

Like any good introduction, this chapter might best be described as a “throat-clearing gesture”—the kind that introduces any inquiry with a series of queries and propositions that create an analytic space for thinking. My own space-making gesture ruminates on two central questions: how do we build a radical visual archive of the African Diaspora that grapples with the recalcitrant and the disaffected, the unruly and the dispossessed? Through what modalities of perception, encounter, and engagement do we constitute it? These two questions induce a volley of corollary queries. What is the place in this archive for images assumed only to register forms of institutional accounting or state management? How do we contend with images intended not to figure black subjects, but to delineate instead differential or degraded forms of personhood or subjection—images produced with the purpose of tracking, cataloging, and constraining the movement of blacks in and out of diaspora? What are their technologies of capture and what are the stakes of the forms of accounting that engendered these archives? These questions of archival practice have fueled my thinking for a number of years. In the pages that follow, they captivate my imagination in ways that return me to the same intellectual juncture at which I left off in the writings that directly precede it.

I ended my last book, *Images Matters*, with a childhood memory of my father’s quiet hum—the hum of a man mourning the loss of his wife. On the night of my mother’s funeral, surrounded by his entire family and all of

his friends in our home, my father hummed my mother's favorite Roberta Flack song. Swaying back and forth while his eleven- and thirteen-year-old daughters sang over the record, he hummed instead of crying. A hum can signify a multitude of things. A hum can be mournful; it can be presence in absence or can take the form of a gritty moan in the foreground or a soothing massage in the background. It can celebrate, animate, or accompany. It can also irritate, haunt, grate, or distract.

On that indelible night in the basement of our home, my father hummed in the face of the unsayability of words. Even now, the memory of my father's quiet hum connects me to feelings of loss I cannot articulate in words, and it provokes in me a simultaneously overwhelming and unspeakable response. It is this exquisitely articulate modality of quiet—a sublimely expressive unsayability that exceeds both words, as well as what we associate with sound and utterance—that moves me toward a deeper understanding of the sonic frequencies of the quotidian practices of black communities. My aim in the chapters that follow is to animate the recalcitrant affects of quiet as an undervalued lower range of quotidian audibility.

What is the relationship between quiet and the quotidian? Each term references something assumed to go unspoken or unsaid, unremarked, unrecognized, or overlooked. They name practices that are pervasive and ever-present yet occluded by their seeming absence or erasure in repetition, routine, or internalization. Yet the quotidian is not equivalent to passive everyday acts, and quiet is not an absence of articulation or utterance. Quiet is a modality that surrounds and infuses sound with impact and affect, which creates the possibility for it to register as meaningful. At the same time, the quotidian must be understood as a practice rather than an act/ion. It is a practice honed by the dispossessed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life. For blacks in diaspora, both quiet and the quotidian are mobilized as everyday practices of refusal.

The relationship between quiet, the quotidian, and the everyday practices of refusal enacted and inherited by dispossessed subjects is the de-

fining tension of this book and the archives of images it explores. It focuses on a genre of image that is both quiet and quotidian: identification photography. These photos are produced predominantly for the regulatory needs of the state or the classificatory imperatives of colonization. Although some are repurposed by their recipients (as well as by artists and relations) as objects of personal recollection, collective or community memory, commemoration or attachment, identification photos are not produced at the desire of their sitters. They are images required of or imposed upon them by empire, science, or the state. The unexceptional format of identification photos and the routinized nature of bureaucratic images frequently lead to a failure to read or a blanket dismissal of them altogether, as we are tempted to see only their success in capturing muted governmentalized subjects of the state.

Rather than reducing identification photos to the instrumental functions for which they were created, *Listening to Images* engages these images as conduits of an unlikely interplay between the vernacular and the state. Taking a counterintuitive approach to understanding quiet as well as the quotidian, it theorizes the forms of subjectivity enacted through the vernacular practice of identification photography. I consider the quotidian dimensions of these imaging practices not in the traditional sense of a site of social reproduction; I engage them instead as instances of rupture and refusal.

At the heart of this book is a proposition that is also an intervention, one for which “listening to images” is at once a description and a method. It designates a method of recalibrating vernacular photographs as quiet, quotidian practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects. It is a method that opens up the radical interpretive possibilities of images and state archives we are most often inclined to overlook, by engaging the paradoxical capacity of identity photos to rupture the sovereign gaze of the regimes that created them by refusing the very terms of photographic subjection they were engineered to produce.

Throughout the book my arguments emerge from what I consider

the endlessly generative space of the counterintuitive. The foundational counterintuition that serves as my first point of departure is a contention that, contrary to what might seem common sense, quiet must not be conflated with silence. Quiet registers sonically, as a level of intensity that requires focused attention. Analogously, quiet photography names a heuristic for attending to the lower range of intensities generated by images assumed to be mute. Redirecting Ariella Azoulay's evocative proposal to "watch" rather than look at photographs (2008, 16),¹ the choice to "listen to" rather than simply "look at" images is a conscious decision to challenge the equation of vision with knowledge by engaging photography through a sensory register that is critical to Black Atlantic cultural formations: sound.

In his foundational writings developing the conceptual framework of the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy defines sound and music, in particular, as a crucial modality of what he calls "a politics of transfiguration." His musical transliteration of a sonic politics of transfiguration invites us to attend to the "lower frequency" through which these transfigurations are made audible and accessible (37).² Taking inspiration from Gilroy, it is through sound that I seek a deeper engagement with the forgotten histories and suppressed forms of diasporic memory that these images transmit. I theorize sound as an inherently embodied process that registers at multiple levels of the human sensorium. To invoke another counterintuition that serves as a second point of theoretical departure, while it may seem an inherent contradiction in terms, sound need not be heard to be perceived. Sound can be listened to, and, in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt; it both touches and moves people.³ In this way, sound must therefore be theorized and understood as a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact. My arguments in the chapters that follow extend the range and scope of our understanding of sound by returning to the fundamental definition of what constitutes sound and sonic perception, starting deliberately and specifically with the lowest sonic frequencies of all.

Frequency: In acoustics, the number of complete vibrations or cycles occurring per unit of time in a vibrating system such as a column of

air. Frequency is the primary determinant of the listener's perception of pitch. (*Harvard Dictionary of Music Online*)

Audible frequency: A periodic vibration whose frequency is audible to the average human. The generally accepted standard range of audible frequencies is 20 to 20,000 Hz. Frequencies below 20 Hz are generally felt rather than heard, assuming the amplitude of the vibration is great enough. (*Wikipedia.com*)

In his celebrated 2003 monograph, *In the Break*, Fred Moten asks, what is “the sound that precedes the image”? Departing from Moten, my invitation not just to look but to listen as well to quiet photos requires us to embrace a different understanding of “sound”—a scientific definition of sound as “frequency.” To a physicist, audiologist, or musicologist, sound consists of more than what we hear. It is constituted primarily by vibration and contact and is defined as a wave resulting from the back-and-forth vibration of particles in the medium through which it travels. The lower frequencies of these images register as what I describe as “felt sound”—sound that, like a hum, resonates in and as vibration. Audiologists refer to such frequencies as infrasound: ultra-low frequencies emitted by or audible only to certain animals, such as elephants, rhinoceroses, and whales. While the ear is the primary organ for perceiving sound, at lower frequencies, infrasound is often only felt in the form of vibrations through contact with parts of the body. Yet all sound consists of more than what we hear. It is an inherently embodied modality constituted by vibration and contact.

Listening to Images explores the lower frequencies of transfiguration enacted at the level of the quotidian, in the everyday traffic of black folks with objects that are both mundane and special: photographs. What are the “lower frequencies” of these quotidian practices, and how do we engage their transfigurative potential? As a vernacular practice mobilized by black people in diaspora, photography is an everyday strategy of affirmation and a confrontational practice of visibility. Vernacular photographs are banal as well as singular; they articulate both the ordinary and the ex-

ceptional texture of black life. My approach to these images, archives, and the image-making practices that produced them revalues the quotidian as a site of cultural formation that Georges Perec designates as “infra-ordinary”⁴—everyday practices we don’t always notice and whose seeming insignificance requires excessive attention. Attending to the infra-ordinary and the quotidian reveals why the trivial, the mundane, or the banal are in fact essential to the lives of the dispossessed and the possibility of black futurity.

