

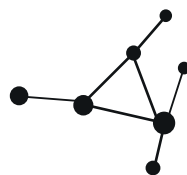
LEARNING UNIT

ACTIVATING ARCHIVES THROUGH RADICAL METHODS: INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Working Group: London

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- # LEGACY
- # BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT
- # ARTISTS OF COLOUR
- # INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION
- # INSTITUTIONAL RACISM
- # ARCHIVES
- # COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY
- # ART COLLECTIVE
- # SURVIVAL STRATEGIES



intertwining hi/stories

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

This Learning Unit is concerned with decolonising art educations, unlearning histories that replicate the colonial gaze, re-formatting our own art educations and a re-positioning of this canon by centring artists and cultural producers of colour. We are focused on histories of 1980s 'Black Arts Movement' in the United Kingdom and its impact on artists of colour and arts education in Britain.

We have developed this Learning Unit by negotiating institutional and hegemonic space using radical and collective methods to produce knowledge and practical resources such as toolkits / learning units for others to use. We have worked with historical archives relating to black British artists in history which we have 'queeryed' and 'unarchived' through intergenerational conversation in roundtables and workshops.

Our ongoing research centers on the legacies and archives of black British art in the UK through a queer, feminist and anti-colonial lens using archives and intergenerational dialogue in Collective Creativity closed and public events, creating a middle ground between lived experience, radical practice and theory.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ How are knowledges collated, categorised, and gate kept?
- ▶ Who has access to archives of queer black and People of Colour histories?
- ▶ How can archives be implemented to reassert the landscape of artists of colour in the past, future and present?

ABOUT THE LONDON WORKING GROUP

Another Roadmap London Working Group includes members of Collective Creativity and researcher Janna Graham, an arts educator and curator who is currently a Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Collective Creativity is a group of QTPOC (queer, trans*, intersex people of colour) artists based in London who have been working together since 2013. We create radical, grass-roots space for QTPOC to interrogate the politics of art in relation to queer identity, institutional racism, and anti-colonialism. We are dedicated to creating space for conversations that challenge institutional racism and white supremacy within a cultural framework. Collective Creativity is Evan Ifekoya, Raisa Kabir, Rudy Loewe and Raju Rage.

ADDRESSEES

Art schools, art history and education departments in art colleges and universities, community programmes and gallery education programmes, in particular students and staff at:

- Visual Cultures Goldsmiths University
- University of the Arts London
- Slade school of Art
- Royal College of Art

CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

• Radical Archives and Radical Activations

As theorist Achille Mbembe suggests, the final destination of the archive is '...always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible.'¹ Radical archiving has this in mind. It is the toil, the care and the love of materials in favour of a story that has been, but also one that is to come. For that reason, radical archives are built not only around the concept of objects, preservation, truth but as the author of *M Archive* Alexis Pauline Gumbs suggests, to grow roots that are deeper, so that 'their branches reach for the sky'². They work to preserve but also to catalyse. They are made for us to use and use and use.

Their 'radical' dimension is not denoted by grand claims of political purity (as they are often very modest) nor to be off-putting for those who don't think of themselves as 'radicals'. Their radicalness is rather marked by their communality, their criticality, their accountability to community, their autonomy, their creatively and experimentally non-taxonomical claim to a space in history that is un- or less governable by its mechanisms of production. They should not be radical at all, but in a society that endlessly excludes they must be such. They cannot exist in the very nice language that is often used when speaking about otherness and suggest that force of social justice is most definitely at radical odds with the forms of Education and archives we are forced to work in today.

In our time, the story that is to come is one, as Mbembe also suggests, that must 'demythologize of whiteness' and instill a 'pedagogy of presence' that claims and insists on archives of another kind, using a logic of both 'indictment' and 'self-affirmation, interruption and occupation'³.

In such an archive there are processes of pinning and unpinning at play, preserving and undoing. Activation, queering, and promiscuously using the archive is crucial. Perhaps, as curator Richard Hill says, we need to consider collecting the strategies of activation that we use to mobilise radical archives for change, as much as we do the collection of the objects themselves.

