

A Publication  
of the 2021  
Inward Outward  
Symposium

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Emotion in  
the Archive

# ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Inward Outward is a project initiated by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, with special support from the National Museum of World Cultures' Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC/NMvW). This publication of the second edition of the Inward Outward symposium is supported by all three institutions as well as the Members Association of the KITLV.

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Inward Outward is an ongoing, iterative endeavour. The driving force behind the symposium series is the wish, and need, to critically engage with audiovisual archives of coloniality. This desire stems from the working practices of the organising team, with members who are employed (often) by institutions that have such collections under their 'care'. The first edition of Inward Outward, held in January 2020, was fuelled by a determination to engage with bodies of 'decolonial' knowledge and addressed the creation, acquisition, management and use of these archives within and beyond the walls of established institutions.

The year that followed this first edition was marred by an unprecedented health and ecological crisis that elicited an array of emotions as we also witnessed and participated in collective calls to redress intensified racial, gendered and socio-economic inequities. As we worked to document those moments and continued to interrelate our archival practices with the afterlives of colonialism and the identity, memory and racial politics that informed our present, we were moved by discomfort, anger, refusal, love. It became clear: the work we do in and with archives is implicated in, and driven by, the emotional. Yet archival research is often

presumed to be focused on the rational excavation of materials, stereotypically imagined as being carried out in a sterile room, in a process devoid of affect.

Where, then, do we encounter emotions, affects and feelings in the archive? How are these captured in both sounds and moving images and in the practices used to organise the archive? And, most pressingly, how do these emotions inspire us to unlearn and undo the dominant imperial practices and discourses that have determined our work so far? These questions, which were amplified by our observations and reactions to the

global occurrences of 2020–2021, formed the theme of the second Inward Outward symposium, “Emotion in the Archive”, which took place October 13–15, 2021.

In order to explore a theme as potentially woolly as emotion, we divided the symposium into three sessions: Defiance & Anger, Shame & Guilt and Love & Compassion, and we invited scholar, author and filmmaker Ariella Aïsha Azoulay to deliver a significant keynote. We considered these session topics as organising threads, and we tried to emphasise our understanding that emotions invite each other and exist in complex patterns. In other words, emotions are often entangled: for example, love and compassion can be very much related to grief and sorrow, or anger. Additionally, our interests also lay in thinking about the generative potential of these emotions. The tone and debate of these sessions are represented in this publication.

Collected and assembled through an invitation to all Inward Outward presenters to contribute, this publication reiterates and reflects on the presentations and conversation that took place during the symposium and explores how emotions undergird, infuse and are contained within archives. In some cases, presenters agreed to share abridged transcripts of their talks, while in others, presenters share reflections or further thoughts inspired by their experiences at the symposium itself. The contributions thus offer a mix of different writing approaches and styles, including essays, reflections, conversations and more visual pieces. As a project centred on sound and moving image materials, you will notice that a few pieces have “Open Video” buttons – these will direct you to the online platforms on which you can watch the materials.

In the table of contents we’ve offered a number of key terms alongside each entry to help navigate the works found here. These key terms represent the symposium session in which this particular text was presented. The emotions after which the sessions are named illustrate the starting point of these interventions, but by no means their end point. You are invited to enter the publication by either going down the path of the long (and ongoing) conversation, working your way through text by text, or to pick and choose the works you are most drawn to by key terms.

The publication begins with an abridged version of the symposium’s opening conversation, “Anger and Defiance and the Archive”,

in which Amal Alhaag and Teresa Cisneros reflected on feeling everything from rage to boredom to amusement as they work in colonial archives, and what actions they take in response to those emotions.

Inspired by their talk, Stevie Nolten shares a series of questions that probe the nature and detail of “Anger in the Archive”.

Wigbertson Julian Isenia explores transnational dialogues between Black, LGBTQI+ intellectuals in “Love and Compassion amid Many Adversities: On Black, Queer Archival Practices”. In doing so, Julian embraces the often, but not always, contradictory relationships between love, critique and personal and institutional change.

Eliza Steinbock offers contemplations of discomfort by encouraging white readers in particular to lean into difficult emotions in “White Affect Caught in the Colonial Act: The Cultural Archive of Shame and Guilt”.

Mary Huelsbeck shares a description of the Wendy Clark Collection’s Love Tapes, a video art installation, and explores the unique contribution of audio and visual archives to the discussion of emotion

Centring the body in a dialogue between present and past, Cécile Accilien examines her own body as “a record of practices [and] values that date back centuries” and help her navigate her individual connections to collective history in “My Hair Is My Archive”.

In “Algerian Letters: The Jewellers of the *Oumamah*”, keynote speaker Ariella Aïsha Azoulay ponders whether, when one’s ancestors have been doubly disappeared from colonial archives, it is possible to trace their experiences and existences through their craft and the objects they created.

In “Item Cannot be Displayed: Refusal as a Modality of Care”, Carine Zaayman reflects on the significance of objects and their curation in light of her recent experience of the Jagger Library fire at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. She shows us how these reflections on loss and care resulted in a different kind of intervention during a workshop she facilitated at the symposium, where participants decided not to share the objects they had brought with them to the workshop.

Taking the question of objects from the material to the digital plane, Daniela Agostinho first contemplates her discomfort with being involved in the digitisation process in

“Encounters with the Danish Colonial Archive: Affect, Labour and Spaces of Care”; she then seeks insight and inspiration from artist Jeannette Ehlers’s installation *Black Is a Beautiful Word. I & I* (*Encountering the Danish Colonial Archive*) which creates context for and dialogue with what had been a static, colonial image.

Imara Limon and Inez van der Scheer explore the reframing of colonially implicated material in an adaptation of their presentation which explored curatorial practice at the Amsterdam Museum and how shame and guilt are connected to a research project and exhibition about the Golden Coach. To think beyond museum collections as they currently exist, they also speak to the museum’s collaborations with artists, asking how critical art practices can interact with museum practices and their collections, while also complicating such relationships.

In “The Museum Visits a Therapist”, visual artists Mirjam Linschooten and Sameer Farooq share images and descriptions of their film of the same name, which explores

the similarities and connections between symptoms of and treatment for trauma and the processes by which workers restore colonial-era objects at the Tropenmuseum, the Netherlands’ largest ethnographic museum.

Finally, in “How to Hold an Image”, Jue Yang shares her process of “interrupting the colonial gaze” by contextualising images produced for the Dutch colonial project and juxtaposing them with images of their creators and traces of herself.

We hope you enjoy exploring these contributions.

If you have any thoughts or reflections on reading this publication, we invite you to get in touch with us at [inwardoutward@beeldengeluid.nl](mailto:inwardoutward@beeldengeluid.nl). ↗

— *Inward Outward 2021 Editorial Team*

*Rachel Somers Miles, Alana Osbourne, Esther Captain, Eleni Tzialli, Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, Carine Zaayman, Alison Fischer, Wayne Modest*

Anger & Defiance

AMAL ALHAAG  
(Curator & Researcher)

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(Curator of People/Wellcome)

# Anger and Defiance and the Archive



The following is excerpted and adapted from presentations and a conversation between Amal Alhaag and Teresa Cisneros as keynote speakers of the Defiance & Anger session of the symposium.

**A**mal Alhaag: This is perhaps more leaning towards defiance than anger, but as a Black woman to whom the notion of anger often brings forward and triggers many different things, I wanted to move more into what I call the dispossessed way of thinking around notions of anger.

I wanted to bring forward a set of propositions. I think often through the lens of science fiction, music, static, and poetry to really consider how we can sit in the space between anger and defiance. To me, both concepts are quite fluid.

When I think about anger, I think about rapper and philosopher Lauryn Hill's song *Black Rage*. In *Black Rage*, released in 2014, she sings the following:

Black rage is founded: who fed us  
self-hatred  
Lies and abuse, while we waited and waited  
Spiritual treason, this grid, and its cages  
Black rage is founded on these kind of  
things  
Black rage is draining and draining  
Threatening your freedom to stop your  
complaining  
Poisoning your water while they say it's  
raining  
Then call you mad for complaining.

Thinking about this digital thinking space and realm, I thought about Lauryn Hill's song. She released it almost a decade-plus ago after semi-disappearing from the music industry as a beloved rapper-singer in the early 2000s. I thought about what it actually means to be deviant. What it means for a Black woman to be deviant is too often that one cannot function in the public eye. The song Lauryn Hill produced touches on many different things: the precarity of being Black and a woman, the precarity of moving in a particular reality that still means, even when wealthy, one must function within a supremacist system. Dispossession over deviance.

When I think of the archive, I return often to the concept of 'the wake' that scholar Christina Sharpe offered us so kindly. Hanging out with anger as a verb means in the context of the archive, hanging out with silences, gaps, confusions, rambles, and boredom. We often forget about boredom because somehow, it's the least sexy concept that often shapes our days and time hanging out in the archive. And I wonder still if it is even possible to interrogate systems of dispossession and negation and actively listen to colonized, marginalized, and

repressed subjects in the archive everyday. What is defiance in the face of bureaucracy? What possible ways can we listen low-key and bring forward racial thoughts, practices, movements, and riots?

What is holding space, but a momentary shift of attention to how we see anger as noise. I want to move towards the thinking of anger as *sound*.

Here I think of *Cold as Ice* by MOP, a group that was famous in the late '90s. The chorus repeats:

You're cold as ice  
You're willing to sacrifice

Thinking about these two words together: ice and sacrifice, I wonder also about anger and what anger means in the Netherlands as a way of being cold as ice, not showing emotions. But what does this actually mean for people who hang out in the archive? My own practice is very much rooted in doing and the undoing. When I say that, it means also having beef with the archive, being in a state of fighting, in a state of negotiation that sometimes might take the shape of disagreement. Disagreement is not yet anger. It might be cold as ice. In relation to this cold as ice notion I ask myself, what am I willing to sacrifice when I hang out in the archive? Especially, if we return to the fact that sometimes the places where objects, documents, remaining stories, gossips, and tales go to die, is the archive.

What does it mean then to listen to the archive? Listening in this context means also listening as a site of racialized technology. Then we have to connect it to the race discourse of listening and sound. It was rooted in the late 19th-century notion of the body and the psyche. Jennifer Lynn Stoeve wrote about how the sonic line has always been politicized, racialized, and classed. She touches on *who* conceptualized this notion of listening: two white men, Frederick Nast, and Hermann von Helmholtz.

I also want to bring forward this idea about the archive as a site of study. Of course, it is, but it's a study as a way of being always in relation with violence. This is especially true in the colonial archive but I feel there's violence in various forms of archives, though I do want to acknowledge the work of people in organizations like the Black Archives, and other places where different types of minor histories are centralized.

In this space of all the beautiful words that we can come up with to conceptually relate to these spaces, I often return to the extractive relationship. We often bring up the words of those who are unheard. But who is unheard? Who decides they are heard? In which spaces are people unheard? Why do we need to push people to the foreground? Did we ask? Where is agency in

the reshaping, remodeling, rethinking of these archives? The agency of those who are trapped in the archive but also those to whom we want to bring this archive to light or to whom we want to show it.

These are my constellations of thoughts and sets of questions that I feel I have to wrestle with.

**Teresa Cisneros:** I am Teresa Cisneros the daughter of Vicente Cisneros and Lucrecia Puente both of Mexican lineage. I am a Chicana or Mexican American. I was born on the Texas-Mexico border. I practice from where I am from, not where I am at.

I grew up knowing that our behavior affects one another and therefore we should always consider the other when we make decisions. A friend said to me, "You are like this because you are a desert person, and desert people cannot survive on their own. They need one another." That is what I carry into all of my practices.

Currently I am the Inclusive Practice Lead at the Wellcome Collection. I'm part of the diversity-inclusion-culture-profession. Historically, I have focused on curating and arts administration, not diversity or inclusion. But I also come from a *curandera* practice, a Mexican healing practice that allows me to work with a different perspective, and work toward healing the colonial wound. The institution as archive is like the scab of a wound that does not heal, but attempts healing.

I was invited to think about anger and the archive.

I am at the Wellcome Collection as an act of retribution or revenge. The institution is the archive. What does it mean to willingly put yourself in the belly of the beast? To accept you are responding from anger and the desire to carry out acts of revenge on the institution? These sentiments are invoked from historical and contemporary colonial encounters, embodied in how the institution behaves, thinks, and acts.

As a paid colonial administrator, who is not white, I center an approach I call healing the colonial wound, which is festering with racism and oppression. The institution is a living breathing thing that embodies and articulates its histories. It is the people, the policies, the outputs, the collecting practices et cetera. Its practices and forms have produced a colonial wound. My practice uses the logic of colonial administration against itself to undo the institution and attempt to heal or reconstruct it.

What does it mean for a body like mine being part of an institution like the Wellcome Collection? You see, the Wellcome Collection didn't ask me to

think about its exclusionary system. They asked me to diversify their audiences. I could not ethically do this without thinking about the institution as an archive to be undone and reinterpreted.

I work through the idea of a wounded hope. I hope there will be change but I know that pain, anger, and revenge will be part of it. Oftentimes I remind myself that I am here because they do not want me here. This makes me want to propel myself forward but also to break the institution open for others.

For instance, I was told, 'We need our front of house team to learn to be more anti-racist.' They expected me to give an afternoon workshop. Instead, we did a series of conversations. When someone there said, 'I've never had to think about race,' because they were white and male, I thought, 'How amazing is that? These are the people who are at the front of our institution, who greet people, welcome people. If we're thinking about the institution as the archive, what does this lack of reflection mean for *us* when we walk in?'

The race conversations started with some of us grappling in a confrontational way. I say confrontational because it was face to face. But they weren't heavy conversations, or they weren't heavy for me. Of course, there were tears. Upset. I remind myself that all those emotions that upset my peers, the anger we feel, it's actually already embedded, embodied within the institution. In the objects we hold.