This book proposes a haptic mode of engaging the sonic frequencies of photographs. It offers an alternate take on “watching” photos that materializes their transfigurations, albeit not in the form of statements of fact or as narratives of transit or mobility. They are accessible instead at the haptic frequency of vibration, like the vibrato of a hum felt more in the throat than in the ear. Each chapter explores a selection of photos that I define as “quiet” to the extent that, before they are analyzed, they must be attended to by way of the unspoken relations that structure them. I do so by setting them in a kind of “sensorial” relief that juxtaposes the sonic, haptic, historical, and affective backgrounds and foregrounds through and against which we view photographs. As we will see, it is an archival interrogation of the multiple temporalities of visual archives grounded in a black feminist mode of analysis that is profoundly grammatical in nature.

Listening to Images theorizes the anterior sensibilities of a series of photographic archives of the African Diaspora by unpacking the forms of photographic accounting and capture that these images enact, and how these forms of capture and accounting affect their viewers. Engaging these images as decidedly haptic objects is a method that requires us to interrogate both the archival encounter, as well as the content of archival collections, in multiple tenses and multiple temporalities and in ways that attend to both their stakes and possibilities. It is a method that reckons with the fissures, gaps, and interstices that emerge when we refuse to accept the “truth” of images and archives the state seeks to proffer through its production of subjects posed to produce particular “types” of regulated and regulatable subjects. The disordering and disruptive archival practice

enacted in these pages thus uses sound and frequency to question the grammar of the camera (as both an event of photography and a photographed event⁵) as well as the haptic temporalities of photographic capture as pernicious instruments of knowledge production.

As a series of four linked essays, each of the chapters that follow stages an encounter with an archive of identification photos of blacks in diaspora that enacts a practice of “listening” to quiet photography. Here again, listening to images is constituted as a practice of looking beyond what we see and attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register. It is a haptic encounter that foregrounds the frequencies of images and how they move, touch, and connect us to the *event* of the photo. Such a connection may begin as a practice of “careful looking,” but it does not end there. Focusing on the forms of refusal visualized through these images, the book rethinks foundational approaches to diaspora studies that emphasize mobility, resistance, and expressiveness. It uses the conceptual frameworks of quiet, stasis, and refusal to reclaim the black quotidian as a signature idiom of diasporic culture and black futurity.

Chapter 1, “Quiet Soundings: The Grammar of Black Futurity,” examines an archive of identification photographs of blacks in diaspora that complicates simple depictions of diasporic movement, settlement, and emplacement: passport photos. It explores the frequency of a collection of found passport photos of black British men in postwar Birmingham in the United Kingdom by juxtaposing the images with two dissonant but related archives of vernacular photographs. The subjects staged in these images are presumed to capture mute supplicants of governmentality. Listening attentively to these quiet photos gives us access to the registers of fugitivity they simultaneously animate and suspend, as well as the creative strategies of refusal they at once reveal and conceal.

Building on these counterintuitive suppositions, chapter 2, “Striking Poses in a Tense Grammar: Stasis and the Frequency of Black Refusal,” proceeds from a third counterintuitive contention—that stasis is neither an absence nor a cessation of motion; it is a continual balancing of mul-

tiple forces in equilibrium. The chapter theorizes stasis as a temporal modality of diasporic motion held in suspension, in ways that hover between stillness and movement. It juxtaposes two additional archives of vernacular photography of blacks in diaspora: late nineteenth-century ethnographic photos of rural Africans in the Eastern Cape and early twentieth-century studio portraits of African Christians in South African urban centers. Focusing on the sonic frequency and creative reappropriation of these portraits by the South African photographer Santu Mofokeng in his acclaimed work, *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950*, the essay explores the continuities and disruptions between vernacular portraiture and compulsory photography. Viewed together, these images blur the line between “postured performances” and “compelled poses,” and, in the process, they redefine what it means to “strike a pose.”

Chapter 3, “Haptic Temporalities: The Quiet Frequency of Touch,” stages an embodied encounter with an archive of quiet photography intended to regulate and literally “arrest” the movement of a class of individuals deemed criminal by the state: convict photos. The chapter juxtaposes two archives of incarcerated black subjects: convict photographs taken between 1893 and 1904 of inmates at Breakwater Prison in Cape Town, South Africa, and mid-twentieth-century mug shots of African American Freedom Riders in the US South. It uses these images to explore the possibilities of what we apprehend—and what we apprehend differently—when we engage criminal identification photos through their physical, affective, and archival touches.

The through-line that connects each of the chapters is a critique of the limits of contemporary discourses of resistance and a rigorous engagement with the discourse of fugitivity in African Diaspora studies and black feminist theory. I theorize the practice of refusal as an extension of the range of creative responses black communities have marshaled in the face of racialized dispossession. In this context, refusal is not a response to a state of exception or extreme violence. I theorize it instead as practices honed in response to sustained, everyday encounters with exigency and duress that rupture a predictable trajectory of flight. Toward this end, the

final chapter of the book is written as a coda that grapples with the grammar of black futurity as it confronts us in the contemporary moment. It assesses the frequency of a very different set of criminal identification photos and their reappropriation by urban African American youth struggling to develop their own practices of refusing the statistical probability of premature black death in the twenty-first century.

Listening to Images reclaims the photographic archive of precarious and dispossessed black subjects in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries by attending to the quiet but resonant frequencies of images that have been historically dismissed and disregarded. Refocusing our attention on their sonic and haptic frequencies and on the grammar of black fugitivity and refusal that they enact reveals the expressiveness of quiet, the generative dimensions of stasis, and the quotidian reclamations of interiority, dignity, and refusal marshaled by black subjects in their persistent striving for futurity.

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QUIET SOUNDINGS

The Grammar of Black Futurity

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Black Futurity—A Primer in Feminist Grammar

fu·ture: noun.

- time that is to be or come hereafter
- something that will exist or happen in a time to come
- condition, especially of success or failure, to come

What does it mean for a black feminist to think about, consider, or concede the concept of futurity? As an African American feminist scholar of a certain generation—a generation educated in the 1980s and weaned on the writings of a cadre of radical black feminist thinkers, who were among the first to claw their way into the university and make a place for others like myself—the question of futurity is inextricably bound up in the conundrum of being captured by and accountable to the historical impact of the Atlantic slave trade on the meaning of black womanhood in the Americas. It is a conundrum that Hortense Spillers famously described in haunting terms in the opening lines of her 1987 essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.”

Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. “Peaches” and “Brown Sugar,” “Sapphire” and “Earth Mother,” “Aunty,” “Granny,” “God’s Holy Fool,” a “Miss Ebony First,” or “Black

Woman at the Podium”: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented. (65)

On the same page of this transformative text, Spillers explains that these terms capture her in a web of what she calls “overdetermined nominative properties.” She continues,

They are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. . . . In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness. (65)

Almost thirty years since the publication of Spillers’s seminal text, I share her sense of capture. More important, I still share the sense of urgency she expressed—an urgency to see possibility in the tiny, often minuscule chinks and crevices of what appears to be the inescapable web of capture for black women and men alike. Like Spillers, I too feel the need to engage those possibilities obliquely, in the terms she presented so brilliantly back then, which remain utterly salient for me today. They are terms found not so much in the foreground of her impactful text, but instead in its margins. They are the terms and tenses of grammar, in Spillers’s case, “An American Grammar Book” of the black female body. It is a grammar of black capture that echoes her equally profound statements in “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,” that black women continue to await “their verb.”

In his elegant revisiting of Spillers’s work, Alexander Weheliye describes her intervention as an attempt to theorize “some general dimensions of modern subjectivity from the vantage point of black women” in ways that “develop a grammar [and] create a vocabulary that does not choose between addressing the specific location of black women, a broader theoretical register about what it means to be human during and in the after-

math of the transatlantic slave trade, and the imagination of liberation in the *future anterior sense of the NOW*.¹ It is in a similarly grammatical sense—a grammar of futurity realized in the present—that I now repeat my opening question: What does it mean for a black feminist to think in the grammar of futurity?

Futurity is, for me, not a question of “hope”—though it is certainly inescapably intertwined with the idea of aspiration. To me it is crucial to think about futurity through a notion of “tense.” What is the “tense” of a black feminist future? It is a tense of anteriority, a tense relationship to an idea of possibility that is neither innocent nor naïve. Nor is it necessarily heroic or intentional. It is often humble and strategic, subtle and discriminating. It is devious and exacting. It’s not always loud and demanding. It is frequently quiet and opportunistic, dogged and disruptive.

