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RACE AND REPRESENTATION IN NORTHERN BRITAIN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BLACK
ATLANTIC: A CREATIVE PRACTICE PROJECT

by

Jade Montserrat

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
University of Central Lancashire

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RACE AND REPRESENTATION IN NORTHERN BRITAIN FROM THE CONTEXT OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC: A PRACTICE BASED PROJECT

Abstract

This thesis is a combination of critical and creative practice. Creative practice includes performance (*Shadowing Josephine/Revue*; Figures: 4-7, 10, 18-24, 29-34), performances-to-camera (*Clay, Peat and Cage*; Figures: 35-44), and performance drawing installation/live art/works on paper (*No Need for Clothing*, and its iterations; Figures: 45-63, 72-74). These artworks, each endowed with their own methodology and references, combine to inform an aesthetic and praxis, draw from personal experience and memory, and are constructed by means of an inherent analysis of the materials used. The body of work considers community and communality as a material axis for belonging and imagining, within and beyond the frame of artmaking and art discourse. This thesis asks the question: can making performance and live art be thought of as a grammar for drawing, with the body as a medium? Speaking of an emergent Black subjectivity in postcolonial Caribbean cinema in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall posed the question: “From where does he/she speak?” Taking this further, I ask: how might his question expand the methodological role and function of performance and location from a Northern premise?¹ And from where, therefore, is my (and by implication all Othered bodies’) space, and place? As a cisgender queer, millennial, postcolonial, mixed-heritage subject whose identity was formed in the borough of Scarborough in rural North Yorkshire, from where I currently work and live, my project provides a unique basis and new insight for political and intellectual self-positioning within Black Diasporic cultural discourse, specifically Black²

¹ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 222.

² I capitalise the ‘B’ in Black to indicate personhood, as opposed the colour black, throughout the thesis.

British artmaking and the critical art history demanded by the age of Black Lives Matter.³ In Josephine Baker (1906-75) I found a cultural icon in whom to anchor this displacement. Baker, an African American music hall legend, Black activist, and world traveller, was born in poverty in St. Louis in the US, and took Paris by storm in 1925 as Fatou in “La Folie du Jour” at Les Folies Bergère. Baker’s life and work, particularly the idea of her pivotal twentieth-century experiment of the ‘rainbow tribe’, in which she adopted a group of twelve ethnically diverse children, has stimulated me to reclaim agency, autonomy and identity-making within my practice. The work explores and expands Baker’s fairy-tale-like ideas of a modern mixed-race family from today’s climate of global, twenty-first-century issues surrounding cultural diversity and political freedom within the context of the imperial movement. Baker’s idealistic family experiment was her flawed solution to a global problem: how to transcend race.

³ See <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	4
Abstract	5 - 6
List of Illustrations and links to online work	8 - 12
Introduction	15 - 33
Methodology	34 - 53
Chapter 1	55 - 62
Chapter 2	63 - 76
Chapter 3	77 - 84
Conclusion	85 - 87
Bibliography	89 - 93

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS and links to corresponding online works (please also refer to supplementary document)

Figure 1, page 1: From *Illegal/Alien* series of self-portraits, photograph, 2011.

Figure 2, page 1: From *Illegal/Alien* series of self-portraits, photograph, 2011.

Figure 3, page 2: *Illegal/alien*, collage, 2011.

Figure 4, page 3: From *Shadowing Josephine* series of self-portraits, photograph, 2012.

Figure 5, page 3: From *Shadowing Josephine* series of self-portraits, photograph, 2012.

Figure 6, page 4: *Shadowing/Revue: Ecclesiastes V*, watercolour, gouache, ink, and pen on paper, 2017.

Figure 7, page 5: *Shadowing/Revue: Ecclesiastes VI*, watercolour, gouache, ink, and pen on paper, 2017.

Figure 8, page 6: *Josephine and the Rainbow Tribe: The Leopard*, film-still, 2014.

Figure 9, page 6: *Josephine and the Rainbow Tribe: The Leopard*, film-still, 2014.

Figure 10, page 7: Sketchbook pages imagining how I might utilize the residency space at]performance s p a c e[, 2014.

Figure 11, page 8: Reading Blaise Cendrars, followed by poetry by Maud Sulter, then text from Nancy Cunard's *Negro* for public activity in the window space (also live-streamed) that I built in to my residency at]performance s p a c e[, 2014. Documentation photograph.

Figure 12, page 9: I devised several performances in the windows of the space as public activity which were built into my residency at]performance s p a c e[, 2014. Documentation photograph.

Figure 13, page 10: Documentary photographs by Alethea Raban, *Interrogations, and Interrelations: Iterations of the Rainbow Tribe*,]performance s p a c e[, 2014

Figure 14, page 10: Documentary photographs by Alethea Raban, *Interrogations, and Interrelations: Iterations of the Rainbow Tribe*,]performance s p a c e[, 2014

Figure 15, page 11: *Covering her body with graphite dancing as a pencil*, watercolour, ink, and graphite, 2017.

Figure 16, page 12: *Sets and Spectacles*,]performance s p a c e[, Documentary photographs by Alethea Raban, 2014.

Figure 17, page 12: *Sets and Spectacles*,]performance s p a c e[, Documentary photographs by Alethea Raban, 2014.

Figure 18, page 13: *Bananas*, watercolour, gouache and ink on paper, 29 x 37 cm, 2015.

Figure 19, page 14: *Shadowing Josephine/Revue*, filmed by Matthew Noel-Tod, Outpost, Norwich, 2016.

Figure 20, page 14: *Shadowing Josephine/Revue*, filmed by Matthew Noel-Tod, Outpost, Norwich, 2016.

Figure 21, page 15: *Shadowing Josephine*, Our Naked Skin exhibition Wiltshire Creative, 2018,
photographed, filmed, and edited and mixed on the initiative of and by Adrian Harris and
Wiltshire Creative

Figure 22, page 15: *Shadowing Josephine*, Our Naked Skin exhibition Wiltshire Creative, 2018,
photographed, filmed, and edited and mixed on the initiative of and by Adrian Harris and
Wiltshire Creative

Figure 23, page 15: *Shadowing Josephine*, Our Naked Skin exhibition Wiltshire Creative, 2018,
photographed, filmed, and edited and mixed on the initiative of and by Adrian Harris and
Wiltshire Creative

Figure 24, page 15: *Shadowing Josephine*, Our Naked Skin exhibition Wiltshire Creative, 2018,
photographed, filmed, and edited and mixed on the initiative of and by Adrian Harris and
Wiltshire Creative

Figure 25: page 16: Installation photograph showing murals, *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home*, 2017.

Figure 26, page 16: Installation photograph showing murals, *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home*, 2017.

Figure 27, page 16: Installation photograph showing vitrines, *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home*, 2017.

Figure 28, page 16: Installation photograph showing vitrines, *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home*, 2017.

Figure 29, page 17: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL, photographed by Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 30, page 18: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL Festival of Performance, photographed by
Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 31, page 18: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL Festival of Performance, photographed by
Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 32, page 18: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL Festival of Performance, photographed by
Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 33, page 18: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL Festival of Performance, photographed by
Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 34, page 19: Installation photograph of *Revue*, SPILL Festival of Performance, photographed by
Christa Holka Oct 2018.

Figure 35, page 20: Double page from sketchbook, A5 pages (15.4x21.5x1.8cm, approx.), 2013-15

Figure 36, page 21: Still photograph from *Clay*, Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 37, page 21: Still photograph from *Clay*, Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 38, page 22: Still photograph from *Clay*, Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 39, page 22: Still photograph from *Clay*, Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 40, page 23: Still photograph from *Cage*, Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 41, page 23: Still photograph from. *Cage* Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 42, page 24: Still photograph from. *Cage* Jade Montserrat, and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 43, page 24: Still photograph from *Peat* Jade Montserrat and Webb-Ellis, 2015.

Figure 44, page 25: *You'll Have to Be on Your Toes*, watercolour, ink, gouache, pencil, charcoal, and pen on paper, 25x17.7 cm, 2015.

Figure 45, page 26: *No Need for Clothing*, drawing installation at Cooper Gallery/DJCAD, 2017, documentary photo by Jacquetta Clark.

Figure 46, page 26: *No Need for Clothing*, drawing installation at Cooper Gallery/DJCAD, 2017, documentary photo by Jacquetta Clark.

Figure 47, page 27: *No Need for Clothing*, drawing installation at Cooper Gallery/DJCAD, 2017, documentary photo by Jacquetta Clark.

Figure 48, page 27: *No Need for Clothing*, drawing installation at Cooper Gallery/DJCAD, 2017, documentary photo by Jacquetta Clark.

Figure 49, page 28: *No Need for Clothing*, drawing installation at Cooper Gallery/DJCAD, 2017, documentary photo by Jacquetta Clark.

Figure 50, page 29: *She saw no need for clothing other than comfort*, watercolour, ink, and crayon, 18x26cm, 2017, Collection: York Art Gallery, with thanks to Contemporary Art Society.

Figure 51, page 30: Iteration of *No Need for Clothing* at Norwich University of the Arts, 2017, documentary photograph by Caroline Fisher.

Figure 52, page 30: Iteration of *No Need for Clothing*, performance book, Norwich University of the Arts, 2017, documentary photographs by Caroline Fisher.

Figure 53, page 31: Iteration of *No Need for Clothing* at Norwich University of the Arts, 2017, documentary photographs by Caroline Fisher.

Figure 54, page 31: Iteration of *No Need for Clothing*, charcoal, Norwich University of the Arts, 2017, documentary photographs by Caroline Fisher.

Figure 55, page 32: *Untitled, [after] Frantz Fanon* installation view, "The Last Place They Thought Of", Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, April 27 - Aug 12, 2018, photo: Constance Mensh.

Figure 56, page 32: *Untitled, [after] Frantz Fanon* installation view, "The Last Place They Thought Of",

Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, April 27 - Aug 12, 2018, photo:
Constance Mensh.

Figure 57, page 33: *Anthem*, drawing installation, IPAF, Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, 2019.

Figure 58, page 33: *Anthem*, drawing installation, IPAF, Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, 2019.

Figure 59, page 34: *Instituting Care*, installation view at Bluecoat, Liverpool, photograph by Brian Roberts, 2019.

Figure 60, page 34: *Instituting Care*, installation view at Bluecoat, Liverpool, photograph by Brian Roberts, 2019.

Figure 61, page 35: *Instituting Care*, installation view at Bluecoat, Liverpool, 2019. Figure 61: photograph by Brian Roberts.

Figure 61, page 35: *Instituting Care*, installation view at Bluecoat, Liverpool, 2019. Figure 61: photograph by Brian Roberts.

Figure 63, page 36: Installation photograph of *No Need for Clothing* performance book, in FIGURE/S: drawing after Bellmer, Drawing Room, London, 20 September – 31 October 2021.

Figure 64, page 37: *Entered her room*, watercolour, gouache, pencil, pencil crayon, ink, graphite on paper 36.6 x 28.9 cm, 2016.

Figure 65, page 38: *His scalp tingled with excitement...*, watercolour, gouache, charcoal, and pencil on paper, 2015.

Figure 66, page 39: *Necessarily pass through*, Watercolour, pencil, and pencil crayon on paper, 2016.

Figure 67, page 40: *My spirit is too ancient to understand the separation*, watercolour, gouache, ink, charcoal, and pencil on paper, 2015.

Figure 68, page 41: *The glamour of her homemade stage*, watercolours, gouache, Watercolour, gouache, pencil, pencil crayon on paper, 29 x 37 cm, 2016.

Figure 69, page 42: Loose leaf from sketchbook

Figure 70, page 42: Page from sketchbook

Figure 71, page 43: Page spread from sketchbook, 16.8x12.7x2.5cm, 2015-16.

Figure 72, page 44: *In Memory of Sarah Reed*, Risograph print onto Munken Lynk 170gsm, 33.1x22.5cm, edition of 100 signed and numbered, 2018.

Figure 73, page 45: “*My anger became my motivation*”: *Baroness Lawrence on Grenfell*, 2018. Photo: Benedict Johnson.

Figure 74, page 46: Hand this piece to one Jacob Aston West (b. approx. 1941-43, Montserrat), Autumn 2018 Night Tube Map. Photo: Benedict Johnson.

Links to online works:

Shadowing Josephine, Performance to camera, Scarborough Spa, 2014, camera phone recording, 2 minutes 40 seconds. <https://vimeo.com/90449393>;

Shadowing Josephine/Revue (take1-part2 copy), performance to camera, filmed by Matthew Noel-Tod, Outpost, Norwich, 2016. <https://vimeo.com/378749029>

Shadowing Josephine/Revue (take2-handheld), performance to camera, filmed by Matthew Noel-Tod, Outpost, Norwich, 2016. <https://vimeo.com/259462143>

Josephine and the Rainbow Tribe: The Leopard made with Webb-Ellis, film, 2 minutes, 41 seconds <https://vimeo.com/91831564>

Shadowing Josephine,

Our Naked Skin exhibition Wiltshire Creative, 2018, photographed, filmed and edited and mixed on the initiative of and by Adrian Harris and Wiltshire Creative: <https://vimeo.com/313802803>

Revue, SPILL, live stream documentation, Oct 2018.

<https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/events/revue-by-jade-montserrat-live-stream/>

Revue. <http://lamama.org/revue/>

Clay Jade Montserrat and Webb-Ellis, 2015, HD video, 9 minutes. <https://vimeo.com/261390112>;

Cage Jade Montserrat and Webb-Ellis, 2015, HD video, 4 minutes.

<https://vimeo.com/webbellis/cage> Password: Hackness

Peat Jade Montserrat and Webb-Ellis, 2015, HD video, 6 minutes <https://vimeo.com/155794300>;

A time lapse video of the drawing installation at CAS is available to link through to here, which includes documentation of the 'Contagion' workshop, inviting participants to redact and add to the wall drawings:

<https://vimeo.com/358780374>

[\(Untitled \(The Wretched of the Earth, After Frantz Fanon\), "The Last Place They Thought Of", Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 2018](#) documented using time lapse, static and go-pro cameras one example here on Vimeo.

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Introduction

Central to this thesis and my artmaking process, its objectives and conceptualisation, is the question and framework prompted by Stuart Hall: “From where does he/she speak?” From my performances, live art, and performances-to-camera, I produce works on paper (or ‘performance documents’, as I have named them) as tools that evidence my process and the continued intention of my art practice: to unearth my heritage/s and affirm my position as an artist, cast adrift from my African Diaspora roots. Working from the rural North York Moors, having grown up and been educated in exclusively white environments in the North of England, has affected the formation of my identity and consequently my artmaking.

A fallout from imperialist thought is the racialised branding of space: cityscapes are cast as crime-addled, full of muggers, knife-wielding thugs, gangs, and general scary foreigners. In contrast, the ideological content of rural and suburban spaces conjures images of “white faces” engaged in pastoral, wholesome, properly English, countryside pursuits.⁴ These function to uphold imperialist dichotomies of good and bad, civilised and uncivilised, safe and dangerous, English and ‘Other’. Harnessed by our white male media and spectacularised by our largely white and male representatives in government, this ideology acts as a stranglehold on the public imagination, and its potential to think space in relation to our multi-ethnic society. Paul Gilroy, writer, theorist and educator, maps the terrain that gives birth to diasporan identities, converging rural and urban realities: “...the premise of a thinking ‘racial’ self that is both socialised and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered usually, though not always, within the fortified frontiers of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state that guarantees their continuity.”⁵ This describes the liminal threshold that racialised and gendered postcolonial subjects are contracted into from birth: to live in this world as a person of colour, or Black disabled trans person, for example, is to resist. That, coupled with resistance, is the inevitable threat towards one’s survival predicated on neo-colonialism.

⁴ Kinsman, Phil, 1995, “Landscape, Race and National Identity: The Photography of Ingrid Pollard”, *Area*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Dec.): pp. 300-10.

⁵ Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1993), p. 31.

The chief concern in Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* is "with the variations in modern experience and with the decentered and inescapably plural nature of modern subjectivity and identity",⁶ a theoretical insight with which to begin unpacking ethnic difference. Further to this, Claudette Johnson, Manchester-born artist and contemporary of artists Sonia Boyce, Lubaina Himid, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney, and Marlene Smith, wrote of these womanist⁷ sensibilities:

The experience of near annihilation is the ghost that haunts the lives of [Black] women in Britain daily. The price of our survival has been the loss of our sense of ownership of both land and body. The ownership of our ancestors' bodies was in the hands of slave owners. The horrors of slavery and racism, a very effective economic model, have left us with the knowledge that every aspect of our existence is open to abuse [...] This is reinforced by the experience of a kind of social and cultural invisibility [...] As women, our sexuality has been the focus of grotesque myths and imaginings.⁸

The Transatlantic legacy, with its phantoms, ruptures, rips, and quicksand, engorges on Black death spectacle, and rather than curb the slaughter of brown and Black people we never get a time to digest, to

⁶ Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 46.

⁷ Womanism is a social theory and movement. The intersecting axis that womanism revolves around centres Black Diasporan femininity and culture, as both experiential condition and lens through which one's gaze and visions enact sisterhood and solidarities against multiform oppressions and subjugations relating to class, race, and gender. Coined by African American writer Alice Walker, womanism remains however contested in definition and has been expanded and revised by subsequent writers and thinkers. In her fable on pornography 'Coming Apart', Alice Walker explains that "'Womanist' approximates 'black feminist', and although the usage of term goes beyond this, all definitions characteristically and adamantly reject white feminism. Black women have historically felt unseen by white feminists, as well as having been, and continue to be, excluded. Womanism additionally makes evident an embrace of men, which we may observe is an altogether softer sensibility than the oppositional stance offered by white Eurocentric Western feminism. Womanism is Black worlding. By that, I understand womanism to be an inter-relation between Blackness and female identifying persons, united in a continued struggle against neo-Imperialist structures that at best impede creativity, while certainly massacring routes for spirituality, in short, united in obtaining the necessary freedoms for Black women to live full joyful lives premised on love."

Walker, Alice, "Coming Apart" *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (The Women's Press, London, 1971), p. 48.

⁸ Claudette Johnson, "Issues Surrounding the Representation of the Naked Body of a Woman", *Feminist Art News*, vol. 3, no. 8, pp. 12-14. Quoted in Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art A History Since the 1950s* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), pp. 145-56.

grieve the enormity of each precious life violently taken, we bewail strategies of torture that distort and dehumanise. Therefore, through self-referentiality, exploring the loss and emergence of identity, how might a theoretical practice-led critique of Black Diaspora eventually push against monological autonomy within my work?

This research project maintains that structural racism is conceived through racialised hegemony and that an art practice that moves beyond the private sphere challenges such hierarchies, leading to considerations of a more democratic praxis. The work I make interacts with specific societal modes such as Black Lives Matter, historical campaigns such as the abolition of slavery and Josephine Baker's praxis (and the politics they invoke). These modes meet to activate the spaces in which my artwork, and myself as an artist, are represented; they refute the obfuscation of an art history that is beyond the frame of colonialist narratives – “beyond the reach of even the well-educated”, as Hall said in his keynote speech at the 1992 national conference *Whose Heritage? The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Britain's Living Heritage*. Earlier in the same address, Hall observes that “the existence of major ‘other modernisms’, with their own indigenous roots elsewhere, passes without serious attention”. While considerable shifts have been made since, I too aim to counteract this still-dominant narrative that continues to marginalise people of the African Diaspora. Paul Gilroy's essay ‘Living memory: a meeting with Toni Morrison’ emphasises Morrison's objective as a writer: to centre Black people in her novels, which are written for Black people. Referencing her Pulitzer-winning, semi-fictionalised slave narrative *Beloved*, Gilroy observes that:

Morrison sees the intensity of the slave experience as something that marks out blacks as the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which have become the substance of everyday life in our own time.⁹

My challenge is to look at British Imperial history and the economic rationale for maintaining structural racism, in efforts to insert my artwork into a Black British art history. I intend to honour a legacy that, by the very nature of being Black and British and centring Other stories, has had to resist a Eurocentric history of art and artmaking in attempts to be read on its own terms. I apply to the necessity for my work to exist Hall's observation, that we would otherwise lack “the resources – the cultural capital – of their own ‘heritage’, as a base from which to engage other traditions. They will in effect be culturally ‘monolingual’ if not silenced – literally, deprived of the capacity to speak – in a world which requires us all to be or become

⁹ Gilroy, Paul, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p.178.

culturally bi- if not multi-lingual.”¹⁰ This thesis argues that the artworks I have made are expressions that move beyond subordination to prevailing ideas and narratives of Britishness – especially British heritage and culture. This is particularly true of works made in the North York Moors landscape, a trilogy of performances to camera called *Clay, Peat, and Cage* (Figures: 35-44). It is also true of my drawing installation work made using charcoal obtained from a local burner, originally called *No Need for Clothing* (Figures 45-49), which has developed through various iterations. It is also present in my work made in relation to Josephine Baker and her ‘rainbow tribe’ (Figures: 4-7, 10, 18-24, 29-34).

This thesis is a thorough attempt to provide the contextual research, reflection and understanding of my praxis and practice. These invariably use my body as subject and witness, to think through and present ideas about race and representation. I suggest that each element of the work discussed here is in conversation with my catalogue raisonné. Therefore, my practice is informed by heterogenous sources and resources, processes, and observations, which Hall terms “this ‘diaspora aesthetic’”¹¹ in reference to Caribbean identities, “the aesthetics of the ‘cross-overs’, of ‘cut-and-mix’” and bricolage. I am concerned with interrogation of the objects I produce: their material structure, art historical and contemporaneous positioning, and my own subjectivity. An aim of this project is to reaffirm a “form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak”.¹² Coming to reflect on the artwork as in dialogue with the critical writing of Stuart Hall ensures that I might enunciate with greater confidence on how my personal identity and links to the African Diaspora is reflected in my artwork, and why this work matters within the context of Black British artmaking, culture and heritage. My art practice serves to carve out methods from which to safely speak and speak with care: to work in concert with others like me, with marginalised identities. This project considers the artwork as working in tandem with understandings of how British culture has and continues to shape my personal identity, and how this in turn impacts my artwork, which is constructed iteratively, often intuitively. As such, my work constitutes the development of identity and significance that Hall discusses in relation to identity

¹⁰ Hall, Stuart, “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Post-Nation”, *Third Text*, vol. 13, no. 49, p. 34 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528829908576818>.