Historically, Wellcome was a pharmaceutical company. Henry Wellcome collected science and cures from around the world. We hold one of the world's Eugenics archives. The father of Eugenics being Francis Galton<sup>1</sup>, who literally, physically lives where I am everyday. We are the belly of the beast of coloniality.

I've been thinking with all my colleagues through the question 'What can we do for people to think differently?' All my life, I have been educated by a white culture, formally educated in a white way. How can I teach the institution – its people -- how to think radically differently and unlearn some bad habits? Especially those related to race and disability?

I have to deal with this lifelong process. Every day I ask myself, have I behaved in a racist way or an ableist way? I literally ask myself, because it's

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For some background on Francis Galton see this video from Subhadra Das, a historian of science and museum curator in "Subhadra Das and the many thoughts of Francis Galton": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPaaIX30k7Y>.

a process, it's an everyday act. I sometimes think about it as something like alcoholics anonymous, where every day I have to face it. Every day, I have to admit that I behave in these ways too and what can I do? I thought, "If I do this, why can't my colleagues learn as well?"

Through these questions, I developed an anti-racism curriculum and lobbied for it to be mandatory. I didn't write it down. I created the conditions where I could bring in activists, professionals, experts in these fields to tell us what we should be learning. Because it's not okay for one person, me, a Brown body, to say how this should be. So it's evolved to be a social justice curriculum. Staff kept thinking it's optional, but I said 'No, it's actually going to be a mandatory piece of work, but it's a lifelong learning piece of work.' I had to keep reminding people, this is the first phase that allows them to learn the foundations of where race and disability have been made. So a place like the Wellcome, we made those conversations years ago.

So while I'm here, I have to act from a place of compassion towards others because they were never taught how not to be racist or how not to be ableist. I always have to remind myself, "These are the people who hold the power of the institution," but also how and what we do with our archives, and the archives being *our* collections, our policies, it's everything we do.

Actually, I'm quite okay with being angry. I really use it as a positive and I'm glad that I feel these things because at least I'm feeling.

**Amal:** Thank you so much for sharing this. For proposing something about how we could make anger in a particular way, in a productive, imaginative way. I have to think about it because, of course, both of us have the colonial institution as a foundational work space.

I think sometimes it's easier to take a radical stance when the colonial is right in your face. Working at an ethnographic museum, you can't hide from it. It's literally in the building, the spectularity of it all, I think that's the reality for many of us. But for me, it becomes more complex when you start thinking about it in the everyday, in the mundane. I want to propose that we move away from the spectacular or purely conceptual. I personally always return to bell hooks's idea where she speaks about moving from theory into action.

But sometimes I have to be very real about it and I feel I'm stuck. For some people working at archival institutions is just work. For others, because of our minoritized, racialized, precarious positions, it is for us almost necessary life work. How do we shift that? How do we actually shift that, and who wants to do that labor?

**Amal:** I want to return also to this idea of extraction in the archive, in relation to people trying to find their own histories in these type of colonial archives. Or via YouTube and social media, how some of these images, these sounds, field recordings, have returned to us through music or through hipster festivals. Or this idea that cool people can work with the archive without being offered the set of conditions of how to actually negotiate space with images, story, sounds.

I'm sometimes more concerned with, not necessarily how things live in the colonial space because I know that that's a very clear confinement, but when they return to enter people's bodies, and brains, and spirits, because there is no altering. When you're looking for yourself, when you're trying to find your own roots or...

**Teresa:** It's also an idea that we are rooted in one thing. I'm going to go find myself in the archive. I'm going to go find my history. But these histories are colonial histories themselves. They already come with a white colonial gaze. Most of the archives we have... I don't want to say the word dangerous, but there is something about it that feels slippery when imagery is involved.

With imagery, especially in the arts, because we have so many artists that will take images and put them into the artwork, make them to be this thing that they were never meant to be, but they become a new interpretation. Their meanings shift by the gaze. But I always think back to the fact that the majority of these images were collected under a specific gaze and these were not supposed to exist.

Just like photography. We know that's one of the worst ones.

**Amal:** I completely agree. I think one of the confinements of photography is that

**Teresa:** I think we are not there yet where we can just release this to the white body to go, 'You know how to do it now,' because they've never been taught. I remember having a conversation with a colleague, and I said to her, 'I really feel sorry for white people.' She looked at me like, 'What?' I said, 'Well because y'all are never taught to be human.' Her face, she was shocked. I said, 'The reason I think that is because for so long, white people have been taught how to dehumanize Black and Brown bodies, especially. If logic is right, if they're not human, then y'all are not human either.'

My way, thinking about my role here, is to think, 'Do I humanize people to be kinder?' To learn how to be together, to treat people like people, and not based on this conception of color, of skin tone? I don't say this is the work everyone should be doing because not everyone is cut out to do this type of work.

But then there's also the other thing, Amal, where we also become the voice by which a lot of people want to use us to speak to the institution.

**Amal:** I have to say, luckily, perhaps, I'm not that person!

If I think about the ethnographic museum, or the way research has shown that people see the museum as the place of truth-making more than the university, then I think we also need to start developing tools of accountability. We don't have a word for accountability in Dutch. Maybe that says a lot. But I often think about how Wayne Modest quotes this famous Shaggy hit, *It Wasn't Me* to demonstrate the refusal of accountability. I sometimes think about it in relation to this undoing.

Many of us are excited about the work of undoing, until it comes to the actual doing of the undoing. I don't get angry, I just get irritated where I cannot even hear any more people blah, blah, blahing about things. I just want to hear, how are you *doing* this?

**Teresa:** Even the word undoing or unlearning. I use it because I want to re-educate people. If I could, I would re-pattern our behavior because we're not just born this way. We are *made* to be this way.

But it also reminds me of this idea of a radical practice. I don't have a radical practice, yet I am told that I do. It's just irritating, as you say. It's not radical, it's just another practice. It's just not white, middle-class, university-educated. There's not language for it yet, because y'all have never allowed the language in or the practice.

The other word that annoys me in the museum sector currently is 'disrupter.' I'm like, 'I'm not a disrupter, this is my work. I get paid to tell you all

its technology was already so colonial and supremacist that to even undo, one almost needs to re-conceptualize what photography potentially could be and it's almost unattainable. What I would then recommend, is to just really acknowledge and embed the colonial roots of it. Because it's almost like living on stolen land. Like how some Canadians or people from the US sometimes acknowledge first that they live on stolen indigenous land. I feel that's what we almost need to put in as a disclaimer with photographic images.

**Teresa:** I completely agree with you.

**Amal:** I think about the technology of today. The algorithm, but also what it means, as a Black person, to even use automated soap dispensers. When people ask me, 'What do you think it was like to live when it was colonial times?' and sometimes to be like, 'Listen, I still live in a colonial era.' That's today for me: the aftermath or afterlife is using that soap dispenser that's not working and having to ask a white person, 'Can you please put *your* hand underneath because it will recognize it?' It's these types of everyday violence or aggression that are within the genealogy and technology of the colonial.

**Teresa:** I think we're all complicit. We're all complicit in upholding systemic oppression every day. From the moment you wake up, and you look at your phone, the alarm on your phone. We contribute to it every day, we exist, I don't think we're ever going to move on beyond colonial time.

13 these things. I'm not disrupting. I'm just asking a different set of questions."

I think for me those layers of where I am complicit -- I get paid for this work and I am fortunate that I get to do this work in an institution that is actually trying to make moves. I'm fortunate. I'm not privileged, I'm fortunate that I've been supported and I think you have too. I think this is something we both can recognize that we've had encounters that have also supported us to work through defiance, or through revenge or retribution or to undo. I just have to say that I'm-- gosh, I really do hate the word fortunate because I've worked my ass off and so have you.

**Amal:** You can be so fortunate and work your ass off and be complicit and maybe.... And maybe let's just end here as a beginning provocation of Inward Outward.

AMAL ALHAAG is an Amsterdam-based independent curator, dj, and researcher who develops ongoing experimental and collaborative research practices, public programmes, and projects on global spatial politics, archives, colonialism, counter-culture, oral histories, and popular culture. Her projects and collaborations with people, initiatives, communities and institutions invite, stage, question, and play with "uncomfortable" issues that riddle, rewrite, remix, share, and compose narratives in impermanent settings.

TERESA CISNEROS is a Chicana Londoner. Originally from the Mexico-Texas border, 'La Frontera', she practices from where she is from not where she is. A curandera and arts administrator by choice, currently she is Inclusive Practice Lead at the Wellcome Collection but thinks of herself as a curator of people, part of agencyforagency, and recently at The Showroom she curated Object Positions to explore cultural equity, decolonial processes, and colonial administration (2016-18). Cisneros has worked with sorryyoufeeluncomfortable and numerous institutions including



# Anger in the Archive

STEVIE NOLTEN  
(Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision)

Anger & Defiance



During the Anger & Defiance session of this year's Inward Outward, I was blessed to listen to the conversation between Amal Alhaag and Teresa Cisneros.

Their honest exchange—about feeling angry in the archive, but also about who gets to emote and when to step away—really resonated with me.

I was asked to write a text about the entire session.

Ultimately I decided to honour all of the emotions that rushed through me at that time. As a person of colour, I recognised their experiences in dealing with colonial violence in the archive and not having the privilege to depersonalise from it.

These are feelings of frustration but also of recognition.

The premise of this text is directly inspired by a quote by Teresa, or rather a question she raised: “Am I really that radical, or am I just asking different questions?”

By sharing some of my questions, I hope to normalise raising them more often.

*Why do I feel angry in the archive?  
Am I taking it “too personally”?*

*Aren't you appalled by the violence?  
Do you need to see, hear and touch the material in order to empathise?*

*Do you confuse detachment with objectivity?  
Is it “professional” to leave your humanity behind?*

*How does it feel to trust the archive, the boxes, the labels, the people guiding you through it?*

*Are you expecting to find the truth, or will you read against the grain?*

*Can you rethink what the archive is, or are you a part of it?*

*Are you ready to acknowledge that colonialism is your history too?*

*Can you sit with the discomfort and can you question your position?*

*Are you not used to being asked what you are doing here to begin with?*

*Do you see the difference between “learning about” and “knowing”?*

*Do I need to intellectualise my trauma in order for you to see me as your peer?*

*Am I really that radical and brave, or am I just asking different questions?*

*Aren't you paying me for this work?*

*Are you inviting me in to disarm my critique?  
Is this accountability, or is it delegating responsibility?*

*How do you guarantee my safety as I stick my neck out?*

*Are you ready to unlearn, resist and give up space?*

*Do you understand that including me now acknowledges that you excluded me before?*

*Will you redirect your emotions to counter the system?*

*What are you feeling?*

*Are you angry now?*

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Love & Compassion

WIGBERTSON JULIAN ISENIA  
(University of Amsterdam)

# Love and Compassion amid Many Adversities:

On Black, Queer Archival  
Practices



often recall a James Baldwin quote from 1961. Wondering how Black artists in the United States reconcile their social obligations with their artistic responsibilities, Nat Hentoff asked him “To what extent do you find this true in your own writing?” (Baldwin et al. 2005). Baldwin replied with the now-familiar words, “[T]o be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all the time” (Baldwin et al. 2005). Baldwin speaks about the indifference of most white people of that day, of the realisation that one may not be a match for the institutional violence one encounters and of the anger at one’s own inability to deal with white indifference. Perhaps he speaks too of sheer hopelessness.

However, we must also read Baldwin’s subsequent words, which are not as well-known and are less often quoted. He also says that there is:

A great temptation to simplify the issues, under the illusion that if you simplify them enough, people will recognize them. I think this illusion is very dangerous because, in fact, it isn’t the way it works. A complex thing can’t be made simple. You simply have to try to deal with it in all its complexity and hope to get that complexity across. (Baldwin et al. 2005)

He suggests that we embrace the full and sometimes contradictory nature of our emotions. Perhaps our reactions to the hardships we face can express themselves in more than anger, defiance, shame and guilt.

I am interested in the relationship between and among these emotions and Black, queer archival practises: our struggles, desires and, as I discuss in this contribution, love and compassion amid—and indeed, despite—countless adversities. Examining this relationship can reveal how we could funnel that rage in order to, in the words of Cornel West, “remain in that boat with the tension, with the hostility, because there was also love, care, loyalty and solidarity” (in hooks and West 129). This love, bell hooks reminds us, goes beyond the romantic interpretation of the term by understanding it as a mutual fulfilment of needs and “the giving and receiving [of] critical feedback” (hooks and West 129). I refer to the translation process necessary to transform one’s experiences for a wider audience as a practice of love and compassion, and how this process, as proposed by Baldwin, can equip our practice with valuable tools.

As an archivist, activist and scholar, I have always found Baldwin’s remarks poignant. I wonder: If we assume that a particular critical stance and consciousness will inevitably and readily put us in a state of rage, what possibilities are there for love and compassion for ourselves and others? How can we show loving affection to partners,

lovers and colleagues while studying colonial, ethnographic and racist archives, as I do? And what about the love, compassion and care for archival objects in archives where writers, authorities and religious leaders seek to erase certain sexual, gender and racial minorities or condemn them as not conforming to the norm?

These questions came to me at the symposium on which this anthology is based as we discussed defiance and anger, shame and guilt and during our dialogue on love and compassion on the final day, which I moderated. Just as I question the issue of anger and rebellion and its intertwining with love and compassion, I also question other emotions: How can we feel love and compassion when shame and guilt are present? How do we deal with this mixture of emotions?

### “Do not take this personally, honey”

To answer these questions, I focus on the Black, queer archival practises of Surinamese Homosexuals (SUHO), an LGBTQIA+ group founded in Amsterdam in 1979, and their accounts of James Baldwin. SUHO emerged after Suriname became independent in 1975 and many Surinamese people migrated to the Netherlands. The group’s publication, the *SUHO Newspaper*, discusses Baldwin twice.