The grammar of black feminist futurity that I propose here is a grammar of possibility that moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as *what will be* in the future. It moves beyond the future perfect tense of *that which will have happened* prior to a reference point in the future. It strives for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have had to happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be. It’s a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.²

Some see the realization of such a future in the form of acts and actions. They see it in political movements and acts of resistance like those that have produced fundamental shifts in the status of subordinated, subaltern, and marginalized groups. But I believe we must not only look but also *listen* for it in other, less likely places. I locate it in the everyday imagining practices of black communities past, present, and future. And I find it, over and again, in some of the least celebrated, often most disposable

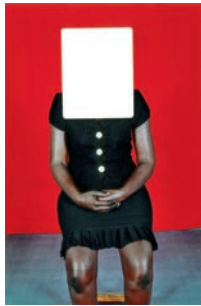
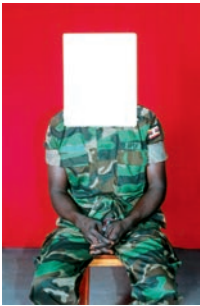
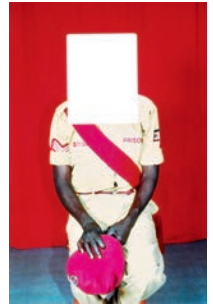
archives of photography. They are images that we are compelled or required to take: identification photos. It is an alternative visual archive of the African Diaspora that I call quiet photography.

The Hum of Silence

The silence of the space couldn't have been louder. Stepping off the elevator of a converted Chelsea warehouse in the middle of a weekday felt like walking into a whitewashed mausoleum. The building was a warren of small but established galleries, yet to me it felt like a maze. I passed the door of the Walther Collection twice but only found it on the third pass. As soon as I entered the gallery, it was clear that quiet was the most appropriate modality for encountering the installation. But its quietude was anything but simple. It was the kind of quiet that is in no way an absence. It is fulsome and expressive. Restless, awkward, and unsettling, it is a form of quiet where gnawing questions simmer and send one searching for more complicated answers.

More than a hundred faceless images hung on the walls of the gallery. The room was empty, except for me and the curator who greeted me. It felt cold and uninviting in spite of the warm welcome he immediately extended. We had corresponded by email and he explained the story behind the exhibit when I arrived. After that, quiet descended once again as I walked around the room to peer at images that wrapped around the room like a thin, bright ribbon. A horizontal line of red, white, and blue back-





grounds traversed two of its walls; two others were covered by a grid of similar images. Each photo was both unique and at the same time serial.

Hands resting on laps. Hands folded over one another or open with fingers extended; hands clasping a bench, a knee, or a receipt of payment for the image itself. And blazers—blue blazers that swallow up men, women, and children. It is in fact a single blazer: a blazer required to be worn by all account applicants to one of the region's largest employers and financial institutions, supplied by the studio for its sitters regardless of gender, age, or size. A polka-dotted clutch purse contrasts with an intricately patterned dress; gently folded, surprisingly delicate hands rest in the lap of a camouflage-clad military man; broad white cuffs frame an oversized shirt and the long slender fingers of a sitter. And a child's smoothly shaven head is framed by the opening of a blazer on his father's lap. But a second look reveals it is not a father, but instead a mother. It is another compulsory blazer that, this time, covers not the shirt and trousers of a man, but the blue, patterned dress of a woman instead.

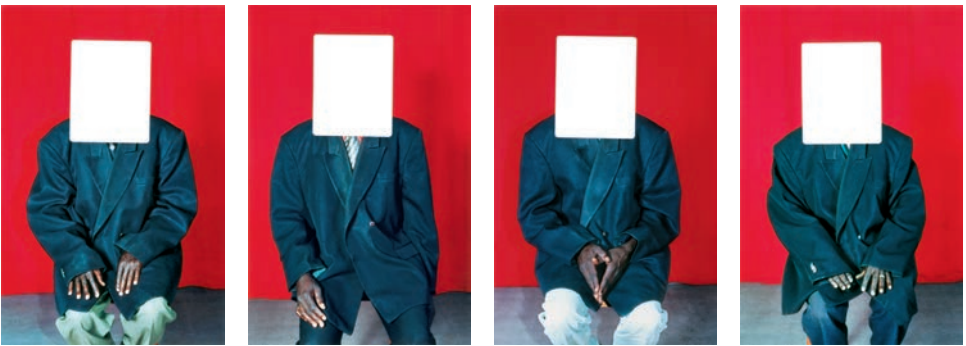
Beyond any other details they share, what unifies this series of images is the absence of a face cut out of a photo, leaving behind an identical white square. That which normally distinguishes individuals—the face—is absent. But in that absence, other forms of individuality are transferred from background to foreground as *studium* shifts to *punctum*. We are drawn to the elements of the image deliberately removed from our view in the finished portrait. Ironically, details intended to impose uniformity—jackets, poses, and backdrops—are now serialized enactments of individuality and difference.

Gulu Real Art Studio assembles an unlikely genre of vernacular portraiture: discarded cutouts of African identity photos, originally taken by Obal Denis, a photographer and the proprietor of *Gulu Real Art Studio*, the oldest photography studio in the Ugandan city of Gulu, and collected by the Italian photojournalist Martina Bacigalupo. The result is a reinstatement of once-discarded, now-reclaimed images that Bacigalupo compares to “a choral narrative” of the Acholi people of northern Uganda. It is a studio typical of countless others scattered across the African conti-

ment—seemingly utilitarian photography studios frequently repurposed by their sitters to create a visual archive of their desire to be agential black subjects.

The explanation for the practice of the cutout faces is simple and functional: the studio's ID photo machine produces small prints only in multiples of four. Because customers rarely want more than one or two, it is less expensive and more efficient to make one full-sized image, cut out the standard-size facial portrait, and discard the rest of the image. As Bacigalupo explains, identification photography is ubiquitous in postconflict Uganda—a region that experienced the violence and instability of civil war for more than two decades.³ ID photos are required for access to and across institutional spaces, to secure and maintain employment, to navigate governmental interactions, and to negotiate financial transactions. Here, as elsewhere, the photograph remains a privileged vehicle of veracity and authentication. These faceless portraits register most profoundly through their seriality—a serial image-making practice that, while frequently voluntary, in the majority of cases is in fact compulsory. Indeed, what resonates most emphatically throughout the series is the recurring presence of a curious detail of compulsion: a blazer required for banking transactions and applications at Barclays Bank.

The exhibit could be viewed as a prime example of the type of serial art championed by artists such as Sol Lewitt or the “ready-mades” problematized by Marcel Duchamp. As Lewitt famously maintained, the creator of



serial art is neither the author nor the agent of the work, but is more of “a clerk cataloging the results of his premise.”⁴ Yet the seriality of *Gulu Real Art Studio* is not Bacigalupo’s artistic creation. The seriality of these images is the product of their photographic genre: identification photography. The work is a serial installation of a serialized object, for identification photography is defined by two primary attributes: it is required and it is serially and sequentially (re)produced. They are photographs created to validate and verify identity as a uniform set of multiples intended to produce an aggregate image of a group of individuals.

The seriality imposed on the *Gulu* sitters was required as part of the neoliberal economic structures created after the years of war and unrest that have plagued Uganda since the outbreak of civil war in the 1980s. Nongovernmental organizations, international aid organizations, and corporate financial institutions mushroomed in the region during the thirty-plus years of this ongoing crisis, as part of a multinational push to resuscitate and bring security to the region. Visual authentication was compulsory for filing claims not only to provide financial support, but also to seek restitution for loss or damage. Many of the sitters interviewed by Bacigalupo recount journeys from miles away to the studio to purchase identification photos for aid, microfinance loans, passports, or opening bank accounts and filing compensation claims.⁵

Gulu Real Art Studio assembles these images as a series defined not by a unifying attribute; they produce instead patterns of similarity that yield multiplicity and difference. The seriality that defines them constructs an open set of identifications and visualizes the articulated identity of African Diasporic subjects. Like other blacks in the diaspora, these internally displaced Africans forge their identities in and through difference, rather than as sameness or unity. The seriality that characterizes this collection diverges from traditional forms of serial photography. Departing from the concept of seriality most often associated with serial photography where the serial production of images functions to constitute an aggregate group, *Gulu Real Art Studio* deploys seriality in ways that fracture and fragment the notion of a unified subject by creating a living archive of images that foregrounds difference as the core of African Diasporic identity.

