A Queering of Memory, Temporality, Subjectivity:
Subversive Methods in Audiovisual Practice

By

Timothy Smith

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Practice-based PhD)

University of the Arts London

London College of Communication

December 2019

Word Count: 59,036 (including footnotes, excluding Bibliography)

Abstract

This practice-based research attends to queer and feminist understandings of sound, memory, voice, temporality and spectrality, specifically in relation to audiovisual art. Through an analysis of artworks and material practices, I identify a range of subversive strategies implemented by artists intent on amplifying the voices of marginalised communities. These include alternative modes of listening, seeing and feeling that complicate hegemonic notions of history, genre, representation and subjectivity.

The project examines five single-screen, digital artworks that I have created as part of my research, as well as works by seven other artists: John Akomfrah, Clio Barnard, Evan Ifekoya, Mikhail Karikis, Patrick Keiller, Charlotte Prodger and Wu Tsang.

In relation to my analyses of the artworks, a number of theoretical concepts are developed: *Queering of Memory* draws primarily on queer and feminist theories of spectrality, temporality and voice (Gordon: 1997; Dinshaw: 1999; Cavarero: 2005; Freccero: 2006; Love: 2007; Blanco and Peeren: 2013). *Haptic Aurality* builds on established theories of cinematic embodiment (Sobchack: 1992, 2004; Marks: 2000, 2002, Barker: 2009), by attending specifically to sound (Voegelin: 2010; Leimbacher: 2017) and breath (Quinlivan: 2012, 2015). *Diffractive Listening* is inspired by theories of diffraction (Haraway: 1991, 1997; Barad: 2007, 2010, 2014) which are reconfigured with a much-needed aural sensibility (Lipari: 2014; Goh: 2017). Finally, the disruptive and transformative potential of *Interference* is considered through the metaphor of the wave (Rodgers: 2010, 2016) and the power of collective action (Butler: 2015; Davis: 2016; LaBelle: 2018).

The structural framework of this thesis is comprised of different configurations of time and subjectivity. A journey that encompasses a vast array of temporalities: from the deep time of geological landscapes and their mythological narratives; the embodied present in all its haptic sensuality; the recent 'historical' past; then forwards and outwards towards the future, with all its multiplicitous possibilities.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Note to the reader

I recommend watching all five of the artworks that I have produced as part of my research before reading this thesis. During some of the chapters there are times where I refer to specific timecodes, which might prompt the reader to refer back to the films in order to further appreciate the moments that are being discussed. The films can be accessed via the Vimeo links below.

Please listen with headphones whilst watching the films.

- *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* (2017) – 14min30
  https://vimeo.com/208857206

- *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda* (2017) – 2min20
  https://vimeo.com/240797251

- *E1: Stories of Refuge and Resistance* (2018) – 11min40
  https://vimeo.com/251803542

- *Queer Babel* (2018) – 10min
  https://vimeo.com/281647518 (Password: Turing)

- *Queering di Teknolojik* (2019) – 8min30
  https://vimeo.com/335570723 (Password: Teknolojik)

Introduction

My reasons for undertaking this research degree were brewing for some time. I can trace the seed of thought as far back as 2010 when I was working as the Events Programmer for the BFI London Film Festival. During my three years in that role I curated and delivered more than forty-five events, ranging from on-stage career interviews with high-profile actors and directors, to more intimate panel discussions with a number of different filmmakers. One event in particular stayed with me more than any other, so much so that I designed the whole proposal for my research degree around it. During the festival, on 20 October 2010, I brought together artist-filmmakers John Akomfrah, Clio Barnard and Patrick Keiller for an event entitled *British Cinema: Breaking with Convention*. The copy that I wrote for the festival brochure reads as follows:

> This event allows us the exciting opportunity to focus on a number of
> new British films that challenge the conventional notion of narrative and
> documentary form and explore the blurring between real lives and fiction.
> John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* is a poetic essay on the themes of
> memory and migration. Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins*, the long-
> awaited third instalment of his trilogy, beautifully weaves a wide range of
> themes and issues into a metaphorical exploration (and critique) of our
> society. Clio Barnard's focus in *The Arbor* is the relationship between
> fictional film language and documentary, drawing attention to the fact
> that documentary narratives are as constructed as fictional ones. […] A
> common thread between these films is that through their process they
> are all concerned with representation and attempt to engage the
> audience by reminding us that what we are watching is a construct.
> (Smith 2010: 96)

Looking back on what I wrote in 2010, as I write this nine years later, it is interesting to note how some aspects of the above text have gained even more importance as my research journey has progressed, particularly my interest in artworks that blur the boundaries between genres and complicate notions of representation. As I will explore throughout this thesis, revealing the ways in

which an artwork is constructed can be one method of engaging an audience, disrupting their expectations and inviting them to generate new meaning.

My affection for these three artists and their work has not changed, but the methodology with which I am considering their work has evolved significantly. My initial proposal pushed forward the development of two theoretical notions, both of which I designed in order to discuss the subversive methods that I had identified in these artists' audiovisual practice. The first was Queering of Memory which argued for a necessary critical engagement with history and cultural memory as a way to amplify the voices of marginalised communities. The second was a theory of Haptic Aurality, which aimed to infuse a much-needed sonic element within Laura U. Marks' theory of 'haptic visuality' which described the way a spectator might *feel* an image with their eyes (Marks 2000). In this regard, I was particularly interested in exploring how sound might be able to engage sense memories in an audience. This methodological approach seemed to be progressing well, at least for the first half of my research journey, but it was around the time of the confirmation process (what some universities call the upgrade) that I began to realise that the form of research that I had been doing was effectively theory-led practice and I still had not fully grasped the meaning of practice-based research. The quest to understand this distinction has carried me through the remainder of the journey and it is a subject that I will return to at various points throughout this thesis.

Upon the advice given to me during the confirmation meeting, I restructured the project from what was a very theory-led endeavour to one that centred my own practice and that of other artists who I felt were operating in a similar orbit. The materiality of the work would be foregrounded, and the theory would then be brought in to support my arguments. The two theoretical concepts mentioned above have not been abandoned, on the contrary, they form part of the framework of two of the chapters that follow. Two more theories are developed in subsequent chapters, as I shall outline further below.

In addition to John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* (2010), Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010) and Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), I will discuss the

work of four other artists. I first experienced Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* (2016), at the 2018 Turner Prize exhibition.[1] The work resonated with my research in a number of ways and for this reason my discussion of Prodger's film is spread across two chapters. I saw *No Ordinary Protest* (2018) by Mikhail Karikis shortly after it was installed at The Whitechapel Gallery in August 2018.[2] I chose to include this work because of Karikis' interest in haptic sound and the collaborative nature of his project. Two weeks later, I visited Gasworks Gallery in Vauxhall to experience Evan Ifekoya's *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief* (2018), which is a six-hour, multi-track sound installation accompanied by other visual elements. The collaborative nature of Ifekoya's creative process and their sensitive handling of the many voices in the work offered a great deal to consider. The final artist is Wu Tsang, whose installation *The Looks* (2015) I saw in November 2018 as part of a large group exhibition.[3] Although the work is audiovisual, it shares a similarity with Ifekoya's work in that they both reconfigure our understanding how a 'white cube' gallery space might function. The inclusion of these four (queer) artists' work, alongside my original three, has enriched my research and expanded my understanding of the ways in which audiovisual work can be discussed, particularly in relation to sound, memory, voice, temporality, spectrality, representation and subjectivity.

In addition to my analyses of these seven artworks, I will discuss five audiovisual works that I have produced as part of my doctoral research. *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* (2017) was first shown in a gallery as an almost-completed work-in-progress.[4] The finished film was subsequently shortlisted for the AHRC Research in Film Awards and screened at Fringe!

---

[1] Prodger won the prestigious prize. See more about the exhibition here: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2018. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).

[2] See here for details: https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/mikhail-karikis-no-ordinary-protest/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).

[3] For more details, see: https://thevinylfactory.com/news/strange-days-memories-of-the-future-the-store-x/. (Accessed: 16 January 2019).

[4] The work was shown under the provisional title *Sound/Memory/Landscape* in this group show 7-9 March 2017: http://events.arts.ac.uk/event/2017/3/7/other-way-round/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).

Queer Film Fest and BFI Flare.[5] I then made two deliberate audiovisual experiments: *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda* (2017), which was designed to play on a loop in a gallery context; and *E1: Stories of Refuge and Resistance* (2018), which can function as both a standalone single-screen work, as well as an interactive soundwalk. My final two films experiment with a digital voice software generated by an artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm. *Queer Babel* (2018) premiered at the 2018 Fringe! Queer Film Fest and also screened at BFI Flare in 2019.[6] *Queering di Teknolojik* (2019) was shown at the 'Sound::Gender::Feminism::Activism – Tokyo' conference in October 2019.[7] It also screened at the 2019 BFI London Film Festival where it was nominated for the Best Short Film Award. Since then the film has screened at Fringe! Queer Film Fest in London and image+nation LGBTQ Film Festival in Montréal.[8]

It is my intention that by bringing these twelve artworks together and discussing them in relation to each other (but also in relation to the methodological framework which I will outline below), this thesis will make porous the boundaries between genres and situate my own work in the interstices, the margins, the liminal space that is created when an audience engages with an artwork. Genre, like subjectivity, is fluid and always evolving, as I shall explore.

The main concern driving this research project is a desire to identify strategies available to artists who are intent on amplifying voices of marginalised communities. Naming these strategies as 'subversive methods' leads to further questions, such as: How can alternative modes of listening, seeing and feeling complicate hegemonic notions of memory and subjectivity? Can audiovisual work move beyond mere representation towards something that might be

---

[5] See the AHRC Research in Film Awards 2017 shortlist here: https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/news/shortlist-announced-for-the-ahrc-research-in-film-awards/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).
See the film's webpage for details of festival screenings: https://www.facebook.com/queering/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).
[6] See the film's webpage here: https://www.facebook.com/QueerBabel/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).
[7] See the full programme for SGFA-Tokyo here: https://www.crisap.org/event/sgfa-tokyo/. (Accessed: 27 September 2019).
[8] See the film's webpage for updates of public screenings: https://www.facebook.com/QueeringDiTeknolojik/. (Accessed: 24 September 2019).

considered as a postrepresentational practice?[9] Is it possible to break free from the constraints of identity and representation to reconfigure a notion of collective subjectivity that has the potential of enacting significant change? I cannot promise answers to all of these questions, but they will certainly be addressed in this thesis.

My methodology might be considered as a lens through which the whole project can be viewed, but this term is far too ocularcentric for my research interests, given that I am intent on giving the aural the same level of attention to which the visual is accustomed. I prefer to think of my methodology as a filter, or rather a series of filters, through which everything is passed. The analogy of the filter is much more useful than a lens because a filter can be used in both audio and visual contexts (to temper sound or light), whereas a lens is only applicable to the visual. The primary, over-arching methodological filter in this thesis consists of two foundational elements: temporality and subjectivity. Within each chapter I construct different sub-filters which are able to adjust the intensity and meaning of the main filter, thereby offering different configurations of time and subjectivity. These sub-filters are composed of various elements, such as themes of waves and echoes which, although present in early chapters as audiovisual motifs, become reconfigured as conceptual metaphors in later chapters. Another recurring motif is that of spectrality, which is introduced in Chapter One but quickly becomes a force that holds many of the other filters in place, haunting subsequent chapters like an unwanted but necessary ghost. The spectre that I invoke in this thesis constantly changes form, drawing aural and visual attention to the liminal space between binary oppositions, in order to complicate and disrupt them. I also return to spectrality's etymological roots as a way to forge connections between the spectral and the audio spectrum and produce waves that are not only felt in the present moment, but echo throughout the different temporalities of this thesis.[10] The disruptive nature of

---

[9] I borrow the term 'postrepresentational' from Gozde Naiboglu (2018). This is unrelated to the 'non-representational theory' of Nigel Thrift (1996, 2007). I will discuss this distinction further below.
[10] 'spectral (adj.) 1718, "capable of seeing spectres;" 1815, "ghostly;" from spectre + -al. Meaning "pertaining to a spectrum" is 1832, from stem of spectrum + -al'. https://www.etymonline.com/word/spectral. (Accessed: 22 June 2019).

the ghost also allows it to be considered for its queer potential and I follow in the footsteps of theorists such as Avery Gordon (1991), Carla Freccero (2006) and Carolyn Dinshaw (1999, 2012) who have turned to spectrality as a way of rediscovering and amplifying marginalised voices and narratives. This method can have powerful epistemological implications when we consider, as María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren do, that 'the ghost also questions the formation of knowledge itself and specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined present and future' (Blanco and Peeren 2013: 9). This is a decidedly political project with a concern for social justice at its core.

Before I offer an outline of each chapter, I need to briefly discuss some of the recurring terminology that I use in this thesis.

My approach to the word 'queer' and its use as both an adjective and a verb, is well described by Freya Jarman-Ivens when she writes:

> Queer is one way of articulating the notion that identities, including and perhaps particularly sexual identities, are not natural but constructed, not fixed but negotiated. As a verb, "to queer" allows us easily to appreciate this sense of negotiation and construction. "Queering" can be readily understood as an ongoing practice; moreover, it affords a distinct agency to the reader of cultural artifacts, texts, and histories, an agency that reflects queer's poststructuralist origins. (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 16)

I also embrace Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash's thoughts that 'what we mean by queer […] is and should remain unclear, fluid and multiple […] keeping queer permanently unclear, unstable and "unfit" to represent any particular

---

'spectrum (n.) 1610s, "apparition, specter," from Latin *spectrum* (plural *spectra*) "an appearance, image, apparition, specter," from *specere* "to look at, view" […] Meaning "visible band showing the successive colors, formed from a beam of light passed through a prism" first recorded 1670s. Figurative sense of "entire range (of something)" is from 1936.' https://www.etymonline.com/word/spectrum. (Accessed: 22 June 2019).
This will be explored further in Chapter Four.

sexual identity is the key to maintaining a non-normative queer position'
(Browne and Nash 2010: 7-8).[11] However, I also heed their warning that this 'is
not a simple task in an academy that increasingly embraces "queer"
contingencies while simultaneously requiring specific rules of rigour, clarity and
truthfulness' (Browne and Nash 2010: 8). I use queer (and particularly queering)
in its most political form as a necessary way to complicate hegemonic notions of
identity, subjectivity, representation, history and memory.

At times throughout this thesis (particularly in Chapter Two) I will use the term
'affect', which carries with it an enormous amount of complicated baggage (far
too large to unpack here).[12] In an effort to simplify matters, I find myself very
much aligned with the way that Ann Cvetkovich articulates her understanding of
terms such as affect, emotion and feeling as relational and interchangeable, as
'more like keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition'
(Cvetkovich 2012: 5). I also share Cvetkovich's preference for the term feeling
'because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings
as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences […],
a conception of mind and body as integrated' (Cvetkovich 2012: 4). This also
resonates with a number of queer and feminist theorists upon whom I rely
throughout this thesis, who prefer to draw on Raymond Williams' concept of
'structures of feeling' when discussing affect (Williams 1977: 128-135).[13] My
feeling about the term emotion is aligned with Sara Ahmed who is 'interested in
emotions as how we are moved, as well as the implied relationship between
movement and attachment, being moved *by* as a connection *to*' (Ahmed 2014a:
209, emphasis in original). This line of thought will be discussed in greater detail
in Chapter Two.

Ultimately, my thinking around affect has concluded that I am not invested
enough in the ongoing debates around affect theory to develop it further in
relation to this project. Whatever affection I might have had for affect in the early

---

[11] For a fascinating and detailed analysis of the historical and linguistic aspects of the word
queer, see: Chen (2012: 57-85).
[12] For excellent discussions and critiques of affect theory, see: Ngai (2004), Hemmings (2005),
Leys (2011, 2017), Wetherell (2013) and Bradway (2017).
[13] See in particular: Gordon (1997: 18, 50, 198-201), Love (2007: 10-12) and Muñoz (2009: 41).

stages of my research has waned. I feel that it is more important to concentrate on the materiality of the artworks, the subversive methods of these artists, and what Karen Barad describes as the 'condensations or traces of multiple practices of engagement' (Barad 2007: 53) that I might be able to find in the artworks. I am interested in the ways in which they disrupt the norm, interfere with systems of power and amplify marginalised voices. The way that all of these artworks (via the methods that they deploy) make me *feel* is largely irrelevant as my feelings are much too subjective to draw any significant conclusions. Subjective experience is informed and influenced by an infinite number of relational factors. All I can do is draw the reader's attention to the various ways in which they might engage with certain phenomena. What I am not able to discuss are the feelings they might experience as a result of that encounter.

My decision to not engage with the various debates around affect theory is also informed by some salient points pertaining to the erasure of queer and feminist voices, particularly these thoughts from Marie Thompson:

> To label affect theory as a 'new' theoretical approach […], is to downplay the long-standing genealogy of feminist, queer and postcolonial thought that precedes the contemporary 'affective turn' and its concern with embodied experience, the material transformations of the body and the role of feeling and emotion in creating and shaping worlds. (Thompson 2017: 10)

Sara Ahmed has similar thoughts, arguing that when 'the affective turn becomes a turn to affect, feminist and queer work are no longer positioned as part of that turn. Even if they are acknowledged as precursors, a shift *to* affect signals a shift *from* this body of work' (Ahmed 2014a: 206, emphasis in original). Expressing this argument in more explicit terms, Ahmed contends that 'when the affective turn is translated into a turn to affect, male authors are given the status of originators of this turn. This is a very familiar and very clear example of how sexism works in or as citational practice' (Ahmed 2014a: 230, n.4).

Staying on the subject of citational practice, it may have become evident already that I am prioritising the work of queer and feminist theorists in this thesis. This was my deliberate intention when I began to think about applying for a research degree in 2015; to not rely on (and not become one of) the 'old white men' of academia and to amplify the voices of women, queer folk and people of colour, especially when those categories intersect. This found serendipitous resonance in Sara Ahmed's 2017 book *Living a Feminist Life*, especially when she writes:

> I do not cite any white men. By *white men* I am referring to an institution […] Instead, I cite those who have contributed to the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism […] Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before […] I cite feminists of color who have contributed to the project of naming and dismantling the institutions of patriarchal whiteness. (Ahmed 2017: 15-16, emphasis in original)

I have attempted to adhere to this citation policy as strictly as my project allows, but it is challenging when drawing on theoretical work in the fields of cinema and sound studies, particularly when the latter is even more dominated by white men than the former.

Another recurring discussion throughout this thesis is the relationship between representation, representationalism and whether a form of 'postrepresentationalism' might be evident in the artworks that I analyse. In relation to audiovisual artworks, representationalism assumes that the artwork is a reflection or a copy of the world that is being represented within the work and that the meaning it conveys is somehow fixed. This kind of representationalist thinking perpetuates the subject/object binary that has been so prevalent in Western science – a belief that the object contains some kind of inherent, static knowledge that can be extracted by the viewing subject. I am more concerned with what might be produced during the intersubjective encounter between audience and artwork, which I understand as a relational process of meaning-making. The artwork and audience become co-constitutive

of each other through this fluid engagement. I am interested in the artwork as material phenomena and what it actually does – including the ways in which it might be able to touch and move us – rather than what it supposedly means. This is because the meaning of an artwork will inevitably change depending on who is engaging with it and will be influenced by a range of other factors, such as the time, place, context and duration of the encounter. As I will argue throughout this thesis, many of the artworks that I have chosen to examine deliberately resist representationalism, often by foregrounding elements of the artists' creative process, which alerts the audience to the fact that what they are engaging with is a construct. This invites a questioning of expectations and a consideration of the multi-faceted layers of meaning that are possible. My understanding of this complicated issue has been informed by these thoughts from cultural theorist Stuart Hall:

> Meaning 'floats'. It cannot be finally fixed. However, attempting to 'fix' it is the work of a representational practice, which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one. (Hall 1997: 228)

At this point, there might be an expectation that I will turn to non-representational theories inspired by the work of cultural geographer and affect theorist Nigel Thrift and his colleagues. At first glance its emphasis on practice, embodiment, materiality and process might feel like a natural fit with my research, but this diverse body of work raises a number of concerns. Although Thrift himself draws on the work of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway (and even some early Karen Barad), he is far too invested in theories of affect (such as those of Brian Massumi) that insist on a separation between affect and cognition, thereby (in my opinion) perpetuating a mind/body dualism. Thrift's work has been influential in the field of affect studies, but for reasons outlined earlier, I do not consider this to be compatible with my project.[14] Subsequent theories that have evolved from the work of Thrift and his

---

[14] For excellent critiques of Thrift's thoughts on affect, see Leys (2011: 442-443) and Wetherell (2013: 353-356).

colleagues, whether they are named as non-representational or more-than-representational theories, are very much anchored in the field of cultural geography and not easily mapped onto analyses of audiovisual artworks.[15] Another reason to classify this extensive and multiplicitous body of research as outside the boundaries of my research project is that the field is remarkably dominated by white men, which offers an explanation for this argument from Tim Cresswell:

> For the most part it seems clear that notions such as class, race, and gender are not part of the theoretical lexicon of NRT [non-representational theory]. Thus, when the subject turns up it is most often as 'the subject'. Group identities appear to be thought of as either products of representational or of structural thinking (and, therefore, too fixed and pregiven). (Cresswell 2012: 102)

It is for all of the reasons outlined above that I draw on Gozde Naiboglu's work on postrepresentationalism, which

> is concerned with a critique of representational ontologies […] and the prefix "post" does not refer to a historically progressive view of representation or what comes after representation. Neither does it reject representation altogether and focus on the nonrepresentational; rather, it is interested in troubling the basic premises of representationalism. (Naiboglu 2018: 13)[16]

As each chapter develops, I will complicate this issue in a number of ways. I will also discuss how the subversive methods of the seven artists disrupt conventional understandings of representation. At the same time, I remain conscious that any critique of representationalism must acknowledge the

---

[15] For a fascinating analysis of the development of 'more-than-representational' theories in the context of landscape studies, see: Waterton (2018: 91-101).

[16] This is not to say that Naiboglu does not draw on affect, in fact she also draws on Massumi (and Spinoza) in regard to affect, and this specifically informs her film analyses. However, she develops her theory of postrepresentationalism later in her book and for this she primarily relies upon Barad's (2007) theory of 'agential realism' (which I will discuss further in Chapter Three).

importance of representation for those who feel under-represented and/or mis-represented in society and culture.

A discussion of representation necessarily implicates subjectivity (and the thorny issue of identity) and when it comes to the subjectivities explored in this thesis, I am interested in what Alexander Dunst and Caroline Edwards describe as 'the actual, and indeed constant, emergence of new subjectivities contesting the practices of power' (Dunst and Edwards 2011: 4). As the chapters progress, the notion of subjectivity evolves from those which emerge spectrally from the landscape, to a reconfigured queer subjectivity that implicates much more than an individualistic notion of queerness, gesturing towards the political as well as the sexual. These subjectivities were already, always in some way collective, but this becomes more pronounced in later chapters; from an emergent, collective subjectivity formed through compassionate and ethical listening, to a consideration of collective subjectivities both human and other-than-human that propel us towards utopian possibilities. My consideration of subjectivity, particularly in the final two chapters, resonates with Cris Mayo's recognition that 'generative forms of subjectivity, action, and community are intimately related to LGBTQ history and resistance' (Mayo 2017: 536).

