of victory and defeat inherent to political organising and descriptions of cultural objects that had aided the growth of their political consciousness. What struck me in these moments was the overwhelming evidence of a core pillar of contingency – uncertainty. Their words and phrases were packed with uncertainty. They felt they could not adequately explain what the future was, where it was located and how it would emerge, sentences were punctuated with the phrase *I don't know*, more times than I could count. I perform an analysis of three excerpts which discuss futurity to examine the specific ways interviewees acknowledged the notion of contingency and dispensed with the idea of ownership over the future. In their hesitancy and linguistic aphasia, participants thoughtfully expressed a desire for a future in which human beings could be free. I perform fragmentary analysis of participant responses to highlight their consistent rejection of totality, prediction and mapping in their linguistic expression.

1. On 8th November 2021, when asked about the imagination's relationship to time, feminist academic Gail Lewis, member of the Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD, thanks me for my question and responds,

> that idea that you don't know where you're going if you don't know where you've come from, which can sound like a linear trajectory, is actually a command that says – in the "now," you need to bring together something from "then" in service of something in the future because it's all happening in the now. What we do now is absolutely crucial and is premised on what we imagine we want for the future and trying to make it happen now, to foretell it (Lewis 2021).

Lewis transforms a historical adage into a linguistic command that acknowledges the cyclical nature of time. This invocation suggests that it is possible, to unite, "bring together" or synthesise core markers of the past in the present in service of the construction of the future. We might think of the imagination as the force capable of doing this and Imaginative Revolutionary Potential as the connective substance that crystallises this process. Her use of the word "something" is crucial here in what it reveals about her conceptualisation of the role of the unknown in understanding the future. The word "something", an indefinite pronoun, denotes the indeterminate quality of the future, a quality that cannot be fully rendered in its totality. "Something in the future" serves as a linguistic marker for her uncertainty, what cannot be known. Here, Lewis reveals how language has no dominion over certain phenomena, the possibility of ownership over the future is compromised by her inability to articulate what this "something" is. Her use of the indeterminate is reminiscent of Derrida's (1997) notion of deconstruction, his rejection of logocentrism in favour of the instability of meaning. Lewis' willingness to embrace the fact that she cannot define the "something" in relation to futurity, is evidence of the multiplicity inherent to futurity as a concept; that "something in the future" could mean *anything*, dependent on *anything*. The inherent instability of the future is acknowledged as part of an understanding of the present condition rather than relegated to a forward time. In order to cleave notions of futurity from a linear trajectory, that "something" in the future needs to be multiple, changing, flexible, unpredictable, unknowable in part, it cannot refer to a singular referent or quality. Language acts as an arena through which the failure of ownership over the future is played out, it marks the *différance* to which Derrida (1997) refers, the notion that meaning is constantly evolving. If the future cannot be rendered explicitly through language, as responses through the fieldwork process suggest, it is not an object that

one might claim belongs to them. Building a future is less about the consolidation of adequate vocabularies of expression but rather what Lewis identifies as the "what we do now."

2. On Zoom on August 10th 2023, I speak to Jacob Joyce, a queer artist, illustrator and community organiser in an interview that has been rescheduled many times, (life has gotten in the way). They link their understanding of futurity to queerness and the maintenance of individual and collective freedom during their participation in the London Queer Social Centre squat in Brixton, South London in 2014.

> It's like queerness, do you know what I mean? It alludes to a future. There's a futurity embedded in the term freedom in the sense that it's something that becomes very different once it's realised. I think maybe if I tried to think of a concrete example of freedom in my life, those squats for example, the London Queer Social Centre, I really do feel like we had freedom in those spaces to do whatever we wanted but we were also having to defend those spaces from the police tryna get in, from the police cutting off our water illegally. We were actually really lucky with those spaces because we didn't really have any violent attacks or anything on us, but in a way we were there because of violent attacks. People were literally fleeing abusive situations and the freedom within the space only comes as a result of the immense responsibility and community action that it takes to hold that space of freedom (Joyce 2023).

Joyce understands futurity as always already entangled with freedom; we might pause here to consider the implications of such a statement. "It's like queerness, do you know what I mean?" they retort, referencing queerness as a theoretical frame whose exploration of subjectivity, affect and political conditions positions it against the restraining limits of heteronormative capitalist relations. Joyce invokes a fluidity inherent to the future with this phrase, for them, the future is a *queer* condition. This calls to mind queer theory's emphasis on subjectless critique. David L Eng and Jasbir Puar write "What might be called the 'subjectless' critique of queer studies disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent" (Eng and Puar 2020, 1). If, as Eng and Puar note, queer theory has no fixed referent for its political claim, we can read Joyce's invocation of queerness in this context as a suggestion that futurity also does not pertain to a specific subject, object or field. If queer theory concerns *everything* then a liberated future is for *everyone*. This is why it cannot be pre-determined or claimed as a property relation through the language of ownership.

Joyce imagines futurity *as* "freedom," the expression of human agency. This conceptualisation understands the future as a condition that is exercised anywhere that freedom is exercised. The creative and artistic elements of this project hold that, even under capitalism's oppressive force, it is possible to glimpse, enact, and *behave* as if one were free despite restrictions and limitations placed on the body and mind. For Joyce, direct action evidences this claim. The act of squatting also *alludes to a future*, reclaiming abandoned property and repurposing it to meet the needs of community members is a form of resistant action (driven by an imaginative impulse) which creates the conditions for freedom, and therefore futurity, to emerge. Rather than attempt to dominate the future through language, Joyce embraces a contingency that allows the future to unfold in present-day acts of resistance. Forms of direct-action are a rehearsal for transformative modes of social organisation; the acts break the stagnancy of capitalist crisis through a performance of human agency, because, as Benjamin Franks (2006) argues, direct-action is synecdochic in nature. It involves political subjects playing out the transformation of society in their actions. In this instance, the future appears in the distinct moments that freedom (human agency) is realised in the act of squatting. This momentary glimpse of freedom that brings the future into the present, is also, as Joyce argues, constantly under threat. "We were also having to defend those spaces from the police tryna get in" (Joyce 2023). This phrase demonstrates how the freedom produced through direct-action is not total and will not last until the sources of unfreedom (in this specific instance the police) have been abolished. Joyce illustrates how the future is contingent because it depends on the elimination of oppressive force. It is a multi-temporal condition which can be enacted and rehearsed through forms of direct action; futurity is not beholden to the rules of hegemonic clock-time, it appears in past and present acts of freedom simultaneously.