The group of African subjects in these photos is in no way aggregate. When displayed together, the seriality of these “leftover” images register in dissonance with the uniformity and anonymity that the ID photo so effortfully strives to achieve. These images resonate well beyond the frames of the cutout faces. The irreverent, intimate, and off-putting forms of (dis)embodiment they stage just below the intended frame of the photo play with difference in ways that defer the meaning of photographic identification and that contest the forms of uniformity, homogeneity, and governmentality that identity photos seek to impose on their subjects. Their complexly mundane performances of everyday life telegraph aspirations to dignity and futurity in postconflict Uganda that register in profound ways in these images.

. . .

Do faceless images emit sound? If so, at what frequencies do they register? If not, what can we apprehend in and through their muteness? The quiet litany of the Gulu cutouts is, paradoxically, deafening. It resonates intensely as an effect of their seriality—the seriality of turquoise ties, navy blue blazers, vividly patterned traditional dresses, and red, white, and blue backdrops. Their litany registers not only through the uniformity prescribed by the strictures of identification photography; it re-sounds in the multiplicity of quotidian practices captured in the extended frames of these castaway photos in a chorus of quiet frequencies. Engaging these frequencies requires us not only to read these images, but also to listen to the sonic dimensions through which they also register.

I’ve been listening to images for years now. In *Image Matters*, listening to images meant attending to the musical patterns, rhythms, and registers enacted in vernacular photographs of black European communities. My listening practices focused on the affective registers of black family photography; on how and why such photos touch and move people both physically and affectively; and on excavating the gendered narratives of diaspora captured in images of communities, often overlooked in many scholarly accounts. My image-listening practices began in 2007 at the City

Archives in Birmingham, England, where I started listening because I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of images I encountered in a collection of found photographs of Birmingham's postwar Afro-Caribbean community.

The Ernest Dyche Collection is an archive of hundreds of photographs, negatives, and ephemera recovered en masse from the Ernest Dyche Photography Studios in an area of the city known as Balsall Heath. From the late 1940s through the early 1980s when it closed, the Dyches were the photographers of choice for many members of the city's largely working-class Afro-Caribbean community (as well as many in the South Asian and Irish migrant communities that also settled in Birmingham), who commissioned portraits to keep and to send to loved ones both in the United Kingdom and in the diaspora. These images were both material and affective objects of diasporic connection that instantiated practices of attachment, belonging, and relation between sitters and their recipients.

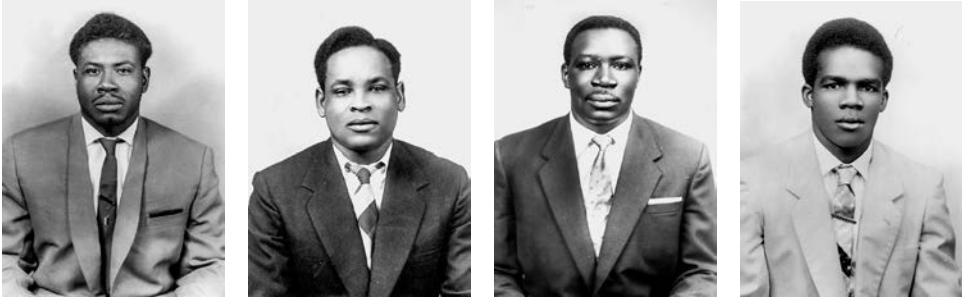
Amid the hundreds of images of this community recovered from the Dyche studio that I encountered at the Birmingham City Archives, there was one set of images I both literally and figuratively "overlooked." They were images I had scanned and reviewed like so many others in the vast collection of artifacts recovered from the Dyche studio. Yet these were images I decided, at the time, to intentionally ignore. To me, they were historically, sensorially, and affectively flat. They were images that, at the time, neither affected nor moved me. They said nothing, told no stories, and gave me no insight into the interiority of their subjects or their historical contexts. The photographs in question share the same archival and diasporic history as the collection of images that initially inspired me to think and theorize images through their sonic qualities. But these photographs command a different kind of attention and a different kind of listening. Viewing them in relation to the Gulu cutouts shifted my encounter with these photos. They are images I have returned to and see quite differently today. They are archetypically quiet photos, yet they are photos that ruminate loudly on practices of diasporic refusal, fugitivity, and futurity.



Quiet Photos, Fugitive Practices

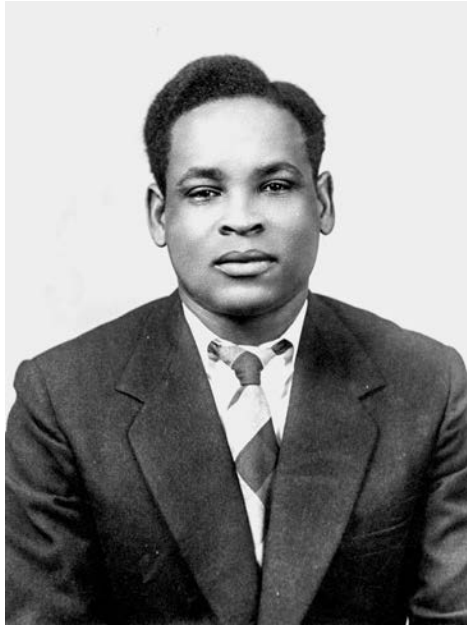
A black man stares down a camera. Full frontal, with shoulders squared and lips pursed. Sullen or solemn; glaring, glowering, or merely dismissive. Fierce, aggressive, or potentially subdued. Jaws clenched in suppressed rage or resentment? This is a familiar script of a black man's identification photograph. Yet it is a script belied by a smart suit and a skinny tie. Middle-class pretension or dapper gangster? Lapels pressed to perfection, their line is marred only by a casually unbuttoned jacket. Stoic, though not without emotion, the image slides between "honorific" and "repressive" genres of the photographic portrait. The repressive genre of the mug shot and identification photos was historically used to archive and categorize criminals, mental patients, and colonial Others deemed deviant or pathological. The honorific "middle-class" portrait aspired to or proclaimed bourgeois respectability and social status. Here, however, the line between them is not quite so clear.

Neither silent nor inaudible, these photographs resonate just below the



threshold of hearing. They do not speak, but they are not mute. Both honorific and repressive, these portraits are command performances of a very specific kind—performances dictated by crown and country of their subjects and citizens. They are passport photos, images that strive to enunciate respectability and aspiration, albeit within highly regulated regimes of social and geographic mobility. They are photographs that engendered new circuits of movement, relation, and dwelling that reshaped the post-war culture of the Black Atlantic. They are some of the least audible and, for many, most ordinary of photos. To me, these sublimely quiet images enunciate an aspirational politics that are accessible at the lowest of frequencies—frequencies that hum and vibrate between and beyond the leather binding and governmental pages to which they were intended to be affixed.