¹¹ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 236.

¹² Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, pp. 236-37.

formation: “identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”.¹³

Stuart Hall’s ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ is the closing essay included in an anthology titled *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (1990), edited by Jonathan Rutherford. It is now unclear to me whether I named my residency and exhibition at Outpost Gallery Studios in Norwich (2017; Figures: 25-28) after Rutherford’s essay from the same book in reference to it, or not, but it is latterly that I have come to read the text analytically. In *A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference*, Rutherford describes a condition of Otherness, which I compare with Baker’s adopted children. In my own upbringing, the Otherness that Rutherford writes about so perceptively elicited fear and created a problem. In my family my Blackness, my Otherness, was a hushed rift from the perspective of normative family-making. Rutherford writes about how difference, relocated from hegemonic and dominant identities and identity-making, can turn from “sites of oppression and discrimination into spaces of resistance”.¹⁴ I argue that my artwork performs and is the mode for my resistance. In a similar vein to Hall, who ventures that such identities are always becoming and in-production and political, Rutherford proclaims that “the place I am writing from is somewhere in motion”, that “identification, if it is to be productive, can never be with some static and unchanging object. It is an interchange between self and structure, a transforming process”.¹⁵ Therefore, the question “from where does he/she speak?” is always and already complicated by hybridity. Reinforcing the “weave of differences” that permeates the formation of identification in the African diaspora, Hall, later in *The Fateful Triangle: Race Ethnicity Nation* (2017), explicates in a passage on the primal scenes, or “contact zones” where these formations revolve as

[having] always been the scene of cultural hybridization, creolization, and syncretism-in short, scenes of diaspora formation where different cultures not only intersect but are obliged to modify

¹³ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 222.

¹⁴ Rutherford, Jonathan, *A Place Called Home* in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) p.12.

¹⁵ Rutherford, Jonathan, “A Place Called Home”, pp. 13-14; *The Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home*, Outpost Studios Residency, 1-30 July 2017

themselves in the face of one another. What situations like this call for is neither the refusal of difference nor its hardening and fixing, but its constant and ongoing negotiation.¹⁶

Returning to Rutherford, he contends that “our class subjectivities do not simply co-exist alongside our gender”. He continues: “rather our class is gendered, and our gender is classed”, professing that “this process of the combining of elements into a ‘third term’ has been called articulation”. I argue that these intersecting axes rotate in relation to race. The foundations from which my identity was built have, since entering the PhD programme, been entirely rocked and the subsidence caused now makes for irreparable ground. The work I have made on location in my original home of the rural North York Moors – where the only family I have contact with, my mother, still lives – and in relation to watching, listening to, reading about, and (to some extent) attempting to embody Josephine Baker, has aligned me and my artmaking to a new and unfamiliar space of intentional resistance. Rutherford describes the impact of this position of resisting from margins: “The assertion of its existence threatens to deconstruct those forms of knowledge that constitute the subjectivities, discourses and institutions of the dominant hegemonic formations.”¹⁷

A critical art history and an intersectional critical theory encompassing gender, race and class is bound to the future of heritage, and to society’s understandings of heritage.¹⁸ Heritage is bound to cultural organisations, the ‘heritage-makers’ that display my artwork. The artwork I make surveys exhibition spaces from a holistic viewpoint while also gathering information about the working practices employed by the institution that has commissioned the artwork from me, and their role within the wider industry – ‘the art world’. My artwork is wedded to the organisation that develops it, and – as with personal identity formation – the identities that the artwork comprises incorporate the weight of the history of the organisation in which it is shown. Invariably, the work I make considers how the museum, when afforded the opportunity to work

¹⁶ Hall, Stuart, *The Fateful Triangle: Race Ethnicity Nation* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017) p. 166. “Weave of differences” is a term Hall uses on p. 169.

¹⁷ Rutherford, Jonathan, “A Place Called Home”, p. 22.

¹⁸ “Intersectionality” is a framework coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who developed the term from her analysis of Black women’s employment experiences, to demonstrate how race and gender intersect to exclude and further marginalise. Crenshaw, Kimberlé, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour,” *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Crenshaw, Gotinda, et al (New York: New Press, 1995).

within them, can be understood as a powerful agent that works to shape history, or perhaps how an organisation in which my work is exhibited fosters a sense of belonging for the constituents it serves. However, transparency is often elusive and working practices are opaque within the cultural sector, as the work I make is often dependent on budgets that prioritise programming within a certain timeframe. These factors conspire to ensure that this aspect of my artistic methodology remains aspirational: I cannot yet make whatever I want to make, therefore my current praxis comprises ongoing continual research, mine is a practice-in-development.

Much of my work that is critical of the function and practices of museums and cultural organisations requires that I address this in my own time, unpaid and beyond my individual practice. There is more scope and safety to critique the institution when working outside of it. This critical work, that also informs my individual practice, is by necessity achieved collaboratively, in solidarity with artworkers invariably working outside of the institution, often working as educators in universities on precarious working contracts. Stuart Hall critiques cultural institutions' deployment of 'heritage', observing "the emphasis given to preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists – as opposed to the production and circulation of new work in different media, which takes a very definite second place".¹⁹ My Ph.D. aims to contribute to a creative and critical field that works to further destabilise this still-pervasive status quo. This project considers and reflects on my formal cultural education, which provides me with an experiential understanding of how culture can be utilised as a tool with which to impose and authorise identity, an identity I recognise as constantly under scrutiny and always an inferior simulacrum, to the annoyance of the hegemonic idea of British identity. I identify with Hall's observation of the Victorian legacy, which was to educate "the citizenry in those forms of 'really useful knowledge' ... which would refine the sensibilities of the vulgar and enhance the capacities of the masses. This was the true test of their 'belongingness': culture as social incorporation."²⁰ I identify with this tactical use of edification when I reflect on how I came to attend the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where I undertook a BA in the History of Art between 2000-2003.

I had always assumed that I would become a solicitor like my mother's husband. I spent my formative years filing and photocopying in his offices, wanting to emulate the staff of women workers in his

¹⁹ Hall, Stuart., "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 23.

²⁰ Hall, Stuart., "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 24.

employ. It is strange to me that I spent so much time in those offices, a building that I now associate with the public library next door, but which I never went to with either of my caregivers. However, when I came to apply to university through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), my mother's husband explained that a career in law was not the route I should be taking. He was very persuasive, and I approached my A-level art teacher at the local sixth form college I attended about pursuing further education in the arts. This art teacher was my go-to, because despite our very rocky relationship – I would go weeks without attending his class because of his imposing and argumentative behaviours (coupled with my own) – he was impressed with my ability to copy from reproductions, my adeptness at observational drawing, and my ability to pick up technique. I grew up as an only child in a very rural home that did not receive terrestrial television, mains electricity, central heating, or other comforts that are usually found in modern households. We were without immediate neighbours, and socialising with friends or family was discouraged, particularly by my stepfather. I did not, therefore, understand fully the cultural significance of television personality and art historian Sister Wendy Beckett, who I have to thank for a broad introduction to a European art history. I was not, however, completely unfamiliar with artists of the past. My mother, a naturally gifted draughtsperson, was studying for her teaching qualification when I started primary school, enabling her to also study the artists she loved as part of her elective studies. Postcards were visible in our home of paintings by Stanley Spencer and Lucien Freud. Later, she introduced me to Paula Rego. These three artists' painterly emphasis on flesh and the body, society and spatialisation, narrative and interrogation of the self, remain a lasting influence. I did not know until I came to apply to the Courtauld Institute of Art that a stand-alone subject called History of Art existed; the book we studied at A-level, which supposedly encompassed the history of art, was after all called *Sister Wendy's Story of Painting*. My art teacher was on a national examination board, and my sketchbooks, with his direction, essentially contained my copies from the reproductions of European masters' paintings illustrated in Sister Wendy's book. I recall him borrowing them to use as examples of a high grade during my time there. When I came to ask for his advice about university, he suggested I apply for a course called History of Art. The audacity to become an artist was out of the realms of possibility for me at this time: I refused to consider it as something I could own, independent of my mother's influence. My then-art teacher qualified this suggestion by proposing that I apply to the most prestigious place to study this subject, the Courtauld Institute of Art. His warning that only people from Eton and Harrow schools, both private boys' schools, received a place there fuelled my sudden determination to apply to this school, where I studied the (Western conception of) History of Art as the only Black woman in my year group of forty people – one of whom was Japanese, the rest white European. I was also acutely influenced by my mother's desire for recognition of her own artmaking. At fourteen or fifteen

years old, I attended life drawing classes at the local Crescent Arts centre²¹ with her, and although I was initially nervous and uncomfortable, the discipline remains rooted as fundamental to my approach to artmaking and observation. My mother has maintained a life drawing practice since I started primary school, and when she went back into education studying towards her teacher training degree, she specialised in fine art. While as a family we did little other than focus on mealtimes (which were extravagant and very delicious), watching videos (mostly repeating the Joan Hickson episodes of Agatha Christie's *Miss Marple*) and preparing for the shooting season, my mother, with great fervour, dipped in and out of life drawing class. My mother has attended them consistently since and has run her own life drawing classes regularly over the last decade. On receiving an offer from the Courtauld, I felt that my mission had begun: to attain the recognition my mother stressed that she wanted and I felt she has deserved. My walls in my university halls of residence were covered with my mother's life drawings. During several of my returns to live with my mother since, I have spent periods of time attempting to archive and contextualise her work.

The assumptions made by the Courtauld, an institution that specialises only in the history of art and its material conservation, were that students already knew something substantial about the history of art and what it offered in terms of a career, and that we had or knew how to access culture (diversity was not then an issue I was aware that I could demand as integral to my accessing a broad curriculum). There was neither pastoral care on offer during my time there, nor careers advice post-graduation. I suggest that this experience alloys with Hall, who asked: "then, who is the Heritage *for*? In the British case the answer is clear. It is intended for those who 'belong' – a society which is imagined as, in broad terms, culturally homogenous and unified."²² Hall names this all-pervading narrative as "that great unspoken British value – 'whiteness'"²³ and continues:

It will require a substantially enhanced programme of training and recruitment for curators, professionals, and artists from the 'minority' communities, so that they can bring their knowledge and experience to bear on transforming dominant and exhibitionary habits.²⁴

²¹ See <https://www.crescentarts.co.uk>

²² Hall, Stuart, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 26.

²³ Hall, Stuart, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 28.

²⁴ Hall, Stuart, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 31.

Pre-empting by several decades #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, two cultural signifiers of the global response to injustice premised on racism and sexism, Hall recognised that:

The agenda will itself have to be open and diverse, representing a situation which is already crosscut by new and old lateral connections and reciprocal global influences and which refuses to stand still or stabilise.²⁵

It could be argued that Brexit narrows Hall's suggestion that 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' might be reimagined as inclusive concepts, because rather than the cosmopolitanism offered by a European identity, Brexit was in part about restricting freedom of movement which is naturally a precursor to inclusivity. However, it forecloses the conversation were this thesis to propose that Brexit emblematises "a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, 'tight little island'".²⁶

Hall suggests that the production of identity requires not an archaeological approach, as such, but a re-telling of the past. Artist and filmmaker Michelle Williams Gamaker's term 'fictional activism' is an innovative process of reimagining the past, and one I intend to explore beyond this thesis. Williams Gamaker embodies and revamps Hollywood actors and films from the past, with an emphasis on the imposition played on minoritised actors during the British Raj. Williams Gamaker explains that the strategy of fictional activism employed in her filmmaking

...puncture[s] our polite collusion in suspension of disbelief, an object that draws from the realities of the subjects and the fantasies of the source material... where subjectivity slips into specimen... Part of the process of *Fictional Activism* is to resist drawing from one source, but to take multiple sources to encourage the plurality of sources as a strategy to make the film that we encounter harder to digest as a fictional object.²⁷

This method for production is similar to the retelling that Hall describes, and which is central to this project: concurrently narrativising my own history, oftentimes made through the vector of Josephine Baker and her praxis, and reclaiming my agency and autonomy as an artist and Black woman, to shape and share a future that centralises creativity and centres marginalised voices. Josephine Baker is a device for imagining, reimagining and role playing, serving as a surrogate for my own Blackness. I am an adoptee of her

²⁵ Hall, Stuart, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 31.

²⁶ Hall, Stuart, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", p. 31-2.

²⁷ Williams Gamaker, Michelle, "On Fictional Activism: Exploring the Film Trilogy *Dissolution* (2019)", in Katy Deepwell (ed.), *Feminist Art and Activisms* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2020), p. 47.

Blackness, which I employ as signifier towards a fuller ownership of my own whole identity. Traversing the autobiographical through slave narratives, contemporaneous writers to her ancestors and family, Toni Morrison appeals to the sensibility I describe on approaching how I ‘access’ the likes of Josephine Baker, explaining that: “...these people are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior.”²⁸ This relational approach to artmaking constitutes a revelation of Baker to myself, in my own, slow time – my investment in this project is life-long. My research on Baker remains limited and admittedly superficial; this project signals as much a commitment to a fuller discovery of her and myself to myself, as it does any finality or conclusion. The work is driven by continued bafflement and bemusement, astonishment and obsession, desire and ambition around her life and work, and my ideas that are generated because of her. In the same essay, Hall speaks about Armet Francis’ photographs as texts. In the case of Josephine Baker, I imagine her life and work as a textural stimulus, restorative of “an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past”.²⁹

Between 2014 and 2015 I worked at Rivington Place in London, as front of house staff and invigilator. I was living in London, having been invited onto my first paid residency, which was at]performance s p a c e[in Deptford (Figures 10-14 and 16-17), a thoroughly warm, generous and productive time.³⁰ Needing to supplement my income, I applied to work at Rivington Place, a publicly funded building designed by architect David Adjaye and purpose-built to house the organisations Iniva, the Stuart Hall

²⁸ Morrison, Toni, “The Site of Memory”, in *Inventing Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, William Zinsser (ed.) (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), (83-102), p. 95.

²⁹ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) p. 225.

³⁰ Public-facing outcomes emerged through the residency at]performance s p a c e[, including *Interrogations & Interrelations: Iterations of the Rainbow Tribe*. The 72-hour live work came at the midway point of my Occupation (artist residency) part of the PAF programme at]performance s p a c e[. From 10am Friday 24 October – 10am Monday 27 October, I occupied the space 24 hours a day: performing, constructing, writing, re-writing. Audiences were invited to participate in my process through active exchange. As such, I requested audiences bring items to sustain both myself (food, drink, etc) and develop the work through a shared dialogue of documentation, verbal, and visual exchange. Performative interventions and statements of address were broadcast sporadically throughout the day via [Ustream](#). The documentation is no longer available.

Library, and Autograph ABP.³¹ I had met curator Lynda Morris a couple of years earlier, while my draft Ph.D. proposal for researching interstices between eighteenth-century pleasure gardens and contemporary music festival culture was being reviewed by a selection committee that she was advising on. I was also studying for my Drawing MA at Norwich University of the Arts. Working on both my MA and a Ph.D. proposal simultaneously proved too much for my capacities, but Lynda invited me to discuss my work with her and has been a supporter of it ever since. Lynda was the first person to alert me to the work of Iniva, Stuart Hall, and the publication *Third Text*,³² as well as the work of Jo Spence, which I will expand on in reference to a work I made in 2011 (*Illegal/Alien*, Figures 1-3) later, in this thesis' conclusion. Before graduating from Norwich, at a time when I was intent on opening a gallery space and bookshop, I visited Lynda in her office at the University. Our conversation concluded with her asking me to consider a profound and enduring question, one that became embedded in my critical thinking. She asked: "What is your class?" I was speechless, with no immediate answer that could avoid convolution, having lived in comparative wealth (educated at several private boarding schools from the age of seven, where I might be the only person of colour in the school, or one of a handful; despite material comfort) but alienated from my African Diasporan heritage. No father on my birth certificate, my name changed to that of my white mother's husband (a solicitor and property-owning farmer) but not adopted by him, and their complexity of emotional estrangement and co-dependent behaviour; my maternal family from historically working class (aspiring middle class) Welsh and severed, apparently Irish roots. Where I was on the class scale suddenly confronted me, with my various experiences that continued to cause unease and instability in my life, and which corresponded to inbuilt structural hierarchies I was observing and encountering as an artist working in the UK. In relation to homemaking, family, and a sense of national belonging, my stepfather, when I exclaimed that I liked a man called Neil Kinnock who I had seen on my grandparent's television (we couldn't receive terrestrial television at home), convincingly replied that if Kinnock became Prime Minister of our country, rather than a Conservative candidate in an election, we would no longer have a home to live in, as Kinnock would take away our home. I was about eight or nine years old, and I lived by that principle until into my twenties. Such anecdotes, which pepper this thesis, indicate the middle-class values that profoundly impacted my personal sense of worth, belonging and positioning.

³¹ "Rivington Place", *Adjaye Associates*, <https://www.adjaye.com/work/rivington-place/>.

³² *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* <http://thirdtext.org/>.

I subsequently purchased a copy of *Run Through the Jungle: Selected Writings* by Eddie Chambers,³³ published by Iniva in 1995, which introduced me to the organisation and their then-operational publishing house. I am happy to be involved, through my relationship with Iniva since then, to be involved in the inaugural publications under Iniva's new publishing format called *Stuart*.³⁴ Working at Rivington Place following my MA in drawing from Norwich University of the Arts (2008-2010) by four years, and post my first studio-holdership at Crescent Arts in Scarborough (2011-2014), afforded me the joy and privilege of meeting artists whose praxis and artwork have influenced my own, having met them during a formative time in my learning and career. My fellow invigilators unknowingly equipped me, through friendship and peer understanding, with modes and methods for thinking through painting, activism, subjectivity, Blackness,

³³ Chambers, Eddie, *Run Through the Jungle: Selected Writings* (London: Iniva, 1999).

³⁴ My publication *A Reimagining of Relations* launches 23 October 2021, as part of my Future Collect Commission with Iniva and Manchester Art Gallery.

<https://iniva.org/shop/publications/a-reimagining-of-relations/>. Note that Hamja Ahsan, who I mentioned meeting when I worked at Iniva as invigilator, is a contributor to the publication. Future Collect is a three-year programme in which Iniva partners with national and regional museums and galleries to commission artists of African and/or Asian descent, who are British-born or -based.

<https://manchesterartgallery.org/news/future-collect-jade-montserrat/>. The publication accompanies new works on paper <https://iniva.org/programme/events/constellations-care-and-resistance/> updating the exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery called *Constellations: Care and Resistance*.

<https://manchesterartgallery.org/exhibitions-and-events/exhibition/constellations-care-resistance/>

religion, performance, ecological issues, Afrofuturism, and more.³⁵ The exhibition spaces were shared between Iniva and Autograph ABP on a rotational basis, and I invigilated exhibitions including Park Chan-Kyong & Lina Selander's first UK solo presentations, *When Harmony Went to Hell: Congo Dialogues: Alice Seeley Harris and Sammy Baloji*, and *Syd Shelton: Rock Against Racism*.³⁶

It was on Saturday, 29 November 2014, while I was invigilating in the upstairs galleries for *Black Chronicles II*,³⁷ an Autograph ABP exhibition, with extended events being held in memory of Stuart Hall, that I met Professor Alan Rice. Professor Rice, having climbed the cumbersome stairs to visit the first-floor part of the exhibition, took rest in the seats next to my invigilator's station. Our conversation turned to a conference that Alan was working on about Black presence in the North of England, with an emphasis on Caryll Phillips' then-forthcoming book *The Lost Child* (2014), which takes inspiration from Charlotte Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). The conference was of great interest to me, having lived in the North of

³⁵ Artists working there at the time included Hamja Ahsan, whose since-published book *Shy Radicals: The Antisystemic Politics of the Militant Introvert* (London: Book Works, 2017) inspires my consideration of the place where practice, theory and experience meet, presenting modes for resistance and a critical art praxis. Hamja and I spoke about the book over coffee at the time, which I now draw attention to in workshops and other teaching scenarios in respect to resistance to extrovert supremacy Also: Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau, whose drawings and writings I became most familiar with, both compelling and icky: <https://www.dekersaint.com/about>; Laura Hindmarsh, whose loose and filmic watercolours frame uncanny visions, conjuring familiarity and voyeuristic antagonisms: <https://laurahindmarsh.com/>; and Christa Holka, who is a leading performance photographer, and to whom I am grateful for documenting my own performance *Revue* as described below. I met artists Ama Josephine Budge, Raju Rage, and Ria Hartley, all of whom I would come to work alongside or directly with, the latter two directly in relation to work around Josephine Baker that operates under the umbrella term *Rainbow Tribe*; and I got to know Evan Ifekoya better (we met on a performance bootcamp earlier in 2014, and Evan first introduced me to Lubaina Himid's archive in Preston called Making Histories Visible) who went on to commission writing from me about their practice, which I am enormously grateful for, as well as our working together under the collective *Network II*.

³⁶ <https://iniva.org/programme/projects/park-chan-kyong-lina-selander-first-uk-solo-presentations/>

³⁷ *Black Chronicles II*, Autograph, London, 12 September – 29 November 2014.

<https://autograph.org.uk/exhibitions/black-chronicles-ii>

England as a mixed heritage person in an entirely white family. I had moved to Scarborough with my mother when I was six months old, where my mother had been raised since the age of seven. During this initial conversation with Alan, I referred to my unusual upbringing and my artwork that responded to it, my cursory understanding of the transatlantic slave trade, and my absented understanding of my Blackness given I did not know my biological father, who was supposedly from Montserrat. We covered a lot in our short introduction to each other, and during the fortuitous meeting Alan introduced me to seminal Black Arts Movement artist Keith Piper, whose heritage, like mine, links to Montserrat.