3. On 3rd December 2021, I sit inside a house shared by people who have forged friendships and romantic relationships through various forms of political organising in London from 2013 onwards. When asked to define her relationship with temporality in the context of political organising, Alex Kelbert, educator, researcher and founding member of Black Lives Matter UK tells me,

> grasping makes sense. For me, it's also the feeling of looking back and seeing that actually, it was always there. Sometimes you feel like you're doing nothing, and then you'll do something and realise it was all happening; the future was already in the past and then in the present moment you look back and you're like "oh". It's a sense of — its not really surprise — but suddenly you realise that time is also working with you (Kelbert 2021).

Here, Kelbert demonstrates that a contingent conception of the future allows for the transformation of futurity from a one-time state or condition of ownership into an encounter. As Lorde reminds us "Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses" (Lorde 1984, 140-1). For Kelbert, that small opportunity for genuine change, "you'll do something," provides a space for the realisation that with regard to the future, political subjects are meeting what already exists, "the future was already in the past and then in the present moment you look back" (Kelbert 2021). If futurity is a matter of encounter which depends on looking back, more possibilities abound for the cultivation of the future in moments defined by political crisis or stagnation. The act of looking back to see "it was always there," breaks the linear temporality that separates those in the "past" from those in the "present." As established in Chapter Three, an encounter is a scene in which relational currents collide and multiple routes forward may be established. Kelbert's "looking back" is a gesture that imbues the scene of encounter with the ability to cut through the political impasse. The scene culminates in a moment of realisation. "Oh," signals a release of the tension between the political actor and the strictures of linear time. The affective moment of encounter frees the political actor from the necessity of locating or conceiving of the future as a totality. The consequence of this affective realisation is expressed as a shock, a jolt; it is an attempt to grasp an intangible relational current, the recognition that nothing is new. Theory and practice are synthesised in the moment of encounter; even if one feels as if they are "doing nothing" (or that their interventions into social or political space do not adequately address the scale of the problem) they are still capable of enacting change, movement or a break, the possibility of agency remains. Kelbert demonstrates how contingent approaches to futurity erase antagonistic relationships to time so that it is "also working with you." Rather than a constraining form, contingency transforms temporality into something permissive, akin to the cycles Lewis elucidated earlier. Kelbert's orientation to futurity is multidirectional, she looks back and finds markers of the future there. The individual or collective needn't capitulate to a linear trajectory in which they are firmly positioned on the backfoot. Contingency enables one to abandon this paradigm, redefining futurity outside of the bounds of victory and defeat.

This thesis has tried at many points to demonstrate how engagement with cultural production can help develop new understandings of the imagination, temporality, and political impasse. These extracts of fieldwork encounters have partially demonstrated the role language plays in

expressing the contingency inherent to futurity. As Hartman reminds us, "The gestures disclose what is at stake – the matter of life returns as an open question" (Hartman 2019, 263). The next section of this chapter performs a scalar visual analysis of three images obtained in the process of fieldwork to draw out the strategic political principles, ethics and values embedded in them. I use a politics of scale to frame my investigation of the types of strategic principles that can gleaned from cultural production, scaled up and applied to present day grassroots political organisations to aid their struggles to resist state violence.

## The scale of the object is the scale of the future

In their summary of the notion of scale with regard to spatial phenomena derived from geographic data, Nina Siu-Ngan Lam and Dale A. Quattrochi (1992) note the need to account for geography's diverse use of the concept. Sallie Marston outlines some of these usages,

> cartographic scale is the relationship between the distance on a map to the corresponding distance 'on the ground'. Geographic scale refers to the spatial extent of a phenomenon or a study. Operational scale corresponds to the level at which relevant processes operate (Marston 2000, 220).

Following Marston, Lam and Quattrochi, we might think of scale as a level of representation which denotes the aspect ratio of any given object or social system as a means of ascertaining the expansiveness (and therefore the limits) of the object in question. This level of representation might take into account the detail, dimension and specificity of a space or place as well as the political processes that created it. Scale marks an attempt to understand the size of a thing but it is also a taxonomical measure which attempts to represent the unique qualities of specific phenomena. Its history as a tool used by imperialist cartographers to divide and expand territories of control is one example of the violence of a scalar politics. Refusing this violence, I repurpose questions of scale so that they, conceptually, work in service of freedom. Rather than a tool for the acquisition of land and property through accumulative measures, I argue that we might use scalar politics to examine the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained in cultural objects, specifically the intensity and presence of certain values, practices, ethics and political principles that should be present in a liberated future and can be applied by grassroots resistance movements in the present. The intended purpose of applying scalar analysis to cultural objects is to identify the strategic markers present in them which grassroots organisations can use to break open political impasse. The researcher can apply questions of

scale to cultural objects, through visual analysis of their details, dimensions and specificity, as explored through my own analysis below.

Scale can also be understood as another metric in wider geographic systems of world management. I turn to Katherine McKittrick who identifies geographic domination as,

> 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 (McKittrick 2006, 16).

Thinking about geographic domination as McKittrick identifies it enables us to understand how traditional conceptualisations of scale are complicit in the reproduction of unjust spatial practices and an unjust social world. In opposition to this, I utilise scale as way of thinking about the *presence* of certain resistant ethics, values and principles. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2020) argues, abolition is a question of presence. Following this invocation, we might use a scalar politics to ask, what resources, for example (education, housing, networks of care) must be present in the future we build together? What are the geographic, operational and spatial extents of specific principles that are central to liberation? How might we expand life-affirming (in opposition to life-threatening) institutions, networks, rhizomatic structures in the present as a means of constructing futurity?

Using cultural objects to make sense of the presence of certain values, ethics, practices necessary in the construction of futurity is not the same as establishing a blueprint or map for what the future will look, feel, taste and smell like. Questions of scale are established comparatively using a contingent mode: *how much more of X will the future hold when compared to the present moment?* This reconceptualisation of scale counters the scarcity logic of neoliberal austerity by stretching aspect ratio, envisioning modes of social organisation premised on an abundance of resource and political acuity. Rather than predication, which operates using a measure of guarantee through science, a scalar politics *implies* the planning and strategy necessary in the present to answer future orientated questions. It uses cultural objects to identify certain dimensions of the future. Understanding scale though planning and strategy resists abstraction. It is one way, under Gilmore's (2011) instruction, to give struggle a form. Staying with the expansiveness of the future means conceding that seemingly abstract notions (*Y depends on X*) produce futurity in that they represent the contestation inherent to the concept. My ongoing concerns with futurity are also explored in **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO**

**DIRECTION HERE** which visually represents my use of scalar politics. I have experimented with principles of disruption, distortion, movement and sought to visualise alternative lateral networks and dimensions that bring together different modes of analysis with regard to futurity.