While the passport records the circuits of movement of individuals in transit, these photos, freed from the frame of a leather passbook, exceed the transliteration of sites of entry and exit in stamps of date and place. Passport photos are steeped in history and memory as images invested with the power to create new lives and histories. They are images that transmit their sitters' hopes and dreams prior to travel, along with the journeys these documents made possible. They register a transnational circuit of negotiations of transit, passage, and connection mediated by the state, family, and community. Scholarly histories of the passport recount the deep entanglement of this document with the increasing need of states to track the movement of citizens, identify those who belong,



and exercise control over populations by certifying some and excluding others. As a technology used to regulate mobility and exercise control over citizens and subjects, the passport is characterized by Lesley Higgins and Marie-Christine Leps as “emblematic of governmentality,” as an instrument of biopower that

targets the life of the one and the many, of the population as a whole and of each individual. It works not only through laws and regulations securing the biological, economic and political health of the nation, but also through the fostering of individual pleasures and passions, desires and ambitions—our very sense of who we are.⁶

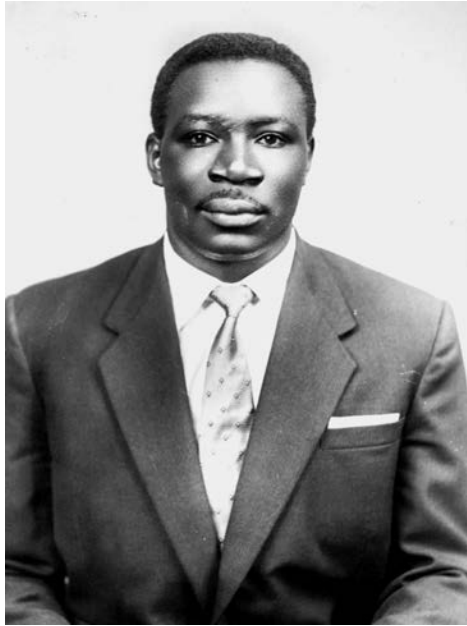
In spite of the history of the passport’s emergence as what Lily Cho has called “a document of suspicion”⁷ issued by the state and used for population surveillance, the passport photo has an equally significant lower frequency. As Craig Robertson notes, the logics of classification, evidence, and authenticity that made the passport such an effective archi-

val technology and investigative modality also privileged these documents as the basis of a retrievable state memory—“an objective, mobile memory that reduced dependence on the recall of specific individuals.”⁸ But how is the passport photo implicated in this investigative modality? Are these images inseparable from the regimes of state regulation and surveillance of the documents for which they were made? Put simply, is the passport photo reducible to a mere function of the passport?

Returning to the photographs we have viewed, it is useful to disaggregate the passport from the photograph in order to discern their alternative enactments of black futurity and transfiguration. The archival technology of these photos is less instrumental, less regulatory, and less bureaucratic than the history of the passport might lead us to believe. For we must remember that our encounter with this collection of images is structured neither by the state nor by the mobility of the passport itself. Like the Gulu cutouts, they too are found photographs—in this case, images recovered by an archivist from the Birmingham City Archives, in boxes, on floors, and on the shelves of what remained of the Dyche studio when it was discovered unexpectedly in 1990. They are photos produced with the intent of inclusion in passports that never found their way to their pages, as duplicates of the images that served this function. They are not photos that journeyed back and forth across the Atlantic. These are images left behind or not chosen. They are photos that stayed in the studio and dwell in the archive. They are quiet, yet anything but silent.

What forms of futurity are made both visible and audible through quiet, “orphaned” photos that never left the studio and never traveled or circulated in the bureaucratic, regulatory regimes for which they were intended? Rather than a punitive document of constraint, for individuals like the postwar Caribbean migrants imaged in these photographs, the regulatory regime of the passport was both an affective and political circuit that facilitated their transfiguration of Britishness. It is a transfiguration that materializes in these photos not as a statement of facts or as a narrative record of transit or mobility.

The quiet frequencies of futurity these images make audible were a



concrete reverberation of the waves of reverse migration initiated by the British Nationality Act (BNA) of 1948. Hailed as “the formal mechanism that legitimated the transformation of the United Kingdom into a multi-racial society,”⁹ the 1948 BNA built on the foundation laid by the BNA of 1914, which established equal standards for naturalization throughout the Empire and Commonwealth.¹⁰ Unlike the 1914 act, which had little significant impact on colonial migration to the United Kingdom, the opposite was the case following World War II. Passed in a vastly different economic climate, when the United Kingdom had achieved full employment and was actively recruiting to solve its postwar labor shortage, the 1948 BNA accelerated Caribbean migrants’ active exercise of the privileges of Britishness that the Empire had promised long before.¹¹ As Randall Hansen emphasizes, “Those arriving from the colonies and independent Commonwealth countries landed in the UK as citizens. From a strictly legal point of view, the term ‘Commonwealth immigrant’ is a misnomer; Commonwealth immigrants were citizens exercising the rights of citizenship.”¹²

UK Visas and Immigration Photograph Guidance for Immigration applications made in the UK (version 07/2013)

The photographs which you have to provide with your application must be in the format specified below. These format requirements meet internationally agreed standards. If the photographs are not in this format, they will be rejected – and in some cases the application will also be rejected as invalid. In particular, the format specified in the first list of requirements below is mandatory where an application for a biometric immigration document is made. **Please note** that applications will be rejected as invalid if any of the photographs provided fail to meet any of the mandatory format requirements. If that happens, you will have to reapply and you may lose appeal rights.

The photographs must be

- identical where two photographs of the individual are required
- in colour, not black and white
- taken against a light grey or cream background
- 45 millimetres (mm) high x 35 mm wide
- able to fit into the template opposite, with the eyes positioned in the shaded area
- free from shadows
- taken with the eyes open and clearly visible (but no sunglasses or tinted spectacles, and no hair across the eyes)
- with the subject facing forward, looking straight at the camera
- with a neutral expression with the mouth closed (no grinning, frowning or raised eyebrows)



The photographs below are for guidance only. They provide examples of acceptable photographs. Examples of unacceptable photographs are given on the following page.



Good Good Good

The requirements listed above are mandatory for some applications – see introduction.

The photographs must also

- be taken within the last month
- be undamaged (not torn, creased or marked)
- be free from reflection or glare on spectacles, the frames of which must not cover the eyes
- if possible, wear recommended photographs without spectacles to avoid the risk of rejection because of glare or reflection
- be free from "red-eye"
- be free from airbrushing or similar enhancement
- be taken of the full head, without any covering unless worn for religious or medical reasons
- be printed professionally or taken in a passport photo booth. Photos printed at home are unlikely to be of an acceptable standard
- have the person's full name on the back of each photograph.



Acceptable But preferable to remove spectacles to avoid any possibility of your photo being rejected. Acceptable Head coverings for religious or medical grounds are allowed. Acceptable But preferable to remove spectacles to avoid any possibility of your photo being rejected.

Children

- Photographs of children aged six and over must meet the full format requirements set out in this guidance.
- Photographs of children aged five and under must show a clear image that is a true likeness of the child. As young children can be difficult to photograph, children aged five and under do not need to have a neutral expression or to look directly at the camera, but they must face forward and meet all other format requirements.
- In addition, babies under one year old do not need to have their eyes open even though this is preferable. All other requirements must be met. If the baby's head needs to be supported, the supporting hand must not be in the picture.
- If you have difficulty in meeting these conditions, you should use a photographer instead of a photo booth.

If you choose to use a professional photographer, please ensure that they are aware of the format requirements specified in this guidance, particularly that the photographs will not show a white background when printed.

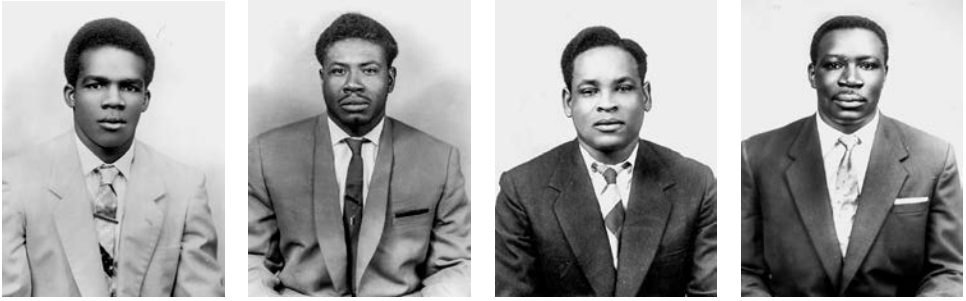
Please note that it is your responsibility to provide acceptable photographs in the format specified in this guidance. If you do not, your application may be delayed or, in the cases mentioned on the first page, rejected as invalid.

Please also note that the photographs provided by you become part of our official records and we will not return them.

Examples of unacceptable photographs



The frequencies of these images register through their formulaic reproduction of the rigid guidelines of passport photography. The rules dictating what constituted acceptable and unacceptable photographs were intended to produce uniform codes for identifying the masses and equally uniform codes for establishing belonging and exclusion. But this was not solely the domain of the state or a unilateral exercise of biopower. While their neutral expressions and their full frontal poses are a legacy of the mug shot and the anthropometric identification systems of Alphonse Bertillon, the emotionless faces captured in the frames of the state's photographic prescriptions do not reveal downtrodden governmentalized subjects. These were individuals who had trespassed the established relation of metropole and colony and were preparing to invert the Commonwealth's migratory pattern yet again. While the Empire had successfully manufactured an idea of Britishness for all its Commonwealth subjects, of which none were ever intended to partake, these images register proud



West Indians laying claim to this unrequited promise. For them, the passport was indeed a regulatory document, yet it was also an affective repository. But these affects are not captured in the images themselves. We do not “see” them; they require listening instead—for their affects register at a frequency that is felt rather than heard.