And yet the material matters. Touching, feeling, translating, co-writing the present with our ancestors in struggle and their afterlives, we are held.

It is for this reason to the radical archivists we must pay tribute, We must, as said by the late Stuart Hall, 'pay particular tribute to all those who have been involved over the years, often in very informal, personally taxing and under-funded ways, in securing in one place slides of the works, catalogues, exhibition notices, reviews and other texts relating to the artistic production of the black and Asian diaspora, without whom this moment of archival retrieval would not exist.'⁴

• Conversation

Conversation is an important informal tool for sharing and generating knowledge. These can take place over kitchen tables, dinner tables, roundtables, restaurants, parks or even classroom tables.

OUR CONCERNS:

• Alternative vs institutional archives:

Those which can be accessed by everyday community, that do not only prioritise hierarchical forms of knowledge, those which are made by the people they represent (By Us For Us).

1 Mbembe A. (2002) The Power of the Archive and its Limits. In: Hamilton C., Harris V., Taylor J., Pickover M., Reid G., Saleh R. (eds) *Refiguring the Archive*. Springer, Dordrecht

2 Gumbs, AP. (2018) *M Archive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

3 Mbembe, A. *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*

Achille Mbembe <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>

4 Hall, S. (2008) *Constituting an archive*. Stuart Hall Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Open University, England Published online: 19 Jun 2008.

- Importance of archiving BPoC histories:

where they are usually sidelined, undervalued, ignored, erased. Where there is complexity in narrative and experience that is simplified. Not just from a colonial western Eurocentric point of view.

- Importance of archiving her / their stories vs his-tories:

disregarding a cisgender-male-centric version of historical accounts and embracing those legacies of women, gender non-binary, gender non-conforming and transgender peoples. Recognising that the word 'his'-story is one way in which these hegemonies work in ingrained ways.

- Erasure, gaps and invisibility:

Using the gaps in an archive as a constructive reason to re-write and write ourselves into the archive. Questioning and queering, what is not there?

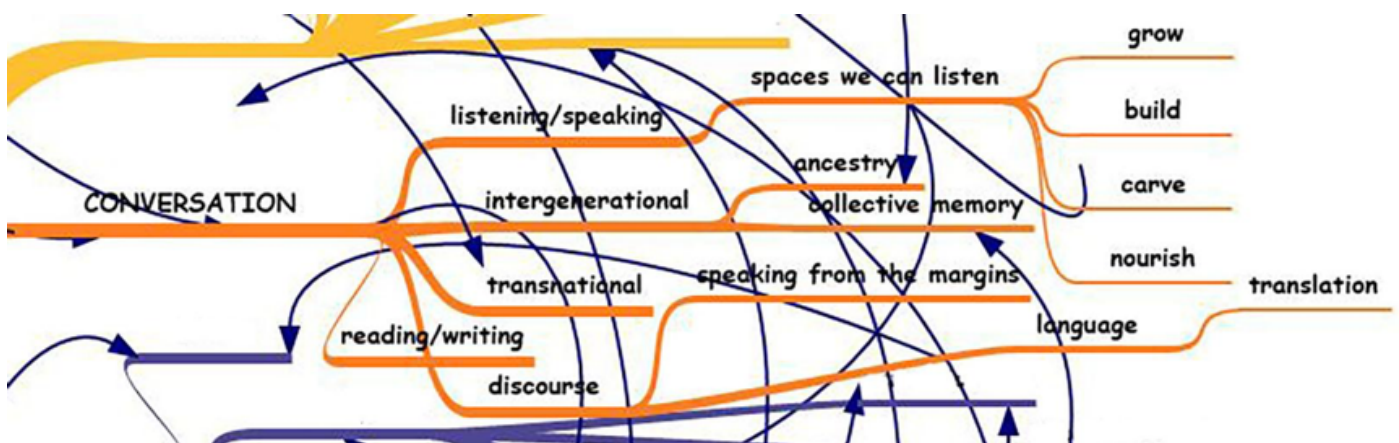
- Unarchiving:

removing materials from the archive and having a conversation, relationship and interaction with the archive. Demonstrating and expressing how we are impacted by the archive. Exploring how the archive relates to past, present and futures.