Finally, I use the term 'audiovisual' when referring to the artworks, not just because I feel that it is more encompassing than 'film', 'video' or 'moving-image', but because it emphasises the aural element more than these other terms. It is for the same reason that I prioritise the word 'audience' over an alternative such as 'spectator'. With the above thoughts on terminology in mind, along with the theoretical framework discussed earlier, I will now briefly outline each of the chapters.

Chapter One deals with notions of deep time and ancient time associated with geological landscapes and the range of mythological narratives that have emerged from them. I discuss my short film *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* alongside Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* and John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses*. My analyses of these three works overlap and intertwine, but revolve around the shared theme of the journey, which is conveyed in the works through the

recurring motifs of water, waves and modes of travel such as boats and trains. I argue that all three works enact a Queering of Memory by deliberately disrupting hegemonic notions of history, memory and subjectivity. Further, I reveal the ways in which creative use of voiceover and attention to landscape and archive footage (which also implicates a notion of intergenerational time) allows for spectral subjectivities to emerge through the work. I extend this line of thought to my analysis of Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins* and argue that when compared to the previous two films in Keiller's trilogy, this work enacts an *unqueering* of memory. I return to the notion of spectrality to suggest that Robinson's queer voice still haunts the work, even though it has been silenced. What connects these four works is their narrative fluidity and ambiguity which, I argue, not only helps them to resist being classified in any particular genre but invites the audience to engage in the process of making meaning from the work.

Chapter Two attends to the embodied present. The spectral subjectivities from the previous chapter are given material form through the development of established theories of cinematic embodiment and a consideration of listening, voice and breath. I take some time to construct the theoretical 'sub-filter' of Haptic Aurality by tracing the evolution of the 'body' of the film, from the hypothetical to something more material as it comes into contact with notions of the haptic, viscera, affect and resonance. I then apply this to my analyses of three artworks which I feel are operating in similar orbits, connected via their mutual concern with hapticity, breath and other aesthetic and processual elements. I argue that my deliberate experimentation with haptic sound and colour-block visuals in *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda* invites a consideration of the liminal, in-between space that is created during the intersubjective encounter between audience and artwork. This analysis is dissected and interspersed between my discussions of two other artworks. I return twice more to Prodger's *BRIDGIT* to argue that this work can be considered as piece of queer haptic cinema through its use of embodied touch and breath. I also turn my attention to Mikhail Karikis' *No Ordinary Protest* and discuss the ways in which haptic, visceral sound can emphasise the power of a collective voice. These three works all reveal multiple practices of engagement and make

transparent aspects of their own construction and this, I argue, invites an investigation of what happens in (and emerges from) the liminal space between artwork and audience. If the spectral subjectivities take on embodied form, perhaps they can be reconfigured with collective potential.

In Chapter Three, I construct a complex sub-filter inspired by the work of Donna Haraway (1991, 1997) and Karen Barad (2007, 2010, 2014). I complicate their vision-based theories of diffraction with a much-needed aural sensibility, aided by a reconfigured notion of the echo via Annie Goh (2017) and theories of ethical, compassionate listening by Lisbeth Lipari (2014). Like the chapter that precedes it, this chapter might feel more theory-heavy than Chapters One and Four, but through a sustained and careful engagement with the work of these theorists I am able to formulate a theory of Diffractive Listening. I describe this new methodological tool as a practice of *listening through time for the voices of ghosts*. I go on to discuss the ways in which a diffractive listening practice can be implemented by both artist and audience, and sometimes by the artwork itself. This informs my analysis of my audiovisual experiment *E1: Stories of Refuge & Resistance* which considers the notion of collective subjectivity as contingent on listening. I also examine Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* in relation to the artist's sensitive approach to audio material and her unique use of a verbatim lip-synch technique, methods which can both be considered as forms of diffractive listening. I pause twice during my analyses to discuss some practical experience from my involvement in a 'Listening Summer School', wherein collaborative experiments and group discussions produced new understandings of listening practices. Through my analysis of Evan Ifekoya's *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief* I argue how a theory of diffractive listening can be applied to an installation work, not just in relation to the collaborative nature of the artist's process but also through the audience's embodied experience. Both Barnard and Ifekoya give enormous care and respect to the voices in their work which can be heard echoing across multiple temporalities. The notion of collective subjectivity that emerges in this chapter gathers momentum like a wave, carrying us towards the future.

Chapter Four reconfigures the conceptual metaphors of the echo and the wave so that they might be useful for a queer futurity. I introduce the notion of Interference as a phenomenon that has both disruptive and transformative potential, particularly when considered in relation to collective subjectivities. My film *Queer Babel* is discussed as a form of practice-based research that complicates notions of embodiment, identity, subjectivity and representation, through my experimentation with digital voice software. The relational issues of algorithmic bias and disruptive interference link this discussion to my analysis of Wu Tsang's *The Looks*, which, in turn, offers another example of the ways in which an installation space can exert a powerful force on the audience. It is a shared sense of precarity that links Tsang's work to my final film *Queering di Teknolojik* and it is during this discussion that the notion of interference becomes transformative. I offer a cautiously optimistic consideration of collective subjectivities and the alliances that will need to be forged in order to achieve a more equitable future.

My concluding chapter brings together the various theoretical concepts – Queering of Memory, Haptic Aurality, Diffractive Listening and Interference – to consider how they are relationally connected and how they might offer a sense of hope for the future. I also offer some thoughts as to what kinds of new knowledge my project offers to the research community, which raises an important question as to the definition of knowledge and how that might be communicated.

I am cognisant that forms of thinking and understanding which might be new for me may not qualify as new knowledge in an academic sense. I take seriously the contention of Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds when they write – specifically in relation to practice-based research in the creative arts – that 'knowledge that is new for the practitioner alone is not included in any definition of PhD practice-based research' (Candy and Edmonds 2018: 66). It is therefore my obligation to articulate within this written thesis what my films actually do as a form of research and argue the case for their inclusion alongside all of the other artworks. This does present a challenge, particularly when we consider these further thoughts from Candy and Edmonds:

Without an unambiguous "language" for all artifacts, whether visual forms or interactive installations, there is room for multiple responses and interpretations. That ambiguity is, after all, fundamental to the nature of art and its complex relationship to our capacity for appreciation. There is, therefore, clearly a tension between having a shared experience of creative works and communicating the understandings that arise in a form that meets the requirements of shared knowledge as exemplified in a PhD submission. (Candy and Edmonds 2018: 67)

What is needed is a shared language applicable to the very specific context of this thesis. I therefore offer the methodological framework and various theoretical filters outlined above (which will be further developed in each chapter) as 'a parallel means of communication—in effect, a linguistic one that can help to frame the way that we view the artifact and grasp the knowledge' (Candy and Edmonds 2018: 67). These elements work relationally, not just with the artworks that I have produced but also in resonance with the work of the other seven artists I have chosen. Together, I hope that this combination of practice and theory can be considered as a counter-canon, a significant gesture towards a new way of appreciating audiovisual artwork. With this in mind, let us embark on our journey.

Chapter One
A Necessary Queering of Memory

The artworks in this chapter share multiple themes and aural/visual devices. I will offer a consideration of these commonalities in relation to three inter-related configurations of time: the notion of 'deep time' associated with geological formations and the universe; the 'ancient time' associated with mythology; and 'intergenerational time' as a way of connecting more personal stories and histories of migration. A consideration of time in this way will help me to explore the ways in which multiple and various subjectivities emerge through (or are disrupted by) the various artworks. To further aid me in this analysis I will draw on some important theoretical work on queer temporality and spectrality which I feel is very much aligned with the way that I think of 'queering of memory', not just as a methodological concept, but also as the title of one of my own artworks. Water is a prevalent theme in three of the four works analysed in this chapter. The motif of water will also flow through subsequent chapters in different forms and with increasing significance.

A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2 (2017) is an audiovisual work that is haunted by multiple subjectivities, the echoes of which can be heard across vast expanses of time and space. *Part One: Oonagh* draws on Irish, Manx and Scottish folklore in relation to the landscape of The Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, deliberately complicating the story of two feuding giants. *Part Two: Mary* is my attempt to come to terms with an intergenerational family feud which I only vaguely remember from my childhood. The narrative in the second part (as with the first) has been necessarily fictionalised due to the unreliability and fluidity of memory and the fact that many of the memories are not my own. I will discuss the two parts separately below, but it is worth stating at this point that this film was not always in two parts. In the early stages of the creative process I experimented with a merging of the two narratives which, although anchored in very different temporalities, were connected by the theme of the feud. This was the first piece of creative work that I attempted to make as part of my doctoral research and I approached it as an opportunity to push the boundaries of narrative structure. The early edit of the film oscillated back and

forth between the different temporalities within an eight-minute duration, which created a very confusing flow of names, voices, sounds and imagery. Based on feedback from my supervisors, I decided to separate the narratives into two distinct parts and allow the common elements of water, memory and the theme of the feud to emerge in a more subtle way, at a gentler pace. Acknowledging the trials and errors of my creative practice has been an essential part of my research process and I feel that it is important to weave these critically reflexive moments into the wider discussion of my work. My other reason for mentioning this here is that in the early stages I was still approaching my research as something more akin to theory-led practice, rather than something that might be considered as practice-based research. Although I believe that the finished film can still be classified as research (or a research artifact), I must admit that it was made in response to the theory that I was reading. I attribute this to my background as a documentary and narrative filmmaker, whereby the work that I produced was always grounded in extensive preparatory research that would inform a script. It was not an easy process for me to break free from those habits and explore new ways of working – to push myself towards a place where ideas and new knowledge might emerge from the process of making.

Part One: Oonagh embraces Carla Freccero's argument that 'all textuality, when subjected to close reading, can be said to be queer' (Freccero 2006: 5). Although the word queer is used in its adjectival sense, Freccero also harnesses its power as a verb to argue for 'the possibility that reading historically may mean reading against what is conventionally referred to as history' (Freccero 2006: 4). In a similar sense, my film offers a queer reading of the most popular mythological tale associated with this particular landscape, which focuses on the giant Finn McCool, his wife Oonagh and their strategic avoidance of a violent situation with another giant, Benandonner.[17] Regardless of whether or not this particular tale is based on historical fact, many different versions have presented themselves using a range of names. Curiously, some

---

[17] For explanations of the traditional mythology, see: https://www.ireland.com/what-is-available/natural-landscapes-and-sights/articles/giants-causeway-myth/; https://celticlife.com/the-legend-of-finn-mccool/; and http://myths.e2bn.org/mythsandlegends/textonly5639-finn-maccool-and-the-giants-causeway.html. (All accessed: 17 February 2015).

accounts of the story only focus on the two male giants, omitting Oonagh's name altogether, despite her playing an important role in her husband's victory.[18] Oonagh is also the name of the Queen of the Aos Sí (also known as the Daoine Sídhe).[19] Her name is sometimes spelled as Oona, Uonaidh, or Úna.[20] The name of Queen Oonagh's husband, King Finvarra – also known as Fionnbharr, Finn Bheara or Finbeara – resembles the various names given to the giant: Fionn mac Cumhail, Finn McCool, or Fingal.[21] His supposed foe, Benandonner, is also referred to as Cú Chulainn or Setanta - a mythical Irish warrior and champion of Ulster.[22] My approach to this material is akin to Carolyn Dinshaw's musings on the 'ways in which a historical past can and does provide material for queer subject and community formation now' (Dinshaw 1999: 22). Historically, these mythical characters were assumed to be heterosexual by default, which does not allow for the possibility of building community and queer subjectivity because, as queer people, we do not hear our voices in these stories. If they can be fictionalised as battling giants and imagined as faeries and heroes of Ulster, then their stories can justifiably be reconfigured into queer narratives. Thinking about these characters and their histories in relation to the spectral is one method we can use in this endeavour. The work of Avery Gordon is helpful when thinking about the ghostly and a queering of memory, particularly when she writes:

> Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future. (Gordon 1997: 22)

---

[18] See: http://www.ballycastle.info/info/finnmaccool.htm. (Accessed: 17 February 2015).
[19] See: https://journeyingtothegoddess.wordpress.com/2012/11/11/goddess-oonagh/; and http://jesscarlson.com/todays-goddess-not-really-a-goddess-at-all/. (Both accessed: 17 February 2015).
[20] See: https://pantheon.org/articles/u/una.html. (Accessed: 17 February 2015).
[21] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finvarra. (Accessed: 17 February 2015).
[22] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cú_Chulainn#A_Legend_of_Knockmany. (Accessed: 17 February 2015).

This sentiment is echoed by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, when they write that

> studies of ghosts and haunting can do more than obsessively recall a fixed past; in an active, dynamic engagement, they may reveal the insufficiency of the present moment, as well as the disconsolations and erasures of the past, and a tentative hopefulness for future resolutions. (Blanco and Peeren 2013: 16)

A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2 can be considered as a ghost story in the way that the voice of Oonagh haunts the work. I use these spectral terms in a similar way to Freccero, who writes that the past 'is in the present in the form of a haunting. This is what, among other things, doing a queer kind of history means, since it involves an openness to the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited, by ghosts' (Freccero 2006: 80). This resonates with the way that Gordon understands haunting, as 'the sociality of living with ghosts, a sociality both tangible and tactile as well as ephemeral and imaginary' (Gordon 1997: 201), and it is this combination of the tactile and the imaginary that has motivated my approach to the work. It could be described as a 'fantasmatic activity […] of retracing and listening, of locating desire in the (not quote total) silence of texts' (Freccero 2006: 81), to reimagine the possibilities for queer subjectivities to emerge, whilst exploring the haptic and affective qualities of voice. This invocation of the haptic echoes Dinshaw's call for 'partial, affective connection, for community, for even a touch across time' (Dinshaw 1999: 21). Dinshaw's approach to queering history relies on Donna Haraway's notion of 'partial connection' which, along with her theories of 'embodied vision' and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1991: 196), form part of a larger project which interrogates the false claims of objectivity in the sciences in an effort to dissolve the subject/object binary (and other dualisms perpetuated by 'Western' society).

> The topography of subjectivity is multi-dimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together

imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. […] There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class. And that is a short list of critical positions. (Haraway 1991: 193, emphasis in original)

The above quote highlights the political and ethical importance of acknowledging my own situation – as a white, cisgender male, queer immigrant – along with all of the privileges and limitations associated with those respective categories. It also reinforces the importance of thinking about the notion of subjectivity as fluid and always evolving, in a constant state of becoming (and perhaps, as I will explore in subsequent chapters, always in some way collective). It is for these reasons that I will attempt to disentangle the subject of subjectivity from notions of identity and (what can lead to dangerous forms of) identity politics. Haraway's contention that the 'split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history' (Haraway 1991: 193) is especially relevant to my current analysis. Also crucial to this is Haraway's subsequent theory of 'diffraction', which she argues can go further than a practice of reflection and 'can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness [...] one committed to making a difference' (Haraway 1997: 273). This has been developed significantly by Karen Barad and forms part of her 'diffractive methodology', the point of which 'is not simply to put the observer or knower back in the world (as if the world were a container and we needed merely to acknowledge our situatedness in it) but to understand and take account of the fact that we too are part of the world's differential becoming' (Barad 2007: 91). Although Haraway and Barad's work will be explored further in later chapters, particularly in relation to my development of the concept of 'diffractive listening' in Chapter Three, I feel the need to foreground it here so that it resonates throughout my analyses in this chapter. Another crucial point that I wish to draw attention to here is the way in which Haraway and Barad's reliance on visual metaphors misses valuable opportunities to consider the equally important aspects of sound and listening.

This will also be discussed further in Chapter Three, but I will now return to my analysis of *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2*.

There is another ghostly presence in *Part One*, aside from Oonagh, and it is voiced in Irish. These pieces of dialogue have been extracted and adapted from *The Poems of Ossian* published by James Macpherson in 1773, who claimed that he had found and translated an ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscript, supposedly written by Ossian, the son of Fingal. It is widely understood, however, that Macpherson fabricated the entire text.[23] The film embraces this tradition of literary falsehoods, using it as an opportunity to give a queer reading to a feud that may or may not have happened, played out against a landscape that has witnessed much violence. What interested me, in using the text in this way, is that these words from Macpherson's text – fabulations in themselves – have travelled across multiple spatio-linguistic-temporalities: initially reimagined by Macpherson from various Irish, Manx and Scottish folklore and put into textual form, they then travelled from Scottish Gaelic, to English, and finally back to Irish so they could be vocalised in my film. When selecting the dialogue from Macpherson's text, I deliberately searched for any words or sentences that could be read as (even vaguely) phallic or homoerotic, as a way to subvert the kind of language that is normally used to speak of war and violence and connect it with queer desire:

> *The soul of Cú Chulainn rose.*
> *The strength of his arm returned.*
> *Gladness brightened along his face.*
> *I joined the bards, and sung of battles of the spear.*
>
> *We brought back the morning with joy.*
> *Finvarra arose on the heath, and shook his glittering spear.*
> *We rose on the wave with songs.*
> *We rushed, with joy, through the foam of the deep.*

---

[23] See: https://www.exclassics.com/ossian/ossintro.htm. (Accessed: 22 November 2016).

They lifted up the sounding sail: the wind whistled through the thongs of their masts.
Waves lashed the oozy rocks: the strength of ocean roars…

The gray-headed hero rose, when he saw the sword of Finvarra.
His eyes were full of tears; he remembered his battles in youth.
Twice had they lifted the spear…[24]

This notion sometimes crosses over into the dialogue that I wrote for Oonagh, such as '*Finvarra rarely contained his spear, or his sword'.* Oonagh explicitly names herself, but the identity of the Irish-voiced character is ambiguous and open to interpretation. They could be the ghost of Finvarra, or his lover, but they could equally be a ghost conjured by James Macpherson's literary playfulness, which could also be seen as a form of queering of memory.

These disembodied voices offer themselves as new queer subjectivities, and they are inseparable from the landscape depicted onscreen – a very particular landscape comprised of geometrical basalt columnar joints found in many places around the world.[25] The wide array of monikers found in various mythologies which can be traced back to just three characters, were born out of this landscape. The footage of molten lava in the opening moments of the film references the fact that this landscape was created from volcanic activity, but it also serves to transport these queer subjectivities beyond the ancient time of their associated mythologies and connects them to the notion of geological deep time. These deep time geological subjectivities are necessarily spectral. They exist in this otherworldly liminal space/time between the fluidity of lava and solidity of stone. The suggestion that we might engage with the landscape in a way that allows for queer subjectivities to emerge might seem fantastical to some, but as Barad reminds us, we need 'a radical rethinking of agency to appreciate how lively even "dead matter" can be' (Barad 2007: 419, n.27). The

---

[24] See: https://www.exclassics.com/ossian/ossian.pdf; specifically, p.117, p.128, pp.157-158, p.182, and pp.201-202. (Accessed: 22 November 2016).
[25] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_places_with_columnar_jointed_volcanics. (Accessed: 17 February 2015).

connection to deep time is further reinforced by the CGI animation sequences depicting the formation of the cosmos which punctuate moments in both parts of the film (at 07:18 and 10:36). The sound that accompanies this footage comes from recordings made by NASA in deep space. Earlier in the film, during a close-up of a complex geometric rock formation, we hear archive sound of a speech by the Reverend Ian Paisley during the Northern Ireland Conflict, which helps to remind us of the long history of violence witnessed by this landscape.[26] I felt it was important to use authentic sounds to reinforce these connections, not just the temporal connection to the deep time of space and the geological structures, but also the spatial connection between the micro and macro. The liminal space between the micro and macro is emphasised by a number of 'graphic matches' such as the lava dissolving into the geometrical basalt (from the 01:13 mark), then further into an extreme close-up of lichen growing on the rock, which echoes the geometry. The persistent motif of water throughout the film (conveyed both visually and aurally) also helps with the flow between the different spatiotemporalities of the disparate landscapes, as well as between the different thematic content in the two parts of the film. Visually, *Part One* consists mostly of aerial footage shot with a drone camera (which is predominantly macro) and shots from the ground (a combination of micro and macro). My decision to use a drone camera was complicated by ethical concerns around the prevailing association of that particular viewpoint with military conflict. But as Paula Amad notes, not all aerial viewpoints need to be tainted by a militarised connotation, rather they should be appreciated in a 'fluid relational context', which requires attending to the 'intertwined aesthetic and military context' of this elevated viewpoint (Amad 2012: 67). On the one hand, we must acknowledge its relation to the evolution of aerial photography during WWI, which was 'literally attached to the more efficient annihilation of humans' (Amad 2012: 66) and its continued association with drone strikes in sites of conflict; but we also need to recognise how aerial views were, and still are, connected to other spatial and temporal perspectives: historical, archaeological,

---

[26] See the speech from timecode 06:22 here:
https://ia800501.us.archive.org/21/items/gov.archives.arc.1633583/gov.archives.arc.1633583.mp4. (Accessed: 27 January 2017).

ecological and artistic.[27] Ultimately my decision was based on my belief that the unique landscape of the Giant's Causeway was best appreciated from above and my feeling that the disembodied perspective afforded by the drone camera would allow for the emergence of spectral subjectivities from this landscape.[28]

The visuals in *Part Two* are predominantly comprised of archive footage that I sourced from various online repositories. I chose imagery that I had an affective response to, in relation to the script that I had written and the 'narrative' that I had fabricated. Perhaps it could also be described in relation to the spectral, as if I was hunting for ghosts within the archive. I will elaborate on my use of archive footage in *Part Two* (as well as footage that I shot myself) later in this chapter.

Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* (2016) also offers connections between deep time, geological landscapes, mythological deities, and queer subjectivities. The title of Prodger's 33-minute, single-screen work, takes its name from the ancient Neolithic deity, but just like Oonagh, Bridgit has had many different names. The Scottish voiceover in the film informs us of this fact, by reading from Julian Cope's 1998 book *The Modern Antiquarian*:

> The weight of different names by which Bridgit was formerly known is because of the vast time scales across which she operated. In her oldest stone age form, Bridgit couldn't possibly have been her name, because her Neolithic contemporaries all had one-syllable names. Considering Bridgit in this manner, and reviewing once more all her known names – BRIDE, BRID, BRIG, BRIZO OF DELOS, THE MANX BREESHEY and

---

[27] I have explored a similar line of thought in relation to the work of artist Shona Illingworth in a review article that was published in this issue of MIRAJ in 2018: https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/miraj/2018/00000007/00000001/art00013. (Accessed: 5 February 2019).
[28] I should state at this point that I am aware of the work of theorists in the field of human geography (and the sub-field of cultural geography) who engage with spectrality and landscape. However, as I stated in my introductory chapter, I have chosen to prioritise queer and feminist theorists. See Maddern and Adey (2008) for a discussion of the (somewhat belated) spectral turn in cultural geography.