The quiet frequencies that reverberate in these images register a failed attempt to control the reappropriation of the passport photo as a vehicle of Black Atlantic transfiguration. These photos were both instrumental and affective conduits of the aspirations of thousands of new Commonwealth migrants who had already arrived and were beginning to contemplate new journeys. Their site of recovery in the Dyche studio positions them at odds with the passport’s intended regulation of Black Atlantic mobility. These photographs—taken not in Kingston, Port of Spain, or Bridgetown, but in Birmingham, in the heart of the British Midlands—register a quiet insistence on forms of diasporic dwelling that demanded the right to come, to go, and to *stay*, as well as to arrive and return over and again. As we will see in chapter 2, diasporic dwelling is not always achieved through the cessation of movement or migration. It requires an exploration of the tensions (both physical and grammatical) between a notion of stillness and stasis and what it means to complicate the distinctions between the two.

Frequency, Futurity, Fugitivity

What is the frequency of the Dyché passport photos? The tensions of diasporic dwelling we encounter in these images are best understood by returning to the definition of frequency and to the vibration of sonic waves that reverberate at variable levels of perception and audibility. My name for their frequency is the quotidian practice of refusal. It is what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney identify as “the refusal to be refused.”¹³ It is what Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou have debated as a “refusal to stay in one’s proper place.”¹⁴ It is a refusal I equate with a striving for freedom that Ruth Wilson Gilmore articulated as “the possibility to live unbounded lives.”¹⁵ The quotidian practice of refusal I am describing is defined less by opposition or “resistance,” and more by a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of blackness to pathology and irreconcilability in the logic of white supremacy. Like the concept of fugitivity, *practicing* refusal highlights the tense relations between acts of flight and escape, and creative *practices of refusal*—nimble and strategic practices that undermine the categories of the dominant.

Returning to the photographs, while the passport remains a document of permission, surveillance, and accountability, the fugitivity of these images exceeds this regulatory function. Reprising Hartman, these individuals exploited “the limits of the permissible” and “cleavages of social order” in an effort to inhabit “transient zones of freedom.”¹⁶ Within the closely monitored circuits of imperial mobility created by the BNA, they mobilized the quotidian as their site of refusal—a refusal to remain either on the periphery or contained by the metropole. Their fugitivity consisted of the temerity to pursue fractal and planar lines of mobility that rerouted imperial migration from postcolony back into the heart of metropole, only to invert it again by simultaneously insisting on both movement and dwelling in diaspora.

The fugitivity of these quiet images lies not in their ability to sanction movement, for, extracted from their context, these photos lack this capacity. It lies in the creation of new possibilities for living lives that re-

fused a regulatory regime from which they could not be removed. These images disorder the strict terms of place and personhood dictated by a passport that reduced them to governmentalized subjects of Empire. Their fugitivity is an insistence on being a postcolonial, West Indian, and British subject—a subject governed by the BNA yet unmanageable and profoundly disorderly because of it.

What kinds of gendered performances do these quiet images also capture? What registers at a first order of listening is anonymity. Recovered without identifying records or other supporting documentation, these are nameless men whose biographical details are withheld from us. In the absence of such information, these serial images present a group of anonymous black men. Unless, that is, we attempt to listen rather than merely view them. What registers at a second order are forms of masculinity transmitted through the serial repetition of four suits and four ties. Viewing them, we see attributes of comportment intended to project masculine respectability. Listening attentively to these mundane details means not accepting what we see as the truth of the image. Attending to their lower frequencies means being attuned to the connections between what we see and how it resonates.

A polyphony of quietly audible questions reverberates in these lower frequencies and resonates in tandem with the images from the Gulu Real Art Studio in ways that make it impossible not to probe a related set of queries. Were the suit and tie that each man wears his own? Were these supremely respectable sartorial items borrowed from a friend, supplied by the studio, or owned by the sitter? Were they purchased on this side of the Atlantic, or were they the same suit and tie they arrived in from the West Indies? Were they “Sunday best” or suits spot-cleaned, carefully pressed, and worn every day? Were they suits at all, or jackets only?

The polyphony made audible when listening to these images echoes the accounts of Caribbean migrants who tell stories of dressing up to disembark at Southall or Victoria Station because they had not just landed, they had *arrived*. Listening, rather than simply looking at them, they offer humbling recitations of their search for employment, being forced to accept



positions below their qualifications, as well as stories of discrimination in housing and on job sites that are in no way “visible” in these images. What is equally invisible is the intersectional topography of Balsall Heath that serves as the backdrop to the fugitive lives and quotidian practices against which these individuals sought to image and imagine themselves and their future. That context becomes audible by way of a slight detour through a very different archive of photos that complicates and reframes the fugitive practices of the passport photos we have just viewed.

The images above are not from the Dyche Collection. They were taken between 1966 and 1968 by a photographer and later documentary filmmaker, Janet Mendelsohn, who had come to Birmingham from Boston as a Fulbright Scholar to work with the renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall at the University of Birmingham’s Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

The images are part of an archive of photos shot by Mendelsohn for



a 1969 photo essay, “Varna Road,” about a young sex worker she photographed and became close friends with over a two-year period in Balsall Heath—the same neighborhood in Birmingham at around the same time in the mid-1960s as the passport photos we have just viewed.¹⁷

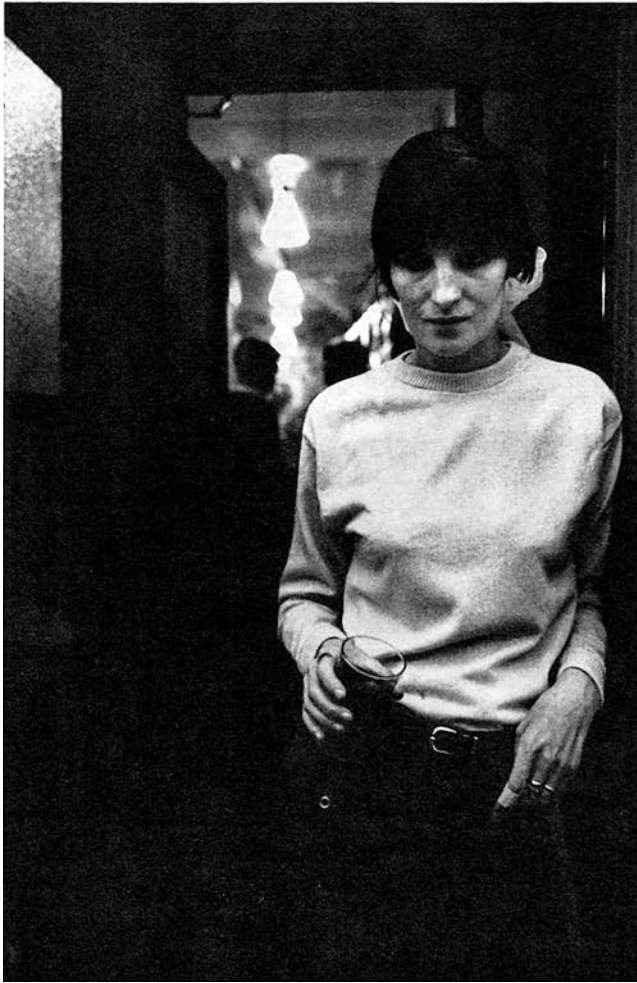
“Varna Road” was shot on one of the main streets of Balsall Heath, only blocks away from the Dyche studio; the men pictured in this image could have been neighbors or possibly friends of those featured in the passport portraits taken by the Dyches. The surface narrative of these images seems clear: interracial cooperation. An indexical proclamation of neighborhood tolerance, diversity, and solidarity between the police and Birmingham’s “new Commonwealth citizens.” But the photographer’s notation (on the following image) tells a different story: “pimps and a cop on the street.”