A columnist named Thijs [surname unknown] mentions Baldwin in the opening article of the “Boeler Mati Book Reviews” column in 1982. Thijs, an otherwise untraceable name for a researcher, writes about Baldwin’s book *Giovanni’s Room* (1956). The name of the column itself refers to sexual practices in Suriname: a man having sex with men (*boeler*) and a woman having sex with women (*mati*). Both may also have relations with the opposite gender. These sexual practices are at odds with more “Western” sexual identities, such as lesbian, gay and bisexual, which are seen as stable, unchanging and an intrinsic part of subjecthood (Wekker, *Politics of Passion*). In this regular column, Thijs considers books associated with the theme of homosexuality, and although they commonly concern Suriname as well, this book was chosen because it “cleverly elaborates the theme of the man who is afraid to come out of the closet about his homosexual orientation” (Thijs 24, my translation). I relate the decision to review Baldwin’s book to how SUHO members in the magazine discuss sexuality as practice as distinct from sexuality as identity and to their desire to use the magazine to achieve their activist goal of creating a more comprehensive knowledge and acceptance of homosexuality among their members. Baldwin’s themes in the book, such as the disclosure of one’s feelings, the protagonist’s inner struggle and a love that cannot last appeal to Thijs in their detailed articulation of complex desires and feelings, even if sometimes left unspoken by the protagonist; the reader gets

glimpses into the protagonist's dreams and longings. Thijs sees this expression of complex emotions as an essential good we should all aspire to.

The second consideration in the *SUHO Newspaper* is a brief reflection on Baldwin's two public lectures in Amsterdam in 1981. Egmond Codfried, a member of the magazine's editorial board, observed that both lectures were "white affairs", and he wondered: "When will my people mingle with the artistic nightlife?" (Codfried 5, my translation). Though the Netherlands had become progressively multicultural with postcolonial migration, Codfried saw no evidence of this at middle-class sociocultural events. It was simply invisible. Perhaps these artistic and cultural events would have enabled the Surinamese people to further articulate their plight, which for Codfried was the fight against racism and homophobia. He remarks on "the vehemence and authority with which Baldwin lashes out at 'them' and 'you'", referring to the predominantly white majority population and audience, and which is "in form and content (...) the only answer to the centuries-long dictatorship of minorities" (Codfried 5, my translation). Codfried makes a connection and a translation between American "nauseating white supremacy" and the Dutch colonial and postcolonial situation (Codfried 5, my translation). Through Baldwin, Codfried thus draws associations with the Dutch postcolonial context, as Thijs does in his review of the novel. For them, these connections can serve as inspiration to improve how we live together. Codfried describes postcolonial migrations from the 'periphery' to the Dutch 'metropolis': "The hen that lays golden eggs has come to the roost to claim her share. Is it immoral to exclude this hen?" (Codfried 5, my translation). Notwithstanding the gendered metaphorical description of the postcolonial migrant who, Codfried says, made possible the golden fruits that the Dutch eventually reaped (an allusion to the Golden Age), he criticises how the 'Dutch' received the postcolonial migrant in the former metropolis. In Codfried's account, Baldwin softened the blow at the end of his retort by adding: "Do not take it personally, honey" (Codfried 5, my translation)—as if to reassure the audience that they must analyse and combat racial prejudice, not only on a personal level but, above all, on an institutional level. The anger and resentment of a few should not stop us from creating a loving world. Adding the word "honey" can be read simultaneously as sarcastic, provocative, reassuring or even confrontational. Codfried reports that Baldwin did offend some of those in the audience, however, who "furiously spat out their objections" (Codfried 5, my translation).

**"Love takes off the masks that we fear  
we cannot live without and know we  
cannot live within"**

As I think about the Black, queer archival practices of SUHO members and their connections to

Baldwin, I return to Baldwin and his views on love, particularly in his 1963 work *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin's meditation on love and how love can be extended beyond romantic love to critical engagement with others is at the heart of this work: "Love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided. Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (*The Fire Next Time* 102–03). He does not interpret love as a personal feeling, but as a "state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* 103). Indeed, in *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin describes whiteness as a state of lovelessness that breeds racial hostility. The only way to remedy this is to restore the ability to love and be intimate without resorting to violence, to discuss intensely without taking offence.

The tricky thing about writing an essay about love is that we have an idea of love as something elusive, abstract and often romantic. But if we take up the idea of love as expressed by Baldwin and hooks, what kind of politics would it lead us to? How would love seen in this light make us analyse what we encounter in the archives? And how could we translate these conversations to our contemporary moment and turn them into something more?

In the column quoted above, Codfried reflects on the future:

Now a little about *boelerij* [faggotry/homosexuality]. This is a Boeler/Mati Newspaper, after all. SUHO is making history. The next generation [...] will borrow the names and minutes of the first SUHO meetings out of respect and reverence. The pioneers with dentures and toupees will make the party nights unsafe. Their demeanour and stories reflect long-forgotten glory. (5, my translation)

With this in mind, Codfried expressed a wish that SUHO's activism should be valuable for generations to come. These SUHO stories have been newly brought to the surface and examined (Colpani et al.; Isenia) and show how a process of translation between, among others, American intellectuals (Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin and Marlon Riggs) and LGBT people of colour in the Netherlands (Colpani and Isenia; Frank; Wekker, *White Innocence*; Wekker, "Matism and Black Lesbianism"). They show the similarities and differences between groups and people on both sides of the Atlantic, the desire and love of two generations to converge through the archive, and how much remains to be done.

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Shame & Guilt

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# White Affect Caught in the Colonial Act:

The Cultural Archive of Shame  
and Guilt

This essay is derived from a talk given at the 2021 Inward Outward Symposium on “Emotion in the Archive”, and it remains a plea for attending to ugly feelings, specifically those of guilt and shame. Guided by where these emotions arise in relation to the cultural archive of imperialism, I theorise the effects of the denial of guilt and shame by the characteristic colonial mentality that stakes its claims on being rational.

Emotions tend to be unavoidable, impactful layers in interpretation and communication, regardless of whether they are registered or not. Prior to becoming an individualised emotion, the capacity to affect and be affected—I will call these “affect” for short—inheres in our objects, colours our thoughts, incites ideas and actions. Associated with the devalued categories of the feminine and the non-white, emotion, feeling and affect are also regularly refuted as scholarly concerns. Entire professional fields have been staked on the claim of warding off emotion, on critical distance, the performance of neutral, unaffected or non-coloured observation. Supposed neutrality can be seen in some forms of archive and collection making. The suppressed emotion in the material cultures of colonial documentation centres is palpable: the straight-ruled ledger pages, the mathematics of profit, the record of captured and sold. Saidiya Hartman’s essay “Venus in Two Acts” seeks to defy the lack of care and flatlined emotion shown in the archive of the Black diaspora. She unfolds the claims of dispassionate documentation to reveal the deep feeling of the deaths of two young African girls on the middle passage, recorded piecemeal in the ship’s ledger and financial accounts, the captain’s log book, a court case that dismissed murder charges against the Captain. Hartman notes that lives blotted out are represented by “an asterisk in the grand narrative of history” (2). The asterisk typically connotes ‘additional’ or supplementary information, and Hartman draws on the asterisk’s aesthetic as close to a nothing as possible, a point on the page, a typography of that barely worth mentioning. It is indicative of a blotting out of emotion and care, a refusal to feel.

Expanding on Hartman’s notion that the archive of the Black diaspora is composed in asterisks, in “Mathematics Black Life” Katherine McKittrick writes that these asterisked archives are “filled with bodies that can only come into being vis-à-vis racial-sexual violence” (16). She describes how perplexing it is to rely on “data that honour and repeat and cherish anti-black violence and black death”, asking how to undo the persistent frame of violence that calculates according to Black suffering and white supremacy (17–18). She sets herself the task of writing Blackness by ethically honouring but not repeating anti-Black violences, reading the mathematics of these violences as possibilities that are iterations of Black life that cannot be contained by Black death. In other words, strategies

that “allow us to read the archives not as a measure of what happened, but as indicators of what else happened” (McKittrick 22). To this end McKittrick borrows “the arithmetics of skin” derived from Simone Browne’s research that shows how biometrics are laden with the logic of whiteness as the measuring stick through which other racial technologies are understood (23). So too, the arrangement of colonial archives seems to follow the white living body as the mathematical measuring stick through which all other bodies are calculated. The indexed and the asterisked are two different orders of being and of feeling inscribed in colonial archives. The rationality of proud, smug white supremacy is indexed, while the refusal to feel for Black suffering is asterisked. From the arithmetics of skin one might project a calculus of racialised affect; in both cases, the white living body is the measuring stick and the non-white, dead body simply takes the stick.

Queer Latinx performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz describes this performance of whiteness as performing on an *affective register* of racialised normativity. He writes that:

Acting white has everything to do with the performance of a particular affect, the specific performance of which grounds the subject performing white affect in a normative life world. Latinas and Latinos, and other people of colour, are unable to achieve this affective performativity on a regular basis. (Muñoz 68)

The inability or refusal to perform white affect has consequences. While Muñoz is primarily concerned with carving out analytical space for a certain mode of “feeling brown” in a world painted white and organised by cultural mandates to “feel white”, I want to consider the affective struggle taking place in colonial archives. The archive’s affective infrastructure is built to not spill, adhering to an unacknowledged vantage point of white unfeeling, a repression of feeling anything at all, a dispassionate non-acknowledgement of how others may feel. Muñoz is again instructional here about the whiteness of occluding feeling, explaining that the predictable clichés of Latino/a affective comportment as “hot ‘n’ spicy” or simply “on fire” are not so much because Latina/o affect performance is excessive “but that the affective performance of normative whiteness is minimalist to the point of emotional impoverishment” (Muñoz 70). He continues that “Whiteness claims affective normativity and neutrality”, a fantasy that is displaced when we look at whiteness from a racialised perspective and see it as a hotbed of anxious attempts to avoid feeling bad (70). Muñoz writes sympathetically that “Once we look at whiteness from a racialized perspective, like that of Latinos, it begins to appear to be flat and impoverished” (70)—the latter a synonym for being needy, poor

and disadvantaged. In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai writes insightfully of animatedness having a long history of being racialised as non-white, making whiteness a kind of baseline affect, as close to deathly non-feeling as one might achieve without dying (92). On the whole of it, if whiteness is the official “national affect” aligned with a hegemonic class (in the context of the U.S., for Muñoz), it might not be a structural disadvantage to feel white, but at this moment in history this discriminating hierarchy is all the more reason “to position whiteness as lack” (Muñoz 70). Muñoz thus calls for an inversion of perspective that shifts the association of imbalance from non-white to white, and to embrace the affective subjectivities that cannot be contained within the sparsely affective landscape of Anglo North America—and we might extend this to the tersely affective landscape of white-identifying, white-acting northern Europe.

I suggest that in the performance of white affect, the flatlining of feeling, white guilt and shame are evacuated and the vacuous affects of innocence and pride are inflated; and innocence and pride are far from neutral. Allow me now to address the other white people, my white readers. Hello, I’m calling you in. Listen. Feel the burn of your cheeks as I call you white. I know, I feel you feeling out this space. What it feels like to be marked, noted; set apart. I’m calling to you to feel this for at least a moment. The prickles that rise up. The blush of knowing you are recognised and seen as something. You are experiencing being seen as something that feels quite apart from your felt sense of self. The self in this moment feels non-sovereign, because you are aware of me gazing at you, inviting in the gaze of non-white people to remark on your whiteness.

Let us go under the epidermal presumptions of being called into whiteness, as we know that it is more than melanin that marks out difference. Those that study whiteness study the structures that produce white privilege, so this is on us as bodies, and also beyond us as embodied individuals. When we examine what whiteness is, we analyse whiteness as a racial hierarchy, a culture and a source of systemic racism. We should be asking ourselves: What are the precepts and group behaviours of white people? What social phenomena are generated by compositions of white people? How does it feel to be white?

In *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, Gloria Wekker writes an ethnography of dominant white Dutch self-representation, distilling the structure of feeling whiteness through the material and incarnate cultural archive that contains a deep reservoir of racial grammars embedded in nineteenth-century European imperial populations (2). Positioned as an outsider within the Dutch, having migrated to Amsterdam as a young child with an Afro-Surinamese background,

Wekker explores how four hundred years of Dutch colonisation has concretised in an aggressively “smug innocence” (18). The claim of innocence, she writes, is a double-edged sword: It contains not-knowing but also not wanting to know (17) and can be clearly heard in the claims of “But I’m not to blame!” and “No, that didn’t happen here!”

White innocence operationalised through practices of “forgetting, glossing over, supposed colour blindness, an inherent and natural superiority vis-à-vis people of colour, assimilating” provides a psychic buffer to white shame and colonial guilt (Wekker 15). White innocence seeks to anchor the racial ordering of the world in cultural life, government and institutions that uphold white supremacy. The claim of innocence disavows guilt, but disavowal is the simultaneous *affirmation and denial* of a thought or desire. Disavowal is a manner of shirking responsibility, refusing to acknowledge one’s role; Wekker sees denial and disavowal as important modes that the majority white population uses to deal with race (30–31). Of course, whiteness has everything to do with race, for to claim whiteness is to claim a race within an ontological order of racial hierarchies. To undo this onto-epistemology of racial hierarchisation that underpins white supremacy, the colour line and colourism, we white people must learn to shift emotional gears from deflecting any sense of guilt to reckoning with our cultural archive of non-acknowledged guilt. We must know—but also feel—this lack of innocence.