THE CRETAN BRITOMARTIS – it is most likely that the Neolithic form of her name was simply BREE. (Prodger 2016: 88)[29]

This particular voiceover is part of a sequence in the film comprised of various shots: a red truck driving through the wild Scottish landscape, accompanied aurally by the percussive rhythm of the moving train from which it is shot; container ships slowly moving through a foggy sea, seemingly shot from a moving boat that although we do not see, we can hear the aural evidence of in the form of water lapping against the hull. These sequences, which convey the audiovisual sensation of travel through water and epic landscapes, evoke the fluid sense of time that is so crucial to the work. They also echo the similar use of such audiovisual devices in my own film. Further, they serve to connect the multiple subjectivities associated with the deity 'Bridgit' to the landscape, and in turn, to Prodger's own queer subjectivity. Boats are a recurring presence in the film, as are Neolithic stone circles, which offer another welcome connection (this time a geological one) to my own work. I was struck by these serendipitous connections when I first experienced *BRIDGIT* at the Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain in London on 14 December 2018.[30]

Mason Leaver-Yap argues that 'Prodger reconfigures subjectivity to the point where relationships between bodies, places and things might not be defined by their proximity or even the delineation of one subject to another. Rather, this is a transcendental notion of fluid relationships across and through time' (Leaver-Yap 2017).[31] Aside from the above-mentioned themes of travel and water, another way in which Prodger conjures this fluidity is through the recurring motif

---

[29] All dialogue quotes from *BRIDGIT* are as printed in the leaflet provided by Tate Britain at the 2018 Turner Prize installation. However, as I have been unable to determine who published the leaflet, I have chosen to attribute the transcript to the artist (see Bibliography) and I am citing page numbers from its prior publication in a downloadable PDF published in 2017 by Bergen Kunsthall, which can be found here:
http://www.kunsthall.no/Dokmntr/NO5_13_FINAL_DIGITAL_1.pdf (Accessed: 11 January 2019).

[30] As I noted in my introductory chapter, *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* had its first public screening in March 2017.

[31] Leaver-Yap's essay was also reprinted in the leaflet provided by Tate Britain at the 2018 Turner Prize installation. However, for the same reasons stated above, I have chosen to cite the work from the author's website (see Bibliography). It can also be found in the above mentioned Kunsthall publication.

of anaesthesia. *BRIDGIT* was made whilst Prodger was recovering from major surgery (an elective hysterectomy) and during one sequence the artist narrates her experience of being anaesthetised before her surgery. During this sequence, the screen slowly transitions from black to a mustard-like colour and we hear sounds of nature: birds tweeting, wind in trees. The anaesthetist has told her to think of something nice, because that will be what she dreams about:

> There's not much time, I haven't thought about it. So I think about a field, I've got it in my mind's eye. But it's not quite right, I can't get the right field so I keep changing it. Now this field, now that one, like slides. I never settled on one and that slideshow, searching for the right field, was the last content before nothing. (Prodger 2016: 88)

If we return to thinking about multiple subjectivities emerging from landscapes, we can appreciate how this reference to multiple 'fields' contributes to a notion of reconfigured, perhaps porous, subjectivity, moving towards a dissolution of the whole idea of subjectivity completely, into 'nothing'. My reason for following this tangent is primarily to discuss the powerful politics at play within Prodger's work, and indeed in her everyday existence, not just as an artist, but as a queer person who does not conform to gender norms. In yet another sequence in the film the Scottish voiceover reads entries from Prodger's journal, describing just a few of the (presumably many) times in which her own body, age, gender and sexuality were scrutinised by complete strangers. They are read as specifically dated diary entries, which distribute these vocalisations across multiple temporalities. The direct reference to other people (the strangers who misgender her, as well as the friends who have shared similar experiences), implicates them in relation to Prodger's queer subjectivity, which is being compromised each time she endures that kind of experience.

There are several moments in Prodger's film that reference the life and work of (and serve as a wonderful tribute to) academic and artist Allucquére Rosanne 'Sandy' Stone. During one sequence we hear Prodger's voiceover tell us:

> I'm on an Island reading things Sandy Stone wrote in 1994 about virtual
> systems theory, technology as prosthesis, and how a disembodied
> subjectivity messes with whereness. (Prodger 2016: 88)

In the article referenced by Prodger, Stone discusses the various location
technologies used by governments to control its subjects and she highlights the
ways in which gamers and hackers disrupt those structures of power. Stone
goes on to write:

> There is conflict between the technologies of government by which
> societies have traditionally kept order and the multiple fragmenting
> entities that political "citizens" are actually becoming […] by *dissolving*,
> *fragmenting*—by being many persons in many places simultaneously
> […], by refusing to be one thing, by *choosing* to be many things. It is this
> fragmentation and multiplicity that characterize communities mediated by
> technological prosthetics of presence (Stone 1994: 183-184, emphasis in
> original)

This speaks to the political and disruptive potential of queer art such as
Prodger's, but it also reinforces the idea that subjectivity is fluid, ever-evolving
and almost always collective. I will engage further with technology as
prosthesis, as well as the notion of presence (or more specifically, embodiment
and the temporality of the present) in relation to Prodger's work in the next
chapter.

At another point in the film we hear Prodger tell us about Stone's time with
Olivia Records, and how the organisation 'asserted a vision of lesbian
separatism that is relational and evolving'. I interpret this as a welcome criticism
of the recent rise of trans-exclusionary sentiment within some small factions of
the lesbian community, the roots of which have a long and complex history
within lesbian separatist movements.[32] Any consideration of this complexity also

---

[32] For an excellent analysis of four particular lesbian separatist organisations (including Olivia
Records) during the 1970s and 1980s, see: Enszer (2016).

needs to account for the intersection of race and class as well as gender, especially given that trans people of colour are much more vulnerable in our society than their white counterparts. Kadji Amin calls for revised strategies for transgender and queer studies, which might include

> returning to a feminist understanding of gender not simply as a neutral category of social difference but as a site invested with relations of power; and capitalizing on transgender's associations with public sex, economic marginality, racialized inequality, and policing to promote a politics of structural transformation rather than identity. (Amin 2014: 221)

This call for structural transformation and shift away from identity feels compatible with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality as 'a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (Crenshaw 1994: 111). This also needs to be a process by which we 'recognize that the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed' (Crenshaw 1994: 114). The sentiments expressed above by both Crenshaw and Amin gesture towards the possibility of new and collective subjectivities and I will explore this further in Chapters Three and Four. It also offers an opportunity to complicate the thorny issue of identity. Blanco and Peeren argue that 'categories of subjectification like gender, sexuality, and race can themselves be conceived as spectral' (Blanco and Peeren 2013: 310), which invokes once again the idea of a dissolving or fragmenting subjectivity evoked earlier. They write specifically in relation to Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity in which she argued that gender norms (and gendered subjects) are (re)produced by performative iteration (Butler 1990, 1993). Blanco and Peeren contend that Butler's theory of performativity

> invokes a sense of spectrality in the way the constant reiterations of the norm required for its maintenance are never perfect reproductions; a slippage occurs with respect to the ideal-image, resulting in a doubling or self-haunting by which the subject is constantly chasing—yet never catches—a posited "proper" self. (Blanco and Peeren 2013: 310)

This haunting might be welcomed by those implementing 'strategies of subversive repetition' (Butler 1990: 147) in order to disrupt societal norms. This returns us to thinking about queer spectrality in relation to subjectivity and how these spectral subjectivities might also serve to complicate notions of representation through their association with ancient landscapes, particularly when combined with voiceover and onscreen text in experimental narratives. This is definitely something that I have attempted to do in my film and this thinking also resonates strongly with my next analysis.

John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* (2010) also deals with names from mythology and uses audiovisual devices of water and travel against a backdrop of epic landscapes. Although we may need to leave the notion of deep time behind us, Akomfrah's film offers a complex consideration of ancient mythological time and blends it with a conception of intergenerational time through a sensitive use of archive footage. I cannot deny that *The Nine Muses* profoundly influenced me when I was making my own film, in fact I deliberately tried to emulate elements of its structure and Akomfrah's process: particularly in regard to mythological narratives and the blend of epic landscapes and archive footage. In what follows, I will argue that Akomfrah, through his use of subversive methods in his filmmaking practice, engages in a queering of memory, not because his work deals with particularly queer subject matter, but because his focus is on communities and individuals who have struggled against systems of oppression. I feel the need to pause for a moment and state that I do not wish to be reductive by equating the respective struggles (collective and/or individual) of people of colour with those of queer people, but in the spirit of Crenshaw's intersectionality and Haraway's partial connection, perhaps we can see some commonality across their myriad experiences, a commonality that is to be found most easily in identifying their oppressors. As Frantz Fanon teaches us in *Black Skin, White Masks*, hatred is not something one is born with, 'it is not a given; it is a struggle to acquire hatred, which has to be dragged into being, clashing with acknowledged guilt complexes' (Fanon 1952: 35). These forms of ignorance and hatred have few boundaries – the fallacious belief in white supremacy that informs racism often goes hand-in-hand with

homophobia, transphobia and of course, misogyny. This is also not to say that there aren't crossovers between these traits, which are personal as much as they are tribal and (above all) learned. Queer people can be racist and misogynistic (and of course they can be people of colour too), and people of colour can be homophobic, transphobic and misogynistic as well. All of this is before one considers the wider discussion of internalised homophobia and racism that occurs within oppressed communities and individuals and how this can further complicate an already incredibly complex subject. All of the artworks in this chapter, indeed in the whole thesis, could be seen to address one or more of these intersecting issues, which is why I have chosen them. The system of power relations that sustain this type of ignorance and hatred are perhaps best summed up by this quote from Audre Lorde's 1980 essay 'Age, Race, Class and Sex', which is included in a recently published volume of her work:

> Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade their responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future. (Lorde 2017: 95)

There are multiple elements, even just in Lorde's last sentence of the above quote, that relate directly to the way that I think about Akomfrah's creative practice. As I shall explore in relation to *The Nine Muses*, his deft and sensitive re-appropriation of archive footage attempts to redefine the way that the migrant experience has been portrayed in mass media and in doing so, complicates notions of representation. I would argue that part of his methodology answers Lorde's call for 'devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future', by reaching into the past to remind us of the problematic consequences of a colonialist ideology that still persist today. Akomfrah's form of queering of memory invites an affective engagement from the audience through what Carolyn Dinshaw describes as 'making relations with

the past, relations that form parts of our subjectivities and communities; […] making affective connections, that is, across time' (Dinshaw 1999: 11-12). The experimental structure of the work reveals part of Akomfrah's process and his engagement with the material. I would argue that this transparency and honesty, within what is undeniably a construction, invites the audience to consider the multiple practices of engagement required to make the work.

A discussion of Akomfrah's subversive methods is as relevant to his long history of making work with the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) as it is to his subsequent work with Smoking Dogs Films, which includes *The Nine Muses*. Akomfrah's films have always been intent on amplifying voices of marginalised communities and this inevitably involves listening to those communities. To think about 'a John Akomfrah Film' demands that one considers the collaborative nature of his working process and to acknowledge the rest of the team behind the work. Akomfrah's producers Lina Gopal and David Lawson have been the driving force behind all of his films, even since their time together with the BAFC.[33] Trevor Mathison's sound and music contributions are an integral component, not just of the films themselves, but also of their potential to engage an audience affectively. In the *Chiasmus* interview, filmed especially for *The Nine Muses* DVD release in 2012 (and incidentally, directed by his producer David Lawson), Akomfrah has very clear opinions on the subversive power of sound in his films:

> Sound has a gaze, and I don't mean sound as in music, or ambience, I
> mean just the physicality of noise in general has a gaze and that
> reverses the traditional kind of understandings that people have about
> the way sound and image works. Normally the idea is that images are
> what have 'gazes' or point-of-views and sound underscores. I'm very
> interested in the sense of cacophony, in the metaphoric sense, that
> sound brings. It has a kind of subversive presence; it has a sort of
> disruptive value vis-à-vis the logic of images. Image says: "A and B",

---

[33] For excellent, in-depth analyses of the oeuvre of the BAFC, see: Eshun and Sagar (2007).

sound says: "Actually, no, there's no A and B, there's just flux".
(Akomfrah 2012: 07:24-08:20)

In her book, *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks contends that a haptic mode of looking is 'more inclined to graze than to gaze' (Marks 2000: 162), and the way that Akomfrah understands sound could also be approached in relation to the haptic. The 'sense of cacophony' that sound brings for Akomfrah might also provide a space in which to consider the 'physicality of noise', through a haptic or embodied mode of listening, to feel what Jennifer M. Barker describes as a kind of 'visceral resonance' (Barker 2009: 123). The work of Marks and Barker will be explored in much more detail in the next chapter in relation to the notion of a haptic aurality.

The Nine Muses is structured around nine chapters, each named after the titular muses who, in Greek mythology, were born out of the union of Zeus and Mnemosyne (the goddess of memory). The film is a poetic rumination on memory and the history of migration of post-war Britain. In what follows, I will analyse what I consider to be a number of important aspects of both the film and Akomfrah's process; specifically, the use of voices and other sounds, in conjunction with the image (both archive and newly shot) that amplifies the theme of *the journey* and how this relates to the notion of *being and becoming*. Alongside this, I will consider the trope of the Sirens and offer an interpretation of Akomfrah's use of this mythology. These elements are intertwined and will necessarily involve an improvisatory flow back and forth between them that eventually returns us to a consideration of spectral subjectivities and will offer further connections to my film and Prodger's work.

During the onstage event that I programmed for the 2010 BFI London Film Festival, entitled *British Cinema: Breaking with Convention*, Akomfrah spoke about his process, in particular his use of archive footage in the film and his decision to use the nine chapters as a structuring device. Improvisation was a necessary component that helped Akomfrah and his collaborators along the journey of making the film. Taking inspiration from improvisatory traditions such as those found in free Jazz and Indian classical music allowed them to operate

freely within the structure and let the material guide their journey, as Akomfrah elaborates:

> I didn't know what archive I was going to find or in what ways the combinations of them might come together. What I knew is that there would be nine chapters and whatever I found had to fit into that. Ethically, it was necessary, it had to be so. What one was also trying to question in making this, is a certain kind of linearity, a linear definition of what constitutes 'black history' in this country. (Akomfrah 2010b: 29:12-29:43)

This questioning of 'a certain kind of linearity' refers specifically to the problematic nature of archives and the assumption and expectation that they are truthful documents of history. Akomfrah believes that 'there needs to be critical interrogation of the archive' (Power 2011: 62), because although it does in some sense provide an official memory of time and place, any assumption that it truly represents the subjective experience of those held within its image needs to be challenged. Especially because, as Akomfrah explains, 'diasporic lives are characterized by the absence of monuments that attest to your existence, so in a way the archival inventory *is* that monument. But it's contradictory because the archive is also the space of certain fabulations and fictions' (Power 2011: 62). Recognising that a state-sanctioned archive of official history consists of 'fabulations and fictions' opens up the possibilities of a queering of memory. Akomfrah considers the ways in which he uses archive footage in his work to be a form of 'recycling', which he explains is about 'doing our obligation to the dead, it's about saying that the living must acknowledge that they have some relationship, even if it's one of remembering, to what has gone past them' (Akomfrah 2010b: 23:03-23:17). Remembering those who have passed draws us back to our previous discussion of spectrality as a way to think about the very particular histories of different communities through the notion of haunting, which 'combines both the seeming objectivity of events and the subjectivity of their affective afterlife' (Freccero 2006: 76). These spectral subjectivities emerge through Akomfrah's very considered treatment of the archive footage, affording them the agency and power to reach through time

40

and touch those still living. In doing so, they implicate multiple generations in a collective subjectivity that is very specific to the Black British experience.

Through his ethical approach and using experimental methods, Akomfrah is 'expressing a kind of dissatisfaction with what constitutes the governing modes of storytelling or the governing modes of filmmaking' (Akomfrah 2010b: 20:51-21:02). Almost every piece of archive footage used in *The Nine Muses* came from newsreels or other films that had their own narration, imposing judgements and comments on the lives depicted in the footage, which created, in Akomfrah's words, 'their own kind of mythologies about what those lives amounted to' (Akomfrah 2010a: 02:19-02:24). The derogatory, colonial voice needed to be silenced and a sense of agency returned to the people depicted in the footage. One of the important ways in which Akomfrah achieves this is to simply remove the narrative voice from the archive footage, as he explains:

> Once you remove the voice, nine times out of ten the images start to say something else […] they suddenly allow themselves to be reinserted back into other narratives with which you can ask new questions. Who are you, this man on the bus? What are you really doing? The narrator tells you he's an immigrant who's come from Antigua in 1961, but without this narration there's more ambiguity—what the narrator's telling suddenly isn't there. (Power 2011: 62)

In asking these questions, Akomfrah could be considered to be doing a form of spectral listening and looking that 'involves an openness to the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited, by ghosts' (Freccero 2006: 80), which in turn, initiates the process of restoring agency to these 'ghosts' and allowing new subjectivities to emerge. It also resonates with the 'logic of spectrality' that Carolyn Dinshaw describes as 'a logic whereby the excluded voices, the unacknowledged bodies, the abjected others return to haunt present formations and try to get the justice due them' (Dinshaw 2012: 142). Can I claim to be implementing similar methods in the way that I use archive footage in my film? Perhaps, but not for the same reasons. Like Akomfrah, I did not know what I would find when I searched through various online databases, although it must

be stated that Akomfrah had access to a great deal more footage than me, via the BBC archive. I did not adopt an improvisatory approach within a loose structure as Akomfrah did, I was deliberately searching for footage to fit with the script that I had written. Just as Akomfrah did, I stripped the footage I found of any accompanying audio, but perhaps my attempt to impose some sort of narrative (even if it might be considered 'experimental') means that my film does not achieve the level of ambiguity required to give agency to the ghosts within the archive footage, to allow them to speak for themselves.

Akomfrah's subsequent method of adding onscreen text and voiceover narration drawn from classical literature, as well as non-diegetic music and sound effects, enhances the aforementioned ambiguity, thereby complicating these emerging subjectivities. Importantly, this invites the audience to engage with the work from the kind of place of 'misunderstanding' that Lisbeth Lipari is describing when she encourages us to 'clear a space in which we can tolerate the painful ambiguities of not understanding or knowing and, in turn, of being misunderstood. For when we assume that understanding is contingent upon continuity, similarity, or agreement, we leave little room for discovery or for others' (Lipari 2014: 140). This is perhaps even more pertinent to audiences who do not have any direct association with the migratory histories with which *The Nine Muses* grapples. Lipari's work will be important in Chapter Three in which I develop the concept of 'diffractive listening' which requires an intentional level of empathy and compassion to listen beyond the realms of one's own lived experience. This consideration of audience – along with the need for them to bring a level of empathy and compassion when engaging with the work – is exemplified in Akomfrah's own words, which also highlight his subversive approach to the filmmaking process:

> One of the things I wanted to do was to begin a process of suggesting a counter-mythology, a counter-memory, which turns the thing around by saying to an audience: well, rather than looking all the time to what the implications of these lives and subjectivities are for this culture, can we try and just imagine what it was like for the people you see in these films, to make this journey? (Akomfrah 2010a: 2:27-2:57)

I will return to a consideration of the audience perspective later, but for now, let us continue on *our* journey. There are many aural and visual signifiers in *The Nine Muses* that relate to the theme of the journey, just as there are in my own film and Prodger's *BRIDGIT*. Boats are a pervasive feature throughout the film and when they are moving through the sea, we hear sounds of the engine as well as the water. Boats that are not moving also feature, both in the archive footage depicting the journey of immigrants as well as the newly-shot footage in the arctic landscape. Many other vehicles help to convey the sense of the journey too: trains, planes, helicopters, buses, trucks, cars, motorbikes, bicycles and even a horse-drawn cart, all make up the ensemble cast, often accompanied by sounds of extreme weather as well their respective, expected sounds, and in many cases, music and voice. Some of the onscreen text that occurs intermittently as intertitles throughout the film, explicitly emphasises the theme of the journey, accompanied on occasion by relevant sounds:

'Hard is the journey,
So many turnings,
And now where am I?'
(*Hard is the Journey* by Li Po).

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year,
For a journey, and such a journey'
(*The Journey of the Magi* by T.S. Eliot).

'Our journey had advanced
Our feet were almost come
To that odd fork in Being's road'
(*Our journey had advanced*
by Emily Dickinson).

'How heavy do I journey on the way,
When what I seek, my weary travel's end'

(*Sonnet 50* by William Shakespeare).

'Art thou abroad on this stormy night

On thy journey of love, my friend?'

(*My Friend* by Rabindranath Tagore).

'He journeyed beyond the distant,

He journeyed beyond exhaustion,

And then carved his story on stone'

(*Epic of Gilgamesh*).

'Every day is a journey and

The journey itself is home'

(*Oku no Hosomichi* by Matsuo Bashō).

The voiceover narration also speaks of the journey, most notably when drawing on Homer's *The Odyssey*, but also other texts, such as Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and poems by Emily Dickinson. Voiceovers drawing on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and two of Samuel Beckett's works, *The Unnamable* and *Molloy*, invite us to consider another theme: that of *being and becoming*, which relates directly to the migrant's journey, as Akomfrah explains:

> We were trying to understand how people "become" migrants. How you move from a place of certainty—your country, your town, your continent—into this other thing, which is not really either here nor there. I don't think it ever ends. [...] It's a kind of interminable process, people are endlessly arriving but never getting there, so to speak—and rather than see it as a problem, I was trying to explore what this means for a sense of being. (Power 2011: 62)

Akomfrah saw connections between the work of Milton and Beckett, as well as the other writers upon which the voiceover and intertitles draw. These connections revolve around the notion of 'ontological transcience' (Power 2011: 62) and the constant state of flux that we all find ourselves in throughout our

individual journeys through life. Drawing on poetry (epic and otherwise) for both the written and spoken elements of the film allowed Akomfrah to forge links between the subjective experience of diasporic lives and the universal notion of ontological transience, feeding into his belief that 'in the "universal" one finds resonances of local and vice versa, […] what is important for me is the dialogue between the two' (Akomfrah 2012: 09:49-10:02). Akomfrah's use of multiple voices for the narration – eleven different voices, all licensed from the Naxos Audio Book collection of established actors reading classical texts – helps to strengthen the dialogic connection between the universal and the subjective. It also recognises the impossibility of representing all migrants' experience, acknowledging that each individual journey carries its own unique voice.