- Radical Archives / Radical Activations:

a political stance to addressing the archive that incorporates non-conventional, anti-colonial and creative methods that generate knowledge.

▶ What are your own archival concerns?



'Conversation' section of *Under/Valued Energetic Economy* tablecloth mind-map by Raju Rage

PART 2: ARCHIVES AND ACTIVATIONS

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN 1980

The Black Arts Movement was founded around the time of the First National Black Art Convention, organised by the Blk Art Group and held at Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1982. The Black Arts Group defined themselves as 'an association of young Black artists and art students who share a commitment to the development of an art which responds directly to the social and political conditions faced by Black people worldwide'. Staging a number of crucial gatherings and exhibitions, the Black Arts movement hosted key projects including exhibitions such as *Five Black Women* shown at the Africa Centre in 1983 and *The Other Story*, staged at the Hayward Gallery in 1989 and curated by Rasheed Araeen. In 1984, a gathering titled the Radical Black Arts Working Convention, suggested the importance of convening artists, art students and community arts and education groups to position black art in relation to community struggle. The event took place in Nottingham and included key members such as Lubaina Himid, Keith Piper, Said Adrus, as well as community educators including Remi Kapo, it was involved with the Peoples Gallery and Shakka Dedi, and with Obaala: The Organisation of Black Arts Advancement and Leisure Activities. The preamble of the convention states that the term Black Art can be claimed by any number of artists, but the term 'Radical' denotes an alignment of Black Art with consciousness raising activities. The group reference in particular to a 1983 exhibition held by cultural activists *Creation for Liberation*, which included work by cultural producers with no formal training and who did not make a living as artists. They also cite statements made by Rasheed Araeen regarding the important alignment of black art with black struggle in general.

While the movement, and the convention in particular, attempted to bridge these activities - making, exhibiting, advocating and engaging directly with Black communities (as well as with white middle class audiences which the Black Arts group describe elsewhere as those whom they hoped - through various exhibitions - to align with black causes), in subsequent years these functions have been increasingly narrated (and at times practiced) in separation. More recent attention to the Black Arts Group - after years of marginalisation, have included major exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary, South London Gallery, Van Abbemuseum in Holland and critical reception for the work of Lubaina Himid in solo shows and receipt of the Turner Prize. To date the importance and intertwining of the informal, educational and community-oriented dimension of the black arts movement, through which many of the members of the group encountered one another still continues.

MAKING HISTORIES VISIBLE - AN INTERVIEW WITH LUBAINA HIMID BY EVAN IFEKOYA, RAISA KABIR AND RAJU RAGE

Video 16.33 mins, 2013



Redefining Legacy: Navigating Practice As 'Emerging' Artists Of Colour

→ VIDEO: www.vimeo.com/123412348

ACTIVITY: DISCUSS IN GROUPS

- ▶ How do the ways that collectives working as artists of colour help produce space for conversation and alternative or adjacent, knowledges?
- ▶ What do non-hierarchical spaces look like and how can they be facilitated, whose voices are left out and how can other voices be placed at the centre?
- ▶ What is the importance of intergenerational conversations and our access to histories?
- ▶ What is present in archives that can be instrumental to informing our present, and how can oral histories or personal narratives add to the canon?
- ▶ How can archives that contain queer and PoC knowledge be gate kept, and how can we map different global archives to create a wider connected picture of erased art histories and radical creative practices?

RUKUS! INTERVIEW WITH AJAMU AND TOPHER CAMPBELL BY RUDY LOEWE AND EVAN IFEKOYA

Audio 19.51 mins

→ AUDIO: www.soundcloud.com/collective-creativity/rukus-interview-with-ajamu-and-topher-campbell

This audio recording introduces the RUKUS! Archive and its inception. We discover the aims and objectives of Ajamu and Topher in starting the archive and their hopes for it in the future. We discussed the politics of navigating institutional spaces as a black queer archive and the journey to the material being housed at the London Metropolitan Archives.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ How might the archive be a site of pleasure?
- ▶ What steps have Ajamu and Topher taken to present material that offers up a unique way of reflecting on Black LGBT/QTPOC experience?
- ▶ Consider themes of curation, storytelling and materiality.
- ▶ If time permits, read the 'Love and Lubrication' interview with Ajamu and Topher after listening to the recorded interview. What further insight about the archive can you gather?