The contestation that so often guides debates about the future is rooted in a fear about the multiple dimensions – geographic, economic, social, political, artistic – on which human life depends. A more robust conceptualisation of futurity that is attentive to question of scale, asks not, what are the exact dimensions is the future and how can we own it but rather how can the aspect ratio and other markers of futurity be identified through an analysis of Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential? What values, ethics and modes of organisation exist in the future and how can these be applied to present day resistance movements?

**The markers of futurity in cultural objects**

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that engagement with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential contained in cultural objects is crucial to breaking environments of affective stasis produced by political impasse. I turn towards three images to demonstrate how a scalar visual analysis can elucidate the strategic markers contained in cultural objects through engagement with the affective charges that constituted them. With regard to scale, I suggest that cultural objects contain markers of futurity that visual analysis can help elucidate. In order to perform a scalar analysis, the researcher must identify how the detail, dimensions and specificity of the image evidence the ethics, values, principles and practices present in a liberated future and provide forms of information that can contribute strategic guidance to present day resistance movements. Here "detail" refers to the particulars and characteristics specific to the image in question, "dimension" refers to their measurable aspects (what is quantifiable about the image?) and "specificity" refers to the unique circumstances related to geography, subject and political concern that define the image. These three aspects provide the parameters for my analysis of the figures below.

Figure 30.


Figure 31.


Figure 32.

First, I begin with details of the three figures because it is in these details that Imaginative-Revolutionary potential is stored. The details of Figure 30 show political actors positioned (sitting and standing) outside Central Criminal Court, The Old Bailey in London in September 2021. The individual in the foreground of the image is masked and raises a flair above their head. Behind them, reads a banner in bold black lettering: **MET POLICE BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.** Though I cannot be sure who took the image, I stumble across because it accompanies a press release from Sisters Uncut detailing their response to the sentencing of Wayne Couzens; a police officer responsible for the rape and murder of Sarah Everard near Dover in March 2021.

SISTERS UNCUT[72] is a feminist direct-action group formed from UK Uncut[73], a broad-based country-wide coalition of political organisers responding to the introduction of austerity measures by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government in 2010. The group, who broke away from UK Uncut to focus on the gendered impacts of austerity, has been active across the United Kingdom since 2014, with established chapters responding to local and national issues. The group's initial aim was the protection of vital domestic violence services and provisions for survivors[74] that were threatened by the introduction of austerity. Critiquing the austerity-driven decimation of infrastructures of social care, Sisters Uncut organised women and non-binary people to oppose cuts to domestic violence services using creative direct-action that exposed their scale, highlighted the Home Office's infiltration of domestic violence provision and critiqued the lack of material support offered to survivors by the state. Sisters Uncut brings together political actors with a range of skill sets to make critical interventions that have fundamentally shifted the landscape of British feminism in the last decade[75]. Offering a bold,

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[72] For more writing on Sisters Uncut, see Molly Ackhurst, "Everyday Moments of Disruption: Navigating Towards Utopia," *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): 115-128, doi: https://doi.org/10.18193/sah.v5i1.169 and Armine Ishkanian and Anita Peña Saavedra, "Intersectionality, Activist Organising and Sisters Uncut," *The Sociological Review Magazine*, April 19, 2019, https://thesociologicalreview.org/journal-collections/featured-papers/intersectionality-activist-organising-and-sisters-uncut/.

[73] For more on UK Uncut, see Tim Street, "UK Uncut: direct action against austerity," in *Political (Dis)entaglement: The Changing Nature of the "Political,"* ed. by Nathan Manning (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2015).

[74] For more on the complex feminist debates regarding usage of the term "survivor" to describe those who have experienced sexual and domestic violence, see Meghan Olivia Warner, "Becoming a Survivor? Identity Creation Post Violence," *Sociological Perspectives* 67, no. 1-3 (2024): 64-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214231195340

[75] See the following media articles for examples of Sisters Uncut's local and national impact:
Vicky Spratt, "How Sisters Uncut are Changing the Way Politics is Done", *Grazia Daily*, August 9, 2024, https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/sisters-uncut/.
Jade Jackman, "Twenty-Four Hours inside Sisters Uncut's East London Occupation," *Huck Magazine,* July 23, 2016, https://www.huckmag.com/article/24-hours-sisters-uncut.
Ellie Mae O'Hagan, "Groups Like Sisters Uncut are the modern suffragettes," *The Guardian,* October 8, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/08/sisters-uncut-suffragette-film-premiere-women.
Kevin Rawlinson, "Sisters Uncut Protests over CPS treatment of sexual abuse victims," *The Guardian,*

uncompromising and materialist account of feminist concerns, they have consistently countered liberal feminist insistence on the introduction of new laws and policy measures as the only meaningful response to gendered violence. Consistent media attention and grassroots mobilisation, occupations and other pressure tactics have forced concessions from local councils and the government at large regarding their approach to women's services. Much has been written about the group's explicit tactics and general ethos. The range of actions has been wide and varied: Storming the red carpet during the Premiere of film "Suffragette" to protest cuts to domestic violence shelters under the banner "DEAD WOMEN CAN'T VOTE" in 2015, occupying empty housing in Marian Court, East London in 2016 to draw attention to the lack of social housing provision available for survivors and reclaiming the visitors centre of Holloway Prison in 2017 demanding that the land from the sale of the prison be used to build a community-run women's centre and social housing.

The group fosters a collective sense of comradeship through processes that strengthen relation including: the establishment of a safer spaces policy as a guiding document for the operation of meetings which is read the beginning of chapter meetings, short and punchy key messages that communicate their intentions to a diverse audience and a distinctive use of aesthetics via propaganda (banners, placards, leaflets) which utilise distinct colours and lettering that make their work immediately identifiable in the public sphere. The group has been successful in creating a base of anonymous organisers who consistently intervene in public space through protest, disruption, occupation. They also operate inside broad based grassroots coalitions that respond to government policies and practices. More than a decade and a half after the introduction of austerity, as the group has grown and changed in size and number, there has been a notable shift away from defensive modes of organising under the banner of protecting services towards more long-term strategies centred on abolition, police accountability, building infrastructures for localised community-based resistance and mutual aid as well as a strengthening of transnational links with resistance movements in Palestine[76]. The group continues to highlight women's deaths in custody and have been a vital force in the creation of opposition towards the Police, Crime and Sentencing and Courts Bill introduced by Boris Johnson's Conservative Government in 2021.

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Novemeber 2, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2018/nov/02/sisters-uncut-demand-police-stop-making-sex-abuse-survivors-hand-over-personal-info.

[76] To see evidence of Sisters Uncut shift in strategy, especially with regard to policing, read Sisters Uncut, "Policing is the Crisis," *The New Socialist*, March 18, 2021, https://newsocialist.org.uk/transmissions/policing-is-the-crisis/ and Sisters Uncut, "Aren't Palestinians women too?" *Sisters Uncut Blog*, November 2, 2023, https://www.sistersuncut.org/2023/11/02/arent-palestinians-women-too/.