Adriana Cavarero believes that in poetry, we find a 'realm of speech in which the sovereignty of language yields to that of the voice' (Cavarero 2005: 10) and that could especially be said in relation to the epic poetry on which Akomfrah draws in his film and the multiple voices delivering poetic text that often has an ambiguous relationship with the imagery, inviting the audience to be carried away by the sound of voice in itself, without too much preoccupation with deducing the meaning of what they are saying. He has spoken of the 'need to keep rethinking how the voice exists. Sometimes the rethink involves invoking something very old' (Power 2011: 63). Because voice is also sound, this rethinking of the voice can be extending to thinking about all sounds, which 'are dynamic events, not static qualities, and thus they are transient by nature. What characterizes sounds is not *being but becoming'* (Cavarero 2005: 37, emphasis mine). Which helps to emphasise the fluid and evolving nature of subjectivity. Akomfrah's invocation of 'something very old' is not just to be found in the written text of epic poetry, but also in the voices of arguably its most intriguing characters: those of the Sirens, who are 'monstrous figures who duplicate, in many ways, the function of the Muses; in the *Odyssey* they narrate by singing' (Cavarero 2005: 103). As a trope, the story of the Sirens has been used and modified in myriad ways over the centuries. Having been represented in Greek mythology as monstrous, bird-like creatures, they evolved in later representations into seductive, mermaid-like creatures. Cavarero draws parallels between this more recent depiction of the Sirens in relation to the

water and the cyclical nature of life's journey, tracing the connection between the 'first voice' that we hear in our mother's womb, surrounded by amniotic fluid, and the way that the Sirens' voices lure men to their deaths in the sea: 'Born from the water of a woman, he thus returns to the water with her to die [...] with the maternal body functioning as both cradle and tomb, as both origin and end of the living body' (Cavarero 2005: 108). Heather Love offers an interpretation on Homer's story that is perhaps more relevant to the migrant experience (even though she is writing about the trauma of queer experience):

> By being bound to the mast, Odysseus survives his encounter with the Sirens: though he can hear them singing, he cannot do anything about it. What saves him is that even as he looks backward he keeps moving forward. One might argue that Odysseus offers an ideal model of the relation to the historical past: listen to it, but do not allow yourself to be destroyed by it. (Love 2007: 9)

I would argue that Akomfrah's subversive methods – specifically, the way that he uses archive footage, sound, voice, and his choice of literature upon which he draws – speaks to an idea of moving forward towards a more equitable future by looking backward and re-imag(in)ing (and resounding) the past, as a way to 'not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future' (Gordon 1997: 22).

In the fifth chapter of *The Nine Muses*, named after Euterpe: The Muse of Music, Shakespearian actor Anton Lesser reads from Book 12 of *The Odyssey*, in which Queen Circe offers advice to Odysseus about the Sirens. Early in this chapter, we hear the slow drone of a siren, perhaps an air-raid siren. The same sound occurs multiple times in an earlier chapter named after Polyhymnia: The Muse of Sacred Song, initially alongside archive footage of workers in a smelting factory, intercut with newly shot footage of an arctic port. Then again, a few minutes later, during some arctic scenes which are cut with archive footage of officials guiding vehicles through fog with flaming torches. A minute or so later we hear the siren again, as the image cuts from archive fog footage back

to the arctic, this time Lesser is reading from Book 20 of *The Odyssey*, telling us about the Cyclops. Returning to the Euterpe chapter, which occurs two chapters after Polyhymnia, the siren sound occurs initially in an arctic scene but drifts into more archive footage of factories and houses. Two minutes later, as Lesser's narration speaks of Circe warning Odysseus about the Sirens and their power to seduce men, shrill vocal singing is introduced whilst we are presented with yet more arctic footage, which then cuts to archive footage of a bingo hall, populated by white women and black men. The image cuts back to a digital video shot of a boat gliding through the arctic water as the voiceover and the vocals continue.

There is something that I have deliberately neglected to mention, until now, about the sound of the siren in the above analysis. Whenever we hear it, we also see – either shortly before or after, but many times whilst hearing the sound – one of the enigmatic figures dressed in either yellow, blue or black coats in the arctic scenes (played by producer David Lawson, composer/sound designer Trevor Mathison, and Akomfrah himself). Sometimes these figures are standing, facing away from the camera, other times walking to or from the camera. They are a recurring motif throughout the film, even at times when we do not hear a siren, but because they do appear linked to the sound, I would like to suggest that they could be seen to embody the Sirens themselves. Heather Love reminds us that the 'word "trope" derives from "turn"; it indicates a turning of a word away from its literal meaning' (Love 2007: 5) and interestingly, she writes this specifically in relation to 'Odysseus looking back at the Sirens as his boat pulls away' (Love 2007: 5). With this in mind, knowing that the Sirens 'know all, […] because they see all' (Cavarero 2005: 105), and that Akomfrah's methods also involve looking back to history, I would argue that the figures in the arctic scenes are the ghosts of the Sirens, here to haunt the audience and remind us of mistakes made in the past. They carry with them the spectral memories of all who came before, all those who have struggled, all those ghostly individuals whom we see in the archive footage that Akomfrah has 'recycled'. Work such as Akomfrah's, that invites an audience to consider the multiple practices of engagement with the past has the potential, not only to highlight 'how far we have come, […] it also makes visible the damage that we

live with in the present' (Love 2007: 29). Alison Landsberg argues that this kind of engagement with historically motivated audiovisual work 'can be a strategy for activating one's own personal stake in that knowledge, for making the past matter. A personal stake in knowledge about the past can in turn catalyze one's desire to engage in politics, to work against injustices in the present' (Landsberg 2015: 19). A key factor in this needs to be the act of listening, perhaps Lipari's notion of 'listening otherwise', which 'is not an ordinary listening, it is a kind of listening attuned, with great sensitivity, to the sounds of alterity and the willingness to be transformed' (Lipari 2014: 183).

A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2 also attends to spectral memories, not just through the explicit mention of this term by the voiceover in *Part Two: Mary*, but also through the ghostly subjectivities that emerge from the archive footage that I have 'recycled' (in a manner quite different to Akomfrah's). I refer to them as spectral memories because they exist as ghosts in my own personal archive: fragments of memories, second-hand and overheard. Forgotten memories, buried either deliberately or simply from the passing of time, hence my need to semi-fictionalise the narrative. In this respect, my treatment of the archive footage is in contrast to Akomfrah's method, through which he gently coaxes the ghostly subjectivities into emerging from the footage. My process is not as gentle. I am the one doing the haunting, 'putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible' (Gordon 1997: 22). Elements of my filmmaking process also haunt the work in the form of the footage that I shot during my journey to and from The Giant's Causeway. The theme of water is prevalent in the footage that I shot on the boat journey from Liverpool to Belfast. The footage that I shot from the train from London to Liverpool also offered an opportunity for me to convey the sense of journey through time and place. The fact that these two forms of journey footage are derived from the process of making *Part One*, but edited into *Part Two*, offers a further consideration of the connections between the two sections and the liminal space between the disparate landscapes.

In contrast to the deep time of *Part One*, *Part Two* deals with the notion of intergenerational time, through its semi-fictionalised account of a family feud,

comprised of a series of events which occurred over the course of six decades and took place between two very different landscapes on opposite sides of the world. The second part experiments more deliberately with the relationship between sound, landscape and memory. My use of boats and trains, just as in *BRIDGIT* and *The Nine Muses*, can be understood as an audiovisual device that 'represents time as movement through space, and locates subjectivity as both local and distant' (Halberstam 2005: 185).

Kate Fahey's voiceover is used in a disruptive way, to provoke the audience into questioning the temporality and subjectivities conveyed through the work by providing a further connection with the previous narrative, in which she reads the narration for Oonagh. In the second part, her voice echoes mine initially, then takes over some of my dialogue, whilst at other times we share the words, via the left and right audio channels, inviting the audience to consider the sound in relation to the spatial as well as temporal connections to the narrative and to the disparate landscapes of Belfast and Melbourne. I am also deliberately complicating the notion of gender – or disrupting expectations of what we should hear – by mixing our dialogue. The connection between sound and memory is reinforced by the voiceover, which refers to memories as 'echoes' (at 10:43 and 12:49). Through the use of these three different vocal techniques – I might call them echoing, subsuming, and sharing – the multiple subjectivities that emerge through the work are further complicated. The initial echoing functions to connect the two disparate narratives, but when Fahey's voice subsumes my dialogue, then shares my words, questions arise as to whose voice this is intended to represent. Are we hearing the thoughts of my grandfather's sisters Margaret or Catherine? Is she supposed to be my great-grandmother Mary? Or perhaps my sister? Ultimately, this is not about 'representation' at all, it is rather about the connection between these voices, as material phenomena, that disrupts any definitive sense of temporality. I would like to consider this in relation to Karen Barad's thoughts on time:

> 'Past' and 'future' are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the
> world's ongoing intra-activity. There is no inherently determinate
> relationship between past and future. Phenomena are not located in

space and time; rather, *phenomena are material entanglements enfolded and threaded through the spacetimemattering of the universe*. […] *Memory – the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity – is written into the fabric of the world*. The world 'holds' the memory of all traces; or rather, the world *is* its memory […]. (Barad 2010: 261, emphasis in original)

Just as Barad's speculations disrupt traditional comprehensions of time and space, the intra-action of the voices in the film disrupts conventional understandings of representation and allows for the possibility of new subjectivities to emerge, both from and across different spaces and times. What also emerges is a new truth (or counter-truth), which was a necessary strategy for dealing with the ethically complex subject matter of the intergenerational feud, in which there exists multiple truths. As my voiceover states in the film (echoed by Kate Fahey), the memories of this family feud are not my own. Therefore, it was necessary to subjectively distance myself from the material and the echoic voiceover was one method of achieving this. In later chapters I will discuss the ways in which, through my creative practice, I have pushed my interest in voice in different directions: from the use of onscreen text as a vocal substitute in *E1: Stories of Refuge & Resistance*, to my experiments with a digital voice in *Queer Babel* and *Queering di Teknolojik*.

My consideration of temporality and subjectivity thus far has taken us from the vast reaches of deep time all the way to the present. At this point I would like to digress slightly and consider Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), the temporality of which does not operate in the same way as the other films in this chapter. However, there are other connections to be made in relation to queer subjectivity and spectrality.

The fictional, titular character of Robinson in Keiller's essay film has no visible presence and no audible voice, nor does he in the previous films of the 'trilogy': *London* (1994) and *Robinson in Space* (1997). I am tentative in defining it as a trilogy because it was not Keiller's initial intention to include Robinson in the final film, which was initially devised as part of an AHRC-funded research

project in collaboration with fellow academics Doreen Massey, Patrick Wright and (then) doctoral student Matthew Flintham. It almost seems inconceivable to imagine the film without the presence of Robinson, despite the fact that he is never actually present: the only material trace of his existence being nineteen film cans and a notebook, which as the onscreen text informs us at the start of the film, were found in a derelict caravan. The unnamed narrator (voiced by Vanessa Redgrave) runs an institute which she and her colleagues set up in Robinson's name and they have edited the footage, supposedly shot by Robinson. Redgrave's narration is a combination of third-person description of what was found in Robinson's notebook, along with first-person offerings drawn from a wide range of literary and historical resources.

The enigmatic would-be academic could be considered as the methodological framework of Keiller's audiovisual experiments, as he explains: 'Robinson was devised to enable a first-person narrator to explore ideas one might entertain but would not necessarily adopt' (Keiller 2012: 8). In the spirit of this, I would like to explore and entertain some other ideas that might initially seem tenuously linked but will hopefully become more tethered as we proceed. Ideas that Keiller himself might entertain but may not necessarily adopt.

Although I will be attending to some of the thematic and formal elements of the film(s), I am mostly interested in what is noticeably missing and what I *feel* is missed. In relation to her theory of cinematic subjectivity, Jenny Chamarette argues in her book *Phenomenology and the Future of Film,* that 'what must also be taken into consideration is absence – the absence of bodies, or the presence of embodied absence in the case of voice and voiceover' (Chamarette 2012: 37). Whilst this is certainly relevant to Vanessa Redgrave's voiceover, there is much more to consider with Keiller's film and the absent subjectivities that might be made present.

When compared to the first two films, *Robinson in Ruins* could be defined by its absences: an absence of music, an absence of hope (or sarcastic humour), an absence of intimacy and, perhaps most importantly, an absence of queerness, as I shall explore. This is not to say that there are not common threads running

throughout all three films; *Robinson in Ruins* is just as saturated with references to history and literature as the previous two films and together, they stand as a scathing critique of neo-liberalism, global capitalism and 'the commodification of everything: land, labour, risk, carbon' (Massey 2010: 54). In this respect, the films in Keiller's trilogy can be seen as a queering of memory because they are subversive and overtly political in their content, as well as their methods and they insert an overtly queer (to the point of being anarchistic) character into depictions of British political and cultural memory. Keiller's process is also subversive: he shoots his film footage (and records the sound) on location well before he writes the script, a reversal of conventional filmmaking methods, although perhaps not uncommon in the essay film genre.

The absence of music in the third film functions as a distancing device, keeping the audience clinically aware of the facts that Redgrave's narrator continually bombards us with, which are peppered with whatever she gleans from Robinson's notebook. In stark contrast, the previous two films offered 'diverse musical motifs [which] gave a precise, appealing vivacity to the swiftly changing affective states experienced by Robinson and the narrator on their journeys of discovery' (Dave 2011: 21). That is not to say that the 2010 soundtrack is devoid of interesting sounds, the beautiful landscape imagery is accompanied by a rich soundscape made up of birds, machinery and other ambient sounds. The clinical distance seems deliberate and necessary, given that the narrator has never met Robinson. She did, however, know the narrator of the previous two films. We are offered information about their relationship, along with what little she knows about Robinson, via these two sections of dialogue:

> My late beloved had once been Robinson's co-researcher, accompanying him on a series of projects during the 1990s, the last of which had led to Robinson's imprisonment. I had heard that he had been released but did not know how to contact him, or where he'd gone.

And then later, we are told:

A few years after Robinson's disappearance in the 1990s, my future lover had published a report based on their work, that had led to his becoming a government adviser. I met him at a conference about documentary film, in China. We set up a small research team with the aim of developing novel definitions of economic wellbeing, based on the transformative potential we attributed to images of landscape.

The narrator's 'late beloved' is the narrator character of Keiller's previous two films, who was voiced by the late Paul Scofield. This revelation might come as a surprise to the audience if they are familiar with the previous two films, as they will know that Paul Scofield's unnamed narrator was also Robinson's former lover. In *London* there is explicit reference to their 'uneasy bickering sexual relationship'. There is more implicit information to be garnered when Scofield's narrator reveals to us that he used to be a photographer on a cruise ship, which 'resulted in some unexpected introductions'. The narration in *Robinson in Space* reveals about the same level of implicit and explicit information, from talk of an 'orgiastic reverie at Cambridge' to that of Robinson's sexual encounter with a stranger from the internet. Whether or not Redgrave's narrator is aware of this historical sexual relationship, we never learn, and it is not really my concern as to whether or not her late partner was bisexual or closeted. I am much more concerned with the *closeting* of the Robinson character in this ongoing narrative and in what follows I will attempt to tease out what I consider to be a *unqueering* of memory. Before I expand on what I mean by this, I should clarify from the outset that I am not suggesting that this was a deliberate strategy employed by Keiller to erase all trace of Robinson's queerness. What unfolds in the third part of the trilogy is perfectly justifiable given the fact that the narrative is centred around the experience of Redgrave's narrator. What it does offer though, is an opportunity to highlight the importance of queer narratives and the way that they might be erased by more insidious motivations. This is an increasing concern in the times in which we now find ourselves. As I have discussed throughout this chapter, thinking spectrally is one strategy available to those wishing to reclaim queer narratives that have been hidden. Karen Barad contends that 'the trace of all measurements remain even when information is erased; it takes work to make the ghostly entanglements visible'

(Barad 2010: 261). Although she is writing specifically about an experiment in the field of quantum physics, it resonates with my discussion of queer spectrality.

In her book, *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed contends that 'it matters, how we assemble things, how we put things together. Our archives are assembled out of encounters, taking form as a memory trace of where we have been' (Ahmed 2010: 19). This is in relation to the objects that we encounter during the course of our lives, and how these objects can offer up to us an affective association. This notion is equally applicable to the filmic experience and the ways in which we remember certain moments, pieces of dialogue, sounds and imagery, and the ways in which these memories stay with us and affect us, whether that be positively or negatively. Representations of queerness on film are powerful objects, they can affirm our existence, but depending on how they are (re)presented, they can also be a cause of anxiety and distress. The importance, for many queer people, of recognising these subtle queer moments in our archives cannot be underestimated, they can become happy objects to us because they 'affect us in the best way' (Ahmed 2010: 22). Alongside this, Ahmed considers the importance of recognising unhappiness, following Heather Love's call for 'a genealogy of queer affect that does not overlook the negative, shameful, and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century' (Love 2007: 127). Ahmed proposes the notion of the 'unhappy queer' as a way to consider

> what it might mean to affirm unhappiness, or at least not to overlook it.
> Unhappiness might appear as feelings that reside within individual
> characters—from tormented narrators to grief-stricken lovers—or moods
> that linger without direction, aim, or purpose [...]. Unhappiness might
> involve feelings that get directed in a certain way, and even give the
> narrative its direction. (Ahmed 2010: 89)

Paul Scofield's narrator always came across, to me, as somewhat tormented (or at the very least, frustrated) by Robinson's behaviour in the first two films. I also feel that Redgrave's narrator and Robinson himself could be considered as

'grief-stricken', given that their mutual former lover has passed away, but this is all somewhat of an aside to my main argument. The character of Robinson is decidedly queer, in a political sense as well as sexual. He engages in subversive activities that eventually lead to him being imprisoned. I would therefore like to consider the character of Robinson as an 'unhappy queer' in relation to how Ahmed describes the societal expectations, or 'happiness scripts', that queer people are subjected to:

> Happiness scripts could be thought of as straightening devices, ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up. […] To deviate from the line is to be threatened with unhappiness. [...] Queer and feminist histories are the histories of those who are willing to risk the consequences of deviation. (Ahmed 2010: 91)

There is much for Robinson to deviate from in this world and with which to stay unhappy. Global market capitalism goes against everything he stands for and his queerness is considered a threat to the very fabric of society. In this regard, we might do well to remember that 'the illusion that same-sex object choices have become accepted and acceptable […] both conceals the ongoing realities of discrimination, non-recognition, and violence and requires that we approximate the straight signs of civility. So yes, we must stay unhappy with this world' (Ahmed 2010: 106). We might also speculate that Robinson's unhappiness is most likely accompanied by a deep sense of loneliness, compounded by his inability to grieve properly for his former lover, because as Ahmed explains, 'queer grief is not recognized, because queer relationships are not recognized, […] you become unrelated, you become not. You are alone in your grief. You are left waiting' (Ahmed 2010: 109).

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, the closet was 'the defining structure for gay oppression in [the 20th] century' (Sedgwick 1990: 71). She also argues that 'the relations of the closet - the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition - have the potential for being peculiarly revealing, in fact, about speech acts more generally' (Sedgwick 1990: 3). Because there is

no explicit reference to Robinson's act of coming out in the narration of the first two films, we can safely assume that he is already out (at least to the audience and Scofield's narrator), because of the other overt references in the narration to his sexuality. The third film effectively pushes him back into a closet in which he may never have been. But who is actually performing the closeting, the narrator or Robinson himself? Redgrave's narrator only knows (and tells to the audience) what she has learned from Robinson's notebook and we don't hear any explicit evidence of Robinson's queerness from her. There is, however, an interesting moment in the film during which we are told of Robinson's activities near Silchester:

> He hung about the neighbourhood for several days, begging in the woods until, eventually, he was sufficiently encouraged to return to Aldermaston.

Knowing Robinson's sexual proclivities as we do from the first two films, we could make an assumption that he was engaging in 'cruising' rather than 'begging', but is he disguising this fact in his notebook entry? There is evidence in the narration to suggest that he might have cause to do so, because he knew that Redgrave's narrator would find his notebook and the film cans:

> He wrote to us, explaining who he was and what he'd been doing. He knew about our work and our resources and suggested we might be able to realise his remarkable proposal.

Given that Robinson was aware of the existence of the institute set up in his name, it is also likely that he knew that the two narrators were lovers. Perhaps he not only wanted to save Redgrave's narrator the heartbreak of knowing the truth, but he also wanted to ensure the survival of his research, even if that meant sacrificing his own truth in the process. The act of closeting 'is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence' (Sedgwick 1990: 3) and it is the silencing of Robinson's queer voice in *Robinson in Ruins* that I would like to briefly examine now, specifically in relation to these thoughts from Salomé Voegelin in her book *Listening to Noise and Silence*:

> When there is nothing to hear, so much starts to sound. Silence is not
> the absence of sound but the beginning of listening. This is listening as a
> generative process not of noises external to me, but from inside, from the
> body, where my subjectivity is at the centre of the sound production,
> audible to myself. (Voegelin 2010: 83)

Voegelin is writing in relation to sound art, so I am risking taking her words slightly out of context. I am not listening to silence in precisely the same way as she is, but I am listening from the position of my own queer subjectivity, for something that I believe has been silenced. An ephemeral trace, any material presence of Robinson's queer voice that I know and *feel* should be there, even if corporeally, he is not, or perhaps never was. In this respect, I am very deliberately attuning myself to what José Esteban Muñoz describes in *Cruising Utopia* as 'the ways in which, through small gestures, particular intonations, and other ephemeral traces, queer energies and lives are laid bare' (Muñoz 2009: 72). I am also acutely aware of the ways in which these gestures and traces can 'transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities' (Muñoz 2009: 67).

In his book *Lexicon of the Mouth* Brandon LaBelle writes that the voice '*promises* a subject; it excites or haunts a listener to recognize in the voice a "someone." An *implicit* body on the way toward an explicit drama: the anticipation or expectation every voice instigates, that of a figure soon to appear' (LaBelle 2014: 6, emphasis in original). This expectation is left unfulfilled in all three of Keiller's films, as we never see the figure of either narrator onscreen. However, it is not the narrator's body or voice that excites or haunts me as the listener of these films, it is the thought of Robinson and what has become of him. LaBelle also writes about the inner voice that we all hear when reading the written word and I would like to briefly consider the following in relation to Redgrave's narrator and Robinson's notebook:

> The inner voice, as a subvocalization performs *under the skin,* to support
> while also haunting verbal articulation. In this regard, it is my view that

the unvoiced and the voiced partner in a complicated doubling, to hinge onto the linguistic socialities of speech the unconscious fevers and emotional states that flit through the body. (LaBelle 2014: 88, emphasis in original)

Perhaps this is where I can find not only the trace of Robinson's voice, but of Robinson himself. Listening for the inner voice of Robinson that comes through in Redgrave's narration, I take literally the idea that 'the unvoice definitively *ghosts* the spoken' (LaBelle 2014: 90, emphasis in original); and that 'some specters lurking in the *now* are created by exclusion' (Dinshaw 2012: 137, emphasis in original); or in other words, by closeting. It is for these reasons I feel that Robinson is still somewhere to be found, as a ghost.