My abstract was accepted for the conference Alan was organising (*Lost Children: The Black Atlantic and Northern Britain - An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, 30 April – 1 May 2015) presenting me with an opportunity to make new work that would be received by academics.³⁸ Having critical analysis of the work I make has always been important to me and the aspirations I have for the work. I invited filmmakers Webb-Ellis to resume filming with me.³⁹ I had been introduced to Webb-Ellis on my approach to Crescent Arts in 2010, during my attempts to acquire a studio (my application for one of the six studios was initially rejected, despite there being several vacancies at the time). We made our first collaborative work, *Josephine and the Leopard*, at the initiation of then Crescent Arts director, Stuart Cameron, for *The Buried City*, an exhibition of studio-holders' work made in response to items in the Scarborough Museums collection. Having enjoyed working together on *Josephine and the Rainbow Tribe: The Leopard* (Figures 8 and 9) and striking up a friendship with the couple, I approached Webb-Ellis to work with me on the further research I was doing about Josephine Baker and the formation of my identity – one that I felt was fractured and required unearthing.⁴⁰ I proposed that we make work from the rural environment I had grown up in and where I had returned to live at intervals: a remote shooting estate with two properties among the 200 acres, where my mother lived in her cottage. From my mid-teens, when I required the generated electricity to provide me with light of an evening to complete my homework, her to-be-ex-husband slept in the farmhouse further up the dirt track/lane. Dinner was promptly on the table at 7pm each night, as was breakfast for

³⁸ See

<https://ibaruclan.com/ibar-in-association-with-the-bronte-parsonage-museum-haworth-present-lost-children-the-black-atlantic-and-northern-britain-an-interdisciplinary-symposium-april-30-may-1/>

³⁹ See <https://www.webb-ellis.org/>

⁴⁰ See *Josephine and the Rainbow Tribe: The Leopard* made with Webb-Ellis, film, 2 minutes, 41 seconds <https://vimeo.com/91831564>

between 6-7am, until a very prompt, stark, long period of depression for my mother in my mid-teens. Before this the three of us lived together, in isolation, in the cottage (at one time two cottages, which were made into one dwelling by the family myself and my mother had not long entered). Electricity ran via an external generator for a few hours each day, otherwise we used gaslights, candlelight, and torchlight. The gas fuelled Aga in the kitchen, which was directly underneath my bedroom and served as the cottage's only heating supply (although no radiators were fed by it). This is where I lived with my caregivers from the age of five, our habitation spanning these two dwellings, the cottage and the farmhouse. I returned to live there post undergraduate education, when, along with other factors, my worries about my mother's vulnerability became too consuming for me to reside elsewhere, which occurred regularly and since. In many respects, this thesis records my journey from muted investigations in performance about my positioning and observations, intentions of my pursuits and research, and attempts at articulations about what and how the works fulfilled these expectations.

My scope is still limited, my reading slow, and my understandings enriched only over time. I have still only approached a few seminal texts by Stuart Hall in this study. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Hall focuses on Caribbean cinema to explicate on identity as that which is in production, and inextricable from retellings of the past. Hall explains that those of us of the Black Diaspora are culturally positioned because of historical and structural colonial displacement, that is alienation, inequality, being of no fixed origin. The thinkers, terms and movements cited within the text, including Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and 'Négritude' (a term and ideology coined by Césaire, denoting "a movement of revolt against slavery and colonial subjugation" that arose in Paris), Frantz Fanon and decolonisation, and Benedict Anderson and community, are considered within the work I make. The pertinence of this foundational article to my practice also speaks to my interest and research on Josephine Baker and her era.⁴¹ Hall discusses identity in reference to collective and plural selves, and I recognise this in relation to the crisis of articulation that has fractured my sense of belonging to the UK, and more specifically to my family and community in North Yorkshire. The different ways to approach "cultural identity", as described by Hall, include shared histories and ancestry, that is:

⁴¹ Kunene, Mazisi, Introduction in Césaire, Aimé, *Return to My Native Land* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1956).

...the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one’ people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.⁴²

Similarly, my introduction to and position in the UK arts industry may subsequently be enunciated through Stuart Hall’s explanation that “what we say is always ‘in context’, positioned”.⁴³ The second indicator of cultural identity that Hall identifies is as follows:

...as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.⁴⁴

The transformative process implied here by Hall is an ambition within my artmaking process, also aligning with Rutherford’s assertion:

A cultural politics needs to address the many locations created by the experience of subordination – men’s violence against women, racism, homophobia, the oppression and abuse of children, class supremacy and so on. These deep structures of prejudice, contempt and aversion characterise the response of the centre to the marginal. A reflexive politics will help us make sense of ourselves, the formation of our cultural-political identities and how they are mapped onto wider symbolic and political identifications.⁴⁵

Having been sent, as a seven-year-old brown child, to majority- or all-white fee-paying boarding schools, I am foremost empathetic with Josephine Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’. I lived in environments for weeks at a time where I just wasn’t loved. What I now understand as considerable emotional instability within the household I grew up in – where substance dependencies and alcoholism was normalised and where co-dependent and manipulative bullying behaviours dominated – required me to fulfil the emotional needs of my caregivers. Constructing a family in such a way as Josephine Baker insisted upon doing, was of great intrigue and gall to me. After a steady decade of regular counselling, I have come to understand that

⁴² Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora:”, p. 223.

⁴³ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 222.

⁴⁴ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 225.

⁴⁵ Rutherford, Jonathan, “A Place Called Home”, p. 23.

the mothering I was required to do as a child, has meant that I live under conditions where normative family roles are reversed. I realise that my fantasy for constructing a family of my own making has been assuaged through my professional work: being dumbfounded by Baker's drive, and acutely aware of the perils of attempting to cancel out her children's difference in their identity. I am aware that Baker's maternal choices may indeed have negatively impacted the children she adopted, and that these complex dynamics are beyond the scope of this study. Like my relationship with my own mother, and hers with her own before her which impacted my upbringing so heavily, the maternal relationships of Baker's children are the makings of myth. And yet, as Hall describes of cultural identity:

It has histories and histories have their real, material, and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning.⁴⁶

Hall is articulating how vital critical thinking is to the formation of selfhood and one's understanding of cultural identity. My project, focusing as it does on belonging and heritage, is rooted in a sense of aspiration, and colludes with Rutherford who writes:

Such a politics must be the discovery and making of 'home' – the formation of values and collectivities that move beyond the postmodern and its fragmentation of the social. And I use the word 'home' here, not only as the making of a sense of self and identity, but as a motif for a culture that values difference and thrives on its own diversity. The task of a cultural politics of difference must be to confront a civil society that is fragmented and turned against itself, poisoned by a class system that destroys human autonomy and creativity.⁴⁷

Published in 1990, the text quoted above is critical of the Left, and is written in opposition to the government at that time, which had been led by Margaret Thatcher for eleven years until November 1990 and then by John Major. Earlier in his essay, Rutherford reminds the reader that the Right "has mobilised the family and nation as central themes of its hegemonic identity".⁴⁸ His argument is in alignment with this project in terms of what it refutes and resists, which is the idea that the nuclear family (described by Thatcher as the "unit") is, has been or can be the foundation with which a sense of belonging is necessarily

⁴⁶ Hall, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 226.

⁴⁷ Rutherford, Jonathan, "A Place Called Home", p. 25.

⁴⁸ Rutherford, Jonathan, "A Place Called Home", p. 12

nurtured. Through my artmaking I argue for wider safety nets, and greater security for queering the family, taking up the mantle of Rutherford's demands, which may indeed be cried today:

We need something more than the Labour Party's call for 'caring values' which suggest an acceptance rather than a transformation of social relationships. A culture of healing and reparation is called for, for the violence, oppression and personal humiliation in our society is such that nothing less will do."⁴⁹

Following the methodology below, in *Chapter 1* I will present work that revolves around Josephine Baker, which I loosely collate under one term, *The Rainbow Tribe*, appropriated from Baker's naming of her adopted family, 'rainbow tribe'. *Chapter Two* aims to contextualise *Rainbow Tribe*, exploring the personal excavation I have initiated in performances-to-camera in the North Yorkshire landscape, or in reference to the rural. I began making performance and live work, because I imagined that my body was a free material tool. But of course, the cost is hidden; such performances have taken a toll on my body and mental health. However, performance and live artwork, using one's body, is gratifyingly immediate and urgent – you're mirroring your audience. The performances-to-camera discussed in *Chapter Two*, *Clay*, *Peat*, and *Cage*, form a trilogy of films made with filmmakers Webb-Ellis. Finally, *Chapter Three*, focuses on *No Need for Clothing*, an iterative drawing installation conceived in 2017. Through drawing with charcoal as a somatic form of expression, I dance, sing, and attend to my body's needs and whims. While making this messy work, the material glides, or jars against smooth and rough surfaces – from MDF board to bare brick surfaces (Figures 57 and 58). My brown, oftentimes naked body responds to an embodied sense of relief from trauma when making this work, as well as a hyper-alert awareness of the structures my citizen body is contained by. Each subsequent iteration of *No Need for Clothing* is purposefully composed of carefully considered titles made for the institution in which it was made, critical of the environments in which it is performed. I subject my hyper-visible body to spectacularisation while making *No Need for Clothing*, drawing out letters to form words on a physically human scale, scratching surfaces with the exclamation that this work is about mourning invisibilised, vulnerable, precarious, criminalised, and tortured lives in solidarity with such movements as Black Lives Matter, and all campaigns against violence.

No Need for Clothing and its iterations centralise text and image within the work and inform works on paper. *No Need for Clothing* drawing installation, performance, and works on paper are linked because of

⁴⁹ Rutherford, Jonathan, "A Place Called Home", p. 25.

the reciprocity between body-as-material and material embodiment of the invitation for dialogue. Through text and image, the work demonstrates a commitment, driven out of a necessity, to understand my body's positioning within histories and legacies of, and cultural and theoretical responses to, chattel slavery and migrations in the context of Black Atlantic cultural studies. I am locating my work within histories of slavery, post slavery and its/their contemporary legacies. These contexts, from where my practice operates, represent the aspirational outlook my praxis is fuelled by and invokes. This aspirational axis, that centres the contemporary legacies borne out of histories of the transatlantic slave trade, the Black Atlantic, and the parallels that can be drawn between these genocidal conditions and the prison industrial complex that disproportionately police Black and brown people worldwide today, is articulated by Gilroy who identifies that "The need to locate cultural or ethnic roots and then to use the idea of being in touch with them as a means to refigure the cartography of dispersal and exile is perhaps best understood as a simple and direct response to the varieties of racism which have denied the historical character of black experience and the integrity of black cultures."⁵⁰ Harriet Jacobs' confinement and slave testimony, for example, will be considered later in relation to the 'cartography of dispersal' denoted by African Diaspora bodies in relation to performance drawing installation *No Need For Clothing*, and its iterations. Women's studies scholar and geographer, Katherine McKittrick reinforces the resistance strategies that my praxis demands, and which informs my practice, and that I recognise in histories of the Black Atlantic: "The geographies of slavery, post slavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that, in fact, spatialize acts of survival."⁵¹ Foreclosure on colonial and imperial histories in my formal education is a driving force within my practice. Gilroy articulates the pains with which creativity can retrieve life-sustaining lineages and refuse capitalism's means of production as conclusive to existence: "Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitution for freedom, from bondage, therefore becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation."⁵² He explains that music, its temporality, "was offered to slaves as a substitute for the formal political freedoms they were denied under the plantation regime. The expressive culture developed in slavery continue to preserve in artistic form needs and desires which go far beyond the mere satisfaction of material wants...art became the backbone of the slaves' political cultures and of their cultural history. It remains the

⁵⁰ Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 112.

⁵¹ McKittrick, Katherine, "Plantation Futures", *Small Axe*, vol. 17, no. 3, (November 2013, no. 42), p. 2.

⁵² Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 125.

means through which cultural activists now engage in “rescuing critiques” of the present by both mobilising memories of the past and inventing an imaginary past-ness that can fuel utopian hopes.”⁵³ *Instituting Care* (2018-2019; Figures 59-62), for example, an iteration of *No Need for Clothing*, applied a contradictory methodology to centre a pedagogical approach to exhibition making. *Instituting Care* combined starting points for discussion about the transatlantic slavery system of African peoples, in relation to maritime centre Liverpool, where the exhibition was conceived, through the textual wall-drawings, with a physical space/structure, replete with soft furnishing and chair lined stretches of books, that hoped to imagine a safe place for visitors to be themselves and feel comfortable enough to have difficult conversations. *Instituting Care* centred dialogue and exchange, with an emphasis on pedagogy, broadly thinking about art education as a way of changing society. Extending this contemporary project out, *Instituting Care* also comments on the nationwide denigration of funding for local libraries for example, or the growing number of homeless indicated by the silver survival blankets that hang from the Tardis like structure, and, through events hosted by guest artists, the structure invited examination of pedagogical approaches circulating in art environments - the work invites you to ‘belong’ in the space lined with books, if only to momentarily rest one’s feet.

⁵³ Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 26.

Methodology

My art practice aims to explore autobiography and memory, taking inspiration from Josephine Baker's biography to gain further understandings on issues of identity and the African Diaspora, modernism and post-slavery, performance and vulnerabilities, motherhood, and desire. These are examples of evolving co-existing threads that issue from how I and my artwork, and Josephine and her praxis, operate in the world. The project centres questions around cultural diversity and intolerance, the exoticism Josephine Baker symbolised, and her simultaneous anti-colonial, and therefore transgressive, behaviours. Trauma factors as residual spectres and surfaces in my artwork through structural enquiry, deferring to a wider contextual and spatialised conception of representation and identity. The work I make for institutions, museums and galleries allows me to consider the circumstances under which trauma surfaces, when engaging in these areas of focus to make the work. How has trauma affected my identity and disfigured my ability to articulate? How does Josephine Baker serve as a foundation for my own aspiration – what do I recognise in her that helps me learn about myself, my positioning, my stance on racism, my desire and idealism? This is an oftentimes personal enquiry, looking at how trauma has impacted my identity and how the practical endeavour of artmaking relieves the condition of trauma as located in the body, or how embarking on a career as an artist is, and can be, traumatic. My work considers what material and ideological structures might make space 'safe' or 'safer', and how to speak critically about experiences in which I have not felt safe to work or live. Consequently, I have prioritised identifying what my fundamental needs are and what I require from the organisations I work with, as well as what I need to move towards building my own family (finding community). One of the aspirations for the work is to collate a resource of therapeutic, practical and environmental strategies for working through (and avoiding) trauma as a visual artist in the UK. As I have begun to outline, I grew up in a chaotic and unstable household, among two fractured families (maternal and step-paternal) who erased my Blackness while perpetuating stereotypical behaviours as white people towards my Black and racialised identities. This included xenophobia, racism, and emotional manipulations, and is reflected in the reception I have been afforded by the wider community in Scarborough and more widely in North Yorkshire. Due to this and other structural factors such as the many societal inequalities reported on in the media – struggles to gain home ownership for millennials, and job security for people working in the arts, to give some examples – I have continued to struggle with obtaining ethical working conditions or safe and secure living and working arrangements. These factors

have had a negative impact on my art practice, while providing content to be explored within it, in particular: my fluctuating income and dependence on patronage and working tax credits, combined with ascertaining strategies that factor in the emotional labour that a critical reflection on histories of the Black Atlantic requires. These factors ensure that employing practices of resistance and refusal are paramount within my practice.

The performance *Shadowing Josephine*, later to become *Revue*, legitimised developing a methodology that required looking further into nutrition, diet, and my overall physical and mental health. I identified through *Revue* that self-care is a priority. Ultimately, after 6 or so hours, I refused the proposition that *Revue* advertised: dancing for 24 hours. The methods that *Revue* ushered in require working and negotiating with others, open communication, honesty, asking: how can a methodology of care operate while doing this work? Having spent my life around alcoholism and addiction issues, and emotionally wanting personalities, these circumstances inevitably took a toll on my mealtimes and general wellbeing. Added to this, fluctuating work schedules served to abet my neglect of a regular and healthy eating plan. *Revue* was intended as a durational 24-hour-long performance, an ambition that required strategising for stamina and developing reserves of energy. The work allowed me to prioritise these lapsed, yet necessary, dietary and wellness needs. Since then, it has felt like the first time in my life that I have begun to prepare meals for myself out of love, as praxis. *Revue* determined engagement of a personal trainer and I decided on regular yoga attendance in accordance with my developing care plan, for increasing my core strength. I reinvigorated my daily meditation practice (when I could settle my active mind). This focus on caring for my body and needs has set the foundation for a working methodology, enabling me to continue making live work and performance, or continue at all. With an emphasis on physical representation and labour, a personal love of dance and dancing, and recent enquiries into movement and somatic based research, I return frequently to the initial attractions that Josephine Baker sparked. My initial research on Baker, who tapped in and boosted my self-esteem, confidence, and desire to riff off her creativity, passion, ideals, and mistakes, included an enquiry into the balance between how she enabled control of her body and persona, representations and possible manipulations of her body, and an unapologetic quest to explore her ideas of equality and freedom. The initial question that prompted *Shadowing Josephine* was, how do we read bodies, and how is this body to be read? I will return to this question in Chapter 1.

My understanding of monological autonomy developed through making *Shadowing Josephine*⁵⁴, which features a repeated, choreographed dance routine set to Cab Calloway's popular Cotton Club track *Pickin' up the Cabbage*. The work was first shown at *The Art Party Conference* (2013)⁵⁵ and renamed *Revue* in 2018, for a performance commission for SPILL Festival of Performance (Figures 29-34).⁵⁶ With Arts Council England funding, SPILL Festival produced *Revue*, billed as a 24-hour performance, in Ipswich in October 2018, where it was streamed into institutions in some of the cities where Josephine Baker performed, and then screened publicly. We partnered with organisations worldwide, including La Mama in New York, Performance is Alive also in New York, School of Art Institute in Chicago, Fusebox in Austin, Cifas in Brussels, and LADA in London. The new name *Revue* was suggested by Season Butler, the mentor assigned to me by SPILL.⁵⁷ Butler works in response to violence and aggression and works as an educator. The renaming of my work references Baker's *La Revue Nègre* (1925). Following her departure from New

⁵⁴ I consulted Miss Barbara Benson-Smith MBE to choreograph *Shadowing Josephine*. Benson-Smith taught me ballet and tap in Scarborough and Whitby on and off from the age of five years old and into my mid to late twenties. I was also taught by her mother Mamie who used a cane to correct the positions of our feet, with a cheeky glint in her eye. Miss Barbara is a formidable woman and someone I have deferred to intermittently. The Benson Stage Academy was the locus for work Miss Barbara undertook within the local community, including with the NSPCC. One of Miss Barbara's protégées at the time, Caron, now the owner of the Scarborough Academy, also helped me work on the choreography, helping me to look at dancing a little more contemporaneously. Working on the choreography in these initial stages boosted my confidence. Having a routine also allowed me to deviate from it and relax into it. Miss Barbara and I have yet to discuss my conceptual development of the work as a durational and unclothed performance, not least the explicit references to my African Diasporan identity and in relation to chattel slavery in the British colonies and Americas. Both dancers, Miss Benson and Caron, were enthused that I was reinterpreting Josephine Baker's work.

⁵⁵ *The Art Party*, an artwork by Bob and Roberta Smith produced by Crescent Arts in Scarborough, was not aligned with any political party but an opportunity to act as a forum and provide a platform for debating the future of the arts in England with an emphasis on school curricula. *The Art Party* hoped to influence decision-makers to reconsider the directions they were taking.

⁵⁶ "Revue By Jade Montserrat - Live Stream", 2018, *LADA: Live Art Development Agency*, <https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/events/revue-by-jade-montserrat-live-stream/>

⁵⁷ See <http://seasonbutler.com/>

York, Baker had barely been in Paris a month before she opened in *La Revue Nègre* on 2 October 1925, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Developing the performance to consider what it would take to perform it repetitively over a 24-hour period (rather than for up to 4 hours as it had been as *Shadowing Josephine*) required me to prioritise and derive a methodology to help me attain and sustain the physical prowess needed to undertake the performance. I worked with a producer for the first time and had an assistant. Both support roles were provided only over the production period. I continued to work with my then therapist, who helped me think through the enormity of what I was taking on, moving my body to say what was impossible for me to verbally enunciate.⁵⁸ I aimed for all stages of the process and performance to be an internal and externalised provocation.

Simultaneously, I began looking for physical spaces that could give me a safety net and where I could build networks. I began questioning my living arrangements and confronting the abusive situations I was living in and around. I confronted equivalent situations in my working environments and relationships. I questioned the working habits I was cultivating, the small remuneration I had been receiving as an artist, especially as an artist making performance and live artwork, and why producers of my performance work were neglecting to inquire about pre- or post-care. During her mentorship, Season Butler prompted me to consider why the space of empowerment for women is still a sexual space, one that is invariably ableist and relies on my body-normative privilege to perpetuate ableism and cisgendered whiteness as dominant in art and performance spaces. Butler made associations between the work I was making, *Revue*, and the film *Flashdance* (1983) and the act of striptease. We discussed together my own complicated relationship to innocence, prompting thinking about child film star Shirley Temple, fictional fairy Tinkerbell, and cartoon characters. *Revue* was intent on reimagining the representation of Black bodies, and came to emphasise protection, care, positioning, and preservation.