Figures 31 and 32, retrieved during fieldwork from the Feminist Library, a grassroots archive of feminist materials in South London, is an image of a first edition copy of Issue 52 of feminist community newspaper, OUTWRITE. It contains images of protests undertaken by Black and racialised people as part of the Broadwater Farm Defense Campaign, established to contest police surveillance, intimidation and widespread arrest of Black and South Asian youth in the wake of the Broadwater Farm Riots (1985). This uprising took place after the murder of Cynthia Jarrett during a police raid of her home in Tottenham, North London. In Figure 31, we see a Black political subject holding a megaphone at the entrance of a building, behind them stands a police officer looking on and another unidentified individual. They appear mid-speech, the banner above them reads "DEFENCE CAMPAIGN." The image is surrounded by an article and accompanied by the heading "POLICE EXPOSED." The accompanying article details the ways numerous young people were detained, harassed and forced into signing confessions admitting participation or culpability for damage caused during the uprising.

The community newspaper OUTWRITE was created by the Feminist News Group, a feminist coalition active from 1982-1988. Intended as a community newspaper for local distribution and specifically anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist in its framework, OUTWRITE sought to make connections between women's struggles across the globe. In an essay titled *La Promesse du Communisme* included in a French language book of essays titled *Gagner le Monde: Sur Quelques Heritages Femininistes*, I wrote about the group, arguing that,

> in laying out a case for an internationalist feminism, the authors focused on similarities in working class women's conditions across the globe and included updates and developments on socialist women's causes. These reports acted as a means of building momentum and developing an ongoing sense of insurgency; that the growth of a global women's movement could not be stopped and that consciousness was being raised in every area of the world (Olufemi 2023, 93).

The collective's intention was to highlight forms of resistance and feminist rebellion from Black and "Third World" Women. Contributors included members of Southall Black Sisters and individuals situated in publishing and other local service providers. In her essay, *Producing a Feminist Magazine* co-founder of OUTWRITE Shaila Shah notes that the producers of OUTWRITE met weekly at the Central London Women's Centre and worked with other collectives and groups on the advertising, distribution, scheduling and production of the

newsletter (Shah 2013). [77] It is important to note that for many years, the group was reliant on funding from the Greater London Council for the production of the newsletter. OUTWRITE emerged through a rich print-making and zine culture, engineered by different feminist formations during the 1980s.[78]

**Dimension and specificity**

Attending to both figures specificity requires not only a broad contextualisation of the images but an attempt to make connections between the geographies and concerns of the images to the researcher or reader's own political condition. The researcher must first ask, how are the broad concerns of the cultural object relevant to the current political conjuncture in which I exist? In this instance, all three images are concerned with events happening in the United Kingdom, despite their respective temporal locations, their specificity lay in their attempt to address the main arm of the carceral state: the failure of the police and the criminal justice system to keep individuals safe.

The Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential of the items, that is their detail, highlight the inherent harm and active danger posed by policing and the indiscriminate use of tactics of state-sanctioned murder and intimidation by policing bodies and court system. I attend to their specificity by connecting the geographies and concerns of the images to my own political condition as a researcher. The growing interest in abolitionist politics in the United Kingdom[79] represents an insurgent form of politics sparked in response to two waves of Black Lives Matter protests in Europe and America triggered by the murders of Mark Duggan in London (2011), Trayvon Martin in Florida (2012-16) and George Floyd in Minnesota (2020-23). I argue that an interest in abolitionist politics has taken hold in the present moment because the legal reform and institutional restructuring promised by state bodies in response to rebellions from 2011-16 failed to produce a substantive difference to the lives of oppressed Black subjects. Liberal democracies did not eliminate or confront policing, courts and the prison system as an imminent threat to life. Abolitionist politics emerges as a framework for understanding, as Gilmore (2020) argues, how unfreedom is produced and reproduced through the many vectors of racial

[77] For more writing on OUTWRITE, see Shaila Shah, "Producing a Feminist Magazine" in *Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. Gail Chester (London: Routledge, 2013).
[78] For more writing on zine and print-making cultures in 1980s England, see Margaretta Jolly, "Purpose, Power and Profit in Feminist Publishing: An Introduction," *Women: A Cultural Review* 32, no. 3–4 (2021): 227–47. doi:10.1080/09574042.2021.1973698.
[79] For more on growing interest in abolition, see Remi Joseph Salisbury, Laura Connelly and Peninah Wangari-Jones. 2021. "The UK is not innocent: Black Lives Matter, policing and abolition in the UK," *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 40, no. 1: 21–28.

capitalism, whose goal is accumulation through racially differentiated modes of violence. Gilmore (2017; 2023) implores us to understand the relationship between organised violence and organised abandonment, arguing that abolition requires political subjects to cleave the two apart so that the needs of oppressed subjects might be met through infrastructures of care in which, life is understood as *precious* and therefore worthy of protection. In outlining the image's specificity, the researcher understands "what" the object pertains to and can begin to make connections between the present political conjuncture and what must be done to oppose it. In this instance, both images, as I have argued, are concerned with the carceral state. As a researcher attempting to connect this specificity with my own political condition, I turn my attention to the operation of carcerality in the social landscape in which I am situated. The political impasse that has resulted in forms of affective stasis in political subjects to which this thesis attends is in part related to the failure of the state to eliminate the threats inherent to policing as well as the Conservative government's expansion of police power, most notably through the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.[80] Individuals who came to political consciousness from 2011-16 time contend with the aftermath of a world in which Black subjects are routinely slaughtered without recourse to "justice," which compounds the notion that no meaningful political interventions can be made to transform their material conditions. The object's specificity then, instructs us towards the necessity of a continued critique of police power in the United Kingdom that, like Afropessimist critique instructs, should not look to the state for redress. The connection incurred between the present moment and the object's specificity is a requirement for the researcher to understand *how* the cultural object is related to the current political condition by finding connections and noticing patterns which open up new ways of assessing the present and what must be done in order to constitute a liberated future.