As I move towards concluding this chapter, it seems an opportune time to pull together some of the thoughts around subjectivity, temporality and representation that have been discussed. A return to Jenny Chamarette's thinking on cinematic subjectivity is helpful, particularly when she notes that when '*thinking through* cinematic temporality, it seems clear that representation is insufficient as a form of engagement with subjectivity' (Chamarette 2012: 35, emphasis in original). It is difficult not to slip into some form of representationalism when making audiovisual work, but with *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* I have tried to complicate the relationship between memory and temporality in an attempt to avoid making a representationalist artwork. Any 'representations' as such, within the film are complete fabrications and I make that fact transparent. All the artworks discussed in this chapter have elements of representation and I think it needs to be appreciated how these forms of representation are important for the communities whose voices the artists are intent on amplifying. However, these artworks go beyond mere representationalism by deliberately not conforming to conventional narrative or documentary techniques and in doing so they blur the boundaries between genres. Making artwork that cannot be easily classified is perhaps another subversive method that can be added to the list of strategies available to artists. One important way that these particular artworks achieve this (and in turn, push further away from representationalism) is by revealing elements of their

process, which imbues them with 'condensations or traces of multiple practices of engagement' (Barad 2007: 53). In doing so, I would argue, they create the possibility for the audience to engage with these processual elements as well as the artwork as a whole and glean meaning through their own unique interpretation of the work. In other words, by drawing attention to the construction of the work, the artist invites the audience to question what they were expecting from the work. Audiences who are used to experiencing conventional documentary or narrative techniques might also be accustomed to passively receiving and accepting the meaning that they feel the filmmaker intended. Therefore, the subversive methods of the artists in this chapter (and even more so with the artists discussed in the subsequent chapters) not only invite their audiences to question the meaning that they might have been expecting, but also why they might have had an expectation in the first place. There is a certain narrative ambiguity in all of the works that contributes to this, further encouraging the audience to generate their own meaning from the work.

The issue of audience experience opens up a number of avenues for discussion, which might include (but are not limited to) theoretical work around memory, embodiment, subjectivity and affect. This will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, but as a possible segue into that discussion, I would like to consider these thoughts from Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulias:

> This turn to affect and embodiment is not necessarily a turn away from the relationship between memory and subjectivity; rather, *it is the relationship between memory and representation that the interest in affect seeks to loosen.* (Callard and Papoulias 2010: 247, emphasis mine)

It is for this reason that I am not completely dismissing the importance of affect theory (although I might be dismissive of some theories of affect) in untangling these complicated issues and I will explore affect further in the next chapter. However, because of the ongoing debates around the many different theories of affect, I have chosen to simplify my use of the term by staying in the realm of Sara Ahmed's thinking, particularly as to how affect, emotion and feeling are

inextricably linked and cannot be defined as separate from other terms such as cognition and intentionality. I find this analogy from Ahmed particularly helpful in this respect:

> The activity of separating affect from emotion could be understood as rather like breaking an egg in order to separate the yolk from the white. [...] That we *can* separate them does not mean they *are* separate. (Ahmed 2014a: 210, emphasis in original)

This is not to say that there are not different types of feelings, or emotions (or affects) that can be named and defined, alongside other terms such as intentionality and cognition, but I consider all of them to be relational and intimately connected to our embodied experience, our memories and therefore to our subjectivity. Feelings can also be shared, so they cannot be ignored in a consideration of notions of collective subjectivity and the ways in which these might emerge and evolve. This will be explored further in Chapters Three and Four, but it is time now to adjust our temporal mode towards the embodied present of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two
Building on Theories of Haptic Aurality

This chapter grapples with a much slower configuration of time which is very much situated in the present (or the very recent past). The subjectivities explored here are embodied, attuned to the senses and intimately connected through sound, noise and breath, as well as image. Structurally, this chapter might feel like a tale of two halves, but it is slightly more complex than that. The first half will develop a theoretical framework which will then be applied to my analyses of three artworks in the second half, one of which is an audiovisual experiment of my own, *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda* (2017). My examination of this two-minute and twenty-seconds long piece will be deliberately slow, pausing at times to discuss the other two works. I will touch twice more Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* (2016) and introduce the work of another artist, *No Ordinary Protest* (2018) by Mikhail Karikis.

When I began this research project my intention was to develop a theory of 'haptic aurality' in an attempt to bring a much-needed consideration of the sonic to Laura U. Marks' theory of 'haptic visuality' from her book *The Skin of the Film*, which explores some of the ways that 'vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes' (Marks 2000: xi). My priorities have shifted somewhat, as the project has evolved. This shift can be attributed to two coincidental but interrelated factors. Even in the early stages of my research I was conscious that the theoretical aspects had already begun to dominate the practice, but the prospect of developing a theory of haptic aurality which might constitute a significant contribution to knowledge was too tempting to relinquish. At the same time, the subject of the haptic had become popular and a number of other academics began publishing their work on the topic, reducing the potentiality of my own original contribution to knowledge in that area. In hindsight this was rather fortuitous as it encouraged me to centre my practice and use the theoretical aspects as supporting devices, rather than the other way around. However, although I can no longer claim ownership over a new theory, I do develop a new approach to existing theories of haptic aurality and haptic listening. The theoretical work discussed in this chapter provides an

essential framework with which to analyse the artworks (both mine and other artists).

Marks' work is indebted to Vivian Sobchack's earlier work, particularly *The Address of the Eye*, which proposes a theory of intersubjective relations between the (theoretical) body of the film and the body of the viewer, in which the film is not 'merely an object for perception and expression; it is also the subject of perception and expression' (Sobchack 1992: 167).[34] Marks' theory of haptic visuality not only connects vision to the sense of touch, but works with embodied sense memories, 'bringing vision close to the body and into contact with other sense perceptions […] making vision multisensory' (Marks 2000: 159). It is within Sobchack's early theory that Marks finds a 'germ of an intersubjective eroticism […] capable of a mutual relation of recognition […] between a beholder and a work of cinema' (Marks 2000: 183). This resonates with Sobchack's later work, *Carnal Thoughts*, in which she develops the notion of the 'cinesthetic subject', which

> both touches and is touched by the screen—able to commute seeing to touching and back again *without a thought* and, through sensual and cross-modal activity, able to experience the movie as both here and there rather than clearly locating the site of cinematic experience as onscreen or offscreen. (Sobchack 2004: 71, emphasis in original)

In a strong and persuasive argument that links further with Marks' 'intersubjective eroticism' and points towards the possibilities of considering all of the senses in the cinematic experience, Sobchack contends that:

> *If I am engaged by what I see*, my intentionality streams toward the world onscreen, marking itself not merely in my conscious attention but always also in my bodily tension: […] my material being. However, insofar as I

---

[34] Sobchack's 1992 theory relies on a modification of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'system of four terms' of intersubjective relations. For a detailed description of Merleau-Ponty's theory, see: Merleau-Ponty (1964: 115). For a detailed description of Sobchack's modification of this, see: Sobchack (1992: 124-138).

cannot literally touch, smell, or taste the particular figure on the screen that solicits my sensual desire, […] I will reflexively turn toward my own carnal, sensual, and sensible being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality. (Sobchack 2004: 76-77, emphasis mine)

I have emphasised the first words in the above quote because it raises an important point about audience engagement that relates back to my concluding remarks in the previous chapter. Whether or not an audience is engaged by an audiovisual work is contingent on both the intentionality of the audience and the methods implemented by the creator of that work.

In the development of her previous theory, Sobchack adds a certain materiality to what was mostly metaphorical, but whilst both Sobchack and Marks acknowledge the role of multiple senses in the cinematic experience, they focus predominantly on the image, largely ignoring sound, as evident in the above quote in which Sobchack focuses on what is seen and neglects to include hearing and listening in the cross-modal activity of sensible beings.[35] Marks does at least acknowledge a neglect of sound in her work, when she writes:

> Although this book remains largely silent on the question of sound, I find it interesting to note that sound operates on a dialectic similar to that of haptic and optical visuality. […] One might call 'haptic hearing' that usually brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated, before we make the choice of which sounds are the most important to attend to. (Marks 2000: 182-183)

Although Marks uses the term 'haptic hearing' she does not develop it as a concept, which, in the early stages of my research, gave me confidence that I might be able to develop a theory of haptic aurality that incorporated all of the senses and make a significant contribution to knowledge. I was also aware

---

[35] It is worth noting that some of her later work, particularly Sobchack (2005 and 2012), does attend explicitly to sound.

(even before I began the research degree) that Lisa Coulthard had apparently coined the term 'haptic aurality' in 2012, albeit in a very different way to that which I intended. In her journal article she does not cite the work of Marks or Sobchack, but she does offer some interesting thoughts on the role of the senses in the cinematic experience, when she writes: 'Integrated and imbricated, sound and vision in cinema create a space for transsensorial hearing with our eyes and seeing with our ears' (Coulthard 2012: 21). This evokes something similar to Sobchack's 'cinesthetic subject' (Sobchack 2004: 67), but Coulthard arrives at this by drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis (via Slavoj Žižek) and the work of Michel Chion, rather than the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Further, Coulthard's focus is on the reciprocal exchange between just two of the senses – sight and hearing – and only in relation to silence, specifically in the films of Michael Haneke. More recently, however, other theorists have produced work that significantly attends to notions of haptic aurality or haptic listening and I will touch on their work below.

At this point it is worth briefly mentioning a few other theorists who have built on the work of Sobchack and Marks.[36] In her book *The Tactile Eye*, Jennifer M. Barker journeys deeper into the field of cinematic embodiment to explore not just the skin, but also the muscular and visceral layers of the human body and how they relate to the filmic body. In regard to the particular ways in which the human body enacts a tactile cinematic experience, Barker theorises that it happens

> haptically, at the tender surface of the body; kinaesthetically and muscularly, in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and bones that reach toward and through cinematic space; and viscerally, in the murky recesses of the body, where hearts, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhythms of cinema. (Barker 2009: 3)

---

[36] There are many other theorists whose work I have chosen not to discuss because, whilst related to the field of cinematic embodiment, I consider them to be operating outside the scope of this project. They include: Martine Beugnet (2007), Elene del Río (2008), Steven Shaviro (1993, 2010), Carl Plantinga (2009), Gabrielle A. Hezekiah (2010), Anne Rutherford (2011), Laura McMahon (2012) and Eugenie Brinkema (2014).

These three layers have a reciprocal, corresponding attitude in the film's body and Barker believes this equally intimate behaviour is displayed

> haptically, at the screen's surface, with the caress of shimmering nitrate and the scratch of dust and fiber on celluloid; kinaesthetically, through the contours of on- and off-screen space and of the bodies, both human and mechanical, that inhabit or escape those spaces; and viscerally, with the film's rush through a projector's gate and the 'breathing' of lenses. (Barker 2009: 3)

Barker states that her main aim is to 'seek out the resonance and reverberation of tactile patterns between the human body and the cinema at these corporeal locales' (Barker 2009: 3). The deliberate choice of words such as 'resonance' and 'reverberation' imply and evoke a direct link with sound. We are offered further suggestion that sound might play a significant role in her analysis, when she writes:

> Close analysis of sound and image will reveal certain patterns of texture, space, and rhythm enacted by films and viewers. Attention to these embodied structures and patterns allows for a sensually formed (and informed) understanding of the ways that meaning and significance emerge in and are articulated through the fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement that occurs between films' and viewer's bodies. (Barker 2009: 4)

Barker's use of the term 'viewer' in the passage above is indicative of the ocularcentrism of her film analyses, although on a few occasions she does offer a sustained engagement with the materiality of the soundtrack. When attending to a particular sequence in Satyajit Ray's *Pather Pachali*, she contends that 'these quick, skittering scratches along a dry surface appeal to us tactilely, visually, and aurally, and they will find their echoes later in the images of rustling leaves, dancing water bugs, and raindrops splashing on lily pads' (Barker 2009: 42). In her acknowledgement of the 'aural' and choosing the word

'echoes' in relation to images, Barker implies that she concurs with Marks that there is indeed a haptic quality to sound. Going further in her analysis of Roman Polanski's *Repulsion*, Barker notices that 'the soundtrack exhibits this unsettling tendency to crack and ooze' (Barker 2009: 48). Despite her insistence on using the word 'viewer' rather than a more aural-inclusive word such as 'audience', Barker does offer some rare moments of solid and detailed description of the ways in which sound and image can work together to evoke a haptic, muscular and visceral experience. One such moment can be found in her use of the phrase 'keenly tactile familiarity' (Barker 2009: 52) which further reminds us that memory is inextricably linked to the senses.

In a journal article entitled 'Cinema as Second Skin', Tarja Laine (2006) takes a slightly different approach to Sobchack and Marks, contending that a crucial missing piece in critical discussions of cinematic embodiment is the discourse around affect.[37] Although Laine's article focuses on the horror film genre, it is pertinent to a discussion of touch and the reciprocity upon which previous theories of cinematic embodiment have been based:

> Emotion is motion—in fact, the Latin root 'emovere' for the word emotion means to move outward—that is experienced as touch; indeed, the semantic kinship between inner feeling and external touching that is found in several languages ('to feel' in English, 'voelen' in Dutch, 'tuntea' in Finnish, 'sentir' in French) points to a reciprocal relationship between emotions and touch. (Laine 2006: 101)

---

[37] I do not wish to imply that Sobchack and Marks completely ignore affect. Sobchack does discuss 'affectivity' (Sobchack 2004: 315, in relation to Mikel Dufrenne). Marks makes multiple use of Deleuze's term 'affection-image' and does refer to affect in relation to fetish objects: 'All fetishes are translations into a material object of some sort of affect' (Marks 2000: 80). In her later work, Marks draws again on Deleuze (as well as Deleuze & Guattari, Bergson, Peirce and Bohm) and discusses the potential for artworks to produce 'affective responses in the audience' (Marks 2002: 213). But in both cases, the lack of overt reference to affect theory is understandable given that both theorists were writing on the cusp of what is considered to be 'the turn to affect'. Barker cites Dufrenne in a similar way to Sobchack, but does not refer to any affect theorists directly, although she does mention other theorists who use affect in film studies, including Laine (2006, who in turn cites Clare Hemmings' 2006 critique of affect). Curiously, Barker quotes/critiques Shaviro without mentioning affect. Barker refers more to emotion, as understood by Sara Ahmed (which as I have stated, is also how I prefer to think of affect), see: (Ahmed 2014: 205-208).

As discussed in my introductory chapter and towards the end of the last chapter, I have chosen to prioritise queer and feminist theorists who understand affect as relational and akin to emotion or feeling, rather than those who define it as autonomous, lacking in intentionality and separate from cognition. Although Laine ultimately perpetuates the neglect of sound in relation to cinematic embodiment, her work is useful for introducing affect into the discussion.[38] Susanna Paasonen agrees with Laine that affect is the missing piece in a phenomenology of cinematic embodiment. Although she works primarily in the field of online pornography, Paasonen introduces ideas which are not only important in the task of reassessing the work of Sobchack, Marks and Barker and their dominant focus on vision and touch, but also helpful in providing possibilities for including sound in the discussion. Paasonen makes no secret that her work has been inspired by Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts*, as well as the work of Marks and Barker. She distinguishes hers from theirs, however, by proposing the concept of 'resonance' as an alternative to 'identification', describing the latter as 'a term that is used in cinema studies as shorthand for moments of being affected but that comes with some psychoanalytical baggage and is less applicable to studies of other media' (Paasonen 2011: 15).[39] Barker's main aim was to 'seek out the resonance and reverberation of tactile patterns between the human body and the cinema at these corporeal locales' (Barker 2009: 3), but her examination of the sound-related aspects implicit in the word resonance was somewhat lacking. For Paasonen, '*resonance* refers to moments and experiences of being moved, touched, and affected by what is tuned to "the right frequency"' (Paasonen 2011: 16, emphasis in original), and she goes slightly further than Barker in acknowledging the ways in which 'sound

---

[38] Laine argues that affect is in the skin and cites Silvan Tomkins without actually defining affect in his terms (or at all - perhaps that would be beyond the scope of a journal article), but rather linking affect to emotion/motion. She also draws on Kristeva, Metz and Lacan, so it is probable that she is thinking about affect through a psychoanalytic lens. Interestingly, Laine's later work (2013, 2015) seems to position her somewhere between a Deleuzian understanding of affect and a cognitivist approach such as that of Plantinga (2009). Laine also takes a formalist approach that would align her with the work of Rutherford (2011) and Brinkema (2014).

[39] Paasonen acknowledges the debate around affect studies and cites Hemmings (2006). She cites Spinoza when defining how she uses 'resonance' (Paasonen 2011: 17), a term that she borrows from Suzan Kozel (2007). Paasonen's understanding of affect is most aligned with Sara Ahmed (2014), working in and with a phenomenological framework (as Sobchack and Kozel also do). Paasonen also draws on Karen Barad's notion of 'a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations' (Barad 2007: 35) as a way to fuse together different strands of critical thought around affect.

intensifies the sense of proximity and immediacy, bringing the viewer close'
(Paasonen 2011: 79). Paasonen uses the term resonance 'to unravel the
material and visceral sensations that are caused by encounters with
pornography. Resonance is carnal by definition, and the sensations and
vibrations that it entails are not necessarily easy to articulate or translate into
language' (Paasonen 2011: 17). She also contends that affect is 'visceral,
multisensory, and untranslatable' (Paasonen 2011: 205). This shift into the
primal realm of the viscera seems to align Paasonen more with the work of
Barker than Sobchack, but there are strong connections with Marks' work too.
Paasonen draws on Henri Bergson's work in *Matter and Memory* in a similar
way that Marks has done, to develop the notion of 'somatic archives or
reservoirs,' the notion of which 'comes close to that of kinesthetic empathy—
that is, feeling sensations in one's body that are similar to those watched on the
screen or in front of oneself' (Paasonen 2011: 202). She goes on to clarify that
'sensation and perception are closely tied together, and they involve movement
between and within bodies […] shaped by historically layered skills,
experiences, and sensations that bring forth particular ways of relating to other
bodies and reverberating with them' (Paasonen 2011: 202). This feels akin to
Marks' understanding of the ways in which sense memories are implicated in
the relationship between the filmic body and the body of the audience, that 'all
the senses may be vehicles of memory, and that bodies encode memory in the
senses in quite varied ways […] All sense perceptions allow for, and indeed
require, the mediation of memory' (Marks 2000: 201-202). This returns us to a
point that I raised at the end of the last chapter in relation to affect and the
relationship between memory and representation. Felicity Callard and
Constantina Papoulias contend that 'the turn to affect can also be seen as a
turn to memory—as long as such memory is understood as embodied and
nonrepresentational' (Callard and Papoulias 2010: 247). This not only
resonates with the discussion of sense memories above but has implications for
the notion of subjectivity, particularly when they go on to describe this form of
memory as 'an implicit or procedural memory, subsisting as the embodiment of
patterns of excitation that construct our sense of self. [...] It promises an
engagement with the living present and a break with the tyranny of
representational memory' (Callard and Papoulias 2010: 247-248). This will

become more relevant shortly when I discuss Jenny Chamarette's thoughts on embodied, sensory experience and temporality, specifically in relation to cinematic subjectivity.

As I mentioned above, the subject of the haptic in relation to sound and listening has recently become an area of interest to a number of academics. In a significant turn of events, two other theorists' work came to my attention in the same month that I presented my research on the topic.[40] Three days before I was due to give a presentation at a conference, I attended another conference at which artist and academic Tim Meacham discussed the possibility of haptic listening in relation to his sound installation.[41] The day after this conference (two days before my own presentation), a colleague sent me a link to an article by academic and artist Irina Leimbacher, which (although dated 2017) had been published on the Project Muse website the week before.[42] In the article, Leimbacher uses the term haptic listening (and briefly mentions haptic aurality) in relation to the documentary film genre and she pays particular attention to voice.[43] The revelation that I would not be able to lay claim to the coinage of the concept of haptic aurality came at an opportune time in my research journey. It provided me with an opportunity to reconfigure my methodology from what was a very theory-led process to something that began to take the shape of what could eventually be considered as practice-based. I will elaborate on my understanding of the distinction between theory-led practice and practice-based research in subsequent chapters.[44]

---

[40] My presentation entitled 'Affect and Resonance: Moving Towards a Theory of Haptic Aurality' took place on 11 January 2018. See p.21 of this PDF: http://www.techne.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/206606/TECHNE-Congress-January-2018-Programme.pdf. (Accessed: 24 July 2019).

[41] See p17 of the conference programme, a PDF of which is available here: https://issuu.com/jenniferlucyallan/docs/loma2018_programme-issu. (Accessed: 24 July 2019). I have subsequently learned that Meacham presented the same paper at a symposium in April 2017.

[42] See 'Additional Information': https://muse.jhu.edu/article/682916#info_wrap. (Accessed: 24 July 2019). Thanks to Irene Revell for bringing this article to my attention.

[43] Leimbacher notes that she only discovered Tarja Laine's 2012 article which uses of the term 'haptic aurality', after she had written her own article. (Leimbacher 2017: 317, n.31).

[44] See also: Candy and Edmonds (2018).

Leimbacher's article offers yet more building blocks for the framework that I am formulating in this chapter, particularly when she argues:

> If haptic visuality pushes our looking to the surface of images, haptic listening pushes our listening to the surfaces of sound and the non-semantic qualities of vocalized speech. It encourages us to engage ear to mouth and mouth to ear, as one human body listening to, resonating with, another. (Leimbacher 2017: 299)

This not only evokes the use of 'resonance' in the work of Barker and Passonen, but when Leimbacher examines the ways in which 'vocal qualities trigger emotions and associations, both cultural and autobiographical' by engaging the listener 'aesthetically and affectively' (Leimbacher 2017: 298), it can be appreciated as to how voice (and other sounds) might also be implicated in Marks' understanding of sense memories.

On the subject of voice, Adriana Cavarero offers a consideration of embodied hearing that recognises the reciprocal relationship between listening and voice, explaining that:

> The sense of hearing, characterized as it is by organs that are internalized by highly sensitive passageways in the head, has its natural referent in a voice that also comes from internal passageways: the mouth, the throat, the network of the lungs. The play between vocal emission and acoustic perception necessarily involves the internal organs. It implicates a correspondence with the fleshy cavity that alludes to the deep body, the most bodily part of the body. The impalpability of sonorous vibrations, which is as colorless as the air, comes out of a wet mouth and arises from the red of the flesh. (Cavarero 2005: 4)

This highly evocative passage highlights the missed opportunities for Barker to include sound in her discussion of the visceral parts of the body and their relationship to cinematic embodiment. It also introduces the idea that not only do we need to consider the effects of externally experienced sounds on the

deepest parts of the body, but when it comes to the voice, we cannot forget that these sounds are emitted by bodies as well (although not always, as I will explore in Chapter Four in relation to the digital voice).