QTIPOC HISTORIES - AN INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHEA SMARTT BY RUDY LOEWE

Video 29.05 mins by Onyeka Igwe



→ VIDEO: www.vimeo.com/247519849

The interview explores the histories of black feminist and lesbian organising in the 1980s, through the retelling of personal stories by writer and activist Dorothea Smartt. In the interview we see the ways in which black LGBT identities have evolved over the last three decades.

ACTIVITY: DISCUSS IN SMALL GROUPS

- ▶ How has the language of black LGBT identities changed?
- ▶ Make a 'mind map' of all of the different words used for different sexualities in the interview.
- ▶ Thinking about the types of organising and spaces discussed, make a mind map, mapping out all of the different groups/ places that are mentioned.
- ▶ Now think about your own context. Can you map out the spaces and groups organising in your own location and time?

CINEMA AND ANTI-RACISM PEDAGOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT: ENGAGING WITH THE JUNE GIVANNI PAN AFRICAN CINEMA ARCHIVE BY JANNA GRAHAM

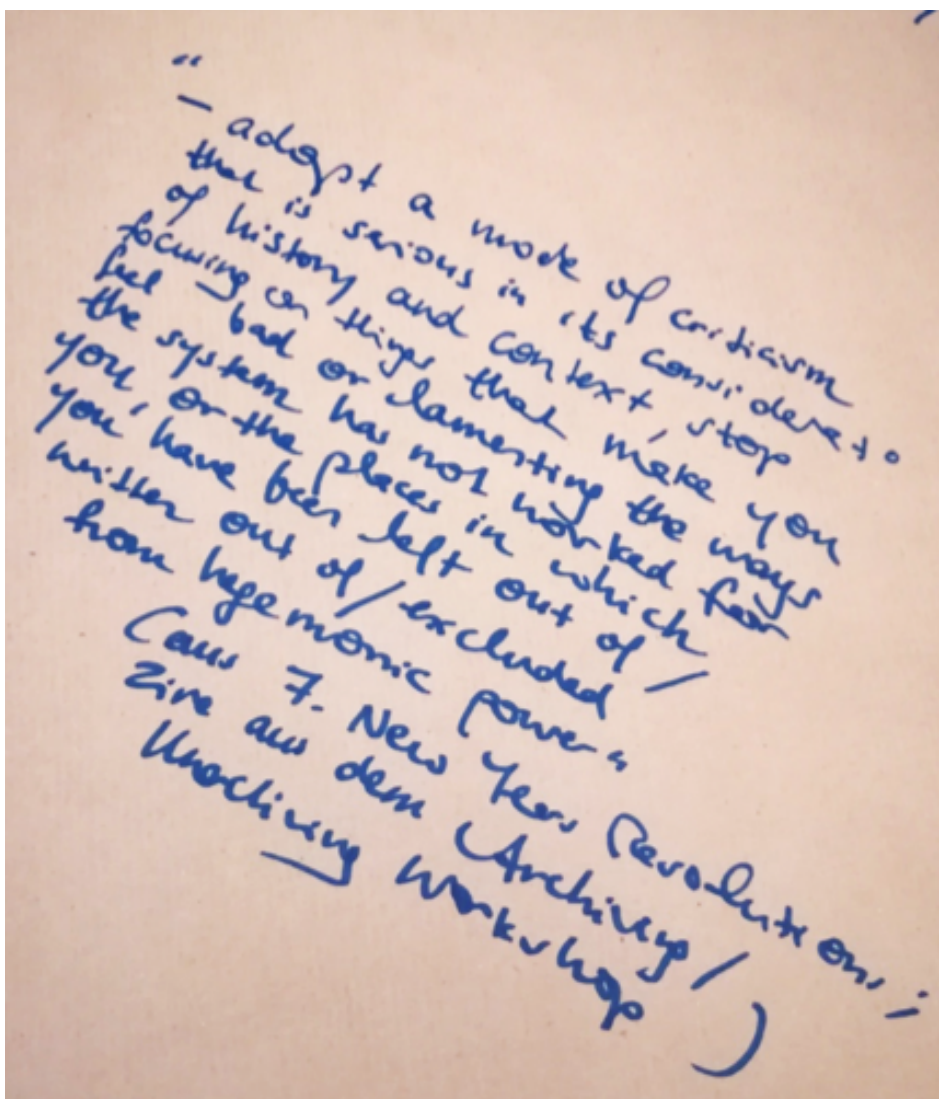


ACTIVITY: VIEW THE ARCHIVE IN THE DOCUMENT AND DISCUSS IN GROUPS:

- ▶ How can we do more than present histories of the Black Arts movement and other significant histories of anti-racism practice, and connect them to communities of colour involved in specific struggles?
- ▶ What can we learn from the terms and analysis of racism and anti-racism in the 1980s, at a time in which racism and fascism are on the rise and often attributed to misunderstanding or mis/under-education? What can we learn from the uncompromising positioning of racism within histories of colonialism and imperialism that are present in pedagogical materials of the time? And what do these structural analyses miss in the context of the present? (i.e. intersections with gender, sexuality)
- ▶ How can educators doing anti-racism and anti-fascism work become more organised and coordinated in the absence of infrastructures like the GLC or ILEA, through which educators were paid to work on radical advocacy for change in the school system? Or, how do we campaign for autonomous funding sources to continue this legacy?
- ▶ How can we provide resources for teachers to use in all schools with explicit language and analysis around anti-racism using cultural forms like the film festival? How do we ensure, in the global fall in provisions for the arts that it is not only arts but arts dedicated to social change the proliferate?