To think through the dimensions of the images, I turn towards their measurable aspects. This project has at every turn rejected an overtly scientific mode for understanding and relating to cultural objects, so rather than name specific aspects of the images that are quantifiable using a scientific rationale, I turn instead toward a visual reading of the images that illuminates the extent of their representations of desires for abolition, or proto-abolition from political subjects. I do so, following Campt (2017), by visibiling the details of the image (their Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential) that depict performances of resistance by political subjects. The measurable aspects of these archival images are the extent to which their details emit resistant

[80] See Liberty, "How does the new Policing Act affect my protest rights?", *Liberty Blog*, Accessed December 1, 2023, https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice_information/pcsc-policing-act-protest-rights/.

affects. In her work, Campt seeks to "animate the recalcitrant affects of quiet as an undervalued lower range of quotidian audibility" (Campt 2017, 4). I enact a similar method, one that attends to the confrontational, pugnacious, insurgent performances of resistance from political subjects trapped in landscapes of dispossession. That is, I perform a reading that measures the extent to which affects of resistance enter and circulate into a forcefield of relation in ways that touch the emotional landscapes of political subjects in the present, pushing them towards action.

The evocative phrasing, **MET POLICE, BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS** in Figure 30 which adorns the banner clearly visible behind the individual in the foreground calls forth a guttural and violent image in the mind of the viewer that rewrites a sanitised notion of policing as a public good. The charge: **BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS** moves the viewer away from the individualising turn of the court system, Wayne Cousens comes to represent, not a wayward or "lone" police officer but a tangible threat posed to all women's lives by the police. I read Figure 30 as evidence of a form of direct-action and as a performance of resistance. The direct intervention into the space, the notable presence of political actors making an abolitionist argument provides an accessible anti-hegemonic political claim for a general audience in the moment of its capture. In this moment, witnesses to the protest are invited, through the affects of resistance produced by the act of protest, to develop an attachment to abolitionist politics, just as the political subjects in the image have. Direct-action involves the public by forcing them to bear witness to the political demand. The moment the image is captured and externalised for public display online and for critical analysis in this thesis, it affirms the liberatory attachments to freedom which constituted the act it depicts.

To consider the image as an external object is to become privy to the power of resistant affect and to feel the effects of the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential it contains. To return to Franks' (2006) notion that direct-action is synecdochic in nature, the actor we see in the image, flare raised to the skies, identity concealed, represents the principles of an abolitionist politic including direct confrontation with the state, collective mobilisation and political education. They come to stand in for the contemporary practices, theoretical interventions and modes of struggle which seeks to ask why and how prisons and policing became the answer to social problems. The extent to which Figure 30 produces a resistant affect in its viewer is also measurable by virtue of the image's circulation online. Its reproduction via forms of media: in articles, google images searches and on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram demonstrate its striking nature. The image touches the emotional landscapes of political subjects

in the present because it evidences a core strategic principle, the necessity to maintain an unashamed antagonism towards the dispossessive arms of the state.

I read the measurable aspects of Figure 30 via its detail against those of Figures 31 and 32 in order to arrive at a conclusion regarding the extent to which both images enter resistant affects capable of moving political subjects beyond stasis into a forcefield of relation. As previously stated, the main photograph in Figure 31 shows a Black political subject holding a megaphone, standing below a sign which reads **"BROADWATER FARM DEFENCE CAMPAIGN."** Because of the way the image is cropped, the viewer has little sense of where the image was taken or if the individuals in it are trespassing. The word "DEFENCE" is important here, though a minor detail, it provides some sense of the group's intentions and posture. Defence implies a threat that must be eliminated. To defend is an outward gesture, a means of shielding against forms of violence, and preserving another entity. Both images position policing as an imminent threat, forcing the viewer to position themselves on either side of a binary: threat or threatened. The effect of this penetrates a static structure of feeling by injecting a sense of urgency into the political subject's conceptions of themselves and their community. This urgency is tied to the subject's recognition of themselves as under threat. It invites them to take up the defensive task demonstrated to them by the political subjects in the images. The affective resonances of both images jolt the viewer into action via community defence. Viewers look at the images and recognise the necessity of an antagonistic stance toward the police in that moment. They then apply the same logic to their own material condition. The camera angles ensure that the subjects in the image confront the viewer's gaze whilst police officers watch over them at short and long distances. In Figure 31, the political subject is captured from a slightly lowered angle, she towers in the frame, adding a gravitas to her speech. In Figure 30, the lone subject stands at the centre of the image. The viewer is immediately overwhelmed by their strong and bellicose stances. The positioning of bodies affirms the existence of another way of being. They are on *the right side of the front line* which must be protected. Their representative positions emerge from the interdependence of political subjects that are threatened by police power. Both images propose an alternative to police power by implying that defence against threats established by the state though care, community protection and forms of mutual aid hold their own power and can sustain life. It is this emphasis, on the sustenance of life in the face of death, police harassment and surveillance, that enables their resistant affects to break through political impasse and their status as images in order reshape the desires of the viewer. They push the viewer towards action precisely because their hostility to state violence produces an alternative vision for how the future could be organised.

**Strategic principles**

I contrast another detail of Figure 31, the megaphone, with the flare held in the hand of the individual in Figure 30. Both objects are visual signals of amplification; the megaphone amplifies one's voice, whilst the flare signals a warning, a sign of distress or is a means of focusing attention on a person, place or thing. Both visual signals are introduced into the space in the same manner as a raised fist, an image that I suggested in *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, "signifies the inevitability of our rising up and breaking through" (Olufemi 2021, 109). Both images are striking in this regard, their resistant affects are produced in the representation of self-assertion and confrontation with sites of state power. The resistance captured in them becomes a spectacle through the use of political instruments as a means of building political consciousnesses in those who witness it. All three figures evidence the threats to security that public performances of radical politics entail. In Figure 31, the political actor seems to be defying the surveillance of the police officer who looms behind them in order to speak. This visual representation of the looming dominance of the state and its violent wing in such close proximity to a gendered and racialised figure who is purposefully ignoring and evading its gaze, brings to the forefront the explicit danger incurred in acts of resistance. The woman in question turns her back towards the state, she faces outward (presumably addressing an audience) and seeks to amplify an alternative message, one that emphasises the power of the collective in response to institutional violence. The megaphone contributes to an excess of resistant affect of Figure 31 because the positioning of the political actor draws attention to the fact that she (if gender is to be assumed) and others, are engaged in an act of public disobedience as a means of communicating politicised information. This call is emitted beyond the image's four corners, it is received by the political subject that engages with it who is moved by her display of resistance. The image expands the cloud of possibility that emerges between the viewer and the notion of a liberated future by connecting them through the political subject's performance of resistance.

**Making connections**

I have commented on the detail (Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential), specificity and dimensions of Figures 30, 31 and 32. If the specificity of the image relates to the failures and immanent threats to life experienced by Black people at the hands of the carceral state in the United Kingdom, the researcher and resistant movements can extract this strategic marker as a focus for research and practical action in the construction of futurity. The images reveal that the carceral state must be a key focus because, despite their existence almost twenty years apart, their parallels in this regard are striking. Regarding the image's dimensions, I have demonstrated

their measurable aspects, showing how and why the images produce an excess of resistant affect capable of penetrating political impasse, reshaping the viewer's desires and moving them towards resistant action. The details of the images (the use of microphones and flares, the text which adorns the banners in each image, the posture of the individuals in the foreground) announce their refusal by positioning themselves antagonistically against state force. They ooze with a desire for a different set of social relations.