When approaching making *Shadowing Josephine* I was looking for permission: to make performance (I was new to making performance); to dance (freely moving my body in public space); to confidently take ownership of my own Blackness as I grappled with the histories I was connecting with through Josephine Baker; to take ownership of histories of the African Diaspora in an environment resistant to a narrative critical of a cis-normative idea of Britishness, and which centred Black histories at the

⁵⁸ I was allocated my current therapist through the victim support organisation IDAS while involved in a police enquiry. Please see note 59 below <https://www.idas.org.uk/>

exclusion of whiteness; to ascertain and take ownership of my agency, autonomy, sexuality and femininity. At Crescent Arts, where I had my first and only purpose-built studio large enough for me to practice dance routines, I deferred to the then-Director, who had worked with performance artists and as a performer from the 1970s. He suggested I use the name *Shadowing Josephine* for the performance, and I did. I had not long since met my then-patron, Anthony d'Offay⁵⁹, who sent me postcards that he found on his frequent trips to America. One of the postcards was Sojourner Truth's *I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance*, an image with which I was already familiar. In the studio I was playing with how I represented myself, inspired by Josephine Baker and the collection of films, books, music, and images I was acquiring relating to her. I also took inspiration from further back in time, to Baker's grandmother's generation of once-enslaved people in the Americas, including famous Abolitionists such as Truth. Introducing myself to Baker's videography, discography and archives immersed me into an understudy role, discovering histories of race and racism in the African Diaspora. I still assume this role. On reflection, being an understudy has allowed the greatest modicum of agency with which I have felt comfortable. By engaging in the life and times of Josephine Baker and approaching my racialised, sexualised body through her, I have felt that I could deflect the painful interrogations required for understanding my own identity formation, for confronting trauma and memory. Having the word "shadow" in the title of this first performance work and publicly declaring my interest in Josephine Baker, is a useful recurring motif. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall, introducing the reader to the specificity of his positioning and identity, writes:

I was born into and spent my childhood and adolescence in a lower-middle class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my adult life in England, in the shadow of the black diaspora – 'in the belly of the beast'.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Quinn, Ben and Ruiz, Cristina, "UK art dealer Anthony d'Offay faces sexual harassment allegations", *The Guardian*, 14 January 2018,

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/13/anthony-doffay-denies-historical-allegations-sexual-harassment>; Jayanetti, Chaminda, "The Tate 'Banned' a Black Artist After She called Out an Art Dealer's Sexual Abuse", *Vice*, 2021 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7vxqx/tate-antho>; Ruiz, Cristina, "Meet Jade Montserrat, The Black Artist Who Took on the British Art Establishment", *The Art Newspaper*, 27 May 2021,

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/05/27/meet-jade-montserrat-the-black-artist-who-took-on-the-british-art-establishment>

⁶⁰ Hall, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 222-23.

Any complex I may have had around the justification of this PhD thesis, erring as it does towards my own identity in my artwork, is assuaged by Hall's following sentences, which also validate the contribution to knowledge I am adamant this study makes in relation to representation in UK culture:

I write against the background of a lifetime's work in cultural studies. 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."⁶¹

In efforts to understand my research on Josephine Baker, I began making self-portraits (Figures 4 and 5), a series of black-and-white 35mm photographs in my studio. The notion that black and white film photography was used by geographers and anthropologists documenting the world's cultures was used intentionally, to explicate on British colonial history and the connections I was beginning to understand between colonialism, Josephine Baker, and my confused identity. Like role-play, I adopted postures inspired by Baker. By attempting to emulate her contortions, my own awkwardness, stiffness, and shame was exposed and sometimes eased. I later reinterpreted the self-portraits as silhouette images in watercolour (Figures 6 and 7). The idea of abstracting the self-portraits and adding divergences to the paintings by means of textural layers served to expand possibilities in the idea of shadow-play: merging shadows and shadowy textures, conveying a circulation of energies. I, too, am commodifying my shadow through the watercolours (I do not yet have a market for my photographs). The self-portraits and watercolours contrast to the performance *Shadowing Josephine*, which places my body and uses movements to accentuate vulnerability. The two-dimensional works allow me to have control over my body, the way it is represented and consumed, and owes a debt of gratitude to Sojourner Truth's affirmation, "I sell the shadow to support the substance". Interpreting Truth's words as her justification for sitting for her portrait, knowing that her voice as an Abolitionist must firstly be provided for so that she might continue, and that, as her voice was inspiration to others, the portrait would provide the financial return necessary to support her and her abolitionist work. While my work pales in comparison, my intention is to memorialise and centre injustices, using artwork as a dialectic with which to highlight oppressive social, working, and living practices that reverberate from these histories and which continue today.

The Scarborough Spa, where I first performed *Shadowing Josephine* and from where it was subsequently recorded using my mobile phone and made available for online viewing on Vimeo, is situated

⁶¹ Hall, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 223.

on the South Bay in Scarborough.⁶² During my lifetime it has hosted innumerable political party conferences, including the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and continues to programme tours of comedians with returning audiences, including racist performer Roy Chubby Brown⁶³, who returned to Whitby Pavilion, an equivalent entertainment complex in the Borough of Scarborough, in 2021.⁶⁴ Scarborough has granted the extremist English nationalist organisation English Defence League (EDL) marches through the town over the years, and there is an annual Orange Order (conservative, British unionist and Ulster loyalist organisation) parade. The Spa is located on a stretch of the coastline that is home to Scarborough's amusement arcades and ice cream parlours, about 800 metres from the since demolished Futurist Theatre. I was acutely aware of the racist history that the two venues have served and my ambivalence and fondness towards both sites fluctuate: I have fond memories of seeing other acts, performances, and films at all three of the venues cited. It is no surprise then to discover that *The Black and White Minstrel Show* began its stage tour in Scarborough in 1957, and they performed regularly at The Futurist during its twenty-year run. Minstrelsy originated in America, and comprises mocking, demeaning and generally popularising racist "entertainment" and, once appropriated for British audiences, incorporated well-known songs from the American Deep South performed by singers and dancers in blackface. *The Black and White Minstrel Show* was a racist show masquerading as light entertainment. Performing the body then, for example in *Shadowing Josephine* (Figures 19 and 20) and later as *Revue* (Figures 29-34), is a language, a tool, and a mode with which to begin articulating a series of ideas. These ideas include how outrage and resistance to prejudices can be performed within live-art settings.

⁶² See *Scarborough Spa*, <https://www.scarboroughspa.co.uk/>

⁶³ See Roy Chubby Brown, *Golliwog Song*, published by Augustus Kwembe on vimeo.com <https://vimeo.com/75718706>

⁶⁴ Wong, Lisa, "Calls for controversial comedian Roy 'Chubby' Brown's show to be pulled in Sheffield" *The Star*, 25 August 2021, <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/politics/calls-for-controversial-comedian-roy-chubby-browns-show-to-be-pulled-in-sheffield-3359386>; Buksmann, George, "Roy 'Chubby' Brown: Protestors call for controversial comic's gig in Whitby to be cancelled" *The Scarborough News*, 1 October 2021, <https://www.thescarboroughnews.co.uk/news/people/roy-chubby-brown-protesters-call-for-controversial-comics-gig-in-whitby-to-be-cancelled-3403766>

These tendencies- to appropriate and fetishise, to justify projections born of ‘rational’ European superiority onto the ‘inferior’ other – form part of a lineage of injustices. In her book *The Colonial Unconscious*, Elizabeth Ezra explains: “By definition, imperialist assertions of superiority entail; the conversion of difference into lack”.⁶⁵ *Revue* refutes this imposition through a choreography that attempts articulation of tribal nuances, and thinking about the Paris of the 1920s as a site of in(clusion)-and-in-equality, the spate of negrophilia⁶⁶ there and how these cumulative circumstances for women engineered changes that were reinforced by the war.⁶⁷ Petrine Archer-Shaw writes in *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* that “In the aftermath of a debilitating war, Paris’s intellectuals and avant-garde were the first to question Europe’s material and moral progress and its ‘civilising’ mission.”⁶⁸ I relate this reference specifically for the purposes of considering Josephine Baker in relation to the work of Anne McClintock. In her book *Imperial Leather*, McClintock stresses that “gendering imperialism took very different forms in different parts of the world” and highlights today’s reality that “...Arab women were to be ‘civilised’ by being undressed (unveiled), while sub-Saharan women were to be civilised by being dressed (in clean, white, British cotton)” and that “These sumptuary distinctions were symptomatic of critical differences in the legislative, economic and political ways in which imperial

⁶⁵ Ezra, Elizabeth, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (New York: Cornell University, 2000), p. 46.

⁶⁶ The multiple ways in which the term “Negrophilia” can be interpreted is discussed in Petrine Archer-Shaw’s book *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000). She begins explicating on the term in her introduction: “‘Negrophilia’, from the French *nérophile*, means a love for black culture. In the 1920s, the term was used positively by the Parisian avant-garde to affirm their defiant love of the negro. The word’s origins, however, are not so flattering. To be called a ‘negrophile’ or ‘nigger lover’ in the nineteenth century was to be damned as a supporter of liberal attitudes towards slavery and its abolition. Even more negatively, negrophiles were sometimes accused of having a deviant sexual appetite for blacks, thereby placing them outside ‘civilised’ society’s moral boundaries.” In a note corresponding to this passage, Archer-Shaw goes on to explain that “The word ‘negrophilia’ has been adapted from Jean Laude’s use of the word ‘*nérophilie*’ ...”. pp. 9, 190.

⁶⁷ Archer-Shaw, *Negrophilia*, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Archer-Shaw, *Negrophilia*, p. 18.

commodity racism was imposed on different parts of the world.”⁶⁹ A white supremacist neo-colonial agenda continues to reinforce divisions in opposition to appeals for intersectional thinking, controlling the lives of the Other whose race, class, religion, culture, gender, sex is different from their own. For example, sixteen countries currently ban the burqa, or face coverings, in public places, including France, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, China and Sri Lanka. This policy is in effect nothing short of “civilisatrice” imposed in France during its negrophilia craze. We might consider how this is further complicated by face-coverings and masks as compulsory in resistance to the coronavirus pandemic. *Revue* has the potential to invite Michael Rothberg’s idea of multidirectional memory work by locating the performance within terms of reference including: slavery and the spectacle of bondage (slave auctions); consumption of culture and Black presence within art institutions; visual consumption of the human body; 24-hour news cycles; dance marathons of the 1930s; monitoring and surveillance; operating in the world despite pain; narratology; time - circular time, racial time, revolutionary time, deep time; and climate change activism in response to environmental racism. Multidirectional memory is American Holocaust historian and memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg’s term, one that elucidates on the confrontation between shared and collective histories. Introducing us to his term in his book of the same title, he writes:

When we talk about collective Holocaust memory or about collective memories of colonialism and decolonization, we are talking primarily about shared memory, memory that may have been initiated by individuals but that has been mediated through networks of communication, institutions of the state, and the social groupings of civil society.⁷⁰

Rothberg’s optimistic term presents memory “as often a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity; indeed multidirectional memory is often the very grounds on which people construct and act upon visions of justice.”⁷¹ While *Shadowing Josephine* has allowed me to consider Josephine Baker, I am contouring her by way of wider contextualisation expressing, through a quite rigidly choreographed dance, my feelings and understandings about contemporary racisms and injustices just as much as I am revisiting

⁶⁹ McClintock, Anne, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), p. 31.

⁷⁰ Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (California: Stanford University press, 2009) p. 15.

⁷¹ Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 19.

histories of the African Diaspora. Repetition locates the live performances and the performances-to-camera of *Shadowing Josephine* – as both historical and contemporary, embodied and disembodied, with and without agency, a staging of the erotic along with the uncanny.

I have come to call the project that encompasses work stemming from Josephine Baker's biography and praxis *The Rainbow Tribe*. The name refers to Baker's family experiment of twelve adopted children. The project was born out of a trip to New York in 2006, a visit to The Studio Museum in Harlem, and a purchase of Powell and Bailey's *Rhapsodies in Black*, which includes Andrea Barnwell's essay *Like the Gypsy's Daughter or Beyond the Potency of Josephine Baker's Eroticism* (1997). The essay introduces and contextualises Baker from her banana-clad appearance at *Les Folies Bergère* (Barnwell's description came to influence the steps I embellished as choreographer for *Shadowing Josephine*) through to her transformation as starlet, in *Zou Zou* (1934) and *Princess Tam Tam* (1936). More intriguingly still, Barnwell details a famous shadow dance from *Zou Zou*, explaining that Baker

...basks in the pleasure of her body's potential and her ability to create an interaction between the corporeal and that which is projected... By demonstrating her conscious decision to please herself she defies colonialist expectations that attempt to confine her to the realm of the plastic."⁷²

I was enthralled by Baker's spirit as a freedom fighter, her humility and idealistic aspirations. I was driven by a bewilderment (and exasperation) as to how this super-famous Black woman entertainer had escaped my attention before my mid-twenties.

I delivered my first conference paper at *Literary Dolls*, Durham University (2013), enabling me to crystallise my research context.⁷³ My paper was the starting point for connections that I take further within this thesis: untethered and polarising forms of media that support, celebrate and denigrate women; the hyper-visible empowerment and objectification of women; and Baker's commodification as a

⁷² Barnwell, Andrea, "Like the Gypsy's Daughter or Beyond the Potency of Josephine Baker's Eroticism", *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. David Bailey and Richard Powell (Hayward Gallery, the Institute of International Visual Art and the University of California Press, 1997) p. 85.

⁷³ "Literary Dolls: The Female Textual Body From The 19Th Century To Now", *READ: Research In English At Durham*, 2014,

<https://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com/tag/literary-dolls-the-female-textual-body-from-the-19th-century-to-now/>

pseudo-colonial spectacle and her unique idea for capitalising on that.⁷⁴ My performances thus came to ask: where does and where can the image, the representation of the body take us? What becomings emerge from the performing body, the ‘marked’ and ‘mark-making’ body? My art practice explores how Baker was appropriated by oppressors as a racialised symbol, to serve a paternalist agenda of apparent sympathy with the plight of the oppressed. This theoretical model, developed by French-Caribbean writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant (through his analysis of the way Nelson Mandela was appropriated), situates Baker as a “hero”, in Glissant’s terms, an “écho-monde” in western discourses, likewise therefore, symbolising the causes of oppressive powers:

Oppressive powers know this very well and attempt to incite ‘heroes’, whether real or mythic, to symbolise their causes. Thus, there appear pseudo écho-monde, which Western opinion has apparently become expert at creating.”⁷⁵

Baker’s work was admired and applauded by the Peron regime and the French Resistance.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding, Baker emerged from colonial and segregation contexts, utilised her celebrity status for humanitarian needs, and was courted by the Civil Rights Movement. This project, taking its cue from Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’ as a theoretical structure from which to consider communality and care for one another, through racisms and oppressions, signals potential for enriching the personal and political, for self-reflexivity and recognising the spatialisation of social and political practice. The project attempts to communicate a centring through practice, which has a precariousness to it – the reality of my personal experience. Glissant’s following quotation is important because it recognises this precarity, and the potential for seeking belonging and towards freedoms, through plurality:

⁷⁴ Instagram, for example, proliferates with celebrities capitalising on their profile for humanitarian purposes or charitable concerns. I wondered at the motivations for this when a web-presence alone, often visually reminiscent of a banal advertising gloss that accompanies any new movie, album or branding, rings a facile alarm. Like Josephine, celebrities capitalise on their name and status, branding themselves. They brand their bodies, and this is how the body can be dismembered. Manipulations may emerge here; this is where the body is fetishised and territorialised.

⁷⁵ Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 202.

⁷⁶ It is perhaps worth noting here that Josephine Baker will be inducted into the Parthéon Mausoleum, Paris by the Macron regime in November 2021.

Every time an individual or community attempts to define its place in it, even if this place is disputed, it helps blow the usual way of thinking off course, driving out the now weary rules of former classicisms, making new “follow-throughs” to chaos-monde possible.⁷⁷

Widening this out again we can think of the position of Black people in Europe and how we situate ourselves, for thinking through the idea of Diaspora, meaning ‘people who are spread’. My artwork and praxis attempt to work through that diffusion.

It was for Baker to legitimise her desire, and possibly society’s maternalistic expectations, that she adopted her twelve children so publicly. Baker’s “grand-design”, a home for her and her diverse children, was funded by her already spectacularised and celebrated body. Baker’s enterprise is founded on a patriarchal, hetero-normative, nuclear family model, the same model that served French needs and expectations, for example, in a reproductive sense under the plantation logic of colonialism. For all its spectacular and even unethical absurdity, Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’ was linked to her activism. A residency at Outpost Gallery Studios, Norwich, titled *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home* (Figures 25-28) during the summer of 2017 allowed me deeper reflection on the exhaustive task Baker undertook.⁷⁸ During the residency month I attempted to prioritise (or rather, thought about) rest as a strategy for refusing the capitalist shock doctrine.⁷⁹ *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home* became a space that aimed to deflect the urgency prompted by quantitative measures of time, labour, function, consumption, and emphasised exhaustion as a valid condition of Blackness. *Rainbow Tribe: A Place to Call Home* took Baker’s family experiment as a starting point for locating, utilising, and making visible resources that could nourish and activate the space: movement between material, taking steps in earnest towards a “democratisation of

⁷⁷ Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 137.

Glissant’s term “chaos-monde” is considered untranslatable. However, we may approach the definition as the antithesis of the Western Capitalist norm or reality, regulated and dominated by linearity in thought and time, and rather a term that comes close to defining “a poetics of relation” between modes of enquiry and knowledges.

⁷⁸ “Jade Montserrat, The Rainbow Tribe: A Place To Call Home”, *OUTPOST*, 2017,

<https://www.norwichoutpost.org/programme/jade-montserrat?rq=montserrat>

⁷⁹ I have interpreted the phrase “capitalist shock doctrine” to describe the prescription by Western hegemonic capitalist forces for Black people, in this instance, to surrender to gruelling working and living conditions in opposition to the care of community and oneself, the condition of being denied full autonomous lives. Naomi Klein’s 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* details how extreme capitalism, tied to dictatorship, reproduces itself through shock, awe and disaster, whereby socialism is cleared out, the market rules, profit is king and people no longer matter.

access”. Achille Mbembe’s term corresponds with his intentionally affective text, written for speaking aloud, evoking the memory work described above, about decolonisation as a verb, in the context of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement.⁸⁰ *Rainbow Tribe: A Place To Call Home* became an opportunity to begin exploring what reparative care within home, community, and institutions could look like, by using the whole space to paint and create murals in, using the budget to buy plants for the home (which the Outpost community adopted on my departure), catching up on vital readings (printed out for communal access within the space), and archiving and exhibiting curator Lynda Morris’ expansive collection of material relating to Black British artists. The residency culminated in sharing space over potluck food and drinks, with performances accompanied by music compiled in a track list on YouTube. Through the ‘rainbow tribe’ Baker enacts her ordinary longing for the intimate comfort of others, particularly of a large family. Expanding this out, my artwork made in response to the idea of a family made with the purpose of attempting to exemplify the transcendence of race or racial subordination by including a spectrum of nationalities and ethnicities, invites understandings of our bodies’ need to nurture and indeed recognise, safer spaces, and of the care we require and are responsible for (eschewing any totalising monolithic understandings and applications of care). Since embarking on this research, I am yet to ascertain how this mixing up of multiples of babies with differing ethnicities under one roof distorted and disrupted the specificities located in personal histories pertaining to each of the twelve children. Given the particularities of each ethnically unique child adopted by Baker, what of each individual child’s lost ‘blood-lines’, and compatriots and ancestry worldwide? Ordinarily these children might have been aligned to cultural and historical specificities related to their ethnicity, specificities that I maintain are so important in the formations of identity, and for maintaining a healthy relationship to self.

Josephine Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’ prompted considering, hitherto neglected, foundations in my formative years in relation to family, community, communality, care, and intimacy. I regard my personal identity as one that has been forged, and not a little ravaged, and I hold the ‘child-me’, as understood in therapy as a device with which to unravel our pasts, in contempt of certain attitudes to race and gender that I am now attempting to dance or paint or draw or write out of myself. I entertain the thought that I can explicate on the micro (my subjectivity) to understand the macro (the global phenomenon of racial

⁸⁰ Mbembe, Achille, “Decolonizing Knowledge And The Question Of The Archive”, *Wits Institute For Social And Economic Research (WISER)* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 2015) <http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>.

subjectivities from a historical perspective). Excavating imperative parallel theories, which were also formerly inaccessible and remain (by my own admission) underdeveloped and crudely grasped, continue to yield knowledge that perpetually emboldens my aspirations for the project: I have acquired a vocabulary and new articulations, typified by terms such as postcolonial, diaspora, intersectionality, the subaltern, interdependency, and the idea of ‘personal boundaries’.

Saidiya Hartman’s book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* considers and approaches the form of memorialisation, through literature and critical analysis of her physical and existential journey tracing the Atlantic slave route. Describing the condition of the émigrés returning to “their rightful homes” as flotsam from the African diaspora, in Ghana, Hartman piercingly enquires:

What orphan had not yearned for a mother country or a free territory? What bastard had not desired the family name, or better yet, longed for a new name for things? Why not dream of a country that might love you in return and in which your skin wasn’t a prison?⁸¹

I have felt alone, stranded, isolated – orphaned even, and envious of my peers who have made their own families, seemingly assuaging these feelings of dispossession. Might Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’ be thought of as an orphanage and, by extension through this contemporary project, Black Britain as an orphaned group? Can such an imaginary theoretical structure as Josephine Baker’s ‘rainbow tribe’ safely share and shape the politics of representation? In the context of European belonging – this collective grouping, shattered since the British exit from the European Union (Brexit) in 2020 – perhaps the disorientation engineered for want of a Black sense of belonging, in resistance to a governmental apparatus that erects more borders and creates further divisions, can be appeased through an imaginary unification. ‘Afropean’ meaning “connected to Africa and Europe but transcending both” is the culminative term of Sheffield born Johny Pitts’ travelogue, on his “search for a tribe that might feel like home” detailing vivid observations of racism in Europe, querying “Was there really a cohesive idea of a black Europe I might find some sort of solidarity with? Everything suddenly struck me as an abstraction: who was ‘black’? What was ‘Europe’?”⁸² My praxis and practice recognises a lineage of displacement and reason for African and Diasporan heritages of all kinds, a ‘rainbow tribe’ if you will, to shape solidarities that transcend topographies and nations, that honour our

⁸¹ Hartman, Saidiya, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) p. 39.

⁸² Pitts, Johnny, *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe* (London: Penguin, 2020) p. 33.

experiences of racism and communality in our Blackness, that sustain us from succumbing to any hegemonic understandings of belonging, representation, and identity.