The cultural archive that Wekker draws on demonstrates the lengths and violence enacted to avoid at all costs what it means, or would mean, to feel white shame and colonial guilt. This is the performance of terse white affect that appears in many of her examples: the off-the-cuff one-liners, the non-responsive attitude to being called out, the curtness meant to cut short any lengthy questioning or feeling. Although her analysis of these responses is detailed and rich, Wekker spends little time examining *how* the affective attitude of innocence intertwines with guilt, and shame with pride. I would like to sit with these disavowed affects of shame and guilt, for they also powerfully organise whiteness through the active repression of ideas, facts, memories and feelings. One might say that shame and guilt provide the invisible or unarticulated infrastructure for feeling white, the necessary foil to the articulated claims of innocence and pride. For instance, we can identify how white innocence and pride serve as emotional covers for colonial guilt and shame in the way the jubilant phrase “the Golden Age” is used to try to positively frame the harrowing, traumatic, disturbing realities of the amassing of wealth in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries through the theft of resources and the commodification of racialised human beings in the slave trade (e.g. Van der Molen n/p).

To better understand how shame and guilt provide the invisible or unarticulated infrastructure for feeling white, I would like to reach deeper into affect theory to examine their workings. Generally, the affects of shame and guilt are like boomerangs: they feel intrinsic to who you are because of something you have done, but in the face of an external source such as an authority or condemning party who 'shames' or 'guilts' one, the affect boomerangs back to settle, forcibly imbedded in the body. The body reflects the intensity: a blush or a blotchy skin, downcast eyes, stomachs tightened into knots, a frozen or stuttering tongue. Think of how I called out to you, white people, how that felt in the charged atmosphere. Shame followed, crept in knowing we would speak of race and racism, of colonial archives and colonial ideas. It was thrown out and inevitably returned, settling between our ears, in our hearts and minds, nestled amongst the 'racial common sense' imbued in us. Shame and guilt have an inward and an outward movement, leaving in their path a sticky residual feeling.

Sara Ahmed describes affect as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29). She describes happiness as a feeling state, but one that turns us towards objects that accumulate positive affective value; of course, objects can also accumulate negative affective value. Similarly, using the language of affect for guilt and shame also raises the issue of overlapping affective and moral economies (Ahmed 30). The notion of "value" used here points to when value is awarded to particular registrations of affect, when they are economised into emotion to be had, avoided, owned or paid for. Before economisation, in its regular circulation, affect can serve to intensify or dampen, jolt or numb, or simply thrum in the background. It attunes us to other bodies, to the world's fleshiness. Theorists of affect have conceptualised the

inwardness and outwardness of affect as being a social path of affect's transmission (such as in Teresa Brennan's interest in crowds and mood), its felt intensity hinging the spaces of the virtual and actual (such that Brian Massumi develops from Deleuze), and a circuit that can be affectively charged within a social script (which Eve Sedgwick develops in her writing on Silvan Tomkins).

Tracing the inward/outward movements of guilt and shame enable me to insist on their social life and to avoid framing them as emotions that are too often received as belonging to a person. Shame and guilt are affects with a particular individualising effect in how they are embodied with responses that seal off the body. They stop sociality; they personalise problems that need to be addressed as shared. It is thus critical that they are examined as affective roadblocks, as something hidden by a defensive turning inward. This is why shame and guilt seem opposites of the affects of pride and innocence, which turn the body outward with a display of outstretched proud arms or an innocent body with nothing to hide. I suggest that white affect is caught in the act, paralysed *in media res* as it pivots between the inward-facing affects of guilt and shame and outward claims of innocence and pride. The only way out of this defensive disavowal seems to be to confront one's 'ugly' feelings as well as the happy feelings that stick to particular objects in the archive. Working on one's own whiteness as an affective complex should not, however, centre whiteness in isolation but should work through the cultural archive of imperialism as an ensemble of racial structures. Though we carry the cultural archive between our ears and in our hearts, we must acknowledge how, where and when these felt concepts were deposited as sentiments that shape the form and contents of colonial archives (Stoler 100–101).

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# The Wendy Clarke Collection:

Love and More in the Archives

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Love & Compassion



Expressions of love and compassion can be found in many places in an archive. Personal letters, diaries, postcards and greeting cards document how love and compassion have been articulated over many years. But these written expressions can sometimes be misconstrued or misinterpreted due to language differences and changing societal norms. Oral histories and home movies enable viewers to see and/or hear moments of romantic, platonic or familial love as well as celebrations and stories of lost love and heartbreak. Wendy Clarke's *Love Tapes* project (1977–2001) and other of her video art projects are a unique primary source that capture some of the many facets and meanings of love and compassion.

A video art project, the *Love Tapes* was open to anyone who wanted to participate—it had no age limit, no admission fee and no censoring of comments. Participants came from many ethnicities and countries and could speak in whatever language they wanted to. Money or social standing did not matter. Members of the gay, lesbian and transgender communities were welcome. *Love Tapes* was recorded at the World Trade Center in New York City, at museums, in prisons, at a shelter for battered women, at youth centres and colleges, at centres for senior citizens and for people with disabilities across the United States, in France, Brazil, Mexico and even in a van that travelled the streets of Chicago. The thoughts and insights shared by the people who recorded their *Love Tapes* were generally unrehearsed and unpolished and blended joy and sadness, sharing

both anecdotes and raw emotions. The participants occasionally invoked clichés, but more often they stumbled toward the words that would adequately capture feelings, memories, presence and loss.

Wendy Clarke is the daughter of independent filmmaker/video artist Shirley Clarke. Starting in 1969, Shirley began experimenting with video—specifically the Sony ½" open reel videotape format. The introduction of the affordable and portable ½" open reel videotape in 1969 made it possible for many artists, schools, non-profit organisations and other non-professional consumers to record and create their own content. Shirley, along with Wendy, Bruce Ferguson, Dee Dee Halleck and Andy Gurian and others, formed the TP Videospace Troupe. At the Chelsea Hotel and various museums, community centres, colleges and universities along the East Coast, they gave workshops demonstrating how video could enable people to be both creator and audience.

In 1972 Wendy began a personal video diary that she used "as a tool for expressing my true feelings, needs and wants, and to see if I was being honest" (Clarke 101). She added to her video diary for the next five years. In 1977 she decided as an experiment to "talk to myself in my video diary for as long as it took to say everything I was feeling at the time, until I had nothing more to say" (Clarke 101). The result was three successive 30-minute tapes. Sensing that she had captured something special, Wendy chose to share the tapes and invite feedback from a few trusted friends. This led her to publicly share one of the tapes, entitled "Chapter One", as part of the *Interactive Video* exhibition at the University of Southern California at San Diego's Maderville Art Gallery. Inspired by the long comments left in the guest book by visitors expressing their own feelings about love, Wendy shared "Chapter One" with some of Shirley Clarke's video graduate students at UCLA, which led five of them to create their own tapes. The format for the *Love Tapes* was a result of this session with the UCLA students: people watch other people's "love tapes" and then record their own, sitting in a booth or a room with a camera and monitor that allows them to look at themselves as they talk for three minutes about love. The three-minute time limit was chosen because it is the duration of the song "I'm in the Mood for Love", which was used at the UCLA session; as the *Love Tapes* evolved, participants could choose from a long list of songs and a variety of different backgrounds. Participants viewed their tape after recording it and decided whether to have it erased or to sign a release to have it added to the collection.

Between 1977 and 2001, over 2,500 tapes were made around the world, illustrating the vast range of interpretations, meanings and memories prompted by the word "love". Through this process, Wendy found that video can operate



Shirley and Wendy Clarke  
circa 1978. Credit: Wendy  
Clarke collection Wisconsin  
Center for Film and Theater  
Research (WCFTR).



YOU ARE INVITED TO MAKE A LOVE TAPE

A flyer promoting a *Love Tapes* event.  
Credit: Wendy Clarke collection  
WCFTF.

both as an apparatus for intimacy and as a facilitator for self-examination. The project's breath-taking scope revealed a rare glimpse of humanity communing through shared experience, albeit mediated by video technologies of both recording and exhibition. Released on PBS and other public television stations in the 1980s, the *Love Tapes* marked a milestone for the advancement of the video medium. Wendy's work was visionary in anticipating the kinds of mediated interactions that became increasingly common on internet platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok.

The *Love Tapes* is also a time capsule that documents how a wide range of people—from a four-year-old child to senior citizens—feel about love. The breadth of representation in the *Love Tapes* is remarkable in bringing people together in the 1970s and 1980s to describe what love meant to them. *Love Tapes* has been exhibited extensively around the world since 1980, including in shows at the Museum of Modern Art (1980), the World's Fair in New Orleans (1984), on KCET/28 TV in Southern California (1989), as part of a Wendy



*Love Tapes* recorded at the World Trade Center in New York City in April-May, 1980. Credit: Wendy Clarke collection, WCFTF

Open Video ↗

Clarke retrospective at Anthology Film Archive in New York City (2001) and most recently at LUX Moving Image in London, England (2019).

To date, approximately 200 *Love Tapes* have been digitised—most from the event at the World Trade Center in New York City in April and May 1980; of these, I have watched approximately 40. With every *Love Tape* I watch, I am struck by the honesty, genuineness and thoughtful insight that participants share. People admit that while they've never lacked love in their life, they are afraid of it, or they don't know what love really is, or they take it for granted. A man who had broken up with his girlfriend the day before is defiant, saying that love is a "two-way street"—he felt his girlfriend was using him—and proclaims that he is "a human being; I have feelings." A woman wants to learn to love unconditionally like her grandmother, who, at age 77, had decided that it was a waste of time to deal with negative emotions. Another man, wanting to be an artist, feels that before he can do anything in his life he needs to learn not only who he is but also how to love himself. For another woman, recording a *Love Tape* is an opportunity to tell her husband how much she loves and appreciates him—things she admits she could never say to him in person. When finished, many participants wonder if what they had said was good enough. Some express how much they enjoyed the experience. Others express a sense of relief at the three minutes being over and a feeling of accomplishment at having done it, while for others, three minutes was not nearly enough time.

Watching the *Love Tapes*, for me, brings to mind many questions. Would I be able to record a *Love Tape*—and if I did, what would I say about love? What do I know about love? How do I feel about love? And why do people say things—admit their feelings and fears—on tape that they could not say otherwise? What is it about the experience of talking to themselves in a booth for three minutes that gives them the courage and freedom to be so honest with themselves? It takes confidence—whether you think you have it or not—and some bravery to commit personal reflections to tape and then agree to share yourself with the world.

The *Love Tapes* and Wendy's other video projects are powerful works of art but are also anthropological studies and oral history compilations. Wendy took a very personal exercise, one that had helped her process many emotions and aspects of her life, and invited everyone to participate and explore their senses and definitions of love. Instead of prompting responses using specific questions, she gave everyone the power to decide what to share and how to represent themselves. Unlike written documents, video recordings capture people's thoughts and emotions with little ambiguity—unless they wish to be ambivalent. Words on a page can be impactful, but hearing and seeing

27 people smile, laugh, cry and struggle for words as they talk about love adds a very particular embodied layer of emotion for the viewer to experience.

Wendy believed that everyone could make art and that video could connect people from around the world. Her video projects are an amazing collection of art that inspire, fascinate and challenge the viewer on many levels. They are also a unique resource that can be used by scholars of many disciplines, along with other archival collections, to gain insight into what people from a specific location and at a specific point in time thought about love. The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research <sup>7</sup> (WCFTR) is privileged to be the home of the Wendy Clarke Collection.

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# My Hair is My Archive — Personal, Political and Social

CÉCILE ACCILIEN  
(Kennesaw State University)

Love & Compassion



An archive is a site where records of the past are stored as a way of preserving the past, of keeping history in the present moment. It holds records of experiences that enable us to interpret and understand history. When I refer to my hair as an archive I am underscoring the fact that it functions as a record of practices, but also of values that date back centuries. My hair is my archive because through it I can tell important stories and recollect key events from my life. I embrace my hair, my locks and now my grey. This is a spiritual act of self-affirmation. My archival hair represents an embodiment of who I am today, how I move around the world, how I am viewed by others and the ways in which I have to navigate my identity/ies in different spaces. And it references not only my own individual identity, but also how I as an individual connect to a larger collective past.

Being in an academic space where whiteness and all that it entails is the norm, choosing to have locks as a Black Haitian immigrant woman at a predominantly white institution is seen by some individuals as an act of resistance and by others as defiance or refusal to conform. However, I am made keenly aware in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways that my hair—and by extension myself—is not always welcome. As feminist and critical race theorist Sara Ahmed explains:

But think of this: those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be here. Think of this: how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us. Think of the kinds of experiences you have when you are not expected to be here. These experiences are a resource to generate knowledge. (9–10)

Unfortunately, the wealth of knowledge, worlds of expertise and diverse experience I could bring are consistently ignored, because I am at once hyper visible and invisible, and far too many people cannot see beyond my hair and my Blackness.

I am a postcolonial thinker and a Black Haitian American woman. Because academia is addicted to whiteness, it is uncomfortable with me. The way I choose to wear my hair — having locks — is for me at once a personal, social and political statement. It is my way of affirming my identity, accepting and loving myself as I am. Through my hair I am able to negotiate my relationship to my ancestors and my identity as an immigrant living in a diasporic space.

I last had any kind of chemical in my hair about twenty-five years ago. This is an ongoing choice, but it has consequences. My choice not to use chemicals in my hair was at first unconscious, because it didn't feel right or healthy, and later

became a conscious act of both defiance and self-love. It is a way of having compassion for myself, of refusing to be traumatised physically and emotionally by what is required to conform to the Eurocentric and white standards of 'beauty' that people of Colour are too often subject to in the West. Like our bodies, Black women's hair is constantly policed as a means of control by structures of power in the dominant culture.