To return to the question of a scalar politics, let us examine how both images display the presence of certain ethics, values, practices and principles that must be present in a liberated future and what other strategic principles they contain that might aid the development of present-day social movements. We might identify the following ethics, values and/or principles from engagement with both images: firstly, the maintenance of an antagonistic relationship to the police and state power, one that affirms the confrontation necessary to defend communities under threat. Secondly, an ethics of collectivity and interdependence derived from the action of community defence, cultivating means of connection that sustain a refusal of the state through revolutionary organisations, activist groupings and mutual aid.

The detail of the images suggests the need for widespread, organised public education which communicates the extent of police violence to the public as a means of building collective political consciousness. The nature of the language in use in both figures, **"MET POLICE BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS," "BROADWATER FARM DEFECE CAMPAIGN,"** is bold and disruptive, warning grassroots resistance movements against capitulation. It points towards a notion of futurity that is centred on collective political demand. The details of the cultural objects pose the following question: in the face of promises of reform by the state and its institutions, how do resistant movements maintain an expressly antagonistic orientation to it in the construction of futurity? Such inferences are examples of the consequences of a scalar politics and evidence that the cultural object is not merely a dormant and passive container for symbol, but an active participant in revealing the strategic markers that aid the construction of a contingent future. In drawing out these principles using a scalar politics, I hope to have demonstrated how scalar analysis draws out the materialist considerations, strategies, ethics and principles that must be present in that future as well as the types of materialist political action on which it depends.

**Capacious, bold, exacting and demanding**

This chapter has made several claims. First, that redefining relationships with the future requires the abandonment of linear conceptions of temporality expressed through relationships of domination and/or ownership. The notion that the future can be won, secured or predicted as a totality must give way to an embrace of radically contingent approach that recognises indeterminacy, uncertainty and conditionality as a means of bypassing affective stasis. It has noted the need to construct futurity using a new grammar based on the real future conditional, as defined by Black feminist scholar Tina Campt (2017). It examined the semantic pillars of contingency through analysis of interview excerpts with three participants, Alex Kelbert, Gail Lewis and Jacob Joyce. In the latter sections of this chapter, I applied a scalar visual analysis to three images, arguing that these images are a starting point for the extraction of specific forms of information, ethics, values and principles that must be present in a liberated future and aid the development of present-day resistance movements whose actions produce the grammar of a liberatory futurity. Cultural objects contain strategic markers of futurity that reveal themselves through analysis and engagement, these markers aid in a material analysis of the present moment as well enabling the identification of what the future requires. These claims are made in an attempt to understand how the imagination contained in cultural production brings us closer a construction of futurity that rejects hegemonic clock-time.

To unlock a temporality not organised around the affective charge of defeat and stasis, the future must emerge as a thoroughly conditional on resistant materialist action and intimately connected to what political subjects do in the present. It cannot simply proceed the present. Cultural objects inform this analysis by holding those markers of the future, created by the imagination and represented in Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, that must be drawn upon up as part of a political strategy for creation of a future condition. Against prediction, such an approach affirms a future which cannot be foretold through mapping or narrative construction but instead requires a rejection of the desire for mastery. An analysis of cultural objects from the past and present reveals the necessity of embracing conditionality when organising in response to world-historical event. Alongside this, serious engagement with cultural objects as agents that participate in the construction of futurity as well as a recognition of their power in shaping structures of feeling when engaged in can produce political subjects intent on building the future, rather than winning it. A reconceptualization of futurity *and* the role of the culture in materialist resistance might birth a politics so capacious, bold, exacting and demanding that it

sustains the ongoing small and large scale political transformations capable of extricating us from a violent world.

# CONCLUSION: A RETURN TO INTIMACY AND DIALOGUE?

*Our lives are never fully encompassed and limited by all of these processes and structures, there's always excess. And that brings you back again to the quotidian…there we can begin to think 'other possibilities are possible', other ways of imagining who we might be in the future if we do this now. – Gail Lewis*

At every stage in the research process, as I have attempted to identify the uses of the imagination in the cultural production of anti-racist and feminist movements, locate the strategic markers of futurity embedded in them and demonstrate how the imagination challenges temporal limits, two concerns have preoccupied me. How does the researcher make a serious case for creative engagement with the imagination via cultural objects without compromising the materialist analysis required for political struggle or overemphasising the importance of creativity as a strategy for resistance? How does the construction of my research methodology reflect my belief in collaboration and the imagination as a relational process best accessed collectively? Gail Lewis captures these anxieties when she remarks, "our lives are never fully encompassed and limited by all these processes and structures" (Lewis 2019, 415). To break through the affective stasis felt by many, to remove the stranglehold of political impasse caused by neoliberalism that defines our present conjuncture in the United Kingdom, proponents of materialism must understand their duty to rebuild an emancipatory structure of feeling. Creative engagement adds a felt texture to the world, as I stated at the beginning of this thesis, I return to aesthetic works in times of crisis because the knowledge they bear replenishes my depleted reserves, helps me to think and act differently. This was the logic behind the creation of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE,** which uses aesthetics to synthesise these concerns, in the hope of producing and reproducing the feeling that more is possible. As a phenomenon, the imagination exists in excess of the "truth" of political condition, it is the driving force of the radicalism necessary to ensure the destruction of state violence and oppressive power. This project has tried, at every level, to embrace the notion that history is cyclical rather than linear, that we can access it in ways that change us. It sits with the impatience of those political subjects who long for *something else* and has tried to challenge the representational aspects of capitalism, the severance of the collective body that created the image of the individual worker.

I pose the question, "A return to intimacy and dialogue?" to end this thesis in order to come back to the *excess* of oppressive structures: the quotidian. It is true that the definitional power of capitalism devours everything, but it is also true that there are *otherwise* forces, intensities, modes of being and relating that defy it. The imagination is one such force, as a process of bringing that which does not previously exist into being, it can never be fully exhausted, clarified, investigated, or explained. It maintains an obscurity that skirts the boundaries of scientific knowledge, impervious to domination and hermeneutical certainty. I hope to have demonstrated how, in its usage and location in cultural objects, it poses questions that can only be answered by another set of questions. A core part of this project is built upon a rejection of the strictures of linear temporality and the predominance of stadial conceptions of history as a prerequisite for understanding world-historical event. I have argued that linear conceptions of temporality produce an affective stasis by consigning radical movements to cycles of victory and defeat in a framework of forward movement, in which they never "progress" far enough. Engagement with Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in cultural objects via the topological distortion encouraged through touch counters the notion that the past, present and future are distinct temporal regimes. It makes the past and future *available* to political subjects in the present and reveals the flow of time as multi-directional, increasing their attachment to undertaking resistant actions that can transform the present. In the workshop space, in the archive, in the process of interview and in the solitary and collective moments that created this body of work, in the act of "touching," I watched temporality dissemble. Linearity was pulled apart by strange lingering's, recurrences, feelings of familiarity brought about by creative engagement with cultural objects. Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential, what I have called, "a cousin to the freedom dream," is a substance capable of instantiating resistant politics. It is the signature individuals and collectives leave in the cultural objects they create in the process of a collective refusal of the world as is.