I originally developed a personal interest in Baker precisely because of her story as a dislocated, self-styled woman longing to make sense of the constructs under which she was born. I continue to be compelled to understand my own sense of belonging and identity formation through consideration of Baker and her multi-ethnic family holed up in the French countryside, at her Château des Milandes. The social experiment Baker conducted – and, to some extent, exploited for entertainment to enable its sustainability – this brave if egotistical ‘life-style’, acts as a location with which to encounter Baker’s refusal to accept “an absolute sense of ethnic difference”, a phrase adapted from Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*.⁸³ Baker’s experiment replicated a fiefdom of sorts, with all the accoutrements of her sovereign and novel position, encompassing agriculture and horticulture, education, and her own mailing system, replete with custom stamps.⁸⁴ Her experiment posits nothing radical in terms of constitutional advances or space-and-place making. Baker did not escape Western society’s promulgation of a woman’s place in society, despite the advances throughout her lifetime and her unique authorship of her own(ed) body, manipulated to subvert inherited norms. Baker was herself unable to conceive, and her enactment of motherhood, although it may be callous to frame it this way, is a vision of inflated need for a family configuration of one’s own invention, which I empathise with. Notwithstanding, Baker’s outward-facing altruism and active role as spokesperson for human and civil rights, through this adopted family that she collected around her, works to underline a basic premise of kinship, intimacy, and care of one another. My work has begun to approach pedagogy as praxis, thinking about ways for learning and unlearning dynamics in relations between people. My artworks present ways of articulating these relations and concerns in non-verbal and verbal ways.

I continue to develop my practice, prioritising these aims from a dwelling in rural North Yorkshire. Location is important to the work. As an artist, it is important to note that the art industry remains London-centric, with most commercial galleries, museums and cultural spaces located in the capital. I am

⁸³ Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Haney, Lynn, *Naked at the Feast: The Biography of Josephine Baker* (London: Robson Books, 2002) pp. 242-45, 266-95; Rose, Phyllis, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (London: Vintage, 1990) pp. 208-09, 231-50; Pratt Guterl, Matthew, *Josephine Baker and the Rainbow Tribe* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

priced out of London as an artist; it is unaffordable. I am not entirely living and working from North Yorkshire freely. As broached earlier, I have returned frequently to reside in the Borough of Scarborough, where my mother lives, out of a grave concern for her welfare, alongside my own spiralling mental health concerns at times. I have also felt a sense of comfort through at least knowing what to expect from residents here: I have learnt to live with the racisms encountered here throughout my lifetime. The desire that I attempt to articulate through my work inspired by Josephine Baker's stage presence and filmography might be exemplified by looking closely at a watercolour I made in 2016, *The Glamour of Her Homemade Stage* (Figure 68). I have amalgamated my specific location with pictorial symbols that I use to indicate earth, soil, and unearthing, towards a sense of joy and freedom. I do this by repeating small circles in earthy tones (Figures 64, 67 and 69) that comprise a mound of landscape. The mound is punctuated by excavated pits, dug out by spades and shovels, and as illustrated here specifically tools used for harvesting peat on the moors. (Figures 69-71) The pits have rainbows emanating from them. Stars flicker in the sky. The picture spotlights turf and peat spades surrounded by Cypress branches.⁸⁵ Combining these pictorial symbols and the text (also the title) is an attempt to illustrate the sense of belonging that I have achieved from the North York Moors National Park throughout my lifetime, invariably through listening and dancing to music. For me, this picture reminisces on the hours I spent dancing to Michael Jackson's 1979 album *Off the Wall* or Neneh Cherry's *Raw Like Sushi* (1989) – they would blare from my ghetto blaster during the holidays, from the steps of the cottages I grew up in. Katherine McKittrick names a similar experience that connects the diasporan experience: "I often proclaim that Michael Jackson and Prince *brought black to me*, musically, while I lived in these places..."⁸⁶ The steps I danced on were my stage, and the vast expanse of forested hill opposite the house was my audience. (Mounds appear in several of my drawings. The mound also symbolises or is exchangeable with a head of afro hair. Figures 64-66). I was also already used to performing in public. I attended dance classes on and off and had participated in shows at the since-demolished Corner Café and The Opera House, the latter of which was the subject of an arson attack, both in Scarborough. When I was still in primary school, I would often be taken to visit my stepfather's

⁸⁵ Hartley, Marie and Ingilby, Joan, *Life in the Moorlands of North-East Yorkshire* (London: J. M. Dent, 1972).

⁸⁶ Hudson, Peter James, "The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness: An Interview with Katherine McKittrick", *The CLR James Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1-2 (Fall 2014) p. 233.

grandfather, who had moved from Leeds to be in a care home in Scarborough. Sadly, and one of the many anecdotes that would be cause for argument between my care givers, “Grandad Joe”, as he was called, bullied me. At that time, and I am not sure much has changed, elderly or infirm people would populate several large rooms in the care home, with chairs pushed back against the four walls from where they might sit all day. When his fellow service users would articulate their happiness for him that his family were visiting again, interrupting our arrival with exclamations about his young granddaughter, he would make no pains in loudly replying, “Does she look like a relation of mine?” From that moment, this antagonistic anecdote was added to a list of routine arguments between my caregivers, with me helplessly in the middle. Nevertheless, I donned my leotard and skirts and went from room to room in the care home, performing the routines I had learnt in ballet or tap class. The work I make from the North York Moors today aims to purge myself of the trauma of such normalised day-to-day family behaviours, which permeated from without. I am looking to confront these personal traumas on location through my artmaking.

I learnt to swim in a duckpond, one of around a dozen dug out for the purposes of feeding ducks for slaughter. I learnt to kill pheasants with my bare hands by the age of seven, by instinct, because the men who were bad shots weren’t prepared to end their kills’ suffering. I was paraded and spectacularised during the shooting season. I was very often the only female (I remember no more than two women ever coming to shoot days) and introduced to unfamiliar men by my stepfather as looking like I do because “I had been left in the coal house too long”. I am an excuse, a pardonable, an embarrassment, a shame, a dependent, a problem. So, when I have been set alive by Black performers and embraced them, it is because I have tapped into two things: one, an inner compulsion to spread the joy and pain one feels through movement and voice, and two, our Blackness. I identify this as a felt sense of connectivity that was never engineered, and it is this condition that I share when devising and exhibiting my artwork.

I learnt nothing of our colonial and imperial histories at school, magnifying what I’ve come to recognise as historical amnesia. My school absences were many, and I was labelled a school refuser. I attended nine schools in total during my school career. From this vantage point I reflect that art was, even then during the 1980s and 1990s, relegated to a marginal position. I observed the varying principles and ethea. The ethics of conduct at these fee-paying schools were such that I found alienating and hierarchical. I was christened a Catholic and attended Methodist, High Church of England, non-secular private and state schools, and was even home schooled. (A series of refusals culminated in me flagging the difficulties that I was experiencing at home at one school, when I was removed, and home schooled for a period of some

months, if I recall correctly). With no interpersonal or societal referent in which to locate my Blackness during my formative years, a dissociative streak taunts my nervous system. I dissociate because of what I identify as “whitewashing”⁸⁷ and, perpetuating the marginalisation of the Othered body, I experienced an internalised dismissal of Blackness. Erupting from this confusion with ambivalence, I have performed anonymity within spaces with other Othered bodies. In the past, I have dissociated from my relation to Blackness. I categorised my neurosis as “fake Blackness”, by which I think I meant a sense of being splintered from cultural, familial, and educational referents that corresponded to my own experience as a brown body (not that I came to codify it as such until I approached my mid-thirties). Katherine McKittrick describes this sense of unease and friction thus: “So my biographical story has always been one that is in tension with blacklessness – a blackness that is and was always black, of course.”⁸⁸ Therefore, my art practice interrogates the spaces I have occupied and felt alienated from, as well as making visible a critique of the spaces within which the artwork, and my body making the artwork, is shown: What does it mean to survey and reclaim environments, relationship to space, and what sort of reclamation or belonging is my praxis aiming towards?⁸⁹

No Need for Clothing (Figures 45-49) was first performed in its entirety at the Cooper Gallery, Dundee, in 2017 for a programme of exhibitions called *Two Night Stands*.⁹⁰ The exhibition’s curators, Lynda Morris and Sophia Hao, introduced me to an earlier programme at the gallery, specifically *Of Other Spaces: Where Does Gesture Become Event*, featuring artists Anne Bean, Rose English, Mary Kelly, Linder, and several others. The pamphlet accompanying *Of Other Spaces*, (plus an accompanying reading list slipped in on a folded sheet of A4 paper), described as the second of a two-chapter contemporary art exhibition and event programme (Chapter One was the *12-Hour Action Group*, 2016), lays out the foundation for how I

⁸⁷ In this instance, the “whitewashing” I encountered by means of disavowing my Blackness as a child and teenager, a deliberately fostered condition, became a complicit but inadvertent assimilation on my part.

⁸⁸ Hudson, Peter James, “The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness: An Interview with Katherine McKittrick”, p. 233.

⁸⁹ For a discussion on my artwork in relation to the curatorial please see Mind the Gap: Unfolding the proximities of the curatorial Dr Ben Cranfield, Royal College of Art:

https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/2983/8/Cranfield_Mind%20the%20Gap_post.pdf

⁹⁰ “Two Night Stands: Jade Montserrat”, *Cooper Gallery: University Of Dundee*, 2017,

<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/cooper-gallery/events/twonightstandsjademontserrat/>

approached the development of *No Need for Clothing* at Cooper Gallery. I aimed to combine the spoken performance made at Spike Island earlier in the year with the drawing installation for the first time:

The title of the programme acknowledges the work of Hannah Arendt who understood politics as a ‘space of appearance’; a process of being seen and heard by others. Deprived of this, gestures whether artistic, social, or political, cannot herald in new alternatives. To do this, gestures must be provoked into becoming an event. Always without precedence an event ruptures and shatters how ourselves and the world appear. Transgressing prejudices and assumptions an event is a moment that declares another world is possible. Summoning the spirit of Arendt’s ‘space of appearance’, Chapter Two proposes the body itself as an event.

Standing among and between others, the body is a resistant otherness, queering and questioning its own appearance. Protesting and speaking, confronting, and mythologising, this questioning body utters its answer in performance.⁹¹

This idea relates to Hannah Arendt’s “words and deeds” from her book *The Human Condition*.⁹² My praxis subsequently seeks to maintain communality as a cure away from the myth of the artist’s ‘genius’ and the centrality of individualism.

I construct texts from my research, conversations, and imagination for *No Need for Clothing* and its iterations. My method is to graft one text, image, song, poem, conversation onto another ad infinitum. I draw these texts onto the walls of the spaces I am invited to perform the work in. This malleable material, its construction and presence in the performance drawing installation makes attempts to unknot long-overdue historical, theoretical, and embodied considerations of the Black Atlantic and my place as a postcolonial subject, who continues to live and work from the site of significant racialised and gendered trauma. I have come to recognise that Blackness is pathologised, both in the US and here in the UK. I learn

⁹¹ Of Other Spaces: Where does gesture become event? Chapter Two: 20 January – 4 March 2017, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, exhibition pamphlet.

⁹² “The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action...Wherever people get together, It is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and forever... Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being.” Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 199.

from US scholars and artists, abolitionists, and activists, because from both my reading and research, and friendships and conversations with American artists and scholars, I note that US conversations about racialised identities and Blackness, structural racism, and whiteness, seem to be further advanced than conversations in the UK. Gilroy notes how seductive African American forms of identity are in the UK. The United States of America and the United Kingdom foster individuals living under similar but very different racisms and histories, and a conflation that undermines the specifics of the British context is useful only for generating homogenous and global identities, perpetuating the new cultural imperialism, if you will, with distinctions and peculiarities stripped of necessary knowledges to resist racialised subordination to whiteness. In an enlightening conversation with the artist Jack Tan, he made clear that our histories – our Black British histories – are distinct from those of our African American comrades.⁹³ The worrying thing with the homogenising tendency of American culture (monoculturalism), Tan explained, is that by attempting to challenge racism in the UK through focusing on the African American experience, we miss the particularity of British white racism and cannot address it in the bespoke way it warrants. The risk is British white people adopting or performing US white racism and therefore a white supremacy extant but different. The performance of whiteness in America is based on segregation, by dehumanising Black people as pure product, objectified, economically commodifiable disposable partial-humans.

No Need for Clothing and its iterations use drawn and spoken text – text drawn through and with the body – as a device to work through embodied material conditions that a reciprocity between words, bodies and materiality can address. I make attempts in all the work I make – whether performative or on paper, video or spoken – to refine and edit towards an aesthetic that can simply get my anti-racist, abolitionist memorialist messages across. By exposing myself in the work, the performance drawing installation speaks a little of the vulnerability that is apparent through the sheer and opposing defiant act of nakedness. This is coupled with interpretation of the naked brown body: brazen or scared, empowered and consenting or surrendering, embarrassed or ashamed, hot or cold, indifferent or hyper-alert, through choice or not, spectacle or pornography. The body unclothed mark-making durationally directly on the gallery walls, flag up concerns about the body's capacity, vulnerability, safety. The vulnerability that is apparent through the sheer and opposingly defiant act of nakedness troubles our feminisms. Placed naked in the space of the gallery we might become alert to the words and deeds indicated within the text panels charging the material charcoal with the tensions, vulnerabilities and strength demanded by the female naked, labouring body. In a

⁹³ Conversation with Jack Tan, 25 May 2017.

discussion about the performances to camera, *Clay* and *Peat*, and work on paper *You'll have to be on your toes to survive these parts*, Alan Rice in his edifying and multi-layered essay “Jade Montserrat’s Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758-2018)” compensates for the apparent ambivalence that might be construed in respect of my nakedness in my work, by drawing the reader back to Glissant whose theorising, he says, “of the legacies of the enslavement illustrate why naked bodies are so important to Montserrat’s renderings in her film and her watercolours. They describe the special status of enslavement that conjure severe displacement, mental and physical, and an attendant nakedness that is visceral...”⁹⁴ Rice, evoking Glissant, speaks of ancestral spirit that is surely coursing through my work as spectre and essence, and my nakedness charges the spaces the work operates from with these references. I concluded initially that making the work unclothed was a practical approach, mindful of the material carbon that I use to draw the texts with, and which would overlay any clothing, making navigating ladders and scaffolding at some height potentially more dangerous than if clothed. In early iterations, audiences were free to engage in conversation with me during the drawing installation. Magnifying vulnerability through seeing a naked body flanked by large scale drawings in production, perhaps interrupted by another audience member, also had the potential to engineer a meditative space for others to mull over the words cauterising the space alongside the dichotomy of my brown naked body.

I like that there is a contagious aspect to the material, charcoal. Like ‘blackness’ and ‘darkness’, ‘contagion’ is considered a negative word, but I can use this. Entering a space can be risky, having no control over what material will land on you, even if the trace is invisible. I think if my purpose is to try and work out how I can contribute to create transformative visions of justice and ethical practice in this world, the work asks me to centre decolonisation work and strategies, to try and unpack and absorb theory around anti-racism, centring Blackness and Black joy. What the charcoal does is implicate everyone in material blackness, which spreads – like the idea of contagion. Specks of charcoal referring to the ‘flecks’ and ‘flex’

⁹⁴ Rice, Alan, “Jade Montserrat’s Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758)”, *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, vol. 7 no. 1 (2020), p.10

<https://tupjournals.temple.edu/index.php/kalfou/article/view/305>.

of micro or daily acts of activism, virally extending, implying perhaps the necessity of mutual aid networks. In a perverse way I like the thought of people being troubled by the material. I like that it offers awareness when washing one's hands, taking the blackness off. One can ignore that quite easily and it might make no impact, but for some people it might be the germ of the conversation with which they'll say, "Isn't that annoying? It's dirty to me, I'm dirty, my clothes are covered in this." Charcoal specks become inescapable, material refusing to yield its blackness, reminding some audiences perhaps of an all too frequent reaction from a potential conversant, sadly too often a friend or relation, by the mere mention of racism or decolonisation, wanting to wash their hands of it, a futile misadventure.

Chapter 1: Shadowing Josephine/Revue

My art practice demands that I interrogate systems of value, labour, and materiality. This is no more evident than in the development of performance *Shadowing Josephine*, subsequently renamed and reperformed as *Revue*. *Shadowing Josephine/Revue* exploits psycho-spatial dilemma as aesthetic possibility: my naked, enduring body repeats a dance routine, the movements wrought with emotion, association, and provocation. The routine is performed for up to several hours, which becomes painful. My body is brought to the point of exhaustion, goaded by what I presume to be the audience's ambivalent eye, surveying my choreographed, racialised body. I consider this work to be in the tradition of artists such as Mowbray Odonkor and Jeanette Ehlers, particularly their respective works *Onward Christian Soldiers* (1987) and *Whip It Good* (first performed 2013).⁹⁵ Ehlers whips paint onto imposingly large canvases in the manner of a violent plantation owner or white-worker. Eddie Chambers, writing about Black British artists of the 1980s, explains that "One of the most compelling subjects to be utilized by a number of these artists was depicting the *memory*, the *experience*, of slavery and the slave trade."⁹⁶ Chambers analyses Odonkor's painting, which represents the fibrous and intrusive spectre of English nationalism, imperialism and colonialism, and interprets the artists intention in the work as positing "...that slavery has left its own painful wounds on the psyche of its victims, on the African continent itself, and on a society that refuses to relinquish racism."⁹⁷ My personal dilemma about performing *Shadowing Josephine/Revue*, as the reproduction of spectacularised and violated Blackness, is heightened by the psychic interventions naturally occurring in contextually specific, loaded spaces of white-cube art galleries, night clubs, and theatres: my voluntarily vulnerable body on show to an audience; my embodied, agonising energies inflecting the performance. My intention is to raise awareness and provoke multi-directional connections and through repeated performance about histories of people in pain conflating with today's news of racialised and gendered violence.

⁹⁵ See Jeanette Ehlers, "Whip It Good (Live Performance)", 2014 & 15,

<https://www.jeannetteehlers.dk/pics/whipit.html>

⁹⁶ Chambers, Eddie, "Remembering the Crack of the Whip: African-Caribbean Artists in the UK Visualise Slavery", *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 34, no. 2, (2013) p. 293

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2013.791179>

⁹⁷ Chambers, Eddie, "Remembering the Crack of the Whip: African-Caribbean Artists in the UK Visualise Slavery", p. 302.

Embodied performances *Shadowing Josephine/Revue* and the durational drawing installation performance *No Need for Clothing* (which I will return to in Chapter 3) are historical meditations on the poetics of time and space, and both aim to suggest that my body, as a symbol for African Diasporan and displaced identities, is a tool for action and is vulnerable.

When black life matters, time itself is altered, creating “revolutionary time”. To make America great again is, then, to make it “white again,” a temporal action in which the future becomes more like the past and less like the present.⁹⁸

This quotation is important because time and repetition, historically and physically, align with Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory: that is traumatic, inclusive, intercultural memory, in relation to Holocaust memory and remembrance. With revolutionary time and readings of the body within my praxis, understanding that the precarity of Black lives today are embedded in a history of transatlantic slavery, a legacy of colonial administrative processes, and imperial expansion. Again, referring to Odonkor’s painting *Onward Christian Soldiers* illustrates a tradition of Black British artists who, putting themselves in the picture, here surrounded by black stars indicative of the Star of David that sit atop repeated bands of red, gold and green colours of the Ethiopian flag, a nod to Rastafarianism, and position the artist as having multi-directional concerns at the forefront of their making. Rothberg suggests that:

pursuing memory’s multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction.⁹⁹

Defining the contrast between collective and shared memory, Rothberg explains that:

When we talk about collective Holocaust memory or about collective memories of colonialism and decolonization, we are talking primarily about shared memory, memory that may have been initiated

⁹⁸ Mirzoeff, Nicholas, “Below the Water: Black Lives Matter and Revolutionary Time”, *e-flux Journal*, no. 79 (February 2017)

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94164/below-the-water-black-lives-matter-and-revolutionary-time/>

⁹⁹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 5.

by individuals but that has mediated through networks of communication, institutions of the state, and the social groupings of civil society.¹⁰⁰

This relatedness that Rothberg suggests invites thinking alongside Glissant's writing. In a passage explicating on 'échos-monde' and 'chaos-monde' Glissant gets to the heart of the relatedness and multi-directional poetic sensibility my durational work aims to set-up:

The poetics of Relation (which is, therefore, part of the aesthetics of the 'chaos-monde') senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues, and transforms the thought of these elements, these forms, and this motion.¹⁰¹

Taking Josephine Baker, her 'rainbow tribe', and her visions to transcend race as my pivot from which to project aspirations for relation, my artwork draws from the theory of multi-directionality understanding that "memory is at least as often a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity; indeed, multidirectional memory is often the very grounds on which people construct and act upon visions of justice."¹⁰²

Dance loosens, speaks its own unique language. For example, it is claimed that twerking, a dance movement that engages the hips, buttocks, and pelvis and is similar to the gyrations we see Josephine Baker perform, can even encourage and alleviate menstruation, which can be a relief.¹⁰³ Dance practice fosters routine: the discipline, expanding imagination and focus through necessary breath work and embodied therapeutic practices. Exploring the bounds of an ethical art practice, requiring acknowledgement of sensory and sensual commitments, must prioritise exploring care-centred initiatives, and spaces where solidarities can take shape. I am currently reviewing dance as a care strategy and practice of resistance rather than a medium through which to labour ideas on exploitation and endurance – what an endless demand to endure does to a person – although these realities do underpin all production within practice, as with life. Dancing

¹⁰⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 13

¹⁰¹ Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 94-5. More recently, I am exploring this relatedness explicitly, so far working collectively on drawing installations, and in publishing. Please refer to: *Learning in-and-within relation (after Édouard Glissant)*, performance drawing installation, Hanover Projects (22 April 2021)

<https://hanoverproject.wordpress.com/2021/04/22/jade-montserrat/> and *A Reimagining of Relations* (London: STUART, Iniva, 2021) <https://iniva.org/shop/publications/a-reimagining-of-relations/>.