Microaggressions and exclusions as they relate to hair are very real. Drawing again from my own life, I still vividly remember the physical and emotional pain I felt when getting my hair pressed. Growing up in Newark, New Jersey, in the late 80s, my mom would use her hard-earned money as a housekeeper to take my two sisters and I to a beautician (the shop was at the beautician's home) so that we could fit the standard of beauty for special occasions such as a wedding or a first communion. For those not familiar with the process of pressing Black hair, a hot comb is used to straighten the hair to make it supposedly 'soft' and 'silky'. I hated the sound and feeling of my hair being pressed, and I remember my scalp burning after putting in a perm and my eyes burning from the smell of the chemicals. Even writing about this decades later is triggering for me. And even after all of that pain, I don't recall my hair ever conforming to the advertised softness or silkiness.

I have had all types of hair styles throughout my youth and into my adult life, including braids, twists and now locks, which I have had for over 15 years. Some white friends have asked if they can touch my hair, and I jokingly tell them, "I will let you touch my hair for a price." I have had in-depth discussions about Black hair with a few white friends who are close enough, brave enough and open-minded enough to listen to that complexity. Some white people feel a certain level of interest, and perhaps for some, exotification, when it comes to touching Black people's hair. I think some whites exoticise Black hair to prove they are liberals and not racists, to show that they understand and accept that Black hair is "different". But beyond simple curiosity, I think it may be another manifestation of white guilt and white fragility.

In *Don't Touch my Hair*, BBC race correspondent Emma Dabiri takes readers on a journey about Black hair, appropriation, body politics and racism.<sup>1</sup> Dabiri notes:

Hair-straightening for people of African descent emerges from a traumatic historical legacy... In denying black people their humanity, the hair that grows from their heads was—one might argue, still is—considered more similar to the wool or fur of an animal than to the straight human tresses of Europeans. (11)

She further asserts that “Hair has the power to confer classification as black or not” (17). Likewise, Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps observe in *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* that “hair act[s] as the true test of Blackness” (17). From an outsider’s perspective, hair texture and style often determines whether people are classified as Black or not.

When we think of hair as an archive, we need to have a certain level of respect. Different archives have different rules, and we cannot simply touch the materials within them. When whites (try to) touch Black hair, it can be understood as a kind of trespassing on certain histories. The record of Black experience must be approached in a way that is more informed and respectful, otherwise it becomes one more form of appropriation.

Probably one of the most emulated and famous Black hairstyles is of Jamaican singer Bob Marley. Practitioners of the Rastafarian religion believe that they are not supposed to cut their hair, so they leave it in locks. Many white people embrace locks because they admire and love Bob Marley, but they do not necessarily understand the implications of growing locks themselves, and are ignorant of the notion of cultural appropriation.

Byrd and Tharps note the strong connection to hair and people’s identity/ies. For many Black people, changing their hairstyle is a form of resistance and a way of being empowered and connected to their African roots. Dabiri notes that “Black hair intimidates a lot of white people” (25). In her novel *Americanah*, set largely in a hair salon, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts the various ways in which hair serves as a metaphor for how race is constructed in the U.S. The novel connects hair politics with power relations, discrimination and European/American beauty standards. For Ifemelu, the main character in the novel, learning to love and accept her natural hair is an act of self-love. I can relate to Ifemelu. It is only very recently that natural hair has become acceptable in certain spaces in the U.S.—especially in corporate America.<sup>2</sup>

When we consider hair as an archive, we can think about how we have (or do not have) access to hair salons and hair products, and how this can affect our choice of hairstyle. A person may choose a

particular natural hairstyle for many reasons, some of which may be practical, political or social. Many of us Black women do not wash our hair every day, which has nothing to do with a lack of cleanliness but is because of our hair texture and the hairstyles we choose. Our hair gets dry easily, and washing it every day would only make it dryer. People may also take for granted that for many people of Colour, living without easy access to beauty salons influences how we wear our hair. I have had the experience of living in very white cities with only a handful of people of Colour, like Portland (Oregon) or Lawrence (Kansas), where I had to leave the city to find hair products compatible with my hair type. Whereas going to the hair salon may for some simply be a matter of finding a stylist they like, for many of us Black women it is a matter of finding a hair salon that actually knows how to do our hair in the first place. The lack I describe here is a result of histories of settlement, migration and prejudice. When I have sought out places that can supply me with what I need to style my hair, I have not been engaged in a superficial quest but in affirming my presence in a particular context, claiming my belonging as part of society in these somewhat hostile places.

Instances of unnecessary touching by authorities also occur because my hair—and by default myself—does not conform to the standard of whiteness. This happens, for example, when I travel and have to go through airport security, and is comparable to the PC tax (People of Colour Tax)—let’s call it the Black Hair tax. You get patted extra as you go through security, because the assumption is that if your hair is not combed in a Eurocentric manner, you are not respectable—and are therefore seen as a potential threat.

Activists like bell hooks are very aware of the damage that look can play in the psyche of young children. Her book *Homemade Love* offers young girls a path to self-esteem and self-love by celebrating their beautiful hair no matter what the style, from hair that is “soft like cotton”, “full of frizz and fuzz”, “short tight naps” or “plaited strands all”. She presents a variety of hairstyles that allow young Black girls to be free. A seven-year-old girl in Tennessee, Morgan Bugg, recently persuaded the creators of an educational app called “Freckl” to include hairstyles worn by young Black girls as options when creating their avatars. Representation matters.

1

Singer Solange Knowles (Beyoncé’s sister) has a song titled “Don’t Touch my Hair” in which she demonstrates the ways in which Black women are connected to their hair, but she also invites everyone to adapt their own style. The video shows various hairstyles and is a warning to white people to stop the microaggressive act of touching Black people’s hair.

2

For more information see the CROWN Act (Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair), a law prohibiting race-based hair discrimination first introduced in 2019 by a Democratic senator in California. It was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in September 2020 but not in the Senate and was reintroduced in the U.S. Congress in March 2021. Eight

states have already passed the act and bills are pending in 27 other states. Interestingly, it has not passed in Louisiana, Georgia and other Deep South states where slavery was legal at the time of the Civil War.

31 Power and representation even subconsciously play into cultural appropriation. As bell hooks writes:

When liberal whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control), they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they wish to see eradicated. (113)

In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks further observes that “While it has become ‘cool’ for white folks to hang out with Black people and express pleasure in Black culture, most white people do not feel that this pleasure should be linked to unlearning racism” (17).

Some people (both Black and white) embody the notion that natural hair is not professional. The idea of whether our hair is acceptable or not is engrained in a colonial mindset in which whiteness and white culture dictate what belonging looks like. As Jacqui Alexander notes:

Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both

the material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. (218)

In conclusion, my hair as a personal, social and political archive reminds me of the words of poet Maya Angelou that “I come as one but I stand as 10,000”. The people who came before me who dared to have their hair natural provide a space for me to accept my hair and be happy with it. My hair is an emblem of freedom—freedom from the pain of having to straighten my hair with a hot comb and later with chemicals. My hair as an archive allows me to name the racial and social trauma that I live through when I make the choice to have a natural hairstyle. My hair is my marronage and my resistance. Therefore, my hair is also often-times a site of politicisation that can have real consequences and impact on my livelihood and how I interact with others. My hair is an archive because it preserves important records of my past and my present and how my individual self is part of history. This history helps me to continuously define myself, guiding me as I move through the world. I claim my place in this history with self-love and compassion.

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Keynote

ARIELLA AÏSHA AZOULAY  
(Brown University)

# Algerian Letters:

The Jewellers of the Oummah



My work has long been to interrogate museums and archives and to delineate the role they play in the colonial project, as well as to interact with these sites as arenas of struggle and decolonisation. In my most recent book, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), I study the role of museums and archives in the destruction of colonised people's cultures, and I participate in the configuration of forms of restitution and repair.

Yet there were still destroyed worlds that I had to attend to, maybe the most intimate ones. When I was close to finishing *Potential History*, I felt the joy of completing ten years of exhaustive research but was also troubled by what I came to see during the writing process, something I allude to in the book's preface (slightly revised here):

I would have loved to be part of an identity group. I wish I could be able to say that I belong to "my community." But there is no community to which I truly belong. I own many objects and artefacts and some works of art. None of these, even those I inherited from my parents or received as gifts from family and friends, were handed to me as a recognition of my belonging. I have not a thing from Algeria, where my father and his ancestors were born and lived until the early 60s, or from Andalusia, from where my maternal family was expelled.

This paragraph, which referenced a whole history of colonial dispossession, re-education, shame, pain, hope, exile and desire, has led me to my next research project—questioning the *extension* of French citizenship to the Jews in Algeria, just a few decades after its colonisation, and studying the role of this citizenship in the destruction of their world. In 1870, Arab Jews and Berber Jews who lived in Algeria for centuries were separated from the rest of the indigenous population and proclaimed by their colonisers as French citizens. In exchange for this imposed citizenship, they had to give up their demands as colonised and renounce much of their pre-colonial way of life. The objects, customs, names, beliefs and languages to which they were attached, and in general their modes of living, became obstacles they had to discard, proving to their colonising 'benefactors' their worthiness for the identity they had not asked for. In a generation, they had to strip themselves of many things that could identify them as other than French. What did it mean to my ancestors to shed their material, corporal and cosmological existence? What does it mean to me as their descendant not to have access to the place where they lived for centuries, or not to be surrounded by their artefacts? What happened to their material and spiritual world and the rights, knowledge and beliefs inscribed in it? Could it really be vanished?

Studying the commonalities between the French colonising powers in North Africa and the Zionists in Palestine, this series of questions prompted my inquiry into the place of crafts in the physical and emotional world-loss of the Arab and Berber Jews, or more comprehensively of Muslim Jews from North Africa. Eventually, this inquiry led me to explore the role of crafts in imagining and rehearsing for world-repairing.

With the demise of French rule in Algeria in 1962, that citizenship doomed these Muslim Jews to a forced departure from their homeland and to a double disappearance—from North Africa and from the history of the French colonisation of Algeria. This double disappearance has far-reaching global consequences—it made the Jewish Muslim world almost unimaginable.

Through my own family life in Algeria and Palestine I study the process through which, in less than a century, an offspring of an indigenous Algerian Jew and a Palestinian Jew cannot simply say "I'm Algerian", "I'm Palestinian". More than just a personal reckoning, family history or implied return, this enquiry interrogates the structures of colonial dispossession, traces processes of world-loss and assumes the necessity to render this process reversible while asking what kind of repair—often also called 'restitution' or 'decolonisation'—is possible. In this destroyed Muslim Jewish world in the Maghreb, the majority of jewellers were Jews, and in general, the majority of them were craftsmen, invested in building, maintaining and repairing the world they shared with their Muslim sisters and brothers. Reconstructing the place of the Jews as the jewellers of the *oummah* (nation), I trace their centuries-long presence in the Maghreb, invoke the unruliness of the jewels—including that of those incredible pieces which are held in French, German and British museums—and propose a potential history of Jewish Muslim conviviality.

While the Jews had to leave Algeria in 1962 and an imperially fabricated end was brought to this shared world, the jewels the Jews crafted stayed, many kept close to the heart and bodies of Muslim women. Copying the forms of these objects and embodying the gestures of their makers, another violent aspect of the 'emancipation of the Jews' is revealed—they were encouraged, if not forced, to abandon their skills as world builders. Thus, the violent taxonomy that turned *different* Jews into a unified historical subject—'the Jews'—turned them into citizens and endowed that subject, 'the Jews', with an imperial nation-state in Palestine, and linked it to a certain body of objects—'Judaica'. At the same time, museums also invested in wings of Muslim art, thus contributing their part to the shredding of centuries of a Jewish Muslim world.

Through a series of open letters I am writing to the living and the dead, to family members and elected kin including Franz Fanon, Hannah Arendt and Sylvia Wynter. I am asking what it could mean to invoke the presence of Muslim Jews through the jewels they crafted, and to consider the condition of being defined by one's craft as a mode of inhabiting one's place in the *oummah*.

Writing these letters, I also spend time looking for my grandmothers in the vast visual archive that the French produced out of the presence, labour and artefact of our Algerian ancestors. Colonisation meant an unrestricted right to decide not only what our ancestors were allowed or forbidden to do in their own country, now ruled by the French, but also who they were allowed to be or forbidden from continuing to be. Thus, colonisation was an imposition of identities, and with the advent of photography these identities became French resources to be exploited. The colonisers' phantasies about who my ancestors were and what they could be were materialised in a new domain of profit and power.

Looking at these women, whose images are printed on postcards that circulated across the French empire, I resent the differences I notice between them and my grandmother Aïsha, of whom I have only a few photos. I keep looking at the images of the women on these postcards, contemporaneous with my grandmother, and cannot avoid asking with dismay: Where did my grandmothers disappear? What did my female ancestors tell each other at the turn of the 19th century, as they became an estranged 'type', seized from

their own bodies and postures and printed on postcards held in the hands of their colonisers? Did they mourn their own disappearance and their subsumption into 'a type', being robbed of their many distinct features, which they could no longer be or inhabit?

Paradoxically, however, the mass production of these kinds of postcards—known as 'scenes and types'—took place shortly after the colonisers turned Algerian Jews into French citizens. Turned into citizens, the colonisers seduced my ancestors to no longer be part of this inventory of 'types' and instead to embody the *Frenchness* imposed on them. At the same time, however, the invisibility that was expected from them when they were forced to pass as French was too insulting for the French settlers—"How do these Jews dare to be French?!" In the first decades after being proclaimed French citizens, they were accused of being all kinds of swindlers, impersonators, tricksters or forgers. The French settlers aimed to expose and display the 'truth' behind their *Frenchness*—they had always been nothing but Jews, indigenous and hardly distinguishable from their Arabs neighbours, thus unworthy of their French citizenship. My ancestors had to recognise themselves in the 'Jewish' type, in distinction from other types, and at the same time, to fashion and perceive themselves as French and 'modern', as distant as possible from this 'Jewish' type that they had to relegate to the past. In other words, citizenship was not only a set of rights but an identity they had to embody even while disturbingly celebrating their double disappearance as Algerians and as Jews.