Building on the work of Sobchack and Marks, as well as the more recent work of Beugnet and Barker, Jenny Chamarette offers this consideration of time and subjectivity in relation to the audiovisual experience:

> Time is a condition of possibility for subjectivity, but subjectivity is also a condition of possibility for forms of time. Subjectivity is the condition under which time becomes decipherable and comprehensible to us as anything other than a ceaseless flux: effectively, subjectivity (or inter- or intra-subjectivity) is a condition for there to be a temporality of sensory experience. (Chamarette 2012: 24)

Given that sense memories help our bodies make sense of the present moment, or in other words, help us understand our somatic *presence* in the world, Chamarette's thoughts are useful in extrapolating this to an intersubjective, embodied encounter with audiovisual work, particularly when she offers that

> thinking presence, or the cinematic moment, allows us to produce a phenomenological account of what subjectivity in a specifically *cinematic* mode might be, at the moment of the phenomenon of film experience […and] lends itself to thinking the between-spaces of embodied relations between spectators and film-objects (or indeed film-subjects). (Chamarette 2012: 38, emphasis in original)

The 'between-spaces' about which Chamarette writes feel similar to what Barker describes as 'a liminal space in which film and viewer can emerge as co-constituted, individualized but related, embodied entities' (Barker 2009: 12), which gestures towards the possibility of a shared subjectivity between the audiovisual work and the audience. This kind of liminal space will become

increasingly important as this thesis progresses, particularly in relation to the emergence and formation of collective subjectivities.

I feel that it is time to take stock of what I have discussed above, before attending specifically to the audiovisual works in this chapter. If we recall once again the filter analogy that I used to describe my methodology in my introductory chapter, I might ask: what is this chapter's 'sub-filter' composed of and how can I apply it to my analyses of these works? Aside from directing our temporal attention towards the embodied present, what these theorists offer is a way to bring the metaphorical body of an audiovisual work, along with all its materiality (not just image, but sound and the sometimes visceral origins of sound, in the case of voice) into a dialogue with the material body of the audience. What happens during that encounter, or what emerges from the liminal space in-between these bodies, is what I am interested in. Memory is an important factor to consider (along with sense memories) in relation to this engagement, which inevitably implicates other temporalities alongside the present moment. It is a negotiation that acknowledges the histories and memories of our own subjectively-lived experiences, as well as the histories (which might be considered as memories) of the technologies that have enabled the artworks with which we are engaging, all in the present moment of the intersubjective encounter. Further, this negotiation must also consider the histories and memories of the creators of the artworks. The theoretical sub-filter that I hope to apply in this chapter creates a haptic connection between artist, artwork and audience. During my analyses below, I will not only make further connections to the theoretical work discussed above, but I will also introduce writing by Davina Quinlivan (2012, 2015), Lisa Robertson (2012) and some more recent work from Carolyn Dinshaw (2012), whose early book was important to my previous chapter.

Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda (2017) slows down time – literally to a snail's pace.[45] As we follow the snail on their exploratory journey we hear (perhaps as they hear) unexpected sounds that reconfigure our understanding of the

---

[45] Hereafter referred to as *PMG*.

creature beyond the other-than-human subjectivity of a snail. Three very different aural environments were designed to evoke the senses of taste, touch and smell (respectively, in each of the three sections). I will elaborate on each section separately below, pausing between each to reflect on the work of other artists whose work shares similar themes or formal elements, before slowly meandering back to my film. *PMG* is an audiovisual experiment, a direct response to theoretical research in the field of cinematic embodiment such as those discussed above, and a deliberate exploration of how ideas around the haptic, embodiment and sense memories might intersect with critical theory in the field of sound studies.

I chose the snail because they are an interesting example of corporeality that embodies all of the senses: they rely mostly on their olfactory and gustatory systems, as well as their sense of touch. They can see, but not very well, and although they cannot technically hear, they feel sound waves through their flesh, which resonate deep inside their body. They also disrupt a binary understanding of sex (and by implication, gender and sexuality), as most snails have both male and female reproductive organs, which, in the context of this filmic analysis, offers a way to complicate notions of identity and subjectivity.[46] All of this gave me much to explore in relation to an 'understanding of the ways that meaning and significance emerge in and are articulated through the fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement that occurs between films' and viewer's bodies' (Barker 2009: 4). Especially when we consider that 'the sound that penetrates through the ear propagates throughout the entire body something of its effects, which could not be said to occur in the same way with the visual signal' (Nancy 2007: 14). I chose sounds for the snail (sourced mostly from online sound libraries) that I felt had a range of haptic qualities to them, bolstered by the affirmation that 'haptic images encourage the "viewer" to get close to the image and explore it through all of the senses, including touch, smell, and taste' (Marks 2002: 118). I chose sounds that, for me at least, felt like they fitted into these three categories of touch, taste and smell. I then

---

[46] I do not wish to conflate biological sex (and the wide spectrum of chromosomal variation evident in human biology) with gender and sexuality (both of which also operate along a spectrum). I understand all three of these concepts as fluid, but separate.

broadened this idea to attend to other elements within the frame: a blade of grass, a drop of dew, among other things, assigning sounds to these objects and making subtle adjustments to their spatiality by panning their associated sounds slightly left or right, depending on where they were located within the frame. The film is designed to play on a loop, perhaps in a gallery context, which in the latter respect, further aligns it with the other two artworks that I will be discussing in this chapter.

The first section of *PMG* begins with a colour-block screen of bright, almost fluorescent green. The colour transitions that occur between each section slowly morph from a colour selected from the end of the previous scene (using an 'eye-dropper' tool in the editing process) into a colour selected from a frame in the beginning of the subsequent scene and I have treated the soundtrack in a similar way. Therefore, the colour that we see at the beginning of the film (along with the sounds of wind and birdsong, to which I will return in due course) is partly informed by the final frame of the film, although perhaps nothing is final given that it is designed to be looped. Marks argues that colour can reveal 'the ways our experience is always synesthetic, always a mingling of our senses with one another and of ourselves with the world' (Marks 2000: 213-214), particularly in the ways that it can engage our other sense memories. But can sound operate in a similar way? If it can, the experience will be different for each of us and will be informed by our individual, cultural and personal histories. Therefore, my analyses that follow can only be informed by my own subjectively-felt experience. But perhaps the colour-block transitions can be considered as akin to (or an extension of) the liminal space between the film and audience, a method of inviting the audience to contemplate the intersubjective encounter. The transitions pull together both aural and visual elements from each of the three sections, reaching forwards and backwards through the temporality of the work to create a haptic connection. This does not serve the same function as a simple cross dissolve or fade-to-black, but rather this method exposes the materiality of the work, encouraging the audience to consider the process involved in the construction of the work itself.

I find it important to note at this point that although the sounds I have used in

this film *perform* an illusion of diegetic, synchronous sound, they are actually all asynchronous and this asynchrony becomes intensified during the colour-block transitions between each scene, when disparate sounds from two different scenes merge without any visual referent to help the audience generate meaning. We might be reminded here of the oft-quoted 1928 statement by Russian filmmakers Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, in which they berate the invention of sync-sound and argue that 'only a contrapuntal [in other words, asynchronous] use of sound in relation to the visual montage piece will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection' (reprinted in Weis and Belton 1985: 83-85). I am by no means claiming perfection, but I like to think that I am exploring the potentiality through this experiment.

Asynchrony also relates to time, and I find Carolyn Dinshaw's theorisation of this term in relation to queer temporality helpful when she argues that 'asynchrony interrupts and perturbs the hoped-for wholeness of the present day, splits, upsets, queers the *now*' (Dinshaw 2012: 63, emphasis in original). Given that this chapter's temporal attention is concerned with the notion of the embodied present, this opens up the possibilities of thinking about *PMG* as a piece of queer haptic cinema. I am not suggesting that the content of the work is overtly queer (aside from the fact the it was made by a queer artist), but just as a queer phenomenology can 'function as a disorientation device […], allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world' (Ahmed 2006: 172), these disruptive moments of audiovisual asynchrony might offer a way to consider the queer potential of a haptic aurality. As Davina Quinlivan argues in her analysis of the experimental work of Derek Jarman and Isaac Julien, 'the queer dimensions of haptic enquiry require further investigation, especially the involvement of sound in the configuration of such "queer haptics"' (Quinlivan 2015: 66).

The sounds in the first section of *PMG* are intended to invoke the sense of taste. Initially, we hear aural evidence of mastication, but it is unclear whether the source of that sound is human or not. By the time we are offered a visual cue, thereby inviting the audience to believe that the snail is making the chewing sound, another sound is introduced: a creaking, sometimes squeaky

sound of hard ice being crushed under foot. Given that we are not presented with any visual evidence to corroborate my claim that it is ice, it is understandable to assume that the source of the sound is the snail's soft undercarriage gliding along the thick blade of grass. Another blade of grass to the left of frame wobbles, accompanied by a gentle sound of rhythmic vibration. The snail suddenly loses their balance, emitting an alarming 'gurgle' sound before regaining their composure and continuing on their journey. The hard sound of ice is consumed by a softer, wetter, more enveloping sound: warm spaghetti being stirred in a pot. The visuals cut to a deep green colour selected from a blade of wet grass and slowly morph into the next scene. The spaghetti sound slowly fades into the sound of creaking leather, but wait… I need to pause for just a moment at this mid-way point in the colour-block transition. The screen glows like English mustard, I can almost taste it and it burns my nostrils, which implicates my sense of smell too. This invites the question of whether it is even possible to target just one isolated sense organ in the audiovisual experience. Especially when Marks offers:

> Audiovisual images call up conscious, unconscious, and nonsymbolic associations with touch, taste, and smell, which themselves are not experienced as separate. Each image is synthesized by a body that does not necessarily divide perceptions into different sense modalities. (Marks 2000: 222)

There are a number of moments in Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* during which a colour-block screen is used as a transition. I was struck by these similarities when I saw Prodger's work at the Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain in London on 14 December 2018. In my previous chapter I discussed this work in relation to deep-time geology and its associated mythology, and the dialogue in the film was a crucial element of that discussion. But there are a number of sequences in Prodger's work that have no dialogue at all. They slowly unfold in a meditative, contemplative manner, invoking the slow, sedentary experience that the artist was forced to endure during her recovery from surgery. Sometimes these colour-block transitions are used in a disruptive way. During one particular sequence, directly after a long section of dialogue in which

Prodger describes her early years working in an old people's home, the visuals depict a beautiful forest with accompanying sounds of birds tweeting, punctuated intermittently by a woodpecker hammering its beak into a tree. At the 06:10 mark, the screen cuts to black and for more than thirty seconds we continue to hear the birdsong and the action of the woodpecker. This is disrupted suddenly by a bright red screen and loud 'test tone' noise, lasting only four seconds, during which time we still hear the birds. Then it cuts back to a black screen, devoid of any other sounds. What comes next is a long section in which Prodger's voiceover describes the process of being anaesthetised (a later part of which I discussed in my previous chapter), whilst the black screen very gradually fades up from black, slowly morphing through a spectrum of dark brown to lighter brown, and slowly, over the course of almost two minutes, the screen eventually arrives at a bright mustard-like colour. This transition reinforces the slow, contemplative sense of temporality and curiously functions in contrast to what we are hearing about slipping out of consciousness. A visual reversal of the aural, an awakening that alerts us to the haptic sensation of being pulled under. This transition functions in a similar way to the colour-block transitions in *PMG*, it creates a tension between the material elements of the visual and the aural and opens up the possibility for the audience to consider the liminal space.

The two transitions described above are seemingly done in post-production, but there is another moment (or rather, a series of small moments) much later in the film in which Prodger creates a transition that I would describe as embodied, haptic and visceral. At the 20:51 mark, the screen once again cuts to black and we hear Prodger's voice speak three iterations of Allucquère Rosanne Stone's name. Then a Scottish voiceover begins to quote from Stone's 1996 book, during which time the black screen cuts to bright red and synthesised music is introduced. After the Scottish voiceover is finished, the music's volume increases and it is possible to notice some subtle movement in the red colour-block screen: gradual changes, shapes shifting in an organic, not-quite-digital manner that feels somewhat disconcerting. This lasts almost forty seconds before it is revealed that Prodger's finger has been obscuring the lens of her iPhone camera and the red screen was caused by light illuminating the blood in

her finger, through her skin – the flow of blood being the most likely cause of the tiny but discernible movements across the red screen. Over the course of the subsequent almost two-and-a-half minutes, Prodger's finger caresses the lens multiple times as her camera lingers on her laptop screen, at times focusing on the minute detail of dust and dried liquid stains on the screen, at other times offering the reflected image of Prodger's fingers holding her iPhone. This returns us to my concluding remarks in the previous chapter as to what might happen during the intersubjective encounter between audience and artwork when the artist's process is revealed. This is an overtly haptic sequence, imbued with the artist's queer subjectivity, and for these reasons I believe it can be considered as an example of 'how "queer" cinema might *feel*' (Quinlivan 2015: 68, emphasis mine), it reaches through the liminal space and welcomes the audience into a reciprocal moment of touching.

The sense of touch is what I have attempted to invoke through my choice of sounds in the second section of *PMG*. As mentioned earlier, we hear the sound of dry, creaking leather during the transition from green, via mustard, to a light-brown colour selected from the snail's shell. We re-join the creature on the next stage of their journey and as they glide across a leaf they reach out with their tentacles (which actually contain their small eyes) and the movement of the leather becomes audibly constrained, helping to build a sense of tension in the scene. As the snail's shell touches a blade of grass, a new sonic element is introduced: the grating, metallic sound of a knife being sharpened, which adds further to the tense anticipation of what is to come. Both the leather and the knife sounds become amplified as the blade of grass scrapes across the shell, eventually climaxing in a loud splash as the snail collects a droplet of dew on top of their shell. The sounds of leather and knives have been silenced, replaced by a creeping, uncomfortable sound akin to the feeling of nails scraping down a blackboard. It is the sound of a screw being turned, slowly, deeply into a plank of wood by a screwdriver, which draws attention to (the tension of) the long strand of mucous that the snail is leaving in their wake. The abrasive, sometimes violent sounds in this scene not only create a tense juxtaposition against the calm visuals, but they also reach through the liminal, in-between space and pull the audience towards the screen, before it cuts to

mustard once again. I will pause once again at this colour block transition and turn my attention to my next artist's work, which creates a similar tension through its use of haptic sound.

Mikhail Karikis' *No Ordinary Protest* (2018) explores the relationship between sound and the sense of touch through deliberately haptic methods.[47] Although the work is less than eight minutes in duration, it has been informed by nine months of collaborative engagement between the artist and a group of students from Mayflower Primary School in East London, all between seven and eight years of age. During the first four months of this collaboration Karikis visited the school twice a week, just to observe. The children were reading Ted Hughes' 1968 science fiction novel *The Iron Man*, which inspired Karikis to do further research which led him to Hughes' 1993 sequel to that novel, *The Iron Woman*. Many themes in the novel resonated with Karikis' intentions for his project, as well as the subject matter of his previous work. In particular, the motif of a woman as the figure of an ecofeminist, anti-capitalist hero who empowers children – giving them a louder voice to fight for social and environmental justice, when they would ordinarily be left unheard. The character of the Iron Woman hears the screams of pain and anguish of every creature on earth, sounds of the suffering inflicted upon them by the effects of environmental damage caused by humans. This 'noise' that she hears is another important motif in the story and she transmits the ability to hear this noise to a young girl, through the power of touch. Karikis invited the school children to reflect upon and engage with these themes through a series of workshops and group conversations. They were asked to consider the moment in the book when the Iron Woman passes the noise through touch and to imagine what that noise might sound like. The subsequent workshops included generating sound using musical instruments, toys, voice, clapping and cymatic experiments, as well as mask-making.[48] The results of these workshops provide most of the audiovisual

---

[47] The work was installed at The Whitechapel Gallery, London from 18 August 2018 until 6 January 2019. For more information, see: https://www.fvu.co.uk/projects/no-ordinary-protest (Accessed: 17 April 2019).
[48] Cymatic experiments involve the study of the visible effects of sound and vibration on inorganic matter. For more details, see:
https://www.cymascope.com/cyma_research/history.html. (Accessed: 17 January 2019).

material for the film. Karikis has made a work that is all about the process of making the work itself. It reveals the material processes and practices of engagement more than any of the other artworks that I have discussed thus far.

In the opening scene of the film we see the children in class with their eyes closed. In addition to the ambient sound of the room, the soundtrack includes a repetitive, atmospheric, agitative drone which begins quietly and gradually increases in volume. Then we hear the children speak:

> She hears noises.
> It's the cries of the creatures.
> Where are they?
> Everywhere.
> What happened?
> Grown-ups poisoned everything.
> And the children?
> She gave them the power of the noise…
> She gave them information…
> The disease!
> What do you call it?
> Noise.

The volume of the non-diegetic sounds increases as the film cuts to black, carrying us through to a sequence of close-up shots of the cymatic experiments in which sound waves vibrate metal plates upon which are mounds of salt. The vibrations cause the salt to form patterns that evoke various landscapes: hills, mountains and shorelines; ocean waves gently lapping and violently crashing; volcanic lava flowing and exploding from the earth; ash raining down from the sky. The soundtrack becomes explosive too, a cacophony comprised of musical instruments and synthetic sounds, all in a mid-to-high frequency range designed to have an affective impact on the listener's skin. As we slowly drift into the next scene, we are left only with the sound of the children playing xylophones (followed soon after by the accompanying imagery), which is then subsumed by high-pitched noises (and images) of the children squeezing

squeaky toys. What follows is a discussion by the children, which ranges from ethical and environmental issues (questioning why humans are poisoning the earth and its inhabitants), to ontological questions pertaining to whether or not humans can be classified as animals. Whilst the dialogue in the opening sequence comes across as somewhat scripted, this later discussion feels candid and articulated very much in their own words. The scene ends with a response to our current predicament, when one boy states, "There's only one answer and everyone knows it", before the screen cuts to black. This moment invites the audience to think about what that answer might be, without offering an obvious solution. From this point on, the soundtrack expands from the realm of the treble to incorporate the bass, initiated by the children playing a listening/clapping game in which they sit with their eyes closed and only clap after they hear the person next to them clap. The clapping becomes deeper and is joined not only by the aforementioned agitative drone that is felt on the skin, but also by lower frequency sounds that rumble through the viscera, before a thunderous cut to a shot of the children facing the camera wearing masks decorated with fluorescent paint which glows under neon blacklight. A subsequent, brief discussion by the children about noise segues into a sequence of scenes in which we hear the children chanting (musically, but without words), then they shout in unison: "JUSTICE! CREATURES! POWER! ACTION!" as images of them wearing monstrous head-pieces (constructed during the aforementioned mask-making workshops) are super-imposed over the cymatic landscape. The soundtrack grows even more cacophonous than before, spreading across the full frequency spectrum as the children lurch in slow-motion towards the camera, glowing in their painted masks, their movements emulating the creatures they hope to protect. They are ready to transmit the power of sound, through the moment of touch, so that we can hear and feel the suffering of all the creatures on earth. These audiovisual elements – the deliberate slowing down of time; the amplification of noise; the sense of touch and its association with the present moment – emphasise the relationship between noise and time. They also invite a connection to the prose of Lisa Robertson (2012) who, in her book *Nilling*, offers that noise 'suspends itself: a thick and tactile curtain, a temporal fabric composed of tiny sub-cognitive movements that function below the spectrum of recognition and outside the

range of rational signification, but not outside of time' (Robertson 2012: 63). There is a welcome ambiguity throughout much of the film, which at times verges on abstraction. Admittedly, the abstract notion that (the ability to hear) sound can be transmitted through touch (which forms the premise of Hughes' story), lends itself to more experimental methods. I would also argue, however, that by explicitly foregrounding themes and audiovisual elements that engage the audience haptically and viscerally, where they can be 'immersed in a sonic subjectivity, more felt than heard' (Voegelin 2010: 67) – whilst leaving narrative elements ambiguous and open to interpretation – meaning can be 'felt', sensed by the bodies of the audience as well as the artwork. It emerges from the liminal space during the intersubjective encounter.

During their collaboration with Karikis, the children expressed an understanding of the relationship between the real and the imagined as something that is very fluid. The work deliberately conveys the oscillation between reality and the imaginary in very material ways. Their 'sonic imaginary' has helped to generate sounds that comprise the soundtrack of the film, informed by their interpretation of the concept of noise. The masks that they have created, combined with their bodily movements when wearing them, emphasises this in visual terms. Karikis has spoken about his belief that communal listening and communal action can lead to social change and this can be considered as a response to the young boy's statement that 'there's only one answer and everyone knows it'.[49] The ecofeminist subjectivity of *The Iron Woman* is embodied within the work, but it shifts somewhat to the background, allowing the agency and subjectivity of the children to emerge, thereby amplifying their collective voice. In reminding us of the urgency of the present moment and the impending environmental catastrophe, they also remind us that they are the voices of the future.

In addition to their speaking (and shouting) voices, there are the moments when the children also perform non-linguistic vocal chanting, which invites a haptic form of listening that 'gives precedence to the sensory perception and affective

[49] Karikis discusses the work and his process here: https://soundcloud.com/film-and-video-umbrella/artist-talk-mikhail-karikis-in-conversation-with-ella-finer-jen-harvie-and-benjamin-jones (Accessed: 4 April 2019).

reception of voice over linguistic meaning' (Leimbacher 2017: 299) and further enhances (and embraces) the ambiguity. These aspects of the work take the exploration of the haptic beyond its obvious associations to touch and connect it to the voice, which as I have discussed earlier has deeper connections to the more visceral parts of the body. Karikis' work therefore takes us further towards a consideration of haptic aurality through the notion that the children (both those in Karikis' film and those in Hughes' book) not only have the power of voice, but they have the power of listening, to be able to hear and feel the sound of all creatures suffering on the earth. They gained this power through haptic means, therefore they embody a form of haptic aurality. But can the notion of the haptic reach beyond its long association with the sense of touch? If we are to consider it, as we have done, in relation to listening and the visceral parts of the body, then we need to engage more of the senses.

The sounds in the third section of *PMG* are intended to invoke the sense of smell, which was always going to be difficult, especially given these thoughts from Laura Marks in her later book *Touch*:

> Film cannot stimulate the precise memories associated with a smell: only the presence of the smell itself can call them up. Yet a haptic image asks memory to draw on other associations […and…] because haptic images locate vision in the body, they make vision behave more like a contact sense, such as touch or smell. (Marks 2002: 133)

Once again, Marks' dominant focus on vision invites a consideration of how this might be extended to include sound. If haptic imagery invites the sense memories needed for this behaviour, then surely haptic sounds could serve to amplify the sensation. Given that our main olfactory organ is also implicated in our breathing, there is more to explore in this section of *PMG* than just the sense of smell. As the snail (still carrying the dewdrop on top of their shell) continues on their journey, the sounds are deliberately simple, but exert a lot of pressure. I opted for the sound of wind in the trees and birds tweeting, which both offer a disturbing atmosphere to the scene: disturbing in relation to the former because we see no evidence of wind as the blades of grass remain still;

and to the latter because of the threat that birds might have on the life of our intrepid explorer. I bookended this section with a playful 'inhale' and 'exhale'. These two moments of breath serve to anthropomorphise the creature and further complicate the relationship between the snail and the audience. It is upon the subject of breath that I will now concentrate my attention.