¹⁰² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 19.

¹⁰³ Afro-Latinx artist, activist and pleasure scholar Fannie Sosa first alerted me to the power of hip releasing and fertility dances <https://fanniesosa.com>

Black people are marked and loaded locations. The regulation of dance was historically employed as both entertainment and a safety-valve by traders on board the slave ship and by the plantocracy. Alan Rice reminds readers in his article “Vagrant Presences: Lost Children, the Black Atlantic, and Northern Britain” that formerly enslaved working class stow-away James Johnson, who arrived in Britain from America during the American Civil War in 1862, from his own account in his posthumously published pamphlet, “...took to singing, dancing and rattlebones, which I found was easier than begging”.¹⁰⁴ Rice explains that this “...underlines the way he brought with him cultural forms learnt on the plantations, distributing, as he travelled, African Atlantic cultural forms which would have been new in many of the wayside haunts he inhabited”.¹⁰⁵ Dance is memory’s interlocutor, through which it is realised and released in ways that written and spoken words can only describe, not enunciate. The evolution of dance is guided by muscle-memory in the body, a profoundly political idea enabling new discourses away from the written word.¹⁰⁶ Dance, as with a yoga practice, is a reparative act of care and a tool with which to release traumas and everyday stresses that otherwise burden day to day movement. I would jolt and stumble during the durational performance, *Shadowing Josephine/Revue* and wonder why I was putting myself through the exacting conditions demanded from the performance and why nobody was stopping me. Mentor Season Butler encouraged making under humane conditions. Therefore, body work specialists and one-to-one yoga and personal training sessions, including nutritional advice, were factored into my budget. I identified professionals who could help my activist approach to artmaking through a gruelling performance art practice combined with intense study. My body has served as one that has cultivated an observation of my body’s basic needs, albeit fluctuating. One bodywork specialist was very responsive to my context, directing me to several texts that will further research on cellular ancestral trauma.¹⁰⁷

How are labourers, loaded with generational traumas, valued in relation to the transatlantic slave trade and system that rendered the negation of Black people? How are the millions of enslaved Africans whose nameless lives live on in peoples of the African Diaspora and in migration stories memorialised? On

¹⁰⁴ Rice, Alan, *Vagrant Presences: Lost Children, the Black Atlantic, and Northern Britain*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Rice, Alan, *Vagrant Presences: Lost Children, the Black Atlantic, and Northern Britain*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Thank you to Alan Rice for suggesting this.

¹⁰⁷ Thank you to Rachel Blackman, body-work specialist in Brighton, September 2018. This was made possible through the ACE grant, support from Steakhouse Live and The Marlborough Pub residency.

the disposability of enslaved Africans, whose dehumanisation and deaths in the millions served as “corollar[ies] to the making of commodities”, Hartman writes:

Incidental death occurs when life has no normative value, when no humans are involved, when the population is, in effect, seen as already dead. In effect, it made it easier for a trader to countenance yet another dead black body or for a captain to dump a shipload of captives into the sea in order to collect the insurance, since it wasn't possible to kill cargo or to murder a thing already denied life. Death was simply a part of the workings of the trade.¹⁰⁸

“The hold repeats and repeats and repeats in and into the present, into the classroom and the hospital” writes Christina Sharpe under a subheading to her chapter ‘The Hold’ called ‘Cradle to Grave, Womb to Tomb’. Sharpe’s book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a painful veering between our transnational imperial and colonial histories and contemporary Blackness, recording and bearing witness to spaces of reclamation and transformation, that reimagine “...an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of being in the wake of consciousness; as a way of remembering and observance that started with the door of no return, continued in the hold of the ship and on the shore.”¹⁰⁹ My praxis questions what types of actions have been/are being taken to secure/institute care centred structures and what provocations can wedge open space and dialogue to challenge “naked self-interest” transformatively?¹¹⁰ Earlier in *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman presents the condition that Baker aspires to transcend with her ‘rainbow tribe’:

...because black lives are still imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery— skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.¹¹¹

Rehearsals of *Shadowing Josephine/Revue* invariably take place the day before public performances: I re-watch the Vimeo video of my performance-to-phone-camera at Scarborough Spa, prompting memory of the simple routine. Re-watching so close to the live performance goads me when I least feel like performing. It is the spur required: I’m my own cheerleader. After a short time into the performance on stage, and during practice now, my body instinctively responds to the music. Muscle memory kicks in and lubricates the

¹⁰⁸ Hartman, Saidiya, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Sharpe, Christina, *In the Wake* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 130-31.

¹¹⁰ Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2006) p. 8.

¹¹¹ Hartman, Saidiya, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 6.

performance and a-temporally, beyond the performance, later, as praxis. I find myself in various stages of concentration and groove during live performances. Movement prompts personal and socially inflected recollections, and I sense dissonances within my body, at the core of my being. Not yet ‘at home’ on stage, thoughts wander to memories of forgetting steps to routines when I performed on stage as a kid. I felt shamefully ‘naked’ then, guilty and glared at – a light-blinded forgetting. However, I have performed *Shadowing Josephine* enough times to have occasionally sensed the abandon that Phyllis Rose in her book on Josephine Baker, *Jazz Cleopatra*, describes as the “ethos of performance: that real life is lived on the stage and the rest of it exists so you can give your best for those few minutes a day when you’re really living and what you do really counts.”¹¹² Some of my fears, for example missing a step, are now conquered or perhaps numbed, and my body, on entering the performance space, instinctively gauges psycho-spatial dynamics. I take in short-sighted eyefuls of the audience (I usually wear spectacles), partially gleaned as I perform the vigorous movements. My movements fall into spasms of protest; I accentuate certain movements. During some of the live performances to the public I have been menstruating, as I was at the Norbert Arns Gallery in Cologne, where I also remember a middle-aged white man with a bow tie gaily nodding and dancing on the spot along to the performance, every now and then making dampened claps just off the beat, as if to gee me along or gee me up.¹¹³ My body, while fairly reliable, moves in accordance to the stresses and strains, joys or relaxation that it has absorbed over the previous weeks or that it might anticipate, understood in relation to postmodernist writer Kathy Acker’s description of her body building practice:

though I am only repeating certain gestures during certain time spans, my body, being material, is never the same; my body is controlled by change and by chance.”¹¹⁴

Movements include twirling, which is exhilarating. I expand my arms while circling the space in turns. I also attempt a deliberately clumsy Charleston and Bee’s Knees dance steps (Figures 21-24). The skeleton of the routine lapses, my exhausted body limps or is jolted and ignited, exalted, convulsing with renewed

¹¹² Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*, p. 50.

¹¹³ A performance-to-camera of *Shadowing Josephine* was also made while I was exhibiting in the gallery ([Shadowing Josephine](http://ShadowingJosephine.com)) November 31 2017 gallerie norbert arns, Koln [galerienorbertarns.de/jade-montserrat/ filmed and edited by David Wesemann;](http://galerienorbertarns.de/jade-montserrat/filmed_and_edited_by_David_Wesemann/) <https://vimeo.com/314000049>

¹¹⁴ Acker, Kathy, “Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body” (1993) in *Bodies of Work* (London and New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1997), p. 7.

vigour and purpose. Jolted by memory, seemingly following the routine, making marching steps, for example, while internally repairing traumatic recollections. Before my mother and I came to live with my stepfather, he volunteered in the Territorial Army. He also collected medals and paraphernalia relating to the Boer War. He expressed and demanded observance of his nationalistic, politically right-leaning military fantasies, and affectations including demonstrating and having me practice the “correct” way to Sieg Heil, or salute, to drill “Attention!”, to say Lieutenant correctly, and so on.

“The self which is unobservable is a mystery. It is imprisoned in the observed. It is constantly struggling to wrest itself from the warp of public ownerships. Its own language is plain yet secret. Rather, obscured.”¹¹⁵ So Dionne Brand describes the condition that Blacks in the diaspora, as she phrases those of us whose inheritance is bound to enslaved Africans, is constricted by a suffocating, smothering blanket of whiteness: the white gaze and internalised white ownership of self. Within the framework of the choreographed dance routine, I exaggerate contortions and steps, sometimes furiously, at other times animalistically. Often, I am rapt with painful emotion, streaming with tears, grieving onstage for lives snatched short, whose once-vulnerability I refer to in isolated dance-steps such as hands in the air, as though ‘surrender’ is ordered of me (Figure 24). At a few points during the routine I lie on the floor, mobilising a lineage of nudity and servility in the history of art, for example in Manet’s painting *Olympia* (1863). I emphasise and refract titillation and tantalisation, returning the audience’s gaze as I perform this labour as art. In full swing, I may fall into a paroxysm, feeling emboldened by stuttering movements my body uses to release. These movements fizz with the freneticism of the multiple ages, times, genders, sexualities, histories, connections, rituals, and relations my research and praxis offer by way of wider material for my performances. *Shadowing Josephine/Revue*, and perhaps to a lesser extent *No Need for Clothing* and its iterations or the performance to camera, *Clay*, can be discussed within a framework of sex work and pornography, given the physicality attributed to them and the way my Black female body is fetishised within the dominant frame of reference: the white, male, heteronormative, eroticising gaze.

In her book *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface*, Anne Anlin Cheng explores what she calls “Modernism’s dream”, which is metaphorically “lathered” or branded all over Othered bodies, and which I interpret to have been achieved through colonial insidiousness and industrialising dominance. The author analyses overnight-sensation Baker, whose nakedness she utilises as a case study for

¹¹⁵ Brand, Dionne, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Vintage Canada, 2001). p. 51.

her notion of “second skins”. Cheng’s is an epidermal analysis of “pure surface” as a Modernist facade, how skin was racialised and codified in graduating scales of humanisation, “as itself a *modern material fascination*”.¹¹⁶ This gap, or failure, offers an entry point with which to serve bewildering, multi-directional subject positions within my practice: I perform as locus in *Shadowing Josephine/Revue* for unearthing, transcribing, and surrendering to my own Blackness, in relation to my African Diasporan heritage, as a British subject, in reference to Josephine Baker, who Cheng posits might be seen to have created an alternative for how the black female body and identity is constructed and represented in history, and consequently how audiences then and historians and the curious, like me, contextualise the spatiality of Baker’s subjectivity, performances and praxis. Griselda Pollock, in her broad analysis and reconceptualisation of female representation in the visual arts, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, refines the perspective with which to appreciate the self-realisation, self-invention and self-projection that Baker promises, transforming the representation of her body from the economies of flesh which the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans inscribed on Black women “in a complex and knowing reclamation of the very terms of her ancestors’ enslavement and abduction from an Africa she had never known”.¹¹⁷ Baker’s compulsion, conviction and commitment to her signification as sexual object reveals and proclaims her body and performativity as a tool to inscribe Black agency and authorship. Baker’s body in the context of cosmopolitan 1920s Paris asks not to be defined by identities but by the body’s relation to everything possible, a reciprocal activity. As Pollock suggests:

Perhaps Josephine Baker unexpectedly found the colonialist fantasies less damaging, more easily turned back on themselves, more amenable to being used as a springboard for her finding her own verb; a verb in which she could speak her own singularity and experience that growth that comes from trying different things and having the space and freedom to decide who to become through work, through art, through love, through politics in which being black was found beautiful, interesting, in ways that did not compromise her fundamental humanity as a person.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Cheng, A. A., *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 14.

¹¹⁷ Pollock, Griselda, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (Routledge, 2007), p. 126.

¹¹⁸ Pollock, Griselda, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, p. 131.

It is this essence that has proved so infectious to my thinking, practice, and praxis, grappling with histories of the transatlantic slave trade in African peoples, adopting this mode of multi-directionality to speak with unknown ancestors and compatriots of the African Diaspora, to articulate and announce the transformations that guide towards sites of reclamation and renewal.

CHAPTER 2

My works in the rural North Yorkshire landscape have been made with less deliberate consciousness of the excavation and representation Stuart Hall urges in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” from which the following pertinent quotation appears: “It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation”.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the identity Hall addresses in the above quotation, one’s cultural identity, that shared sense of communality versus the peculiarity and particularity of my Blackness in the rural, specifically, is explored through collaborations

¹¹⁹ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, p. 223.

with filmmakers Anj and Caitlin Webb-Ellis.¹²⁰ We began independently collaborating in 2014 by making a series of performance films in the landscape around our shared home space. Titled *Clay, Peat, and Cage*, these film vignettes grew directly from my research and sketches. They document the performance of physical acts – refusals of containment or control – in the landscape, questioning who is privileged enough to be in the rural landscape (Figures 35-44). Whether in the act of gouging clay from the earth, splashing through wet peat, and entering a fox trap, the performances open conversations around land ownership, race, trauma, and belonging, through the lens of the body. As collaborators, we work through these ideas as an

¹²⁰ Through collaboration we are learning from one another and bearing the load towards fulfilling the aim of making and developing the work at all by pooling our resources and sharing the burden of navigating and applying for funding. In 2020 we embarked on two new films produced in lockdown conditions, *Chronicle ia* (<https://youtu.be/ubTdoM6eqa0>) and *Re:seeding* (<https://youtu.be/I22njxizskQ?t=971>). The films explore inter-personal impacts of lockdown through the documentation of a collaborative making process, emphasising new ways of being, together. Weaving together performance and documentary moments, the short films suggest a framework for a dialogic practice-based research process, and move our shared practice into new territory, both visual and conceptual. The cinematic representation I aim for, however, is still to come and *Chronicle/Coracle* (working title) will see us embarking on our first collaborative multi-screen film/installation as a trio. This new film takes as its starting point my intensely personal understanding of my place in a history of migration, stemming from my Irish, Welsh and Monsterratian ancestry. Our experimental approach across multiple screens will combine performance footage with documentary material, to weave narratives linking the ancient past to the complexity of the present moment. Webb-Ellis will be there on the periphery of the film, acting as witnesses and interlocutors. Working together across multiple screens for the first time will allow us to create a film which rejects a definitive single narrative i.e., patriarchal, and colonialist ways of being and seeing. Sound will also play a big part in creating atmosphere. Delicately incorporating our artists' voices with archive recordings, poetry, quotes and music, *Chronicle/Coracle* will set out to reflect and name global imaginaries - uniting bodies in a non-essentialist movement to traverse histories, nations, ideologies, and times. Ultimately the works made to date and in development consider the possibilities for Black female engagement with the land, environmentalism, agriculture, climate change and food sovereignty?

unfolding dialogue, examining our respective subject positions as postcolonial white and mixed-heritage artists and the role of our friendship within this web of meaning.¹²¹

These considerations have arisen in parallel with the reflective work that *Clay*, *Peat*, and *Cage* demanded. Meaning is subordinate to making a work of art, and the intentions for making. Meaning also evolves over time. We embarked on making what has since become a trilogy. My intention was to record responses to locations redolent in personal history and assuage curiosity towards specific locations as locus for broader meaning and interpretation. We made the trilogy in the order of *Clay*, *Cage* and *Peat*, and it was only in 2020 that I came to visit the edit of *Cage*, seemingly for the first time. Between 2019 and 2021 Alexandra Moore, a PhD candidate and researcher at the University of Santa Cruz, California, conducted several interviews with me (Webb-Ellis included on occasion) about the trilogy of films. Transcripts from the Zoom recorded interviews have informed this chapter. I will footnote direct quotations from the transcript; otherwise, please note the influence of the interviews. Central to the discussions is Moore's observation that "All of these films are looking at violence embedded in rural landscape and the constructedness of rural landscapes," adding, "There is no perfect pristine landscape. There are relationships that are violent and then there are relationships of mutuality of care. That's something all the films make me think of. Like in *Clay*, there's a sort of lovingness of getting into the clay as opposed to the violence of making a plantation".¹²² Moore's understanding complements the idea that watching the film *Clay* serves to implicate the viewer as witness to an act, to use Alan Rice's term, of "guerrilla memorialisation".¹²³ Rice observes, quoting Paul Ricoeur, that:

This transformation of 'the physical absence of the lost object into an inner presence' is crucial to an understanding of Montserrat's artwork as an act of recovery of black lives marginalised and

¹²¹ As nomadic people, Webb-Ellis are regularly vilified on account of their living in a converted furniture removal van, demonised for approximating "travellers" or "gypsies". Notwithstanding their discriminated-against status, irrespective of the privileges that ensure that they can rebuke this as misunderstanding, through our shared alienations and observations of living in the rural landscapes we are all three of us advocates of UK citizenry right to roam – a hard-won fight, as campaigned for on <https://www.righttoroam.org.uk> and also in solidarity with <https://www.landjustice.uk>.

¹²² Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

¹²³ Rice, Alan, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 13, 120, 104.

forgotten in this landscape and the act of digging into the earth to construct a grave-like pit as a ritualised guerrilla memorialisation that works against melancholic forgetfulness.¹²⁴

It is important to remark that Ingrid Pollard's photo-text series *Pastoral Interlude* (1987), introduced to me by Caitlin Webb-Ellis, anchors our enquiries in relation to rural belongings, estrangements, and alienations. In the work, a Black female model is captured by Pollard in a variety of solitary rural scenes, accompanied by text. One reads: "'Pastoral interlude'...it's as if the black experience is only ever lived within an urban environment. I thought I liked the Lake District, where I wandered lonely as a black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease; dread...", while the hand-tinted silver gelatine image shows the model, with a camera in hand, staring intently out of the frame.¹²⁵ Pollard's is a guerrilla tactic, reinserting, envisaging, and interrogating who belongs in the English countryside, who has access, and points to some historical processes that are responsible for this. A parallel aspect of this work is Pollard's contemporaneous founding of and work towards BEN (Black Environmental Network), a since-disbanded Birmingham-based organisation that "worked to enable full ethnic participation in the built and natural environment" through a range of activities intended to raise awareness, influence policy, and build a community of ethnically diverse participants.¹²⁶ Both projects – artwork and community organisation – are doing similar things, that is, questioning where Black people belong, and calling into focus the reality that the presence of Black people and Black social life in Britain is invariably thought of in terms of the urban. Ingrid Pollard's work and activism is extremely important and *Pastoral Interlude* is incredibly prescient. My experience of the rural landscape and its species was communicated to me through disjointed definitions, whereby respect for the landscape combined predilections for forcing nature to my family's will (as humans are wont to do and which I aspire to continually betray).

¹²⁴ Rice, Alan, "Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758)".

¹²⁵ "Pastoral Interlude, Pollard, Ingrid", *Victoria And Albert Museum*, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O107865/pastoral-interludeits-as-if-the-photograph-pollard-ingrid/>

¹²⁶ "BEN Network", *Ben-Network.org.uk* (2021) http://www.ben-network.org.uk/about_ben/intro.asp

In *Clay* I perform intimately, instinctually, and responsively to a landscape I had lived within, by the time of filming, for several decades. Each of the performances-to-camera that comprise the trilogy are unscripted. In anticipation of working with Webb-Ellis on filming, I narrowed down locations and possible actions that I might make within the specific environments. I explained my strategy in interview with Moore:

I was wanting to explore that area, in a way, to make coherent memories of it that I hadn't discussed or hadn't experienced with other people. And through having worked with Cait and Anj, we could explore on terms that meant it was kind of fun and also use our imaginations to explore... It was amazing to be able to invite and film, I think, and also foster a friendship, because we were having to negotiate the parameters of the landscape together. It wasn't at that point for granted that I could go on all the landscapes.¹²⁷

On this first occasion, I had intended on somersaulting down a relatively small and narrow grassy section of a hill that otherwise had a plantation of pine and spruce conifers flanking three sides of the enclosure, potentially quite a theatrical staging. The somersaulting was intended as in reference to an old slogan, *Go Spin You Jade*, quoted in the Southern States during the American Civil War against women abolitionists in the North. On arrival at the site, however, the giant pit was fortuitously there, ready for the action. I proceeded to make in the film *Clay*. Prior to filming, I made sketches detailing an idea called *Mud Pies* (Figure 35). These loose sketches described the landscape and a digging taking place in it – balls of mud featured prominently. In works on paper, *Entered Her Room* or *My spirit is too ancient to understand the separation* and *The glamour of her homemade stage* (Figures 64, 67, and 68) notice small overlapping and tightly packed circles, which are drawn as a reoccurring motif symbolising compacted mud, soil, archaeology, matter, compost, tarmac. In these and other works, I am repeatedly attempting to illustrate the visceral quality of the clay on flesh, or the somatic response to moulding and moving and playing with slippery and solid matter, as well as indicating topography and the connection between body, earth and the archaeological resonances that inflect the concerns of soils. I had imagined digging with my hands, as I had done as a child, to find clay to model that I often came across at the duck ponds, carved out of this earth to create false temporary homes, for slaughter by rich white men. The hole in the ground looked to have been

¹²⁷ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

made by the regular digger man and annual hedge trimmer, Alan, who I saw later that day heading back to a site that I sense was made to divert water pipes. Webb-Ellis also took footage of me making a snaking, slippery, slithery action through a narrow tunnel that led from the huge hole in the ground *Clay* was made in, and that stretched from this area on to the right of the frame, towards the stream where I later washed myself, filmed by Webb-Ellis. *Clay*, as understood by Alan Rice in his article “Lost and Found” is about humans gouging the earth, humans being gouged from the earth, about rebuilding and the vulnerability that is faced when this is attempted in isolation, pointing out that “for African Atlantic people who have found themselves in Northern England as ‘lost children’ and are building lives out of the surrounding dangers, there is hope in survival, in making their presence felt.”¹²⁸ And in his thoughtful essay reflecting on *Clay* and *Peat* titled “Jade Montserrat’s Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758)” he asks, in contrast to the economic “sporting” imperative that required the hole being dug on my step-fathers land, “Has she created a burial pit, a shelter or a wall, or all three. Is she a gravedigger, a craftsperson or a putative homemaker.” He adds:

She is all three, expressing the mourning of black lives lost through the history of slavery and its aftermath, creating new other lives in alien worlds and finally making homes; the multiplicity of the film is central to its powerful meaning, where the artist and performer Jade Montserrat seeks to articulate her claim to this alien British rural space as a black woman.¹²⁹

Viscerally evocative, *Clay* presupposes my racialised flesh, provoking the non-linearity of memory. I now reflect that I was racialised before I knew what race or what my ethnicity was (a sense of ‘difference’ however was always felt and made clear). Clay and mud and soil as it was in this malleable crater created a point for unification with matter, and a sense of ownership towards this land that had been so formative in my upbringing. In one of the interviews conducted with Moore I explained to her that:

Physically I belong to that landscape and that landscape completely belongs to me. But I have been ostracised from that landscape through the divorce and the shooters who would come through. It’s a place of sanctuary. Using the clay as I did, was very reminiscent of my time as a child there.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Rice, Alan, “Lost and Found: Echoes of Britain’s Black Voices” *Times Higher Education*, (11 June 2015 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/lost-and-found-echoes-of-britains-black-voices>)

¹²⁹ Rice, Alan, “Jade Montserrat’s Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies”.