I have argued that the imagination is both constitutive of resistant cultural production and a consequence of it, releasing affects which produce and affirm resistant desire. Those desires become the material used in the construction of a liberatory structure of feeling, even as desolation abounds. This is not a method of hope but rather, one of political determination. I aspire to have demonstrated, through analysis of the punctum, language, encounter and exchange what political determination looks and feels like. In an attempt to reconceptualise futurity in Chapter Six, I suggested that future time is not a game of prediction but rather a theoretical framework that rejects totality, maps, blueprints in favour of flexibility, movement and contingency. The future is a lacuna which is given form through grassroots organisation

spurred on by the imagination. If we are to find beauty inside of a squalid landscape, we must insist that we are *involved* in the past, that we can access it affectively and that it helps constitute future time by providing instruction for the material interventions we undertake in the present. I intend to embolden the future researcher who adopts and contours my method to keep exploring these questions and the dimensions of touch through their own creative practice and endeavour to situate their practice materially. This work has not intended to provide a historical account of the emergence of the imagination or a densely theoretical appraisal the political economy. Rather, it has tried to refocus attention on the importance of culture's relationship to materialist political demand and concepts of freedom, revolution and liberation. It has stayed with the excess, the "feminine" overspill of grief, affect, emotion, desire, feeling and relation. All the charges that stick to us and define our experience of the world in this place and in this time. Political theory that does not attend to this excess, leaving space to analyse it through aesthetics and creative invention, does itself a disservice. I hold, like Rose Schneiderman, that *workers need bread but they need roses too*[81]. Workers who are exploited also feel the pain of that exploitation. That pain, misery, alienation and defeat calcifies, determining their capacity to make meaningful political interventions, big and small. This is why discourses of immobility abound.

At times during the research process, when my own method had yet to be fully articulated, I was intent that dialogue and collaboration remain central, as a means of mimicking the relational practices and interdependence that are key to political struggle. It was my relationships with others, my grasping for connectivity as a feminist thinker, that drove my theoretical interest in the imagination and perhaps most importantly, kept me interested in questions regarding the production of life through resistance. I turn towards cultural objects, as evidence of the production of life, because it is inside these objects, these forms of "living labour" (Marx 1887, 130), that resistant affects, *which become desires, which become impetus to resist* are represented most acutely. Inside British universities, the effects of neoliberal governance have deadened the potential to conceive of liberatory modes of social organisation. Indeed, the notion that this research project must enter an academic market to be contested, legitimised and assigned value mirrors all the modes of exchange that occur as part of wage labour under capitalism, all the modes I have tried to escape in my creative practice and theorisations. In undertaking this research project, I grappled with how its emancipatory potential would be flattened by academe.

[81] For more on the origins of the term, see Liz Rohan, "The Worker Must Have Bread, But She Must Have Roses, Too" in *The Educational Work of Women's Organizations, 1890–1960,* ed. Anne Meis Knupfer and Christine Woyshner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

But, to assuage this frustration, I follow Abeera Khan in her writing on utopic pedagogies, when she notes, "now, I find myself ambivalent to the institution and grateful for the community I have carved out within it" (Khan 2022, 327).

The most invigorating aspects of this project – the creation of a temporal landscape, the facilitation of workshops, interviews with those engaged in resistance – happened in dialogue with others. Indeed, the closest I got to experiencing the imagination's force as recursive, genealogical and teleological was through the eyes and ears of one or several interlocuters. They have given my work structure and form. They have shorn up my own resistant desire when I have been tempted to allow my weariness to take over. I cannot, therefore, conclude without nodding towards the fruitfulness of these exchanges in my conceptualisation of the imagination. I choose to end this thesis by responding to the words of others to underline the importance of cultivating and experiencing the imagination as a collective and relational force, to recreate the intimacy that affirms touch as a methodological approach. I do this to demonstrate that this kind of relation can and should be achieved in the absence of bodies. When the border, or state failure to address the consequences of a global pandemic, or the prison or any other socially violent barrier is erected, relation might be forged precisely through engagement with the Imaginative-Revolutionary Potential stored in the things we make and say about, with and for each other across time. In images stashed away in the archive, in the hapticality of language exchanged, in a political poster that adorns a neighbourhood bus stop, in a voice note or recording. Cultural objects are themselves borne from liberatory imagination and go on to facilitate a liberatory *use* of the imagination which culminates in the breaking of alienation, the production of resistant action and the development of political strategy. We needn't be beholden to the idea that a critical mass always requires a mass of bodies located in the same place or the same temporal location. When our movement is curtailed, there are other ways we can find each other.

The work of fortifying the substance that is the imagination, the work of drawing upon its markers in cultural objects requires us to undertake a theoretical task so capacious it is often derided. That task is to repair the broken structures of feeling which have produced our stagnancy, to take seriously the connection between the affective environments people live in and experience and what they are willing to do. Put simply, if resistance *feels* impossible, it becomes impossible. The imagination is a force capable of breaking stasis because it reanimates the forcefield of relations that structure everyday life. The forms of small and large scale organisation that make life worth living are constituted by imaginative forces that reject nihilism,

solipsism, "the individual," and all other forces that feed the lifeblood of capitalist violence. What we must insist on instead, is a materialist politics that is intensely social, that recognises the value of communality, of sharing and collective responsibility. Transformations in social organisation through resistance and revolution require us to build the capacity to truly *be* with one another, to build workable caring infrastructures, to understand other people as part of a social body. This theoretical work is as important as a structural analysis of production, labour, economies, markets and borders. Properly synthesising these elements into our accounts of the world might also result in less instances of interpersonal violence and disillusionment.