'As breathing or seeing is for us', writes Sobchack, 'so this visual introception and its commutation to visible projection is to the cinema' (Sobchack 1992: 208). This analogy between our breathing, seeing bodies and the cinematic body finds an echo in Barker's writing, when she discusses 'the "breathing" of lenses' (Barker 2009: 3) in relation to technical body of cinema. The focus of these discussions, however, remained firmly in the visual domain. In her book *The Place of Breath in Cinema*, Davina Quinlivan infuses Marks' theory of haptic visuality with a much-needed aural element to propose the notion of a 'breathing visuality' which (inspired by the philosophy of Luce Irigaray and Roland Barthes) not only considers 'co-existences between our breathing bodies and those on screen, it also draws attention to the potentially inter-subjective nature of viewing, *as well as hearing*, bodies that breathe' (Quinlivan 2012: 126, emphasis mine). This helps to flesh out the intersubjective encounter between the snail and the audience, especially when Quinlivan goes on to argue that

> the sound of breathing creates another dimension of the lived body on screen for the viewer; it lends itself a volume and shape, a hapticity, through its suggestion of a human physicality that can almost be felt and touched. […] This embodied encounter between [onscreen] breathing and my own body is precisely intersubjective in so far as it provokes me to think about and feel my own breath through what is audible on screen. (Quinlivan 2012: 140)

The two moments of breath that bookend the third section of *PMG* are enhanced by the sound of wind and together they give voluminous form to the filmic body. Further, by anthropomorphising the creature, a potentially queer subjectivity emerges, that might be considered in relation to Quinlivan's later

work, when she suggests that 'the audio-visual evocation of breathing in film might also be queer, since it is unsettling; it creates "queer moments" and disturbs our perception of bodies […and] might offer a different kind of haptics which also emphasises the queer dimensions' (Quinlivan 2015: 70).

This unsettling notion of breathing is also a feature worthy of discussion in *BRIDGIT*. In relation to her creative process, Prodger has noted that 'systems of the body are enmeshed with the camera. It's a kind of symbiosis, but also a kind of grappling' (Tate 2018: 1:38-1:45). Whilst we might consider the aforementioned finger-caressing-the-lens technique as a kind of 'grappling', there are a number of sequences in the work where the 'symbiosis' is evident, particularly when the camera gently rises and falls with the movement of Prodger's breath as her iPhone rests upon her body. This occurs initially over the course of the opening two-and-a-half minutes of the film during which Prodger is clearly lying on a sofa, legs elevated, her jeans and trainers taking up a significant part of the frame. We intermittently hear the radio as well as Prodger's voiceover describing (in deliberately ambiguous terms) her experience of being prepared for surgery. The second scene in which the breathing camera-motion occurs is towards the end of the film, around the 29:30 mark. We see a door and a t-shirt drying on a radiator, with music playing in the background. Then Prodger's voiceover explains that the 3D animator who made the grid (that is used as an overlay in the final scene of the film) is also a recovery nurse and he has shared stories that echo Prodger's experience of waking up from a general anaesthetic. As the camera moves up and down, we glimpse a socked foot, only partially visible as it pokes out from underneath a duvet, offering evidence that Prodger is lying in bed. These two scenes offer a visual, inaudible use of breath that implicates the filmic body and draws attention to the fact that Prodger is recovering from major surgery. Through the gentle respiratory movement of the camera, I feel the boredom and frustration – and the hope of a full recovery – that Prodger must feel. This hope can also be considered as an aspiration and allows for me to begin to draw this chapter to a close with a quote that not only connects to the theme of breath, but resonates with my foregrounding of Prodger's queer subjectivity in the previous chapter,

specifically the moments in the film in which her body, gender and sexuality were subjected to intense scrutiny.

> We could remember that the Latin root of the word *aspiration* means "to breathe." I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. Having space to breathe, or being able to breathe freely, […] is an aspiration. With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe. (Ahmed 2010: 120, emphasis in original)

Prodger's work also opens up exciting possibilities and aspirations for the future of queer art; to have the freedom to breathe.

My analyses in this chapter reveal experimental methods that, just as in the previous chapter, defy genre classification. What is perhaps more evident here than in the previous chapter is the deliberate foregrounding of the material processes involved in constructing the artworks. Prodger's overtly haptic technique of using her finger to create colour-block transitions and revealing her own reflection in her dusty laptop screen, disrupts what we have come to expect from audiovisual work. If that touching was not intimate enough, her symbiotic connection to her camera – allowing it to rise and fall with the movement of her breath – draws the audience into the embodied moment, inviting us to feel the pain and frustration of her slow process of recovery. Likewise, Karikis' decision to document the nine-month collaboration with the children and foreground that process within the work is an experimental method in itself. When combined with the experimentation of deliberately haptic techniques that implicate voice, noise and embodied listening, Karikis' work helps to develop the notion of a haptic aurality through a material practice. My own experimental methods use asynchronous sound in an attempt to push the notion of the haptic beyond its association simply with touch to consider the senses of taste and (through the notion of breath) smell as well. The combination of sound with the colour-block transitions offers a way to consider the liminal space of the intersubjective encounter, creating a material tension between the body of the film and the

body of the audience. Although I cannot claim that the accomplishments of my short film are at the same level of the other two artists' work, I do feel that this deliberate experiment has proven itself as a valuable device, allowing me to open up connections to the other artworks that would otherwise remain unexplored. I therefore feel that is has justified itself as an artifact of practice-based research and earned its place alongside the other artworks. As Candy and Edmonds argue, 'artifacts that practitioners create are an integral part of practice and, within PhD research, the making process provides opportunities for exploration, reflection and evaluation' (Candy and Edmonds 2018: 66). However, they also recognise that 'the point of the artifact can be to enable an experiment, and it can be rather intangible' (Candy and Edmonds 2018: 66). My experimentation with sound and colour-block screen in *PMG* allowed for further, related experimentation in my subsequent piece of creative practice and this will be explored further in the next chapter.

Whilst the previous chapter attended to spectral subjectivities emerging from ancient landscapes, this chapter offers a more intimate, material connection between the bodies of the film and the audience. I argued in the previous chapter that certain methods might invite the audience to generate their own meaning from the work and this chapter provides a space for that to happen – the liminal space created from the intersubjective encounter. When all of the processual elements outlined above are considered not only through the sub-filter constructed from a developed notion of haptic aurality, but also in the temporal context of the embodied present, perhaps this allows for the emergence of a reconfigured subjectivity that connects artwork, artist and audience. One that is more in touch with the senses, open to listening, breathing and feeling, to hearing voices that need to be heard. A form of subjectivity that is not preoccupied by identity and representation, but open to empathy, compassion and motivated towards inspiring collective action. My discussion of the collective power of the children's voices in Karikis' work already gestures towards the notion of a collective subjectivity and this will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter Three
Towards a Theory of Diffractive Listening

This chapter considers time in a much less linear way than the previous two chapters. It deals with multiple temporalities folding back on themselves, reflecting upon histories, communities and personal stories in order to amplify marginalised voices and allow for the emergence of collective subjectivities. It is perhaps akin to the previous chapter in its structure and once again I will spend the first half constructing a theoretical framework which will then be applied to my analyses of the artworks. More specifically, I will propose and develop a notion of 'diffractive listening' which is a form of embodied listening inspired by Donna Haraway's use of diffraction as 'an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world' (Haraway 1997: 16). I will extend this metaphor to include the aural and combine it with recent work around the politics of listening. This will be further contextualised within a discussion of temporality and subjectivity. I approach this via Haraway's concepts of 'embodied vision' and 'situated knowledge', fully embracing the idea of a feminist accountability which 'requires a knowledge tuned to resonance, not to dichotomy' (Haraway 1991: 194). These thoughts are reinforced by Estelle Barrett and helpful for situating this thesis in relation to practice-based arts research, particularly when she explains that embodied vision 'links experience, practice and theory to produce situated knowledge, knowledge that operates *in relation* to established knowledge and thus has the capacity to extend or alter what is known' (Barrett 2010: 145, emphasis in original). This relational thinking informs my development of diffractive listening practices as something that pertains to artist, artwork and audience, recognising the importance of partiality and listening for 'the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible' (Haraway 1991: 196). This also resonates with Sara Ahmed's acknowledgment that 'my hands cannot be impartial. […] Impartial hands would leave too much untouched' (Ahmed 2014b: 18). This will provide a foundation for a framework to analyse artworks (and artistic processes) which are intent on listening to and amplifying the voices of those who have historically been marginalised and silenced; specifically works by artists Clio Barnard and Evan Ifekoya, as well as one of my own audiovisual experiments. The relationship

between haptic listening and voice – which was an important aspect of my discussion of Mikhail Karikis' *No Ordinary Protest* in the previous chapter – will be amplified here, particularly in relation to Barnard and Ifekoya's work. Crucial to my development of this framework will be recent work around the ethics and politics of listening by Lisbeth Lipari (2014). During my analyses of my own work and Barnard's work I will pause briefly to discuss two relevant experiences which took place during a 'Listening' Summer School that I had the privilege of co-convening between February 2018 and July 2019.[50] These discussions will further emphasise the value and importance of experimentation and its potential for producing new knowledge through practice-based research.

Before I elaborate on my concept of diffractive listening, I need to discuss exactly what diffraction is in practical terms and clarify what it means for Haraway. Without delving too deeply into scientific terminology, diffraction is one of three behavioural properties (along with reflection and refraction) of wave phenomena. All waves, regardless of their spectral classification (whether they be light, sound, or water, to name just a few) carry with them the potential to be reflected, refracted or diffracted when they encounter a medium.[51] In their simplest terms: reflection acts like a mirror in the context of light or image, and like an echo when thinking about sound; refraction refers to a change in direction of a wave, such as a ray of light through a prism; and when diffraction occurs, the wave bends around the medium that it encounters and continues in many different directions. Haraway primarily uses the term diffraction as an alternative to the metaphor of reflection that informs a reflexive methodology, which has often been relied upon in the cross-disciplinary field of feminist

---

[50] The 'GeoHumanities Summer School: Listening (to) Field, Voice and Body' was a collaborative 'Conflux' led by a core team of academics from Royal Holloway and University of the Arts, London which I co-convened along with another mid-stage researcher. A group of nine PhD students were then invited to participate in the Summer School which consisted of a series of London-based seminars and a week-long trip to Bude, Cornwall. The Conflux was funded by the TECHNE Doctoral Training Partnership, more details here: http://www.techne.ac.uk/for-students/training-and-support/techne-confluxes. (Accessed: 2 September 2019).

[51] There are more behaviours of waves (such as absorption and dispersion) that could be discussed here, but for the purposes of simplicity and brevity I am limiting the scope to these three. For more details on wave behaviour, see:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave#Physical_properties. (Accessed: 21 August 2019).

standpoint theory.[52] She argues that 'reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere' (Haraway 1997: 16), whereas diffraction patterns 'record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference [...], diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness [...] one committed to making a difference' (Haraway 1997: 273).

As I mentioned in Chapter One, Haraway's theories have influenced Karen Barad, who is equally critical of the kind of reflexive methodology that has proved useful to many academic disciplines including the physical and social sciences. Barad argues that reflexivity has failed in the field of science studies because it is rooted in representationalism and still 'takes for granted the idea that representations reflect (social or natural) reality' (Barad 2007: 87). This raises an important point in relation to my discussions in previous chapters about representationalism and I will return to this in due course. As an alternative to reflexivity, Barad (following Haraway) proposes her diffractive methodology, which develops a (reworked Butlerian) theory of performativity as an alternative to representationalism. Essentially its purpose is to deconstruct binary thinking, not just to make porous the boundaries between binary opposites, but to reveal the ways in which they are entangled. Differences are acknowledged, but without absolute separation. It is a continual negotiation back and forth and practices of engagement are a pivotal factor, as Barad elaborates:

> a diffractive methodology is a critical practice for making a difference in the world. It is a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom. It is a critical practice of engagement, not a distance-learning practice of reflecting from afar. The agential realist approach that I offer eschews representationalism and advances a performative understanding of technoscientific and other naturalcultural practices, including different kinds of knowledge-making practices. […] And furthermore, the point is not merely that knowledge practices have

---

[52] For a detailed summary of feminist standpoint theory, see: https://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/. (Accessed: 15 February 2019).

material consequences but that *practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world.* Which practices we enact matter – in both senses of the word. (Barad 2007: 90, emphasis in original)

Crucially, Barad uses an 'agential realist elaboration of performativity' (Barad 2007: 136) to argue that all matter enacts agency, all matter and phenomena are co-constituted through a process of 'intra-action'. She clarifies this term as something which 'signifies *the mutual constitution of relata within phenomena* (in contrast to "interaction," which assumes the prior existence of distinct entities). In particular, the different agencies remain entangled' (Barad 2007: 429, n.14, emphasis in original). How is this radical rethinking of ontology applicable to my forthcoming analyses of audiovisual artworks? Barad's theory of agential realism (which is developed through her diffractive methodology) might seem too scientific (and abstract even though it's dealing with the materiality of, well, everything), but it informs her thinking around spatiotemporal phenomena which will be valuable to my later discussions. Barad argues that her diffractive methodology allows for connections to be made across disciplines, creating a dialogue between different knowledge-making practices (essentially a reading of theories from different fields *through* each other, rather than against each other) in order to 'engage aspects of each in *dynamic* relationality to the other, being attentive to the iterative production of boundaries, the material-discursive nature of boundary-drawing practices, the constitutive exclusions that are enacted, and questions of accountability and responsibility for the reconfigurings of which we are a part' (Barad 2007: 93, emphasis in original). This is indeed helpful for my endeavour to make porous the boundaries between genres. Despite this claim, however, Barad's work is primarily situated in the sciences and although she does discuss briefly how sound and water waves can be diffracted (in much the same way I described earlier), she uses diffraction primarily as an optical metaphor (although importantly, the diffractive methodology itself is not a metaphor).[53] What I find

---

[53] Barad does attend to ultrasonic waves in her fifth chapter, but primarily in relation to 'sonic diffraction patterns translated into an electronic image' (Barad 2007: 202), which perpetuates the ocularcentrism.

curious is the fact that Haraway and Barad both critique the use of an optical metaphor such as reflection, then replace it with another optical metaphor. It is the ocularcentrism of such approaches that I find problematic because by privileging seeing (or focusing on that which is not possible to see, as in the case of quantum physics), they ignore listening as a critical practice of engagement.[54] In my opinion, Barad's diffractive methodology is an idealistic goal that wonderfully complicates our understanding of all matter in the universe, but perhaps she is too quick to discard critical aspects of a reflexive methodology that might be useful in achieving that goal. Granted, reflexivity may not work in the technoscientific world of Barad and Haraway, but perhaps a *critical* reflexivity still has something to offer other fields. Barad argues for a dialogue between different disciplines and knowledge-making practices, therefore, why can there not be a dialogue between the metaphors of diffraction and reflection (and for that matter, refraction)? In excluding reflexivity, Barad in effect creates the kind of binary that would be incompatible with her own diffractive methodology.[55] This comes down to a crucial question: how might it be possible to critique representationalism whilst acknowledging the importance of positive representations (both visual and aural) for marginalised communities?

Annie Goh (2017) offers a possible solution to this quandary by connecting the work of Haraway and Barad to sound studies, specifically the burgeoning field of archaeoacoustics, which Goh argues has relied upon 'damaging dualisms' such as the 'subject-object binary' which in turn 'supports the relation between the masculinist subject/mind/culture and the feminized object/matter/nature' (Goh 2017: 288).[56] Goh proposes a method of 'sounding

---

[54] Barad does briefly discuss a 1996 televised experiment in which the audience 'hears' physicist Don Eigler move an atom but reverts soon after to a focus on the optical. See (Barad 2007: 354-356).

[55] It must be noted that Barad has subsequently claimed that 'reflection and diffraction are not opposites, not mutually exclusive, but rather different optical intra-actions highlighting different patterns, optics, geometries that often overlap in practice [and] the table in chapter 2 [in which she compares specific examples of diffraction and reflection (Barad 2007: 89-90)] is not dichotomous; rather, one might usefully think of the line of separation in the table as a cut that differentiates-entangles – reading it diffractively' (Barad 2014: 185, n.2).

[56] Archaeoacoustics is best described as archaeology of sound. For an overview of the pioneering research of Iegor Reznikoff and Paul Devereux, see: https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/archaeoacoustics. (Accessed: 15 February 2019).

situated knowledges' by thinking through the phenomena of the echo, as she elaborates:

> The echo is an apt feminist figuration for the diffractive methodology in sound. Although echoes in acoustics are often commonly defined as reflected sound, echoes as sonic experiences on a physical-material level […] are constituted by both reflection and diffraction, as well as refraction. […] Therefore, diffraction in sounding situated knowledges functions alongside reflection to suggest the validity of both metaphors in feminist epistemologies. (Goh 2017: 296)

This is a welcome push back on Haraway and Barad's critique of reflexive methodologies and opens up a way to think about reconfigured subjectivities, particularly because 'the reflective metaphor is mobilizing an awareness of heterogeneous subjectivities, which standpoint theories might also advocate, whilst simultaneously, the diffractive metaphor can be considered part of a conscious endeavour to get to a political and epistemological elsewhere' (Goh 2017: 296). I feel that on Barad's methodological journey to that 'elsewhere' the notion of subjectivity was abandoned, somehow subsumed under the umbrella of phenomena and matter, despite the claim that 'agential realism can contribute to a new materialist understanding of power and its effects on the production of bodies, identities, and subjectivities' (Barad 2007: 224). Goh's sonic intervention – via the echo, which in turn takes us to listening – allows for a more nuanced understanding of a diffractive methodology. It offers a way for the voices of those for whom notions of subjectivity and representation are still important, to be heard in all their complexity.

The notion of diffractive listening that I am proposing attempts to align the above discussion with Gozde Naiboglu's methodology of 'postrepresentationalism' which, she argues, should 'explain the relations of power, not by undoing the question of representation, but by reformulating its questions. Thus, such a postrepresentational understanding should be advanced by engaging productively with its critiques, not by altogether abandoning the terms of representation' (Naiboglu 2018: 129). With the

welcome return of the echo, the sub-filter for this chapter is partially constructed. I just need one more element and it relates to a more compassionate and ethical understanding of listening as well as a discussion of temporality and spectrality.

In Chapter One I briefly touched on some of Lisbeth Lipari's theories in relation to John Akomfrah's work, but there are other aspects of her work that are pertinent to this chapter. Lipari's research attempts to 'conceptualize language and communication holistically rather than atomistically; rather than breaking the various phenomena of listening, thinking, and speaking into separate analytical categories, […] to understand them in relational synthesis' (Lipari 2014: 160), which invites an obvious connection to the relationality of Barad's method. In addition to the notions of 'misunderstanding' and 'listening otherwise' which I employed in my analysis of Akomfrah's film, Lipari also offers that at times, 'we can *hear* but fail to *listen* […], hearing without listening is response without responsibility; it is a form of pseudodialogue without ethics' (Lipari 2014: 196, emphasis in original). It is with this in mind that Lipari develops her concept of interlistening:

> In dialogue, interlistenings reverberate with connections to everything heard, thought, said, and read in the past, present, and future lives of each interlistener. […] Interlistening thus brings a multiple emphasis on the *inter-* of interaction, interdependency, interrelation, intersubjectivity, as well as an acknowledgement of the attunement, attentiveness, and alterity always already nested in our process of communication. (Lipari 2014: 158-159, emphasis in original)

To the above I would add the *inter-* of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, upon which I drew in Chapter One. Lipari's acknowledgement that these phenomena reverberate across past, present and future connects to my discussions of the past in Chapter One, the (embodied) present in the previous chapter, and my impending discussion of the future in the next chapter. The passage above also speaks to the multiple discussions of intersubjectivity in relation to theories of cinematic embodiment in the previous chapter.

Interlistening becomes even more relevant to these previous discussions (and to the form of diffractive listening that I wish to develop in this chapter) when Lipari dissects her term into three well-defined but inseparable parts. Interlistening is understood as 'polymodal (occurring across multiple sensory modalities […]), polyphonic (occurring through the voices of different characters […]), and polychronic (occurring in a confused multiplicity of temporal modalities […])' (Lipari 2014: 160). When these three parts are considered together, they allow for a consideration of the multiple temporalities that unfold (and are enfolded) through the artworks and gesture towards the possibility of listening *through* time and space. This becomes even more pertinent when considered alongside these thoughts from Barad:

> Space, time, and matter are mutually constituted through the dynamics of iterative intra-activity. […] The past matters and so does the future, but the past is never left behind, never finished once and for all, and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter's iterative becoming (Barad 2007: 181)

What else emerges from Barad's reworking of a Butlerian performative iteration? Given that 'the echo offers multiple ways of not simply displacing the same elsewhere, but in producing non-self same versions of something' (Goh 2017: 298), perhaps it might be possible to consider its spectral implications by thinking of the echo as 'a doubling or self-haunting' (Blanco and Peeren 2013: 310). I will explore the possibilities of this in my analyses of the artworks.

The diffractive listening that I am proposing considers the multiplicity and relationality of the various and ever-evolving subjective positions and situated knowledges that the audience and artist bring to any engagement with audiovisual artworks. It acknowledges that each individual brings with them their own personal histories, imbued with their own sense memories and a sense of a wider cultural memory. Intentionality is the key – an intentional form of diffractive listening by both artist and audience allows a diffractive listening to be performed by the artwork itself, thereby generating a form of collective

subjectivity that can make a difference in the world. This is a form of listening attentive to the sounds of our own bodies and the bodies of others, in and out of time. A listening *through* time that occurs between artist, artwork and audience in the liminal space of the intersubjective encounter. It also embraces the serendipitous moments of the creative process in which the artist's intention may be overtaken by the momentum of the artwork itself. The artist may think that they were listening for a particular voice, or sound, or event, but perhaps the artwork heard something else, something (or someone) extra – the ghosts of other possibilities. It is also possible that the audience will hear something different or interpret what they are listening to, entirely differently to the way the artist intended. One final thing worth stating, before I embark on the analyses of the artworks, is that I am by no means suggesting that these are the only kinds of artwork that can be discussed in relation to diffractive listening practices. Rather I am offering the notion of diffractive listening as a potential method for application by artists and audiences to allow for new meaning (and potentially reconfigured subjectivities) to emerge through the intersubjective encounter with an(y) artwork. Although, as I will discuss (and have discussed in previous chapters), perhaps artworks that reveal their processual elements make themselves more amenable to a diffractive listening practice.

E1: Stories of Refuge and Resistance (2018) is an experiment.[57] I cannot make any bold claims as to the success of this experiment, but I can discuss my research process and what I learned from it. The work serves a dual purpose, which is intended to complicate its classification in any particular genre. It functions as a standalone audiovisual piece, but it also has the potential to become an interactive soundwalk. Thinking of the work in this way opens up the possibilities for the emergence of a collective subjectivity and I will return to these thoughts towards the end of this chapter.