- ▶ How can we support radical and self-organised archives that continue to operate without resources in spite of widespread interest in their contents? How do we insist that the galleries and universities that draw from them make more significant contributions to their survival, while enabling them to maintain their autonomy?

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

How do you feel about how archives impact us in the present and in our futures?



What kind of archive would you create?

From *Un/Archiving as Forms of Collective Resistance* Workshop with Raju Rage and Sunander Mesquita Berlin 2018

GLOSSARY

Alternative archives: moving beyond traditional colonial forms of archiving and thinking of new ways to document and archive.

BAM – Black Arts Movement (in Britain 1980's)

BPoC – black people and people of colour

PoC – people of colour (a person who is not white or not solely of European parentage)

Grass-roots: people coming together in community and self organising as the basis for a political or economic movement.

QTIPOC – queer and trans people of colour

Queerying – the act of querying something from a queer perspective and lens e.g. breaking categories or creating new categories instead of fitting into existing ones.

Hegemonic – dominant ideologies in a political and social context.

Her/their-stories – moving beyond his-tories and cisgender-male-centred stories to represent cis and trans women, Non-binary gender, a-gender and transgender people.

Unarchive – removing from the archive // in this context showing the relationship to the archive by removing materials from the archive and interacting with or activating it.

PART 3: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Surviving the Art School as Artists of Colour Toolkit 2015
https://issuu.com/rudyloewecomics/docs/surviving_art_school_as_artists_of_

QTIPOC Histories - An interview with Dorothea Smartt
Video, 2014 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vOaKOoFTaLdigbb574VY1FuNU3NysW17/view?usp=sharing>

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES IN THE UK

African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive, Chelsea College of Arts, Library, UAL

Black Cultural Archives

Making Histories Visible, Centre for Contemporary Art, UCLAN

June Givanni Pan-Afrikan Cinema Archive, May Day Rooms

Stuart Hall Library, InIVA

rukus!, London Metropolitan Archives

Women's Art Library/Make, Goldsmiths, University of London