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From the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s, Balsall Heath was a magnet for many new migrants to Birmingham because of the cheap housing offered by private landlords who often illegally subdivided the larger, Victorian housing stock that marked the neighborhood's past as a formerly middle-class hilltop district of Birmingham, where more affluent residents settled to get away from the pollution of the factories and manufacturing in the city center. Unlike other residents of the city, newly arrived postwar migrants were not eligible for more affordable, subsidized public housing due to residency requirements and long waiting lists. They were forced instead to seek substandard housing from unregulated private landlords. In Balsall Heath, this led to widespread blight in an area that at the time had become targeted for slum clearance by the city government. The neglect of property owners was mirrored by that of the city council and the police, who turned the blind eye to a growing influx of drugs, crime, and, above all, prostitution. In fact, in the period these images were made (just over a decade after the passage of the BNA), Balsall Heath was well on its way to the dubious distinction of being Britain's most notorious red-light district.

When they met in 1966, Mendelsohn's subject, Kathleen, was twenty-three years old and living with the father of her two children in Balsall Heath. She was the fourth of fourteen children born into an Irish immigrant family, and she had grown up in Balsall Heath with her mother and siblings who lived nearby. According to Mendelsohn's notes, Kathleen supported her children and their father, Salim, a British Pakistani who also grew up nearby and whose family lived a few blocks away. A year before publishing the photos, Salim was stabbed to death in a café. In the four years they lived together, they had a two-year-old daughter and a son who was born while Mendelsohn was shooting her photo essay. Mendelsohn's archive contains excerpts from interviews conducted with Kathleen and Salim, their families, friends, and other men and women working in the sex trade on Varna Road. Their comments offer a complicated account of the lives of the individuals in her photos.



“It was me and him living in this house where this girl was, you see. Well, when I first went with this girl—I ran away with her, you know. We both ran away. What we did, we got a room and started doing it. I think he brought me back about three times. Mind you, he was working then, you know. He was working in a biscuit factory and he got the sack. Got another job and then he brought me back about three times. I kept taking off because I thought the money was nice then. In the end he took time off from work looking for me again and got the sack so we just drifted into it together, you know? Or I pulled him.”

“Where we used to live, the people would never guess what I was. They thought I went out canvassing these soap powders round the streets. I used to give them a terrible story. He was a car salesman in town; he used to get a good commission and oh I built up a lovely story for them, you know. Imagine their faces when they read it in the paper. The centre page is his right name and everything. I thought my god if the kids ever see it in school. Splashed all over ‘First Vice Lord Gets Six Months.’”

“I know her’s on the game, I do. I know it for sure, I do. I know it for definitely. If her father were here, he’d kill her. He’d chop her legs off. Her’d have no legs left to walk, her would. But she’s got no call to do it. She was never brought up to lead that kinda life. She weren’t. She was made to do it through Salim. I mean, I live with a man but I live respectable with him.”

“If [my daughter] went on the game, I’d chop her legs off. I would kill her. She’s my daughter, you know. Same as it’d hurt my mother if she knew. Well, she does know now but she don’t know I do it for definite.”

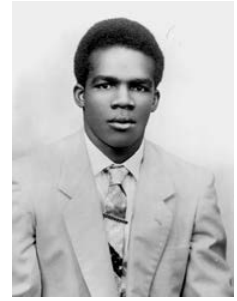
“When [my son] is older, I’ll tell him—look, my life is no good. I don’t know no reading, no nothing. I’m an engineer but I can’t read, so what’s the use to be an engineer? So if he learns properly he could



be a doctor or could be pilot or anything, you know, so that people will say—there is Salim’s son—and I’ll be proud.”¹⁸

Mendelsohn’s archive includes photos of Kathleen’s pregnancy, intimate scenes of her home life with Salim and the children, her mother and siblings, and Salim’s family, as well as photos of their son’s birth. Alongside these photos of their domestic life, Mendelsohn also photographed Salim and Kathleen with others in the trade on the infamous Varna Street, dubbed by one national newspaper at the time as “the wickedest street in Britain.” The photo series, captioned “The Street” in Mendelsohn’s annotations, includes images of the Amsterdam-style sex trade that operated in the abandoned houses on Varna Road and in the clubs along Cox Street, where women sat in windows selling their services.

Against this backdrop, do the passport photos we have just viewed register differently as a consequence of this unexpected stroll just a few



blocks down the road into the broader social geography of Balsall Heath? Do the same sartorial echoes suddenly perplex us? Do suits and skinny ties still perform respectability, or do they now register “swagger”—or possibly both? Attending to the lower frequencies of these images, we must ask whether they depict different diasporic subjects or whether we are encountering instead different strategies of diasporic survival. For our passport sitters could also have been the “brothers on the block”—brothers who were also lovers, husbands, fathers, and sons, perhaps maintaining children, siblings, and extended families. What were their respective strategies for survival and what were their possibilities for futurity? Do we “see” them in these images? Or must we expand the sensorial register of the image to perceive them? And what becomes audible in them when the practice of listening is not just about hearing, but an attunement to different levels of photographic audibility, many of which register at lower

frequencies through their ability to move us? Attuning oneself to such frequencies and affects is more than simply looking and more than visual scrutiny. To look or to watch is to apprehend at only one sensory level. Listening requires an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact. It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer.

The frequency of these very public images is the polar opposite of the passport photos that paradoxically constitute their visual supplement. Their frequency is the minor tenor of street life. They conjure the sounds of catcalls and curb crawlers, car horns and club music. They make audible the cries of mothers on doorsteps and children in the yard. But my juxtaposition of these two different but intimately related sets of images also gives voice to an insistent question: why? Why make this detour, and how do I reconcile it with my investment in a black feminist future lived in the tense of the now?

Put simply, I do so because I must. As a black feminist, it is not an option to ignore or erase these potentially troubling depictions of black masculinity and the less-than-respectable lives black and brown men also lived in Birmingham, only blocks away from the site of production of other, sublimely respectable images. As a black feminist, I must resist the lures and seductions of an easy reading of any of these images: an easy reading that designates some black men as upstanding, and others as fallen; or one that accepts the labeling of them as “pimps” in ways that render a simple dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. Indeed, it is imperative for us all to resist such easy readings; to reckon instead with the complex intimate economies of sex and sex work that such images depict; and to grapple with the equally complicated roles black men play—as “pimps” and “johns,” lovers and friends, brothers and fathers—within this economy.¹⁹

This detour is an essential juxtaposition because what we apprehend when we listen to both sets of images together is a common thread: desire—a desire to be seen, to be photographed, to be visible, and to matter. In each case, it is a desire to live a future that is now, because of the

precarity of black quotidian life wherein tomorrow is fleeting and often too risky to wait for or imagine. Those desires were sometimes enabled by fugitive performances of respectability; sometimes they were lived illicitly, through alternate economies of sex and desire. Listening to this ensemble of images together registers a dissonant yet resonant refrain of black futurity that allows us to encounter them much differently. Their futurity is the quiet, yet intense fugitivity of Black Atlantic transfiguration—a quotidian practice of refusing to stay put or to stay in their designated place, and a refusal to accept the rejection of and limitations on black futurity many ultimately confronted in the United Kingdom.

Attending to a stereoscopic and stereophonic juxtaposition of these images illuminates a different dimension of the sonic registers of the passport photo. On the one hand, they amplify the extent to which the BNA of 1948 was an invitation never intended to be extended and never intended to be accepted.²⁰ On the other hand, this archive of passport photos of postwar Caribbean migrants to Britain, found in a defunct studio in Birmingham and now resident in the city archives, registers not so much through what we see—the faces, postures, and poses of subjects seeking permission for transit and border crossing. They register instead at an ambient frequency that transmits the utopian dreams and diasporic memories of those who came, nevertheless, in search of betterment and the possibility of new forms of black futurity. Theirs was the dream of a future beyond Empire they sought to realize right smack in the heart of the metropole itself. The hum of these images is a quotidian practice of refusal that exceeds the sayability of words. Their transfiguration was a transformation of nameless colonial masses into a generation of black British citizen-subjects with planar, rhizomorphic, and fractal mobility.²¹

Returning to the images with which this chapter began, the Dyche and Mendelsohn photos register at a similarly low frequency as the Gulu cut-outs. While the transfigurative politics of the cutouts were structured neither by the rigidity of the passport photo nor by an inverted postcolonial migration, their aspirations to dignity, humanity, and futurity in post-conflict Uganda are instantiated in equally profound ways in these images.