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Learning & Unlearning Archival  
Practices Workshop

CARINE ZAAYMAN

(Vrije Universiteit and Research Center for  
Material Culture/ Nationaal Museum van  
Wereldculturen)

# Item Cannot Be Displayed:

Refusal as a Modality of Care

*This is the knowledge that most African people do not have; they do not know that these bones of their African ancestors are there. When you are exposed to this, the full gravity of the situation weighs upon you as you realise you are dealing with something much bigger than yourself, centuries-long colonial violations. In short, I had found myself in the centre of evidence of the colonial crime scene.*

—Wandile Kasibe

To be a South African means to be constantly conscious of your relationship to the past. For us, the past is not an abstract subject but is something we recognise as shaping the fabric of our physical and inner worlds. Scholars and artists from South Africa are driven to engage the difficult legacies of colonialism time and again. Yet the narratives that we identify as ‘history’ are as contested as they are present. Where do the material remains of the past, serving as the sources of ‘history’, live? What does it mean to care for such objects? These are some of the questions haunting those who, like me, are invested in

finding just ways of telling the stories of the past, and especially in making visible the absences of untold stories.

Some objects from the South African past have found their way into archives and collections within the country; one such collection recently faced great peril.<sup>1</sup> The globally dispersed community connected to the University of Cape Town awoke on the 18th of April 2021 to scattered reports of a fire on Hoerikwaggo (also known as Table Mountain). At first, we heard that the restaurant at Rhodes Memorial had suffered major damage from an exploding gas bottle. Some of us may have thought wryly, “Rhodes is at it again.” But then the wind shifted and fanned the flames towards UCT’s upper campus. Students were evacuated and buildings cleared. Before long, a frightful image lit up computer screens and mobile phones around the world: The Jagger Library was on fire!

Swiftly, scholars, activists and artists began enumerating what was at risk as the flames tore through the building: The university’s special



1

All photographs were taken by the author on a site visit to the Jagger Library, as part of a workshop titled “Ways of Reading After the Fire: Creative Knowledge Production in African Studies”, organised by the Centre of African Studies, University of Basel, and the Centre for Curating the Archive, University of Cape Town (25 April 2022).



collection, comprising photographic collections from the struggle against apartheid, archival documents and out-of-print-books—all faced irredeemable peril. Several commentators reminded us that the priceless trove of Xhosa histories, the Bleek and Lloyd archive, was lodged in a basement of the library. “Was the material digitised?” many asked, disregarding perhaps the ways in which archival documents are more than their text, more than what can be reproduced purely intangibly, immaterially. After waiting breathlessly for the salvage operation to start, reports of what had been lost emerged in the following days. Bleek and Lloyd was safe, thankfully, but around 70,000 books and 3,500 DVDs featuring historical film and government documents from across Africa had been destroyed. The African Studies Collection, lodged in the library, held many treasures from the African continent, including resources for gender studies, media studies, HIV/AIDS research and African languages studies. As the salvage operation continues one year after the fire, a comprehensive list of what was ruined is still being collated.



Shock and sadness in the wake of the event were quickly followed by realisations that as it destroyed, the fire might in many ways also reveal, making sensible some dynamics of archive. Images taken by volunteers in the salvage operation circulated on social media. Some of the

damaged but partially legible material brought into view in this way had not been consulted for years. The fire also made visible the precarity of archives, their fragility in the face of disasters such as this fire. Other, more intangible things also became visible in the aftermath of the fire. For example, the attachment felt by researchers was palpable, but so too was that of those who had deposited material there in the interest of preservation. This attachment to ‘mere matter’ was in itself telling, however. Many observers pointed out the irony inherent in the collective outcry over the loss of library material, even as fires wreak havoc in informal settlements across the Western Cape every summer, attracting far less attention, concern and, especially, action. We further came to understand that it was not only a connection with the past that had been ruptured, but also one to the future: Future work on the lost material had now been fundamentally affected, potential scholarship and archival engagement rendered forever unrealisable. In the collective mourning of the material destroyed by the fire, what was it that we feared was lost? When these fires raged, it was not ‘history’ as such that was in peril, but the site we designated to hold the deposits of our past. As the fire moved us towards collective mourning, I wondered whether we were not forgetting the ways in which archives have failed us.



With the Jagger Library fire, the strong emotions it elicited and the complex questions it surfaced still fresh in my mind, I presented the first of two iterations of a workshop in May 2021, as part of the Inward Outward symposium edition which centered on emotion in the archive. As is the case with many post-colonies, several objects from the South African past are located outside its borders. Wandile Kasibe, for instance, traced various human remains from southern Africa held in collections in the Global North. Highly publicised debates and activism around the restitution of these remains, as well as objects looted from the continent of Africa, make apparent that the loss with which (South) African collections have had to contend entails not only the kind of destruction

occasioned by the Jagger Library fire but a foundational, originary loss. As an initiative, Inward Outward seeks to compel institutions in Europe to address their complicity in the production of this loss, as well as how these institutions maintain and extend it.

Inward Outward invited participants to the workshop whose daily work entailed the care for archival holdings and collections of materials that bear burdens of coloniality and extraction. It was designed to be a space in which participants could engage critically with materials under their care and to develop strategies for their mobilisation. Instead of approaching archival collections as inert sources, the workshop aimed to consider how various affective encounters with archival materials can inform such ethics of care. It was conceived to provide an opportunity for participants to share the challenges they face and to learn from one another's experiences. We did not seek to preclude any methodologies for working with challenging material; instead, the workshop endeavoured to help imagine creative and practical ways through which to resee and reframe them, and to recognise and deal with the emotional valences they carry.

The workshop posed the following questions to organisers and participants alike:

- How do emotional responses from archive workers, researchers and activists to material kept in our institutions offer insights into and lead to otherwise unthought of means of connecting with the past?
- On the basis of these responses, which strategies can workers in institutions employ to imagine archival practices anew?
- Can silence, refusal, disruption and even destruction be understood as productive curatorial practices that aid in unlearning imperialism when engaging colonial archives and archives of coloniality?

Upon invitation, each participant was asked to bring a piece of material from the archive or collection with which they worked that called attention to methodological questions of care and display. Before sharing the material in the

workshop, we discussed ethical considerations around showing this material to the group. In the first iteration of the workshop, the group decided *not* to display to one another the material they had brought. This decision was reached by a consensus predicated on contributions from participants who expressed their fatigue with consistently encountering difficult material in the course of their professional work. Our conversation focussed on the divergent ways in which museum and archive workers are affected by materials in collections. In particular, people of Colour and those from diasporic communities working in European institutions more often have to process difficult emotional responses than their white counterparts, for whom such material is conventionally more 'distant'. How do institutions deal with the fact that the (colonial) past is for some more present than for others, and is in some places more than others?

Even as it steered us outside the 'planned' programme of the workshop, our decision not to show the materials opened a space for conversation around the interrelation between the contents of a collection and the institutional structures that govern its custodianship. Exhibitions constitute the public face of organisations such as museums, but behind these welcoming veneers often lurks turmoil. Institutions are composed of people, and, as many of the participants indicated, the conditions of archival labour remain entrenched in colonial modes of knowledge production as well as interpersonal interactions.

My recollection of that moment of togetherness in the workshop is most prominently characterised by our collective assertion that when we speak of 'caring' within archives and collections we are also referring to caring about those who work with them every day. The collective decision to push against the impulse of 'showing' was an act of refusal, of acknowledging that the significance of archival material exceeds any notion of 'scientific knowledge' purportedly at the heart of European institutions. It was a powerful moment that afforded a central space to the emotions of those—both within and beyond institutions—who know that the way in which stories about the colonial past is narrated shapes life in the present.

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# Encounters with the Danish Colonial Archive:

Affect, Labour and Spaces  
of Care

DANIELA AGOSTINHO  
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Anger & Defiance

What spaces of care and respect does anger generate in the archive?<sup>1</sup> I approach this question through the lens of my ongoing project *Archival Encounters* <sup>2</sup>, which I initiated in the aftermath of the digitisation of the archives documenting Danish colonial rule in the former Danish West Indies, today United States Virgin Islands. A substantial portion of the archived history of these islands has been stored in Denmark for more than a hundred years, far removed from their source communities, ever since Denmark sold the islands to the U.S. in 1917.<sup>2</sup> A variety of collections were digitised and became digitally accessible in 2017, at a moment of centennial commemoration that brought to light painful histories and enduring colonial erasures.<sup>3</sup>

As a visual culture researcher resident in Denmark, an outsider to this history but now implicated in it through my role as a researcher, educator and collaborator, I was struck by how the digitisation of these records (including photographic records) was seemingly removed from considerations about the coloniality of vision, power relations and ethics of representation. It was as if digitisation, conceived as a neutral technical process, overwrote the “scenes of unbearable historical weight” (Enwezor 33) documented in the files. Even if unacknowledged, these scenes were nevertheless there, and they haunted these repositories and the conversations surrounding them. In the words of Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer and Temi Odumosu, more than scanning and releasing data, digitisation is “a process of implication, a graphic exposure to documents that evidence the seen and unseen of the colonial world, and therefore a haunting” (41). As I joined and facilitated activities that dealt with the digital release of these archives, I was (and continue to be) reminded of the incredible material and affective labour that artists, researchers, cultural mediators, librarians, activists and educators undertake to surface questions of power and the enduring presence of coloniality—efforts often and continuously met with resistance and hostility but also supported by joyous collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

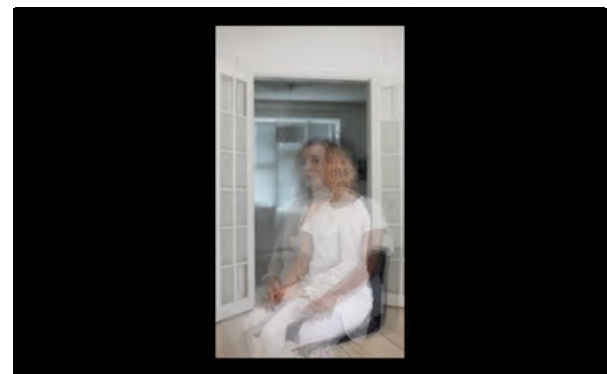
Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich, archival scholar Marika Cifor posits that archival records are “repositories of feeling and emotions” (Cvetkovich

7), meaning that they have affects encoded within their content in meaningful ways. In addition, Cifor notes, records are also repositories of the “affective practices that surround their production and reception” (14). Extending Cifor, one could add that colonial archives are also repositories of the emotional labour required to grapple with them, both the “tough and troubling” (Isenia and Steinbock 10) work of wrestling with and tending to these archives, and the public mediation of this archival engagement.

In this writing, I offer a tentative reflection on ‘spaces of care’ and emotions in the archive, elaborating further on my presentation and the ensuing conversation between my co-panellists Teresa Cisneros, Amal Alhaag, Julie Métais and organisers Alana Osbourne and Alessandra Benedicty-Koken. The conversation challenged and encouraged me to further grapple with the emotional density of working with these archives.

\*

I would now like to bring in a companion, an artwork that has inspired me to consider these questions. *Black Is a Beautiful Word. I & I (Encountering the Danish Colonial Archive)* (2019) is an installation by Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers that directly addresses a photograph from the Danish colonial archives.



Jeannette Ehlers, *Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I*, film still. Voice and words by Lesley-Ann Brown, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

[Open Video ↗](#)

1

Many thanks to the editors Rachel, Ali, Carine, Esther, Eleni, Alessandra and Alana for their supportive editorial work. Thanks to Jeannette Ehlers and her collaborators in *Black Is a Beautiful Word* for the inspiring work, and thanks to all the authors whose work has helped me think and write this text. The inadequacies in the text are of course mine alone.

2

On the history of these records, see Bastian; and Meyer and Odumosu.

3

For a contextualisation of these effects, see Meyer and Odumosu; Odumosu (“Response”); Agostinho et al.; and Agostinho.

4

For accounts of this labour, see Odumosu (“What Lies Unspoken”) and Marronage.



Through a monologue written and voiced by Trinidadian-American writer and educator Lesley-Ann Brown, the installation addresses a Black woman pictured in a photograph from around 1900, who is described as “Sarah in a ball gown (housemaid)” in an album by Alfred Paludan-Muller, a Danish pharmacist and prolific amateur photographer who lived on the island of St. Croix between 1870 and 1904. In this album, the photograph shows Sarah sitting in a chair on the porch of a house in St. Croix, wearing a white gown and facing the camera. Throughout the many albums created by this amateur photographer, many other Afro-Caribbean women (presumably servants to the Danish colonising class) surface in similar compositions.

In Ehlers’ installation, a print of the photograph is carefully framed and lit and hung on the wall of the exhibition space. A video work is projected on the adjacent wall on a much larger scale. Described by Ehlers as a “floating portrait”, the video features a series of portraits of white-clad Black women, including the artist herself and her close collaborator-friends, their individual moving portraits flowing into and overlapping one another.

In a section of the five-minute monologue voiced by Lesley-Ann Brown, we hear the following words, addressing Sarah:

How did you get there?

Your expression. Defiance without words.

Your surroundings are not worthy of you, your people and your labour.

Who took this picture?

Beastly people.

Your eyes do not waiver.

She staggers of disgust and sadness.

Yours is not a head that bows.

What is it that your eyes see?

What have they seen?

Firstly I would like to speak about the sadness.

It is the sadness of being ripped from land.

It is the sadness of having land ripped from you.