¹³⁰ Phone Interview with Alexandra Moore, 27 September 2019.

Later in that interview with Moore I make a comparison between clay and breathing and taking this further I now wonder about how, in attempts to alleviate pressures on breathing, or any anxieties generally, it is encouraged that one positions one's body in postures that can elicit a sense of grounding. Artist Mathew Parkin sensitively considers in his reflection of *Clay*

...what it can mean to use mud as a balm for a legacy of alienation. White supremacy sits at the root of all oppression and queers should fight against this. Violent borders (or 'enclosures' to take a Federici slant) resonate through the urban and rural and need to be resisted and dismantled.¹³¹

Soils are vital for food and nourishment, and these soils can be supported to breathe through agricultural methods that respond to the earth's needs (as opposed to human), tended by stewards of lands working for the collective, in harmony with the lands, not yet entirely desecrated. There is a cyclical and synchronous relationship between soil and breath that I ritualise through actioning my body at one with itself and the earth and under the gaze and recognition of Webb-Ellis, as witnesses.

The third in the trilogy, *Peat*, also explores land ownership and Black fugitivity. Although the site for filming is again one loaded with personal significance, it is imagined as metaphor for the brutality of ownership the world over, and the violent measures that landowners and national governments take, particularly over perceived trespassers, to maintain ownership and control. Discussing the watercolour painting, or 'performance document' as I sometimes call such responses on paper, *You'll have to be on your toes to survive these parts* (Figure 44) which takes a photograph I took looking at my feet post-performance in the peat-bog with my camera phone, Rice concludes that:

Literally and figuratively, fugitivity is summoned here as the mode that black people adopt to survive; nimble mobility and improvisatory gestures are modes that are essential to making a way through an alien landscape that you continually have to try and make your home.¹³²

The site is that of the deepest peat deposits in the vicinity of where I grew up: Peat Bog Moor on the Hackness Estate, near the Falcon Inn off the Scarborough to Whitby Road, which I was led to believe my step-father Joe's family owned at one point. It is one of the last very small bogs in the area, nestled in a large swathe of forest. Historically providing fuel for the locals and a cottage industry for the surrounding villages, here all the tenants of the estate had right of turbary, an ancient legal right to cut peat for fuel on

¹³¹ Parkin, Mathew, "Cottaging the Hedgerow", *MAP Magazine* (June 2020)

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/cottaging-the-hedgerow-part-4>)

¹³² Rice, "Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies", p. 10.

common ground.¹³³ It was once a resource for the community and a landscape I felt an inherent sensitivity towards, recalling it always as mysterious, knowledgeable, and somehow safe. In the present day, the bog is confined to one acre, situated amid trees planted by the Forestry Commission, and is not as deep as it was. Peat bogs have been forming for 10,000 years; they comprise centuries of buried histories, are extremely diverse ecosystems and are the UK's 'rain forests': the material of preservation, warmth, and growth, the past layered in its mass as new beginnings emerge on its surface. Peat bogs are endangered, the irony being that they are pillaged for gardeners. Note this inane conflict between the force of nature and the control of nature. Ninety-six per cent of peatlands have been destroyed in this century and they are on the verge of extinction – another casualty of climate change, and humanity's encroachment and decimation of the land.¹³⁴

Peat was made in response to Alan Rice's invitation to make a work for the conference mentioned above that aimed to celebrate and contextualise Caryll Philips's then newly published book *The Lost Child*. The book offered me an introductory route into Charlotte Brontë's book *Wuthering Heights*, which Phillips reimagines in the twentieth century. I was moved by the agony of love, of possession and dispossession, of alienation and death, that permeate both novels. Through reading the two novels I was moved to imagine that both Heathcliff (representative of the dispossessed) and I are aliens dropped into these ancient landscapes in the North of England. Each of our appearances, our (by all accounts) our melanated, codified, and racialised skin, suggest we were not meant to be here. To further the antagonisms between our appearances, are the hierarchical structures of whiteness that conduct how our Blackness and humanity is to be read and responded to within these landscapes. On returning to this site, I recalled to Alexandra Moore in one of our interviews that: "I got that alienation. I understood the despair and pain. I suppose it was the beginning of me putting together the understanding of our imperial history with the landscape."¹³⁵ The

¹³³ For a definition of turbarry please see [merriamwebster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com)

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/turbary> and for more on peat, see Hartley, Marie and Ingilby, Joan, *Life in the Moorlands of North-East Yorkshire* (London, 1972) pp. 73-81

¹³⁴ For more on peat: <https://peatlands.org/>. Sarah Jane Cervenak distilled the essentials regarding the composition and uses of peat matter in her essay on the performance-to-camera. Cervenak, Sarah Jane, "With: Jade Montserrat's Peat", *ASAP Journal*, 1 August 2019

<https://asapjournal.com/with-jade-montserrats-peat-sarah-jane-cervenak/>)

¹³⁵ Phone Interview with Alexandra Moore, 27 September 2019.

alienation experienced by those of us who are Othered is magnified by landscapes scarred by borders, raised inscriptions of territorial ownership marked by hedgerows and dry-stone walls. Conveyed in the action witnessed and edited in the film for emphasis by Webb-Ellis, my body becomes heavy, sluggish, destabilised; this is reinforced by isolation, reminiscent of Heathcliff's desperate tread. Heathcliff's and my own experiences mirror each other's: the territory is bleak, remote, unforgiving, unhearing, without union or unity with other bodies. The separation between Heathcliff and Catherine is even more awesome through the breath-taking union of their souls. Cementing their union is the landscape. Heathcliff and I fall under a net of unbelonging, although fully of this landscape.

Peat builds up to my body, filmed by a drone, jumping up and down (represented in slow-motion in the film) in what might be interpreted as a wound in the earth: deep reds, burgundies, and ochres rim my body's location. My body acts out a drill, one that I imagine could propel or sink me, earthbound, to hide from the drone's surveillance, which is tied up in warfare and extermination. The energy that I am releasing by repeating the jumping movement is urgent, immediate, sensational and was also inspired by my initial reading of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, and in particular a quotation from the foreword by Homi K. Bhabha which reads: "...the state of emergency is always a state of emergence".¹³⁶ Simultaneously, I am boring down into the earth to protect myself from the condition on being Othered in this landscape, as per my lived experience and in resonance with the fictional character of Heathcliff. And concurrently "emerging" through the act of creativity, of being witnesses and witnessed, of propelling my ideas and expressions forward into and through relation by means of collaboration. Webb-Ellis had not long purchased the drone before filming *Peat*. Their investment coincided with me reading Grégoire Chamayou's *Drone Theory*, a book about US drone warfare and Barack Obama's role in robot warfare via airstrikes on Pakistan. In contrast to *Clay*, I am less in communion or ritualising an exchange with the earth. In *Peat* I wanted the earth to open-up, to protect and shelter me, and the futility of my method to accomplish that is alarming in the presence of the drone – every moment is a potential moment of capture. Sarah Jane Cervenak queries this sense of fugitivity in her article "With: Jade Montserrat's *Peat*". imagining that "the auditory expressivity of wet grasses, some uncultivated green, in conjunction with a black woman's visually pursued form indicates a kind of spatiotemporal, ecological resemblance to an anti-black plantational fetish

¹³⁶ Bhabha, Homi K, Foreword in Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

coterminous with the pursuit and unmaking of (presumptively uncultivated) earth and flesh.”¹³⁷ The actions I make – walking, running, and jumping – intentionally suggest that state of anxiety and impotent energy in the face of climate change. In the performance I am suggesting the humanity appears to be walking, running, and jumping towards the verge of collapse. I was inspired by Martin Luther King Junior’s notion of walking together to resist racial oppression, during the Civil Rights movement in America:

...their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.¹³⁸

This call for solidarity by King Junior is disobediently conjured, striking revolutionary chords, by Édouard Glissant, whose notion of “global errancy” is evoked by Alan Rice who encouragingly describes *Peat* as an exemplary imaginary conception of such errancy as it makes estranged landscape into home and centres black presence far from the urban landscapes traditional British historical narratives would confine them to. The global errancy is linked to local peripheral spaces which then become central to newly conceived histories of Black British presence.¹³⁹

Both filmed over consecutive days, *Cage*, in contrast to *Clay*, reproduces the familiar condition of peoples the world over: those with no claim of ownership, with restrictions on their freedoms, chillingly and impotently witnessed in the media during former President of the United States, Donald Trump’s administration, for example, particularly the caged humans and children in detention centres on the Mexican border.¹⁴⁰ *Cage* utilises, for the first time in one of my performances to camera, a prop and found object, a fox trap, a contraption familiar in the surroundings. As recalled to Alexandra Moore in another interview about watching the film seemingly for the first time in 2020, my sense is that

¹³⁷ Cervenak, Sarah Jane, “With: Jade Montserrat’s Peat”, *ASAP Journal*, 1 August 2019

<https://asapjournal.com/with-jade-montserrats-peat-sarah-jane-cervenak/>

¹³⁸ Luther King Jr., Martin, *A Gift of Love* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).

¹³⁹ Rice, Alan, “Jade Montserrat’s Fugitive Traces and Earth-Splattered Bodies: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758)”, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ “Trump Migrant Separation Policy: Children ‘In Cages’ In Texas”, *BBC News*, 2018

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44518942>

at the time it must have been really difficult to watch, and I will have just rejected it. But coming back to it I see a different tenderness... I knew that there was a real connection between my body and finding a language to describe my body in that landscape, and how to build friendship and collaborate in that landscape because it had been so private. It literally had that sign on the gate that said “Newgate No Callers” [on the approach to the site where *Cage* was filmed, within the area of the pheasant release pens, signs read “Private - Nature Reserve”]. Which was always difficult for me to comprehend because I knew the sort of slaughter that went on there.”¹⁴¹

This vignette, shot in the woods, *Cage*, is inflected by the indelible influence of Charles Perrault’s *Fairy Tales*, replete with line illustrations and etchings, by Gustave Doré (1697). This was a confusing and eerie enchanting feature of my childhood and journey to adulthood. The illustrations had a profound emotional and visceral effect on me before I could make full sense of what they were depicting or indicating. I compared these etchings, depicting scenes from these frightening fairy tales, with the vast but often eerie, wooded, lonely landscape I was living in and, anecdotally, recalled to Moore an intrusive memory that conjures up for me a similar sense of dread and mystery to that provoked by fairy-tales:

I’d always been really intrigued by that particular series of fields or enclosures actually. So, where we went was a former pheasant release pen and it’s around those woods where I have very distinct memories of squirrels being trapped. So, I think the scale of things was really magnified for me because these landscapes had made such an impression on me as a very small child, away from other human beings so we came to following that... not just memories but ways of using the land which are really bewildering. And that I know that on a bodily level that I was really disturbed by the memories and the witnessing of the hanging squirrel. Just as I was really disturbed by fox traps which is what that cage is, isn’t it? Because I didn’t grow up with generated electricity or a television reception, I did have an introduction to other very similar landscapes through our program of choice which we watched through videos on repeat, the Joan Hickson *Miss Marple* series. The three of us would be able to recite passages from *Miss Marple*, but there’s also one of them, *A Pocket Full of Rye*, where there’s a man trap. And what was indistinct for me was the difference between an animal

¹⁴¹ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

trap or a man trap. Because there was so much violence operating in the landscape that is otherwise full of mystery and creativity and wonder, but these ugly sides never escaped me.¹⁴²

The cage itself had other personal resonances that spoke to my adolescence and my first forays into the Scarborough club scene as an older teenager. Scarborough no longer has any nightclubs, but one of the few remaining stragglers, which also doubled as a strip club, was called Club Excess and had cages inside. I found dancing in the cage there freeing, a moment when I wasn't expected to conform. A confined space that I also felt comfortable within through having some parameters; I enjoy the space, as a protective one, free to dance how I wished without the fear of having my personal physical boundaries crossed.

Around the time that *Cage* was filmed, wondering if I might wear the mantle of 'feminist', I began cursory research on the approximately 25,000-year-old figurine *The Venus of Willendorf*, Saartjie Baartman (the Hottentot Venus) an objectified and exploited African woman under subjugation in Europe during the nineteenth century, as well as colonial exhibitions featuring human cages (e.g. Great Bradford Exhibition of 1904; Brussels World Fair of 1958), and their contemporaneous recreations (Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Ali Fadlabi's *European Attraction Limited*, 2014¹⁴³; Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*, 2014), which in turn led me to Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, 1992). Containment was something I identified in my own conditioning as a Black woman and English national, and that I recognised as a feature connecting these historical, art-historical and contemporary leads. Prominent in this line of enquiry was Elizabeth Barnwell's essay, *Like the Gypsy's Daughter* (1997), which featured a still photograph from the film *Zou Zou* (1934), showing Josephine Baker perched in a life-sized bird cage, dressed like an exotic bird, singing for an audience. *Zou Zou* was Baker's first talking film. During my conversation with Moore, we teased out that part of the condition I was attempting to articulate through my artwork was that of being treated like a pet, which I recall as a dynamic for as long as I can remember with family, friends, educators, and employers alike, and she noted that when she re-watched *Cage* she "then saw that, being treated like a pet, like a fetishised object, that is encaged. Which is maybe

¹⁴² Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

¹⁴³ Fadlabi & Lars Cuzner, *European Attraction Limited* (KORO/URO, 2014)

<https://koro.no/content/uploads/2014/12/uro-EALtd-eng.pdf>

not a connection I would have made if we hadn't had that conversation".¹⁴⁴ In contrast to this condition, and in testament to our working relationship, Webb-Ellis continue to work with care and sensitivity around both the content of our films as well as during the on location recordings: we review our support of one another; we are mindful of how trust manifests and how we might nurture it; we acknowledge and listen to how trauma is showing up in the work and through our bodies; we recognise the violence of the gaze (the camera), their white gaze as filmmakers and the violence of the content; we review our consent while disturbing consensual boundaries within the content of the films. Notwithstanding, there is a care and beauty evident in the film, *Cage*, described by Andrew:

The communication was happening in the moment of silence... I remember what set the performance she did for *Cage* apart was the sheer endurance aspect... It became an utter exhaustion really... It felt really connected. The sheer unknown. We didn't know what to expect. How big this cage was going to be? To find it in a very lifeless state and then to inject this life into it was quite an experience, I think, for all of us.¹⁴⁵

In answer to whether or not I have recollections of being in the cage, yes, and I reflect that, as with making performance generally, I go into a zone, whereby I am absorbing the surroundings, the profundity of place, and in respect to *Cage* it felt like I lacked the means of communicating the tumult of feelings and ideas, I had no other language, and this was the truest means of speaking, articulating. And of equal import is our freedom as artists to make in the enclosures that the vignette details, the former pheasant release pen and in the cage itself – we were relatively free to come and go there, there were no restrictions placed on our bodies other than the action that I chose to perform. We owned the situation and the visual depiction and had autonomy over representation. Moore's profound understanding is, however, in relation to her collaborative project, *The Solitary Garden*.¹⁴⁶ Moore remarked during our conversation:

I don't know how much solitary confinement is used in the UK. It's used a lot in US prisons. Its torture. It's putting individuals in a cell that's 6 foot by 9 foot by themselves for 23 hours a day.

¹⁴⁴ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Young, Timothy James, "Solitary Garden Project" (2021)

<https://timothyjamesyoung.com/about/solitary-garden/>

Which is just an atrocious human rights violation that is sanctioned by the government. It's just state-sanctioned violence. So yeah, I also thought of that while watching it.”¹⁴⁷

The connection between the Transatlantic trade in enslaved African people and the prison industrial complex today is explicitly linked in drawings I have made. *Untitled*, a wall drawing installation which I refer to in greater detail in Chapter Three, provided the stimulus for a work on paper called *In memory of Sarah Reed*, utilising the text used in the installation as the drawings' main focal point: “Freedom will blossom from the skies of prisms**prisons” (Figure 72). *In memory of Sarah Reed* formed on part of a trio of drawings I made for a commission by Art on the Underground for the Transport for London Night Tube Map, launched in December 2018 (Figures 72-74). Each work was hand drawn using masking fluid, watercolour, and pencil on paper. I combined an examination of experiences cited in the British press as examples of structural racism in Britain, aiming to add to a legacy of artistic work that invite prompts to shape a sense of collective understanding of the world we live in. The map reads: “My dear friend, I know that you and you alone possess peace” and was accompanied by a poster work, displayed in the 270 London Underground stations, titled: *‘My anger became my motivation’: Baroness Lawrence on Grenfell. In memory of Sarah Reed*, was made into a limited-edition print. The print speaks of imprisonment and the tragedy that befell Sarah Reed, a Black woman with a history of mental ill health who was confined, segregated, and punished by public authorities. Since learning of her case at the time, I consider this and other drawings to serve as a prompt, questioning the role of social care and imprisonment: how do citizens communicate distress and abuse while detained and in care, for example? Sarah Reed was found dead in her cell at Holloway prison five years ago. Under existing conditions whereby trauma is met with traumatising behaviour and violent uncaring systems, Sarah Reed simply didn't stand a chance. The poster references the Grenfell Tower massacre, a similarly preventable nightmare born of neglect and callous exploitation; justice remains forthcoming. The Tube Map's text is a quotation pulled from a play by Aristophanes and, as the words suggest, “My dear friend, I know that you and you alone possess peace”, is an invitation to pass on this piece of paper, a resource, a peaceful gesture but laced with a selfish ulterior motive. The work was also a tactic for finding my father, supposedly named Jacob Aston “Herbie” West, allegedly imprisoned in Pentonville prison during my mother's pregnancy with me. Before and after his imprisonment he lived in London. The title of the tube map is *hand this piece to one Jacob Aston West (b. approx. 1941-3,*

¹⁴⁷ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

Montserrat). Combined, the works circulate and spread in their hundreds of thousands throughout the city, prompting a call to action to rethink our notions of cultural diversity and political freedom. This amalgam of texts, utilising a methodology that mines from empirical and secondary research, aspires to belong to a poetic realm of exchange and future imaginaries; the possibilities of belongings and becomings.

A motivation for revisiting and performing actions in these sites in the landscape is to enact rituals for transformation, while querying and queering both the site and our relationship as collaborators with very different lived experiences. These motivations flag up questions pertaining to land use and management, extraction (the wider site is quarried land, Hackness Rock (sandstone) was quarried locally to build, for example, the Rotunda Museum in Scarborough, completed 1829),¹⁴⁸ ascertaining who these spaces are and have been for, and who could benefit from them in the future. For example, I advocate for a ban on the UK's shooting industry and the capitalist ownership of land, which is steeped in extraction, exploitation, and control of the potential for inter-species co-habitation. I attempt to gesture with as much subtlety and grace as I might muster, given my evident resentments about some of the conditions and situations in which I have found myself in this environment. Therefore the films serve as metaphor for a capitalist relationship to the land and to my personal situation precariously living on this land. A comparison could be made again to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*: the sense of bitter loneliness, the dispossessed orphan, bleakly exposed in these ominous-feeling vistas.¹⁴⁹ Hone in close as the camera does in *Peat*, my feet enlarged in the frame, pitter-pattering in the mulch; or focus in on the viscous and plump terrain in *Clay*; or zoom in on my flesh, lubricated and dimply like a taut and honied plucked-chicken, viewed beside the wire frame decorated with fallen brash, firs and undergrowth, as is evident in *Cage*. Do so, and “the more alive it becomes” as Caitlin explains.

¹⁴⁸ “Smith, Noble And The Hackness Connection”, *The Geological Society Of London* (2010)

<https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/Geoscientist/Archive/January-2010/Smith-Noble-and-the-Hackness-connection>

¹⁴⁹ Thank you to Alexandra Moore for this thought. Subsequently Alexandra expanded on this point: “Lost children feeling unmoored in their society at the time. The racism looks different at different times, but it's all different modes of feeling alone within that landscape.”

Even though it's not a great diverse ecosystem. The closer you get to the landscape, the more you realise how unbleak it is. Some of the lichen on the rocks are just fluorescent. Which the films get into it. They try to go small or close.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Montserrat, Jade, Caitlin Webb-Ellis, and Andrew Webb-Ellis. Conversation on *Cage*. Interview by Alexandra Moore, August 14, 2020.

CHAPTER 3: NO NEED FOR CLOTHING

No Need for Clothing first emerged as a spoken performance. The performance was made for an event I was invited to participate in by artist Evan Ifekoya who proposed that each of the artists from the collective we were then part of, Network 11, respond to Lubaina Himid's exhibition *Navigation Charts* at Spike Island in Bristol (2017)¹⁵¹ onsite, immersed in her work, for an evening of performances. I performed this first iteration of *No Need for Clothing* in the gallery space within her mini retrospective, specifically next to Himid's work *Cotton.com* (2002) which had influenced the conception of my work. Soon after, I expanded this performance by combining the spoken performance with writing on the wall, the texts both read aloud and drawn mirroring each other. Initially then, at Spike Island, I stood naked, adopting a contrapposto pose (akin to figures depicted in classical Greek statues) while reading from a book held in both hands placed in front of my chest (Figures 45, 52, and 63) while in the space with *Cotton.com*. The book I read from was held at an angle, positioned in such a way as to allow discreet page turning. I read a particular group of texts aloud, with text and speech, heard and seen, mirroring each other. Studio practice included transferring the book's sentences into works on paper. For the Spike Island performance of *No Need for Clothing* I stood directly next to the brass plaque that comprises part of Himid's work. The plaque reads: "He said I looked like a painting by Murillo as I carried water for the hoe gang, just because I balanced the bucket on my head."¹⁵² Alan Rice understands the plaque as providing an "elliptical statement [that] explicates the way art has historically been complicit in exploitation like slavery by aestheticizing it. The slaves' labour is the occasion for a voyeuristic moment of recognition, which places his/her balletic movements in an aesthetic frame that helps remove it from its everyday, prosaic mode of labour."¹⁵³ The

¹⁵¹ *No Need For Clothing*, in *Sounding In, Sounding Out*, Spike Island, Bristol

<https://www.spikeisland.org.uk/programme/exhibitions/lubaina-himid/>

¹⁵² Rice, *Creating Memorials*, p. 86.