The affective charges driven by the imagination, the resonances, passages, and intensities that stick which I have attempted to trace in cultural objects, were produced in the presence of others. It was the presence of others in processes of methodological enquiry that ultimately, strengthened my political determination and enabled me to take my own yearning for freedom seriously. This presence, in interviews, in the collaborative creation of **THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE, YOU WILL FIND NO DIRECTION HERE,** in workshops, also implied intimacy. Berlant argues that intimacy requires "an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (Berlant 1998, 281). Intimacy has pervaded this project since its inception precisely because I did not and do not know the particularities of future time, nor can I, or my interlocutors, provide a total account of the imagination. We set about to establish a narrative together. In offering a different way of conceptualising the present, marked by ongoing and overlapping crisis, I have endeavoured to provide an intimate portrait of the necessity of using cultural objects to cultivate resistant desires in material processes of liberation. At many points throughout the research process, I felt that my "aspiration for a narrative" was shared.

1. When Gail Lewis said,

> isn't that the character of organisation? It is an iterative process, and if it's iterative, it doesn't just mean it's repeating. It means it's more like spiral time; whether the spiral goes down or upwards. There is a repetition with a difference. There's a restating of stuff that has had to be continually stated because we still live in conditions of the afterlife, if you will (Lewis 2021).

I thought about how, in order to remain focused on the goal of political transformation, a more flexible understanding of temporality and the "repeated" actions we undertake for the sake of

establishing communal environments in which our needs are met, must be established. Theoretically, grassroots political formations must integrate spiral time into their analysis. This can be done without dehistoricising the co-constitutive nature of gender, race and class. If linearity or an understanding of unidirectional progressive movement produces the *feeling* that we labour without reward, then we must reconceptualise that labour not only as a "repetition with a difference," but as recurrent, a meaningful intervention that modifies and creates alternatives, even if those modifications or alternatives are not immediately obvious to us. If history slows us down, then we must bypass it to maintain the imperative to organise.

2. When Tej Adeleye presented a striking portrait of imaginative capacity,

> imagination in that space is what is pushing you to think about what you've forgotten, who you've forgotten, what process you've overlooked. It's pushing you to consider how you have not yet reached that horizon you imagine where you've made something better (Adeleye 2021).

And then followed it with an expression of despair,

> I'm not too sure there's going to be a sweeping day of revolution when everything changes, unless an asteroid hits the earth. I don't know if that sounds really cynical, but it's the honest answer I'm going to give right now. I have faith that there are some imaginations that will carry us through and I hope that I contribute to that; but there's a very pragmatic sense of needing to do what needs to get done (Adeleye 2021).

I was reminded of the power of the present political conjuncture to produce a sense of fatalism which compounds individual feelings of alienation. Tej's expressions do not contradict each other. In fact, she impels us to recognise the necessity of pessimism, despair, grief and exasperation in the process of articulating imaginative capacity. The imagination persists despite the doubts of the individual because it gains its most potent articulation via collective action. She indicated this in her invocation that "there are some imaginations that will carry us through." Imagining is an ethical responsibility for those who are able on behalf of those who cannot. Much stronger than either "optimism" or "pessimism", it is not a fixed location but a relational process, that might be accessed, ignited and discovered amongst peoples in a variety of ways.

3. When Alex Kelbert, emphasised the importance of culture in imaginative processes,

> If we understand that the realm of culture is really fundamental to any political work (it's not distinct, or an add-on, it's not that part of the strategy needs to address culture but it's actually all part of the same thing) then obviously cultural production is a huge part of what we do. Even going back to that video, that's a way of engaging in cultural production: by putting visuals and putting words and putting frames, and throwing that somewhere and seeing what comes back, seeing where it resonates (Kelbert 2021).

I remembered the power of cultural objects to circulate, reverberate, create new openings and leave indelible marks in the process of political consciousness raising. These objects are imbued with a particular force, one that moves them closer, if they are produced by human beings, to the realm of the ontological. It bears repeating that cultural objects are not static phenomena. They are alive with all the decisions, processes, intensities, and organisational forms that created their relevancy and significance. The task of attending to cultural objects is not at odds with materialist critique. It is another dimension through which to understand the ideological force of capitalism and the social relations it produces. Cultural objects can ask questions, resolve conundrums and build connectivity when crisis prevents human beings from doing so. Culture is a site of emanation which we must recouple with the political. It is how political subjects *throw things out there* to see what sticks.

4. When an Anonymous Participant remarked,

> one thing I've noticed, is that when people stop radically reimagining the world they instead are able to be folded into quite liberal, reformist politics. When people stop radically reimagining the world, they enter institutions; and then institutions become the mechanism through which the world becomes reimagined, or understood, or made sense of, rather than it coming from ourselves, or our communities, or our histories, or more autonomous collective struggles (Participant 2023).

I was reminded that the affective stasis that defines the present political conjuncture in the United Kingdom is a direct result of the failures of neoliberalism and the proliferation or reformist solutions to the problem of state violence. A key feature of the imagination is how it can help political subjects maintain antagonism toward a violent state and its institutions. When utilised by the collective, the imagination confronts the affective failures produced by neoliberalism precisely because it circumvents belief in the viability of inclusion into the state and frameworks of legibility. Like all truly revolutionary phenomena, it cannot be contained by

the bounds of academic or institutional knowledge, it exists, as this anonymous participant argues in "ourselves, our communities, our histories and more autonomous collective struggles."

3. Finally, when Aviah Day remarked,

> I think that there is definitely an unbroken tradition and that is part of what keeps me going, knowing that it has never fully been broken. One way of thinking of it might be: the movement lost the battle, but it has not lost the war. The war of class struggle, whatever you want to call it, has not actually stopped. We're in a period now where we've suffered losses, really big losses. Lots of different things keep me going. Even with those ambivalent feelings that occur when I engage with images from the sixties and seventies, I try to remember that they did get to a point of mounting a very serious and significant challenge to capitalism and imperialism. I take it seriously when I hear Angela Davis say that in the late sixties and early seventies, her comrades really thought they were five years away from revolution, they genuinely believed it (Day 2021).

I remembered that, like Wang (2021), I insist on the luminous tree. The impetus for this project developed from my own preoccupation with manufacturing the types of desire and affect that could sustain and survive the ravages of capitalism, transform our collective structure of feeling, reinvigorate the possibility of materialist resistance and produce liveable life. It began as an investigation of the interiority of a belief, the genuine belief that revolution is possible. I end this project with a greater commitment to explicating the central role of the imagination in the construction of resistance, material and otherwise. I end with an invocation to future researchers to take the imperative to imagine seriously against all the forces that will minimise it. This project intends to add to the legacy of radical research which informs materialist political struggle, it is a critical invitation to think together about what is to be done. The imagination, an unbroken relational process constitutive of and contained in cultural objects across time can help rescue us from affective stasis that tightens the grip of a death machine world. It is the driver of the ongoing collective, militant, revolutionary action necessary to remake the world. The past is not behind us nor the future in front. *A luta continua!* (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique 1962).

**Appendices**

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