Our bodies, our countries etched in our blood.

That dress.

The sadness of that stiff dress of whiteness.

Its material itches, scratches your soft flesh into submission.

That dress.

Your eyes. What do they see?

In Danish they call it *dræberblik*.

In English we say, “If looks could kill”.

Some will say it is anger that your eyes transmit.

I understand that anger.

Your eyes tell of what you would do if you could truly do what you wanted.

Upon viewing the installation, I was particularly moved by how Ehlers culls Sarah from the original album to offer her the company of kinship. In this recontextualisation of Sarah’s photograph, *Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I* invites viewers into a meditation that critically speculates on the injurious conditions in which the photograph might have been taken, making room to address the pain and anger inscribed in and elicited by the photographic record. At the same time, in placing the photograph in the “still-moving” company of kinship, the installation also creates a space of loving enclosure, an embrace that holds Sarah, so that the pain and anger inscribed in the image and voiced in the monologue are carefully cushioned by the floating portrait.

But while directly addressing Sarah, the monologue also indirectly addresses viewers, calling each one into a space where anger, defiance, sadness, love and kinship are given expression. While Sarah’s photograph is displayed on the wall of the exhibition space, the thoughtful spatial arrangement places viewership at the centre of the installation. In this composition, it is our own work of reckoning that is on display. As viewers, we are looked at by the portrayed women and are called on to consider, reprising Saidiya Hartman (“Delia’s Hand” 522): “Why look at these images again?”, “What are the ethics of looking?”, “What claims are articulated by these images, and what is it that they demand of me?”

Upon viewing the piece, I felt both welcomed and challenged, as if generously invited to a difficult reckoning that does not begin and end in the exhibition space but is ongoing. In my own work with these archives, I am often hesitant to look at these images and to contribute to the cycle of exposure they have been subjected to, knowing

that images such as these were created and meant to be seen by a white European viewership. South African poet and scholar Gabeba Baderoon has asked, in relation to Sarah Baartman, “How can we look at a figure that has been looked at too much?” (65). Navigating these archives feels inadequate and fraught, and most acute now that I engage with these archives mostly online, leaving behind traces that add to the images’ unpredictable, algorithmically curated digital trail. But it is precisely because these images inhabit a digital afterlife on an unprecedented scale that they call for ‘spaces of care’, alternative spaces of encounter where histories of seeing and being seen can be queried and countered with more considerate ways of making the past sensible.

*Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I* curates a space of encounter where viewership can be queried without neglecting the care and loving embrace that the image calls for. More than centring viewership, *Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I* invites viewers to witness an encounter (the one voiced by Lesley-Ann Brown) and to create and inhabit our own encounter with the images. In that embodied encounter that each viewer co-creates, we are invited to do the “poethic” (Campt, *A Black Gaze* 167) work of connecting with these

haunting presences beyond the colonial terms of address, without denying the enduring power of those terms of address and our own implications in them. While cradled by the hospitable space of the installation, this “poethic” work is not devoid of tension; it asks viewers to look inward and outward: to deeply examine their own emotions, implications and complicities at all levels; and through that, to cultivate relation and possibility.

In other words, *Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I* foregrounds labour: the labour of caring for these archives and “the presences that they conjure” (Odumosu, “Response” 110); the labour of creating a space of “affective reckoning” with the past (Thomas 220), of grappling with “scenes of unbearable historical weight” (Enwezor 33); the labour of reckoning with our own implication in infrastructures of colonial harm; the labour of being affected and working through inadequacy; the labour of sustaining relationships and being accountable to them. The space of care modelled in *Black is a Beautiful Word. I & I* is another form of archive, one that offers hospitality to grapple with the extant one; and through that, to assemble other kinds of archives that support possibility and transformation.

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Shame & Guilt

IMARA LIMON  
(Amsterdam Museum)

INEZ VAN DER SCHEER  
(Amsterdam Museum)

# Curatorial Practice at the Amsterdam Museum

*The below text is excerpted and adapted from the presentation we gave during the Shame & Guilt session of the symposium. In it, we discuss our curatorial practice at the Amsterdam Museum and present a case study of the museum's exhibition and research project around the Golden Coach and how it connects to concepts of shame and guilt, especially in acknowledging the Dutch colonial past.*

The Netherlands has been reckoning, and continues to reckon with, its colonial past and colonial heritage. On July 1, 2021, the mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, publicly apologised for the extensive involvement of former city governments in the worldwide slave trade. This was a significant step, as the Dutch government has not (yet) issued a formal apology on a national level. In 2019, the Amsterdam Museum decided to no longer use the term “the Golden Age” as a synonym for the seventeenth century, as it was definitely not a golden age from the perspective of people who were enslaved or otherwise oppressed by colonial systems. This decision was not isolated from the museum's ongoing collaborations and dialogues with activists, grassroots movements, artists and other initiatives in the city that have been fighting for equity for a long time. As a city museum, we aim to reflect the diversity of this city, but we also acknowledge that our collections still represent an inherently white and socially privileged perspective. The decision to no longer refer to “the Golden Age” sparked public outrage within national borders, giving rise to claims that ‘banning’ this term removes part of Dutch identity and wrongly shifts the narrative from pride to shame. The critique is comparable to the backlash to the anti-blackface activists who have been protesting the racist caricature of Black Pete for decades now.

Resistance to, and activism within, institutions has always existed and has instigated changes and developments, whether as resistance to slavery on Caribbean plantations 400 years ago, through the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement, or through the international anti-colonial movement that had its headquarters at the Amsterdam-based Surinamese Society.

### Golden Coach

The Amsterdam Museum's major exhibition *The Golden Coach* (June 18, 2021 – February 27, 2022) reflects on the Golden Coach, a widely discussed object on loan to the museum by the Royal Collections of the Netherlands. The carriage was gifted to the Dutch queen Wilhelmina for her inauguration in 1898 and until recently was used by the royal family every year on Prince's Day and for weddings and other ceremonies. It has become a contested heritage object, partially due to the painted panel on the left side of the vehicle: *Tribute from the Colonies*. Depicted in this painting are people of colour from the colonies paying tribute

to a young white woman who symbolises the Netherlands. An increasing number of people find this glorifying depiction of colonialism inappropriate for national celebrations. Questions that have increasingly emerged in public debate include whether the carriage should continue to be used on Prince's Day and during Orange weddings and inaugurations, and whether the carriage deserves to be adapted or belongs in a museum.

The exhibition featured a multiplicity of voices and perspectives on the carriage, both contemporary and historical, and gave insight into the shifting social and political contexts of Amsterdam from the late 18th century until today. It was curated by an interdisciplinary research team that organised regular feedback sessions with a diverse sounding board of about 25 people, also from outside the museum: researchers, museum professionals, activists and so on. With an extensive public program and a large-scale research project, we aimed to facilitate a national dialogue about contested heritage and identities.

As part of the exhibition, the Amsterdam Museum commissioned 17 artists from different generations and with various (cultural) backgrounds to offer artistic and critical perspectives on the Golden Coach by creating artworks in which they reflected on the rituals that encompass the coach, the materiality and craftsmanship of the vehicle and the colonial past and its impact on the present.<sup>1</sup>

One of the commissioned artworks was *BLOODY GOLD* (2021) by AiRich, a reinterpretation of the *Tribute from the Colonies* panel, in which the violence and dehumanisation of the romanticised image on the coach are made visible. AiRich references archival documents, photographs and other materials in a collage that expresses the stories and emotions behind the Golden Coach and Dutch colonial history that still too often remain hidden or unspoken. AiRich speaks about her work in this short video.

1

The Amsterdam Museum also organised a two-day international conference, “The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past”, on November 26–27, 2021, in collaboration with the following partners: the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis; the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; the Black Archives; the University of Amsterdam; the National Museum for World Cultures; the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam; and Amsterdam City Archives.



Still from "NL AiRich - De Gouden Koets" in which the artist discusses her commission artwork *BLOODY GOLD* (2021).

Open Video ↗



AiRich. *BLOODY GOLD: TRIBUTE FROM THE COLONIES/ WHAT ABOUT REPAIRING THE DAMAGE*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist, Amsterdam Museum and CBK Zuidooost.

### Artistic Practices

In her ongoing research on contemporary artistic practices and museum collections, junior curator Inez van der Scheer (Amsterdam Museum) asks: How do critical art practices interact with museum practices and their collections? What is the nature of these collaborations, as museums are still in power when they select and commission artists to respond to the collections and narratives of the museum? By positioning artists of colour to deal with colonial heritage and address the violence

and dehumanisation of it, do we not run the risk of reinforcing the idea that colonialism and slavery are Black and Brown history rather than White history, which at the museum is still presented in its gilded glory and without shame?

Inez van der Scheer spoke to two artists in the exhibition whose work engaged with the contested panel of the Golden Coach and who contributed their critical original work to the exhibition. Both noted that the current trend in Dutch museums of inviting Black and Brown artists to collaborate with them to address issues of colonialism or the erasure of Black and Brown people by institutions raised some concerns for them – shame and guilt not being among them. They talked about the fatigue of being commissioned to relive generational colonial trauma, about being anxious, about being pushed into a niche they did not choose, and they expressed concern that these conditions may push this generation of artists of Colour into competition with each other, leading to burn-out and over-exposure. They wondered who would leave their artistic mark when this trend of dealing with contested heritage had exhausted itself. They expressed anxiety, exhaustion and frustration, a new host of emotions emerging from the very collaborations intended to serve as reparative vehicles for the shame and guilt of the institutions. We hope that reflection continues about where these emotions are stored and processed, whether they are sat with and whether they can be subsidised and about the place of emotional experiences in the debates around colonial heritage that museums are currently engaged in.

This case study of shame and guilt in curatorial practice will be further explored and is part of a larger research project on how to connect the approaches of cultural institutions, artists and academics to further the collective conversation and turn it into tangible research. In the wake of the symposium "The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past" in November, 2021, the Amsterdam Museum is also editing an anthology that will be published by Amsterdam University Press in 2023.

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Shame & Guilt

MIRJAM LINSCHOOTEN  
(Visual Artist)

SAMEER FAROOQ  
(Visual Artist)

# The Museum Visits a Therapist

For over a decade we have been engaged with the fraught and violent histories of encyclopaedic museum collections, their colonial origins and structures. Our works are often collaborative and counterbalance how dominant institutions speak about our lives: a counter-archive, new additions to a museum collection or a buried history made visible. Over the last four years we have brought our research to the largest ethnographic museum of the Netherlands—the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam—where we produced the experimental film *The Museum Visits a Therapist*.<sup>1</sup> We started by researching the Tropenmuseum's collection and exhibition history, and in 2018 we were granted the opportunity to film at the museum during restorations and the construction of a new permanent exhibition.

As the Tropenmuseum holds many looted objects, we began to draw parallels between centuries of unresolved colonial trauma and the physical patterns we filmed in the museum. The project started from these observations, seeking to understand how the inherited trauma of Dutch imperialism has found its way into every aspect of the museum's construction and operation.

The first period of filming was largely about watching what was happening. While observing, we noticed some curious tendencies and gestures that we thought were interesting. Objects were obsessively cleaned, trembling hands repaired and braced artefacts and displays were arranged with an obsessive precision. Reviewing our footage, we found several similarities between museum practice and the cognitive-psychological symptoms of trauma, including obsessive-compulsive behaviours and shame. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a common disorder in which a person has uncontrollable obsessions and/or behaviours with a repetitive urge.

We wanted to understand the roots of this behaviour and show where these gestures originated. In his book *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, curator Dan Hicks writes:

*Through a camera, through a museum display,  
through a gun that shoots twice,  
an event, through violence,  
can encompass a kind of fragmentation  
that means it can't quite end.*







49 This quote spoke to us a lot, because it links what is happening in the museum today to the violence associated with removing objects from their original contexts. Not just physical violence, of course, but also the violation of appropriation: the violence that comes from feeling entitled to take things and put them on display. Further fragmentation happens when the objects are separated from these violent events and are placed in the context of care.<sup>2</sup> While the violent history becomes detached from the collection over centuries, evidence of the theft and anxiety that gave rise to the museum are written on the architecture and in the gestures of the museum workers.