¹⁵³ Rice, *Creating Memorials*, p. 87.

romanticised violence at play here serves as a basis with which I too could fashion an aestheticized disruption and critique of the 'aesthetical frame'. *Cotton.com* explores labour, the economy of bodies and the transatlantic trade in enslaved African people, and what it means to wear cotton. The capture, sale, and forced labour of Black people is inextricable from cloth, a material that, other than for utility and comfort, has functioned to attribute status from the fifteenth century onwards. This global problem can be interrogated through impositions connected to fabric and clothing today, as described above in reference to the idea of 'civilisatrice'.

Having seen photographs and a floor plan of the extraordinary space at Cooper Gallery in Dundee (DJCAD), with its elegant parquet flooring and natural sky lighting, what I really wanted to do was draw into the fabric of the space and think about a cacophony: words, music, and visual languages. Sophia Hao, curator at DJCAD, had alerted me to Hannah Arendt's notions around words and deeds becoming an event, which had made me interested in developing a plurality of voices within the space. I wanted the making of the work to be a provocation, for people to see the labour that goes into the drawing. Not a conventional drawing, as such, but using the tools of traditional, conventional drawing. Because the drawing becomes part of anyone who enters that space, it becomes relational. Taking that further introduces the notion of life drawing: people are observing my body in the traditional manner of life drawing, which means that observations that are made could also become drawing – that is, drawing without a material process but with the perceptual process. The drawing is located in the choreography of the body around the space which are a kind of drawing; some will leave material traces; some will leave traces of memory. It is useful to consider drawing as a mode of being or a mode of operating, because of the forgiving nature of the practice. And this forgiveness of the 'mark' in this mode is evidence of reclamation, a 'site' of belonging internal and external to the body; this points to the potential of the gallery space. The gallery audience were encouraged to speak with me; we were in conversation while I made the work (Figure 51). What distinguishes performance-making is that it is a mode with which to reject entertainment and consumption, which we might find in theatre or film beyond the frame of art making. The performance

emphasises intimacy, vulnerability, confrontation, awkwardness, and exchange. An excerpt from the original texts comprising my longer prose poem (as performed at Spike Island earlier in the year) for *No Need for Clothing* reads: “She saw no need for clothing other than comfort”, and here we might return to the idea and benefits of considering sustainability (Figures 48 and 50). I am generally troubled by hyper-consumption that is to do with status or fashion. *No Need for Clothing*, drawn and spoken naked, has the potential to speak of entanglement, of commodity fetishism; possessively accumulated, intimately discarded; a polemic engaged in combat between histories of colonialism and today’s realities, imposition and economies of trust, protection, vulnerability, and survival.

At DJCAD I had two days to cover huge, high walls; the ladders I used were incredibly long! I could enjoy the mark-making without fearing that I was wasting anything, and the project required simple measurements of time and expectation, of space and materials. I was able to take a risk: perhaps because of the simplicity, and the fact that there wasn’t room to fear making a wrong mark. When I was high up, however, there was every reason to fear making a wrong movement; I had to be aware of my body and careful about every step I took and every reach I made. I had to move my body in a way that embodied grace, restraint, patience, and a certain amount of pleasure and desire. I asked for a towel, water, music and speakers. I listened to either *Late Junction* or Gilles Peterson’s radio show, both on the BBC Radio Sounds app, sort of catching up with what was current. Both of those programmes return to music from previous decades and geographies, so there’s this constant to-ing and fro-ing in time and geography that I really enjoy.¹⁵⁴ The process of making the artwork is made explicit and visible, incorporating the everydayness of making decisions, navigating words, creating space to notice where words fit in, and where space is running out. There is an inevitable mundanity attached to making the installation.

¹⁵⁴ BBC Radio 3, *Late Junction* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tp52> and BBC Radio 6Music, *Gilles Peterson* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01fm4ss>

The reason I have been able to arrive at the idea of drawing as an expanded process is because I've gone through a certain type of education, and because my mum emphasised the importance of life drawing, observational drawing, drawing with charcoal. Although drawing is democratic and generative and has these possibilities, in practice it doesn't work unless we're all up to speed with the idea that creativity can happen at any point, and ought to be prioritised from early years education and through the rest of one's life. The work lays bare abundant possibilities, with access only to the most simple and minimal of materials, and knowledge, and collaboration (with the curatorial and technical team). Creativity is fundamental to a children's development in particular, with drawing an essential pedagogical tool in our school curricula, emphasising the vitality of creativity as a human need. Observational drawing is a key to sensorially understanding and communicating with our world. I propose that observational drawing is also a discourse between bodies and the structures they serve. I have arrived at a formulation that drawing is more like performance: we're leaving a trace and that trace can be a conversation. I find it difficult to divorce writing from drawing and drawing from speech, because they all demonstrate how humans interact with one another. I'm seeing that there's a connection between us all: through conversation there is a line, a thread, points of connection, as when drawing and sewing. Drawing is something that we're taught to do in school, it's something that we do as children, it's accessible, and allows for thinking about democracy and speaking in layman's terms. It doesn't need to be 'art' or a highly detailed observation of something on paper, although it can be all those things and more. It can include photography, commissioning a photograph, or taking a selfie, but within the confines of this nuanced idea of an ethical practice. By 'ethical practice' I mean practising sustainability and care.

Through drawing, one maps, edits or traces something. I'm also making an appeal that no type of drawing is wrong, because that sense of 'doing things wrong' is what limits everyone's access to spaces for creativity, and also our own potential for creativity. When I perform the spoken element of *No Need for Clothing*, there are pauses: I breathe in and out for three seconds. It isn't showy, but I just pause to breathe in and out, so that I can keep going for the duration. I sometimes think about how we unlearn how to breathe fully, and it wasn't until I began yoga

practice that I was taught how to inhale fully into my diaphragm once more, so that it expands while exhaling. I think there are similar limits placed on our imaginations, because we're perhaps even breathing in this constant state of suspense or anxiety that this world creates around us. My work asks that after we experience the scenarios that the work sets up, we take something away and go back into the world changed.

Often naked (but more recently, clothed), I draw on walls, predominantly those of a gallery. I utilise a modular configuration, using charcoal to draw short texts on the wall from ceiling to floor. I draw oversized letters on the wall like an enlarged page of writing from a book. The texts are drawn freehand, out of scale and disorienting. I refer to each text written on the wall as a 'panel'. Together, these panels are configured claustrophobically: flanking, potentially overwhelming bodies moving in the space. The text panels derive from a multitude of sources. I am constantly gathering texts through my reading, listening, conversations and from my imagination. I then chop and slice the texts, devising them to be both ambiguous, enigmatic, poetic; and clear, direct, and factual. The accumulation of textual inspiration is feverish and obsessive. Annotation is an integral part of my reading process and assists in arriving at these final text works. The texts use a combination of my notes and other writers' words, how the Dadaists and, later, William Burroughs and Brion Gysin would combine and collage texts, their "cut-up method". *No Need for Clothing* and its iterations, however, are conservative in command, with no linguistic signifiers, no references to a particular culture apart from the dominant one – the stretching of language is regrettably missing. The performance in its entirety, spoken and drawing elements combined, don't just ask that we take away from the experience of the scenarios that their work sets up, but that we go back into the world galvanised or changed as a result. Writing on the wall, we might become alert to the words and deeds indicated within the text panels charging the material, charcoal, with the tensions, vulnerabilities, and strength that the female, stripped, labouring body exerts.

When thinking about human rights, sustainability, and ethics, that's essentially care. We're already equipped with the tools of relation required to work through ideas of safer space,

what safer spaces could be, and how we care for one another. This is somehow entwined with my drawing on the wall at Dundee, and in *Instituting Care* (Figures 45-49 and 59-62), an iteration of *No Need for Clothing* commissioned later by the Bluecoat in Liverpool (2018), and which subsequently toured to Humber Street Gallery in Hull (2019), through the structures and the events that were activated in it.¹⁵⁵ Charcoal is used as a combined metaphor for the roots of creativity and the roots of existence, for symbolising a plea to consider the ‘sustainability’ (to use a contentious term) of precious resources, and racialised bodies bearing the brunt of environmental catastrophe, environmental racism. So rather than be a spectacle of labour, the work has developed to present someone negotiating the boundaries of what they need when covered in that material. The clean, white, walls of the contemporary gallery exhibiting *No Need for Clothing* become disturbed by charcoal’s potential to ‘blacken’ the bodies entering the carbon-specked installation, which I consider to be gentle implication by way of reckoning, and, using Alan Rice’s understanding of making artwork, an aestheticisation of these perilous concerns. Paraphrasing Dominick LaCapra, Rice suggests that “...the difficulties of creating aesthetically valid art in such traumatic contexts effectively calls on artists and their audiences to foreground empathy with a traumatic history that will enable work that speaks to, of and from that place”.¹⁵⁶ The gallery space stands in as a metaphor for silence (whiteness) and breaking silence (the contagious material, charcoal) – that is, getting beyond the silence surrounding British colonial and imperial histories and the pivotal role played in the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.

An iteration of *No Need for Clothing* titled *Untitled, [after] Frantz Fanon* (2018) was made at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia, after I read *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, in which Fanon describes the warped logic of colonisation that all but obliterates a sense of identity for oppressed people. *Untitled*’s texts, considered as a stand-alone arrangement, serve to illustrate attempts to tie the Transatlantic Slave Trade and slave system to

¹⁵⁵ I commissioned a wooden-framed structure that enlivened my question of what a ‘safer space’ has the potential to feel or look like.

¹⁵⁶ Rice, *Creating Memorials*, p. 216.

the prison industrial complex, noting the black Atlantic as a site of navigating communications and communicating our navigations. This reflects “Freedom will blossom from the skies of prisms**prisons”, a piece of graffiti remembered from the train ride from Philadelphia airport to the ICA in April 2018 to install *Untitled* (Figures 55-56). The use of words is a central way to fracture meanings, create etymological connections, expand definitions, blur space; as calls to action, as interlocutors, for locating the static; for movement, for drawing attention to the “absented presence” within the words and their arrangements: dyeing/dying, peace/piece, prisms/prisons, place/pace. *Untitled* took three days to install as a site-specific work in the ICA’s ramp space. The work found inspiration in practices of protest, public murals, performance, drawing, literary traditions, and testimony, and exclusively used charcoal hand-made by a North Yorkshire charcoal burner, who is a former neighbour. The use of this locally sourced charcoal serves to further implicate the word within the land I have a direct relationship to. The work I make from this position understands that the body is a material connected to the ground and the landscape and is inevitably sculptural.¹⁵⁷

Charcoal has always been a dominant material in my life; my mum, who emphasised the importance of life drawing, loves charcoal. When I came to make *No Need for Clothing* for the first time at the Cooper Gallery in Dundee, I asked them to buy charcoal made from coppiced willow and birch, which has amazing thicknesses and texture – like velvet (Figure 54). *Untitled* attempts to make visible transnational, transgenerational solidarity movements and ideologies, multiple freedom struggles and human rights violations, using the body to illustrate a somatic form of expression, flanked by drawn text inscribing understandings of needs, movements, and measurements. It makes visible the futility of the labouring body contracted to make an impermanent artwork, unearthing psychophysical threats and anti-Black complicity by the nature of their staging, attempting to memorialise and activate decolonisation strategies and resistance movements. In his book *Empire of Cotton*, Sven Beckert, a scholar of capitalism, links cotton

¹⁵⁷ Conversation with Jack Tan, 25 May 2017.

across intersectional means of exploitation. Having detailed the economic system built on cotton by enslaved labour and bondage, he draws the reader's attention contemporaneously, explaining that:

Violence and coercion, in turn, are as adaptive as the capitalism they enable, and they continue to play an important role in the empire of cotton to this day. Cotton growers are still forced to grow the crop; workers are still held as virtual prisoners in factories. Moreover, the fruits of their activities continue to be distributed in radically unequal ways – with cotton growers in Benin, for example, making a dollar a day or less, while the owners of cotton growing businesses in the United States have collectively received government subsidies of more than \$35 billion between 1995 and 2010. Workers in Bangladesh stitch together clothing under absurdly dangerous conditions for very low wages, while consumers in the United States and Europe can purchase those pieces with abandon, at prices that often seem impossibly low.¹⁵⁸

Drawing on gallery walls, so far in periods of up to ten hours, with charcoal, material darkness, my body covered in the dirt of the work of it, further calls to mind the north of England's coal mining and cotton milling heritage, the class dynamics implied by women workers and rural working, and the labour that generates and is required by a creative practice, by drawing on links between industrial capitalism and the neoliberal art economy, as well as intergenerational, transnational and inter-species solidarity movements.

Thinking about resistance in the context of asset-stripping and manumission, *Untitled* was commissioned on the basis of revisiting Harriet Jacobs' courageous slave testimony, *Incidents in the Lives of a Slave Girl* (1861). Daniella Rose King, curator of the exhibition *The Last Place They Thought Of* in Philadelphia, recognising in Jacobs' slave narrative a "kindred soul", commissioned me to install a charcoal wall drawing, which became *Untitled (The Wretched of the Earth, After Frantz Fanon)* for the exhibition. *Untitled* refers directly to the story of Jacobs', a woman who escaped slavery, in part by stowing away and effectively imprisoning

¹⁵⁸ Beckert, Sven, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2014), p. 442.

herself in her grandmother's attic: "the last place they thought of".¹⁵⁹ Jean Fagan Yellin reminds us, in her introduction to *Incidents In The Life of a Slave Girl*, that Jacobs "did nothing but read and sew" in her isolation.¹⁶⁰ This act of creativity, of giving voice to and valuing those "memories within" suggests not escapism (for her containment featured no freedom) but survival and of the vital immediacy of creativity.¹⁶¹ Dionne Brand offers method for collectively breaking the silence, emerging as containers for the screams of slavery: "Reading narrative requires, demands, acts of identification, association, affiliation, sympathy, and empathy, acts of en/inhabiting."¹⁶² How do we listen when the pains are gagged and internalised? When the words terrify our minds, deepening vulnerabilities that seep from empathy or forgiveness for perpetrators and profiteers? How does one begin to find language for indescribable abuse: "The degradations, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe."¹⁶³ By refining a textured aesthetic that can travel within the context of art institutions, performance spaces and universities, my practice converses with the texts and other bodies that might occupy the space. The texts convey the longing that annotating subjectivities in the context of the Black Atlantic imply.

¹⁵⁹ Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, [1861] 2001), p. 98.

¹⁶⁰ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, p. vi.

¹⁶¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, p. 25.

¹⁶² Brand, Dionne, *An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, p. 26.

Conclusion

On 4 August 2011, twenty-nine-year-old Black British father Mark Duggan was shot dead by the London Metropolitan Police, who were attempting to arrest him, spurring nation-wide protests. Duggan was born five days before me, in the same year. His murder and the subsequent outrage elicited comment from my immediate contemporaries living in the vicinity. These were people with whom I socialised: the circle of friends I considered closest to family. Predominantly consisting of Facebook posts, their commentary included:

Riots are a disgrace where has the pride gone for the place you live in and call home?... What the hell has been breeding in this country... All over London and Birmingham and Leeds – shocking. Nando's, Primark shops people love, businesses, people's homes, and livelihoods! If I was in charge I would have shut down twitter and blackberry messenger and then call in the army to start shooting (not to kill tho!)... Theresa May softly softly is not a language these people understand you shouldn't be ruling anything out but instead doing whatever it takes to protect families and their homes and businesses. Even the Met admit they were overpowered call in the bloody army!!¹⁶⁴

This marked the beginning of an intense and agonising withdrawal from them.

My experiences of racism for many years had been diminished in the very eyes of my closest friends, with regular racial slurs circulating between them and normalised misogyny and xenophobia within the group. These experiences were not dissimilar to those with family and their acquaintances over the years, an unchallenged diatribe that muted me and still pains me. My response at the time was and could only be through an act of creation: a series of self-portraits made with British artist Jo Spence's work (as exhibited in *Renegotiations: Class*,

¹⁶⁴ Some of the idiosyncrasies in grammar and spelling remain in this quotation. The posts were at their height on 8 and 9 August 2011. I have kept the writer anonymous despite these posts being public.

Modernity and Photography at Norwich Gallery) in mind.¹⁶⁵ Although I have only seen them as reproductions, I recollect Spence's use of text to confront the viewer in the series of self-portraits. Coupled with her body language and expression, they had an immediate impact on me and remain inspirational: she held up placards in front of her chest, slogans reading "Middle class values make me sick", and so on. In response to the anger, frustration, fear, and disappointment I felt towards those who recoiled at the protests following the murder of Duggan, and apathy towards the relentless racisms that it stirred, I made use of old make-up and talcum powder to alter my appearance, playing with the trauma I was reacting to through self-portraiture (Figures 1 and 2). In my twenties, finally and determinedly enquiring of my mother about my biological father, I learnt that the green racer-back that she wore for mowing the lawn was once an item of my father's. I wore this for the photoshoot, setting up in the room I was using as a studio in my mother's cottage. The only other belonging of my fathers that, upon asking, my mother volunteered to tell me about, was a Nina Ricci talcum powder pot. I used the soft pouf inside the designer talcum powder set to apply talc to my face and neck. I wrote almost illegibly on my body with red lipstick, in a stream of consciousness. I placed myself in front of a map of Britain, sitting crossed legged, as if being schooled, or reclining, looking precociously at my camera. The series was, in the manner of Jo Spence, a therapeutic exercise and a political one: I was articulating my sense of un-belonging for the first time. I was querying how I continued to be seen in my immediate environment, asserting my felt position from a national perspective. I was representing my minoritised position, one I felt on a deeply personal and creative level.

In this thesis I have identified multiple artworks that together demonstrate a commitment to working through issues of race and identity, representation, and culture in the context of the Black Atlantic. Spatialised through the conflicting/ed environments people of the African Diaspora are expected to entertain, my art practice and praxis rebuke the obfuscation of our recent histories, and erasures that perpetuate ignorance, hate speech, indifference, and ambivalence towards structural inequities. Our shared imperial and colonial genocidal histories

¹⁶⁵ Lynda Morris kindly gifted me a copy of the catalogue, which I am currently unable to access to consult.

have been hitherto ignorantly erased from our collective memory. The obtuse absences and flagrant pomposity that commemorate colonial empire are deliberate attempts to keep the Black British story eclipsed, that the public may remain ignorant about our colonial and imperial histories and the implications these have on culture and politics today. My PhD work contributes to the memorialisation that my critical art practice and praxis centres, as a Black woman living and working in the margins, from a rural backwater.

My critical art practice actively considers agency within the collective, as prompted by Josephine Baker's 'rainbow tribe'. It holds the multiple contradictions, alienations, and becomings that arise through and by navigating identity formation and the articulation of it, that is "with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity".¹⁶⁶ My praxis attests to my building an identity as much as excavating one. The rural belonging I have unearthed is one that is both held by the landscape and dispossessed within it, and embedded in that sense of belonging is a contrasting and provocative African Diasporan identity. This is a newly appreciated identity for me, one that I might consider in-production – as Hall would have it, "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."¹⁶⁷ My skin has served as a perceptual marker for observation, as the gazed-upon Other, an internalised and muted sense of difference, an "inner expropriation of cultural identity" that, as Hall explains, "cripples and deforms."¹⁶⁸ It is through the artwork discussed in this thesis that articulating this sense of difference and the impacts it has had on my sense of self became possible. The self-care strategies described are cause for celebration within my praxis; they aid in refuting categorisations that otherwise distinguish between event, process, labour, artwork, and value. My praxis centres establishing new patterns of behaviour through self-care, self-compassion, and boundary setting. Like most people I repeat patterns of behaviour and have historically lapsed into co- and counter-dependencies, and the methods that I have begun to embed into my art

¹⁶⁶ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 232.

¹⁶⁷ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 222.

¹⁶⁸ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 226.

practice and praxis offer opportunities to erect boundaries, which combat falling into historical responses to traumatic situations, including in the context of the white gallery space.

My long-term aim is to convert the research undertaken so far into performance and film, which have been worked out further through text, works on paper, sound, paintings, workshops, readings, and collaboration, by centring materials that demand intimacies and explore care. I intend for the work to mediate further on refusals of containment and control, as well as rest – emphasising renewal and renewing – of both energy and materials. I am careful to understand what will spoil these composting ventures, spreading earthy mycological spores with complete disregard for segregated lands, concepts of terrain and ownership, or erasures of history and memory. The work memorialises what has been experienced but that simultaneously could never be. The creative works comprising this project explore the intersection of art and activism through performance, film, installation, text, and drawing. This project has cemented potentials for enriching the personal and the political, allowing me time for self-reflexivity and to recognise the spatialisation of social and political practice. My praxis is a radical one that hopes to echo that of Josephine Baker, among other freedom fighters the world over, whose activism propels the work I make. The project straddles the thresholds of race, class, gender, sexuality, and globalisation, recognising that these elements are all in constant movement and flux. My project, my idea of a *Rainbow Tribe*, the working title for my overall work, can respond to the one, my one, point in time, again recognising that all is in flux. My job as a creative practitioner is to feel it, research it and present it in hopes for a greater sense of communality, issuing out to unite with international solidarity movements.

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