Both Gulu and Balsall Heath were sites of diasporic arrival and transfiguration made differentially visible or wholly erased in each of the respective genres of identification photography their residents were required to produce. In a city riven by the violence of decades of civil war, many of the faceless individuals photographed in the Gulu Real Art Studio were people who had been driven out of their homes miles away who found shelter in Gulu. Their portraits enunciate quotidian claims to survival, resilience, and possibility in the aftermath of violence. Similarly, Balsall Heath was also a place of struggle and survival, a complex site for the convergence of exigency and aspiration. Like the cutouts, they make these claims not visually, through absent faces and expressions, but at a much lower, infra-sonic frequency.

What is the frequency of these images? Quiet. A quiet hum full of reverb and vibrato. Not always perceptible to the human ear, we feel it more in the throat. To look at these images is to see genre and form. To look at them is to look through their sitters and see function and format, to “oversee” them in ways in which black people have been erased and overseen for centuries. To listen to them is to be attuned to their unsayable truths, to perceive their quiet frequencies of possibility—the possibility to inhabit a future as unbounded black subjects. Listening to these images gives us access to something much more mediated and perhaps far more powerful: the hum of utopian dreams and diasporic aspiration. It is a hum that resonates the unsayable truths of black folks at the lower frequencies of quiet photography.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 16.
2. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 37.
3. One of the most moving examples of the affective tactility of sound is the experience of deaf people listening, responding to, and producing music. There are numerous instances of deaf people experiencing sound and enjoying music in particular through physical sensations. This capacity to experience sound in ways that bypass hearing and the ears has been explored most notably by the National Orchestra of Wales, which staged a series of workshops and concerts for deaf children who passionately responded to the music of the orchestra by lying on specially designed “sound boxes” through which they “listened” by feeling the contact of sound waves on their bodies. Aharona Ament describes these embodied sonic sensations as “feelings that hum along the body when the music infiltrates the molecules in the walls and in ourselves as well.” See http://gapersblock.com/transmission/2010/07/22/beyond_vibrations_the_deaf_musical_experience/; <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-21601130>.
4. Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. My thanks to Anne Garreta for pointing out this useful reference.
5. In her 2011 essay, “Photography,” Ariella Azoulay argues that no individual is ever in sole control of what she describes as the “event of photography.” She explains, “The camera generates events other than the photographs anticipated as coming into being through its mediation, and the latter are not necessarily subject to the full control of the agent who holds the camera” (70). Azoulay further differentiates between the event of photography and the photographed event that a photographer attempts to capture. “Both the

camera and the event that it catalyzes are for the most part restricted by the skilled gaze of the spectator in order to see the ‘thing itself;’ that is to say, that which will become the photographed event. But the rendering marginal of the event of photography, displays of indifference toward it or even the attempt to ignore it altogether can never obliterate its existence or the traces that this event which occurs between the various partners of the act of photography leaves on the photographed frame” (75). Azoulay makes two significant conclusions that undergird my own approach to engaging quiet photography. First, “The photograph is a platform upon which traces from the encounter between those present in the situation of photography are inscribed, whether the participants are present by choice, through force, knowingly, indifferently, as a result of being overlooked or as a consequence of deceit” (76). Second, “The event of photography is never over. It can only be suspended, caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualization: an encounter that might allow a certain spectator to remark on the excess or lack inscribed in the photography so as to re-articulate every detail including those that some believe to be fixed in place by the glossy emulsion of the photograph” (77).

1. Quiet Soundings

1. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 39, emphasis added. The future perfect tense (e.g., future anterior in French) expresses action in the future *before* another action in the future. It can also be described as the *past in the future*. For example: The train will leave the station at 9 am. You will arrive at the station at 9:15 am. When you arrive, the train *will have already left* the station.
2. Prefiguration refers to the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present: either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest. It was coined by Carl Boggs as the desire to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement . . . those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.” Prefigurativism is the attempt to enact prefigurative politics. See Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers’ Control,” 100.
3. See Bacigalupo’s catalog essay, “Leftovers,” as well as Sandrine Perrot’s historical contextualization of the history of Acholiland, “Pieces of Life, Pieces of War,” in *Gulu Real Art Studio*.
4. See Lewitt, “Serial Project #1, 1966.”
5. See the interviews conducted by Bacigalupo with customers of the studio published in the exhibit catalog, *Gulu Real Art Studio* (110–167).

6. Higgins and Leps, “Passport, Please,” 96.
7. Cho, “Citizenship, Diaspora and the Bonds of Affect,” 278.
8. Robertson, “Mechanisms of Exclusion,” 83.
9. Hansen, “The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain,” 95.
10. In “The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain: The British Nationality Act,” Randall Hansen argues that one of the major implications of the BNA of 1948 was its severing of the direct bond between sovereign and subject (77), which challenged one of the cornerstones of English common law: the concept of “allegiance.” “‘Allegiance’ implies two conditions: first the bond is a direct, unmediated relationship between King and subject, and second, any privileges attached to one’s status as subject are granted by the sovereign. These features distinguish a ‘subject’ from a ‘citizen’; the latter enjoys his status through membership in a community enjoying the same status and makes claims against the state based on this membership” (70). See also chapters 1 and 2 of Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*.
11. While the 1948 BNA made the prospect of traveling to the United Kingdom a more attractive option for residents of the British Caribbean, the United States continued to be the preferred destination until the implementation of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, which restricted entry to the United States and led to a dramatic increase in immigration to Britain. Prior to the 1952 act, annual immigration to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean numbered in the high hundreds. These figures doubled the following year to 2,200, leaping to 10,000 in 1954, to 27,550 in 1955, and peaking eventually at 66,300 in 1961 (a year prior to the implementation of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act), with the vast majority of these individuals migrating from the island nations of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados.
12. Hansen, “The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain,” 94.
13. “Can this being together in homelessness, this interplay of the refusal of what has been refused, this undercommon appositionality, be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question? Not simply to be among his own; but to be among his own in dispossession, to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything.” Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 96.
14. Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 20–23.
15. Gilmore, roundtable comments, “In the Wake of the Black Atlantic: Pedagogy and Practice,” The Black Atlantic @ 50 Conference, Center for the Humanities, CUNY-Graduate Center, October 24, 2013, <https://videostreaming.gc.cuny.edu/videos/video/1097/>.

16. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 50, 63, 50.
17. Mendelsohn, "Varna Road," 61–67.
18. Mendelsohn, "Varna Road."
19. I am grateful to Saidiya Hartman for encouraging me to name and engage these uncomfortable ambivalences and seductions.
20. The granting of equal rights of transit and residence for all citizens of the Commonwealth was both a hotly debated and strongly contested extension of citizenship rights that was challenged at different points by both liberal and conservative politicians, as well as a variety of other interest groups. Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi offer a nuanced and critical assessment of the extent to which the act was either motivated by or achieved its egalitarian objectives, and in what ways it facilitated a more fluid circulation of labor or addressed chronic labor shortages that characterized Britain at the time. Their study and the research of black British social scientists in particular document the contradictory role of race in parliamentary and cabinet-level debates and discussions before, during, and after the passage of the BNA, and the stakes of different groups in whether nonwhite citizens of the Commonwealth should be entitled to the same access to the "Mother Country" that white citizens (e.g., in Ireland and the home countries) had. See Carter, Harris, and Joshi, "The 1951–1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration" (55–72), and Clive Harris, "Postwar Migration and the Industrial Reserve Army" (9–54), in James and Harris, *Inside Babylon*. The work of these scholars also details some of the many negative responses to the presence of black citizens in the workplace, in shared housing accommodations, and in attempts to hinder access to social welfare resources such as education, healthcare, and unemployment benefits. For a comprehensive overview of historical literature on these debates, see Perry, "Black Migrants, Citizenship and the Transnational Politics of Race in Postwar Britain."
21. Gilroy famously describes the Black Atlantic as a formation characterized by a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure" (*The Black Atlantic*, 4).

2. Striking Poses in a Tense Grammar

1. "The native's muscles are always tensed. You can't say that he is terrorized, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 53).
2. Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 38–39, 58, 64, 39.
3. Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 64.
4. See also Harvey Young's exquisite discussion of the performance of stillness in *Embodying Black Experience*.