We connected with this history by diving into a specific period of accumulation. In the film we follow the restoration of a series of *bisj* poles from the Asmat people of Papua, a Dutch colony until the early 1960s. These objects were taken by Dutch collector Carel Groenevelt, who worked for the

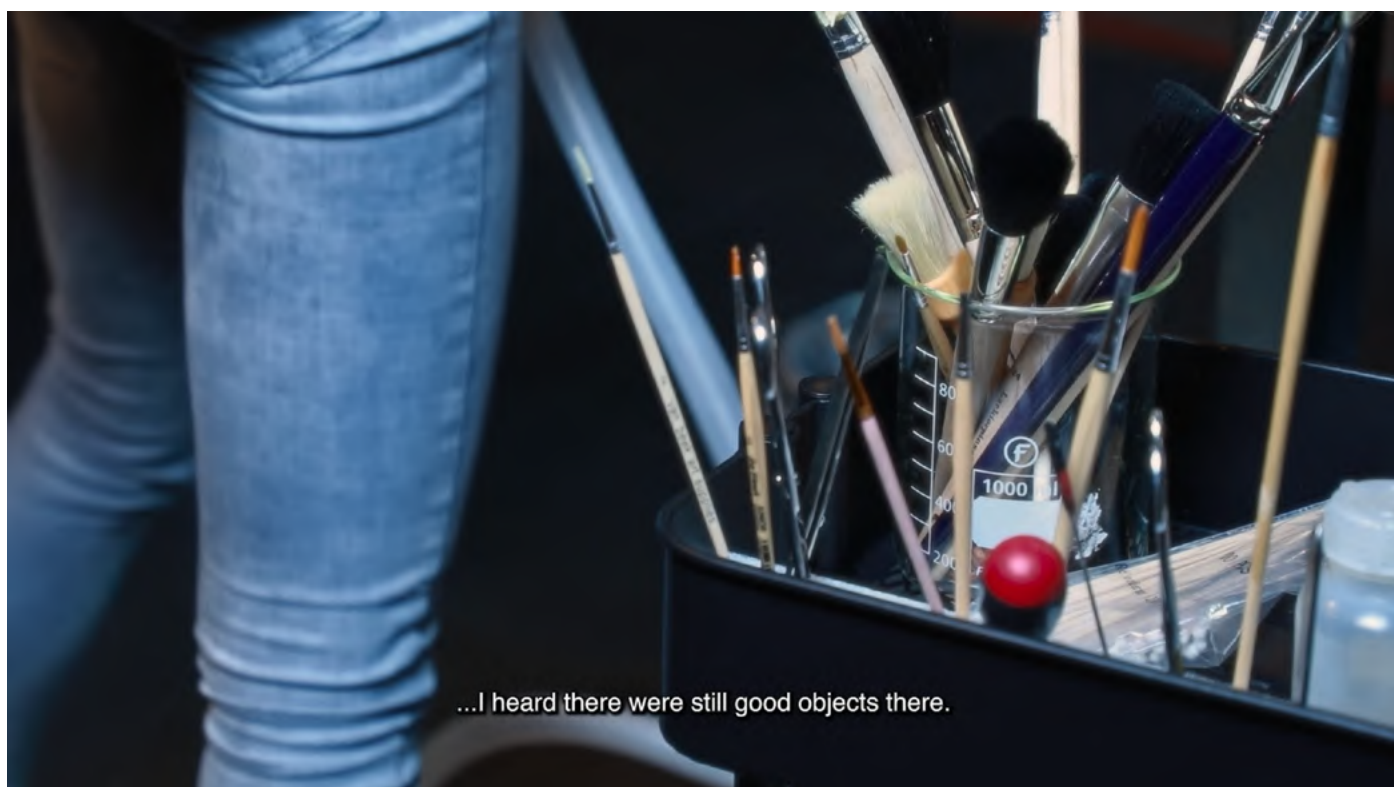
Tropenmuseum and for the ethnographic museum in Rotterdam—both of which are today part of the National Museum of World Cultures.

Our research led us to the late 1950s/early 1960s, when Groenevelt was collecting in Papua and the Dutch were about to lose the colony. Dutch missionaries had settled centuries earlier in Papua and paved the way for traders and collectors. As Indonesia claimed it as its territory, the Dutch sent military troops in an attempt to retain it. All of these figures form the ground of a collection such as that of the Tropenmuseum.

This was a turbulent time, full of violence, uncertainty and distress. In a letter from the museum to collector Groenevelt, we can sense the urgency the museum felt while collecting—or ‘grabbing’—as many objects as they could as the colony slipped away from the Dutch.







...I heard there were still good objects there.



It is a kind of delusion of euphoria,  
adrenaline, hate, all at the same time.



We had to keep New Guinea for the Dutch.

*Honourable Sir Groenevelt,*

*In the area of Dutch New Guinea, we not only have the opportunity to have the most beautiful collection in the country, but also to get a collection of world reputation.*

*Here lies a big task!!!*

*Building a beautiful collection concerning our*

*New Guinea. So continue to grab what you can grab. The museum can use everything.*  
(Hollander 65, translated from Dutch to English by the authors)

To evoke this history, we dug into the archives of these Dutch figures: stories from veterans,<sup>3</sup> letters between Groenevelt and the museum and the diary of a missionary (Jens). We compiled the script from these journals, interviews and letters.



*Polishing, misting, brushing, dusting...*

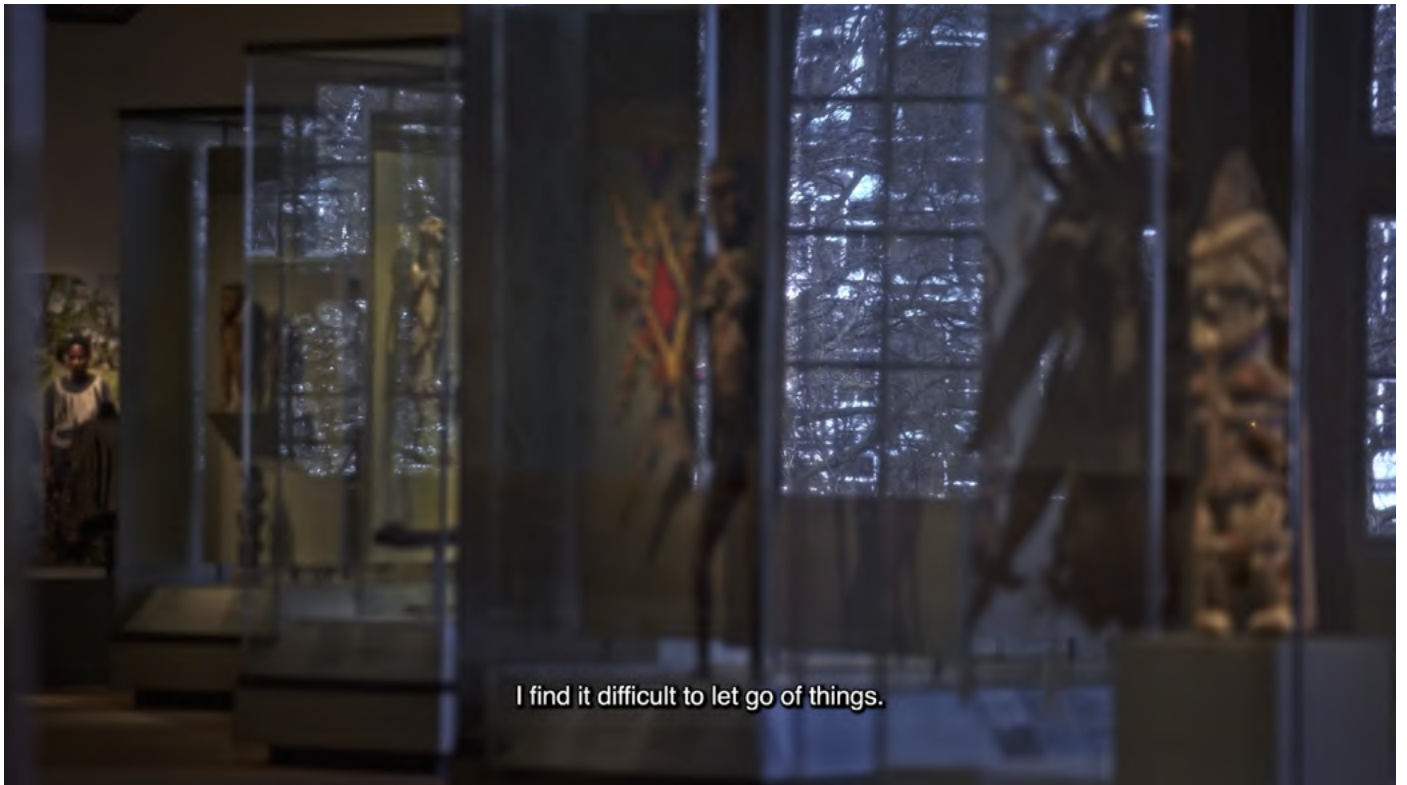


*through polite, gloved hands.*



*From this fracture comes a century of arranging*





With this understanding of the inherited trauma of Dutch colonialism and how it has seeped into the gestures of workers at the Tropenmuseum, we wondered what would happen if the museum visited a therapist. The final film is structured as a conversation between a fictional therapist and the museum.

Our research led us to speak with therapists about different treatments and methods (Egan et al.; Fournier and Korteweg). For the film we used an intake questionnaire (Obsessive Compulsive Inventory - Revised, OCI-R), which is often used as part of an initial patient assessment. Our filmic language was also affected by therapeutic

modes in its use of EMDR therapy (eye-movement desensitisation and reprocessing), where the patient recalls traumatic or distressing experiences while experiencing bilateral stimulation, such as side-to-side eye movement or a beeping sound moving from ear to ear. In the film we translated the formal qualities of this treatment into a filmic language expressed through a moving dot, sounds and flashbacks.

Offering a nuanced critique, *The Museum Visits a Therapist* navigates the history of violence, religion and trade that shaped the Tropenmuseum's object collection and simultaneously imagines new forms of reparation within museum spaces.

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Shame & Guilt

JUE YANG  
(Writer & Filmmaker)

# How to Hold an Image

How to hold an image? This is the question I asked in my performance lecture during the 2021 Inward Outward symposium: Emotion in the Archive. During my presentation, I held the images, both metaphorically and literally, from the 1927 film *Inlansche Bedrijven* by the Dutch filmmaker Willy Mullens. Here I describe some thoughts underlying my presentation:<sup>1</sup>



*Photo of hand holding a still image from "Inlansche Bedrijven". Image credit: Jue Yang. Still image extracted from "Inlansche Bedrijven". Collection Eye Filmmuseum, the Netherlands.*

My first reaction towards the film is anger. What I see is a textbook example of crude, early ethnographic images that exoticise and objectify—and thus create—the Other. The colonial agenda of the film is clear, given that it was funded by, among others, the Ministry of Colonies and the Ministry of Education (Hogenkamp 20). As I watch the black-and-white footage from what was the Dutch East Indies, I notice the moments when people—women, men and children alike—look into the camera. Many of them seem timid. Some smile shyly and look confused. In my mind's eye, I travel

1

Editorial Note: As editors of this publication, we wanted to share that we are ambivalent about reproducing the images from the film *Inlansche Bedrijven* in our volume, because we recognise that the ethnographic photograph is being made to perform work, or being pressed into service towards signification that could potentially perpetuate the violence of the context in which it was produced and circulated. Moreover, it could be troubling for people encountering the image. We are also mindful that Jue is trying to find a different way to engage the image, that she is trying to figure out if the colonial framework of the image can be visibly troubled. In order to demonstrate her argument, Jue has to show the images. We have on this basis agreed to her request to include them.

back to the filming site a hundred years ago where Mullens, supervised by two officials from the Education department (Hogenkamp 21), puts down his "big black box" in the middle of a village and, in a language they do not understand, directs people to re-enact labour.

While anger is my entry point into the film, I want to find ways to treat the images and their context with compassion. The biography of Mullens, to my surprise, becomes a generative space for contextualisation. In 1897, 17-year-old Mullens performed in the circus as a human cannonball. One evening he was knocked out by a kangaroo and failed to finish his act. The spectators booed, and Mullens was fired from the job (Koops). Both the objectification of the body as a cannonball and such amusement in a tragic event applaud violence and cruelty.

For the presentation, I decided to collage the scene where the villager, the camera and the human-cannonball-turned-filmmaker encounter each other. In this collage, I try to embody the gaze and locate the camera in its historical context. The Othering and objectification at the heart of colonial film-making cannot be compared or equated to the humiliation and objectification of human-cannonballing. Yet, by juxtaposing these images, I want to convey how Mullens saw his filmic subjects with a gaze that echoes the one he was himself subjected to. The movie camera, invented in the same decade as Mullens' circus career (Martín), embodies the logic of power and alienation.



*Collage. Left: Still image from the film "Inlansche Bedrijven". Right: Willy Mullens behind the camera (cropped from original photo). Given "Inlansche Bedrijven" was made one year before this photo was taken, I deem the photo representative of the physical appearance of Mullens and the camera he used at the time. Image credit: Left: Collection Eye Filmmuseum, the Netherlands. Right: Fotopersbureau Het Zuiden, Breda City Archives (Breda Beeldcollectie, GN19901739).*

In the performance, I portray myself holding a printout of the villager. The image, screenshotted and printed on a piece of paper, becomes malleable and welcomes questioning. I narrate: “I want to knock on the image, shake it until it breaks open, tear it up and toss it until it comes screaming: no! But isn’t that itself a violent act—to break open the image and throw it away?” To hold an image is to go beyond seeing, to give rise to questions and pauses and, as I present in the performance lecture, to blur, interrupt, disrupt, replace the (colonial) gaze. Mark Sealy’s words serve as a productive proposition for me:

Decolonising the photographic image is an act of unburdening it from the assumed, normative, hegemonic, colonial conditions present consciously or unconsciously in the moment of its original making and in its readings and displays. Decolonising the camera is therefore a process of locating the primary conditions of a racialised photograph’s coloniality and as such it works within a form of Black cultural politics to destabilise the conditions, receptions and processes of Othering a subject within the history of photography. (Sealy 4)

I also created a video that shows my hand interacting with the film as it plays. I use an AI voiceover to tell an alternative version of the encounter between the villager and Mullens. The voice is based on a white male, which I use to ‘subjectify’ Mullens’ internal monologue.

I must note that these image manipulations are possible because the film is available online and that the Eye Filmmuseum agreed to the publication of the still and modified images. On the one



In this short film, I hold parts of the archive film and tell an alternative story. Credit: Jue Yang. Archive film footage from “Inlansche Bedrijven”. Collection Eye Filmmuseum, the Netherlands.

Open Video ↗

hand, the internet that I encounter today offers prompts for methodologies of engagement with archival images—pausing, isolating and remixing images has become a norm. On the other hand, the unmediated availability of these images comes with its own problems. Such access can lead to an act of display without a critical premise or contextualized understanding, which perpetuates and obscures the coloniality embodied by the images.

When images are unlocked from glass cabinets and institutional screens—i.e. when confabulation becomes possible—one must be willing to acknowledge and reconcile with difficult history. In a way, to ask “how to hold an image” is to enquire: how to confabulate a story that counters the story told by the camera with the ethics of understanding and compassion?

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# Critical Archival Engagements with Sounds and Films of Coloniality