E1 was initially intended solely as a sound piece, with no visuals at all. I conducted a great deal of research into the history of my neighbourhood, although I was already aware of its fascinating history, having lived between

---

[57] Hereafter referred to as *E1.*

Whitechapel and Shadwell since 2013. The historical research that I conducted can also be considered as a form of diffractive listening, insofar as every event, every historical moment, not only conjured forth the ghosts of those who were there (or memories of those still with us), but reminded me every step of the way of my own subjectivity as an Australian-born white, male, queer, immigrant living in the United Kingdom. I was also reminded of the inescapable fact that I am a product of colonialism. Because of the atrocities of the 'British Empire' it became possible for my father to be born in mid-1940s Melbourne to immigrant parents and my mother was able to emigrate there as a teenager in the early 1960s with her English and Scottish parents, allowing my sister and I to be born on stolen land. Being born to a British mother also gave me the privilege of being able to relocate to London in 1998 with 'the right of abode' certificate in my Australian passport and three years later I was able to apply for British citizenship. Interestingly, if my father was British, I would have been eligible for a British passport from the outset, which exemplifies how patriarchal colonialism can be. Each of the events that are referenced in *E1* also have a connection to colonialism and this sentiment resonates with the other artworks which I will be examining in this chapter.

Through the work I intended to address the question of how sound in particular might evoke a feeling of shared cultural or collective memory, whilst adopting an overtly decolonial approach. I had been exploring other ideas, one in particular revolved around my own childhood memory of a jigsaw puzzle depicting Captain James Cook. 2018 would mark the 250th anniversary of Cook's *Endeavour* voyage and it seemed an appropriate time to consider this historical event in a more critical way. I thought about devising an audio walk along the river to Greenwich, but my research took me down some very different rabbit holes and I became much more interested in the history of my local neighbourhood and the stories of refuge and resistance that I uncovered. The Cook idea also felt like I was centring my own subjectivity and personal history, whereas turning my attention to my local neighbourhood would allow for other stories to be told (other ghosts to be heard), albeit some that I had a personal connection to.

E1 is comprised of a combination of personal memories (of my chance encounters with a Syrian refugee whose story affected me, of hearing my neighbour Max talk about his role in the anti-fascist movement) and my personal experience of shopping at my local Watney Market. I had already learned of some of the history of the area, but during my extended research I learned more details about specific events. This in turn led me to learn about other significant events which resonated with what I had already uncovered and together they created a rich tapestry of stories that weaved through multiple temporalities within the limited spatiality of the E1 postcode. My historical research informed a draft of the script, which I had initially planned to record as a voiceover. This would then be layered over the audio that I recorded on the walk, the route of which was also informed by the script research, the location of each historical event gave the walk its shape.

From my flat in Sidney Street, I would cross Commercial Road, traverse the length of Watney Market then turn right onto Cable Street. Halfway along Cable Street I would turn into St. George's Gardens and stay for a while with the mural that depicts the 1936 Battle of Cable Street.[58] Resuming the walk along Cable Street I would remind myself of the racially motivated violence that took place there during the summer of 1919,[59] eventually turning up Back Church Lane, crossing Commercial Road once again and taking Adler Street to my final destination, Altab Ali Park: the site of a brutal murder in 1978.[60] This was the planned route, and this was indeed the route that I took when I recorded the audio on 28 December 2017. It had snowed the night before, which offered the promise of exciting sounds underfoot. During the walk, the experience of listening to what I was recording had already begun to spark some ideas, but when I returned home and listened once again to the audio, I realised that I did not want to detract from the sounds that were already there by adding a voiceover track. In fact, aside from truncating some sections to shorten the

---

[58] For more about the history of Cable Street, see: http://www.cablestreet.uk. (Accessed: 6 February 2018).

[59] For more about the 1919 Race Riots, see: http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/1919-race-riots. (Accessed: 6 February 2018).

[60] For more about Altab Ali, see: http://www.altabalifoundation.org.uk. (Accessed: 6 February 2018).

duration between locations, the audio in the finished piece is just as it was recorded. Deciding to add the script as onscreen text allowed for some serendipitous moments to occur, as I will discuss below.

I need to pause for a moment to make a brief point relating to my research journey. I believe this is the stage in my PhD where I began to make the shift from what was previously theory-led practice, towards something more resembling practice-based research. I was not fully aware of it at the time but having reflected upon the process since then (and reflecting upon it further as I write this chapter), it seems to be the beginning of my gradual understanding of how new knowledge might emerge from the *making*. This also seems an apt time to briefly contextualise my foray into the world of soundwalking within the greater history of the practice (or more accurately *these practices*, as they are multiple and diverse).

In 1974, Hildergard Westerkamp defined a soundwalk as 'any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment. […] No matter what form a soundwalk takes, its focus is to rediscover and reactivate our sense of hearing' (Westerkamp 1974: 18). Westerkamp was involved in R. Murray Schafer's research which led to the publication of his book *The Tuning of the World*, in which he makes a distinction between a listening walk and a soundwalk.[61] He describes the former as 'simply a walk with a concentration on listening' (Schafer 1997: 212), but he seems to differ from Westerkamp on the definition of a soundwalk, which he describes as 'an exploration of the soundscape of a given area using a score as a guide. The score consists of a map, drawing the listener's attention to unusual sounds and ambiences to be heard along the way' (Schafer 1997: 213). Although the soundwalk was born through the work of acoustic ecologists such as Westerkamp and Schafer, its definition has evolved in multiple directions since the 1970s through the work of many artists and geographers. One might even say it has been diffracted. A few notable artists worth mentioning in this regard are Janet Cardiff (who also makes

---

[61] The original book was published in 1977 as *The Tuning of the World (The Soundscape)*. I am quoting from the 1997 republished version entitled *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World.*

collaborative work with George Bures Miller), Viv Corringham, and Yolande Harris.[62]

In addition to the *E1* audiovisual experiment, I had the opportunity to devise what might be considered as a more traditional soundwalk during my time co-convening the Listening Summer School that I mentioned in my introduction to this chapter. This allowed me to explore the potential of the soundwalk as a methodological practice and offered first-hand experience of the learning opportunities available when the listening attention of a group is attuned in a certain way. The Summer School itself was interested in attuning our listening practice towards three distinct (but inextricably linked) themes: Field, Body and Voice. The walk that I designed was structured around a route that would encompass three very different sonic environments within a range-limited urban locale in central London. On 15 March 2019, fifteen of us from the Summer School began our walk in Bunhill Fields, the burial place of Catherine and William Blake, Daniel Defoe and other historical figures. I chose this location as a potentially good place for the group to stay still for a while, to listen to our own bodies and the bodies of those who are buried there. What I did not anticipate was that our listening experience would be disrupted by the constant sound of building construction from multiple sites around the cemetery, which resulted in some surprising reflections on the temporal and spectral aspects of the location. During our post-walk discussion some common thoughts emerged in relation to this embodied listening experience, made more visceral by the penetrating vibrations of the machinery. Many in the group remarked that the sound of construction – of the ground being torn up and moved – made them think not only about their own bodies and the bodies (and ghosts) of those who are buried there, but it also invited a connection to the city itself and the way that London has been in a constant state of (de/re)construction over the last 2000 years. Our next location was the Barbican Highwalk which offered an architectural field full of sonic delights. The iconic brutalist building not only

---

[62] See more about Cardiff and Miller's audio and video walks here: https://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html. See more about Corringham's Shadow-walks project here: http://vivcorringham.org/shadow-walks. See more about Yolande Harris' soundwalks here: http://yolandeharris.net/?nk_type=walks. (All the above accessed: 2 September 2019).

offered a visual spectacle that also engaged the sense of touch via its differently textured concrete, but the architecture regulated the listening experience in surprising ways. In various parts of the Highwalk the sound of traffic ranged from clearly audible, to amplified, to silenced. Other parts presented us with calming sounds of water from the fountains or melodic sounds from the Guildhall School of Music. The concrete surfaces also provided perfect examples of the way echoes and reverberations are experienced on a material-physical level and how they might be considered diffractively, not just as reflected or refracted sound.[63] Our third location took us through Whitecross Street Market during a busy weekday lunchtime when many local workers and residents were deciding what to eat from the plethora of food stalls. This offered myriad opportunities to listening to voices, eavesdropping on snippets of conversations that inspired many in the group to speculate about their possible backstories. This in turn opened up an interesting discussion about the assumptions and inherent biases we bring to such a listening practice and the ways in which we might challenge them. The experience of designing and staging this particular soundwalk has offered much to my thinking about the notion of diffractive listening, particularly in relation to the unexpected outcomes such listening might offer. It is with this in mind that I return to my analysis of *E1*.

I paused my description of *E1* above at the point between the recording and editing stages. It was during the editing process that a number of things coalesced. I decided to use onscreen text rather than voiceover to convey the information in the script primarily because I thought a voiceover would detract from the richness of the sounds that I had recorded. Rather than using a black screen I chose to experiment further with the colour-block transitions that I had used in *PMG*, except this time the whole film would become one long transition, slowly and gradually morphing from one colour to the next, never quite settling or arriving. This is intended to create a feeling of anticipation; the screen tantalises with the promise of an image that is never provided. All that it offers is

---

[63] For a clear explanation on the behaviour of sound waves, particularly in relation to rough concrete surfaces such as those found in The Barbican, see: https://www.sonic-shield.com/behavior-of-sound-waves. (Accessed: 2 September 2019).

an expectation, which in turn fuels the imagination, creating a flow of evolving meaning in the liminal space created by the colour-block transition. Just as Sobchack's cinesthetic subject must turn inwards to fulfil the sensual desire not sated by what is onscreen (Sobchack 2004: 76-77), the audience must draw on their own sense memories and lived experience to contextualise what they hear, with what they read onscreen. This leads to an important point – that the text must be read. This implicates not only the inner voice of the audience, but also the inner voice of the artist (and perhaps the inner voice of the artwork itself) and we can consider this in relation to my concept of diffractive listening. The text onscreen does not function purely as image, it is conveying information and intended to be read – to be listened to and heard. Just as my inner voice haunts the words in this thesis, my inner voice also haunts the onscreen text. Further, the text is haunted by every individual who experienced what is described onscreen. The pain and anguish of Marwan, the Syrian refugee, echoes throughout the section in which the text describes him telling me that he had lost both his parents and became separated from his sister in Italy – the sound of a child crying in Watney Market (at the 02:19 mark) offers one serendipitous moment of a/synchrony between audio and text. Shortly after, there is a vocal sound that could be easily heard as 'nah', in response to my question of whether or not Marwan has heard from his sister. The possibilities are there for many other connections to be made, for ghosts to be heard, invoking Dinshaw's contention that 'asynchrony, in the form of restless ghosts haunting the present, can be the means of calling for justice' (Dinshaw 2012: 34). Marwan's story is deeply connected to the other stories and events depicted in the work. The UK government was complicit in the political instability across the Middle East which led to the war in Syria and forced Marwan and his sister to flee their home. Marwan arrived in the UK seeking refuge, only to encounter the 'hostile environment' created by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary. This anti-immigration rhetoric is embedded within all of the other events of *E1*, but they contain within them, stories of protest, resistance and hope. The violent racism of the 1919 riots is echoed in the fascist hatred of Mosley's 1936 march and echoed again in the murder of Altab Ali in 1978 by three National Front supporters. The 2013 protest against the English Defence League reminds us that the nostalgia for empire is a strong and enduring force,

but we do not need much of a reminder as we are confronted with it every day during this tumultuous time of Brexit.[64]

The final section of *E1* brings together all of these multiple histories (from the 10:25 mark), layering both the audio and the colour-block transitions upon themselves, allowing the entanglement of these temporalities and their ghosts to be heard together. Listening diffractively in this way invites a politics of listening that, as Leah Bassel argues, 'must involve both a sense of past and future, in the name of recognising the sources of political and material inequality and the colonial past-present' (Bassel 2017: 50). It is with an openness to the possibility of this kind of listening that one might approach *E1* as an interactive soundwalk, which (as I suggested earlier) might allow for the possibility of a collective subjectivity to emerge. This might already be present within the work, emerging via a collective haunting from the many voices embodied within the work. But taken as a soundwalk, the listener-walker could add an extra layer of temporality and aurality to the multiplicitous, entangled elements already in operation. New and unexpected moments of serendipitous a/synchrony might occur, sounds of the present moment merging with those on the recording, combining with the listener-walker's own situated knowledges and sense memories to create new understandings of the histories and spectralities embedded within the work. Among the sounds of the audio track and the inner voices of the text, one might hear some ghosts of the resistance whose voices still echo today, among them, Max Levitas who was so prevalent in my description of both the 1936 Battle of Cable Street and the 2013 EDL protest.[65] Although Max was still with us when I created *E1* in early 2018, he passed away on 2 November of the same year, aged 103. His voice haunts these words as I write them, along with the voices and legacies of all those who resisted (and continue to resist) the forces of hatred and oppression. I feel a responsibility to amplify their voices and I do so with these thoughts from Barad in mind:

---

[64] For more about the 2013 protest, see: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/07/edl-marchers-east-london-mosque. (Accessed: 6 February 2018).
[65] For more about Max Levitas, see: http://spitalfieldslife.com/2016/10/04/max-levitas-the-battle-of-cable-st/. (Accessed 6 February 2018).

> To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain
> or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be
> responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past
> and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance […]. (Barad
> 2010: 264)

The responsibility of inheritance can often be very complicated, as I shall
explore now in my analysis of Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010). To reiterate, my
concept of diffractive listening is about intentionally listening *through* time and
place, listening for ghosts and echoes. It is about feeling the waves of the past
lap against the shore of the present and allowing them to carry us into the future
(and back again). It is about reflecting upon one's situated knowledges (and
inherent privileges) and acknowledging our ever-evolving, relational
subjectivities. A diffractive listening practice might allow for more
compassionate modes of understanding and for collective subjectivities to
emerge.

This kind of listening practice is very applicable to the way in which Barnard
approaches her film, which primarily focuses on the tumultuous life and work of
Bradford playwright Andrea Dunbar, best known for her plays *The Arbor* and
Rita, Sue and Bob Too. Dunbar died suddenly in 1990 at the age of twenty-
nine, from a brain haemorrhage, leaving behind her three children, Lorraine,
Lisa and Andrew, all of whom were fathered by different men. Dunbar's eldest
daughter Lorraine was eleven when her mother died. As an adult, she struggled
with heroin addiction and in 2007 she was sentenced to three years in prison for
the manslaughter of her two-year-old son, Harris, who died after ingesting
methadone and the sedative dothiepin. During the research process for the film,
Barnard noticed parallels between Dunbar's experiences of addiction and
hardship and those of Lorraine, and the focus quickly became shared between
the two.

Barnard experiments with three distinct formal elements and the complex
interplay between each of them contributes to the film resisting being classified

as purely narrative cinema or documentary filmmaking.[66] Barnard draws on archive footage from three documentaries about Dunbar's life and work – *BBC Arena* (1980), *BBC News: Look North* (1987) and Yorkshire TV's *The Great North Show* (1989) – as well as footage from the 1987 film version of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. Combined with this is newly shot footage in which actors perform scenes from Dunbar's stage play *The Arbor*, and these scenes are filmed on the Buttershaw Estate in Bradford, specifically Brafferton Arbor, the street where Dunbar lived. Barnard invited the residents of the estate – many of whom knew Dunbar – to participate as extras in the filming, which is an important factor to consider in relation to a collective subjectivity that might emerge from the work. The third formal element is also newly shot footage, in which actors lip-synch to audio from interviews that Barnard recorded with Dunbar's family and friends. It is this sound-specific element that not only infuses the film with haptic qualities (as I shall explore later), but allows these voices to 'speak to us as *co-existing multiplicities of entangled relations of past-present-future-here-there*' (Barad 2010: 264, emphasis in original). I will argue that this lip-synch technique not only requires a diffractive listening from the actors, but it also invites one from the audience. Barnard's film is also a decidedly feminist piece insofar as it centres and amplifies the voices of women at the intersections of class and race. Lorraine's father was of Pakistani heritage and her experience of racism – both from society in general and from her own mother – is gradually revealed as the film unfolds.

Barnard's process is informed by a listening practice based on empathy and compassion, as well as an ethical engagement with the material. She spent two years recording audio interviews with Dunbar's family: her sisters Pamela and Kathy, her brother David, and her children Lorraine, Lisa and Andrew; as well as other residents of the Buttershaw Estate, Dunbar's former partner Jim (Andrew's father), Lorraine's foster parents Ann and Steve, and theatre director Max Stafford-Clark, who staged *The Arbor* at London's Royal Court Theatre in

---

[66] The film was commissioned by Artangel, which further complicates any potential genre classification. Artangel's website states: 'For over 30 years […], Artangel has produced extraordinary art in unexpected places […] We produce art that challenges perceptions, surprises, inspires and wouldn't be possible within the confines of a gallery'. See: https://www.artangel.org.uk/about_us/ (Accessed: 22 May 2019)

1980. When producer Tracey O'Riordan came on board the project and learned that Barnard had collected nearly ninety hours of audio, she quickly understood that sound (and listening) would be the driving force when planning the production schedule, as she explains:

> My first task involved listening to all the interviews; there was an abundance of material from many individuals linked to the Estate, so the first step was to decide which stories to focus on. Clio had also sourced some archive footage of Andrea Dunbar and we recorded a guide track of actors reading some scenes from Andrea's first play; 'The Arbor.' Next came the audio or sound edit; *usually one of the last things you do on a film*. […] Following seven weeks of editing an audio screenplay was produced, which was transcribed and this became our script. (O'Riordan 2011: 10, emphasis mine)

It is important to note that Barnard and O'Riordan's acts of listening dictated the production schedule from the outset. Through a listening practice based on compassion and empathy, they realised that the film could not follow a conventional film production schedule and they would need to subvert the documentary tradition to suit the demands of the project. There are two main areas of inquiry that I wish to attend to in relation to Barnard's film. Both involve the lip-synch technique, and both relate to the ways in which memory, embodiment, voice and temporality are entangled in a diffractive listening.

Firstly, there is a notable disparity between the recollections of Lorraine and her sister Lisa, not just of specific events, but the way in which they remember their mother, Andrea. At the beginning of the film, both Lorraine and Lisa (lip-synched on screen by Manjinder Virk and Christine Bottomley, respectively) talk about an incident when they were younger, when Lorraine set fire to their bedroom to keep her and her siblings warm. They were unable to escape the bedroom because the door handle had either been removed or fallen off. Whilst Lisa remembers very clearly that it was Lorraine 'messing with matches' that caused the fire, she blames herself for not being able to escape. Virk and Bottomley face the camera, whilst flames rise from the burning bed behind

them. Bottomley lip-synchs as we hear Lisa say: 'I think it were actually me […] when we'd shut the bedroom door, the handle fell off the door on the inside so we couldn't get back out. […] I think it were actually me that broke that'. Whereas Lorraine's testimony, lip-synched by Virk, offers: 'My mum used to take the door handles off and she used to come in the bedroom and check that there were no knife or forks, cos if you got a knife or fork you could put the handle in to get out of the door'. Admittedly, Lorraine was seven at the time, two years older than Lisa, so the audience is more likely to believe her version of events. But in revealing this disparity, Barnard calls into question the veracity of memory and invites the audience to interrogate the filmmaking process. Barnard herself explains that it is important 'to acknowledge the instability of truth when making a film based on fact and the formal techniques of the film are designed to remind an audience of this' (Barnard 2011: 4). Lorraine's truth, however, is inextricably linked to her realisation of her racial difference, highlighted when she recalls one of the many times that she pretended to be asleep when her mother returned home loudly from the local pub. One time in particular, Lorraine overheard Andrea stating that she regretted having her, regretted sleeping with a Pakistani man and could never love Lorraine to the same level as she loved Lisa and Andrew. This memory of explicit racism from her mother stayed with Lorraine from a very young age and informed her opinion of Andrea even after her death. The audience learns later, that Lorraine has publicly verbalised these memories before; a decade before Barnard recorded the audio interviews (and a decade after Andrea's death). Almost an hour into the film there is a scene in which Virk lip-synchs to the audio of Lorraine's voice (from Barnard's interviews) reading from the script of *A State Affair*, a verbatim play written by Robin Soans and directed by Max Stafford-Clark in 2000, intended as a follow-up to *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. Lorraine and other residents of the Buttershaw Estate were interviewed for the play's script, so in Barnard's audio interview, Lorraine is actually reading her own words, but from a decade earlier. Applying a diffractive mode of listening to this scene reveals the entangled relations of voices and temporalities in what we hear. In Barnard's recording, Lorraine is echoing herself at a time when she was struggling with addiction, but she speaks with the gravitas of all her subsequent experience: 'If my Mum wrote the play now, Rita and Sue would be smack-

heads, on crack as well, and working the red-light district, sleeping with everybody and anybody for money. Bob would probably be injecting heroin, taking loads of tablets as well.' We hear her turn the page and she continues to read. This is echoed visually by Virk turning the page onscreen as she continues to lip-synch to Lorraine's voice. The subsequent words recall a similar account of what we have heard Lorraine say earlier, about Andrea regretting having her, but her words are slightly different here, stating that Andrea had 'said she wished she had had an abortion with me'. This subtle difference in her two testimonies, a decade apart, further emphasises the malleability of memory and Barnard's intention of alerting the audience to the subjective nature of truth and how it is affected by time.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Barnard is questioning the veracity of Lorraine's testimony, the minor discrepancy between Lorraine's choice of words is not the most important point. I am much more interested in Barnard's subversive methods and methodology which serve to amplify the voices of marginalised women that might otherwise be left unheard. In the example outlined above, Lorraine's own voice is heard and embodied through multiple temporalities and in myriad forms: her words, once recorded from her own utterance, were then printed on the page in Soans' script, performed on stage in a theatre, recorded once again by Barnard and visually embodied onscreen by Virk. I think it is helpful to think about the long spatiotemporal journey taken by these words and the fact that through Barnard's filmic process, they are reunited with their original voice, Lorraine's voice. Perhaps what is operating here is a form of 'interlistening [which] involves the whole being, body, heart, and mind, and […] occurs within and between persons, in and out of time' (Lipari 2014: 165); and for these reasons it might also be considered as a practice of diffractive listening.

In the scenes that follow, Lisa (lip-synched by Bottomley) expresses her disdain for what Lorraine had said in the interview that became the script for *A State Affair*. Lisa's disapproval is then echoed in the voices of her Aunt Kathy, her brother Andrew, and his father Jim (also lip-synched by actors). This not only reinforces the very different stances that Lorraine and Lisa have taken in

recalling their memories of their mother – Lisa is fiercely loyal to Andrea – but it also draws attention to their other differences. Lorraine has been 'othered' because of her Pakistani heritage and ostracised by her family for her drug dependence. These two seemingly unrelated factors are inextricably linked. After Lorraine describes overhearing her mother's overtly racist feelings towards her, she explains that 'every day I feel hurt, pain, anger, hate. That's why I went on heroin, to block out those feelings'. Lisa and the rest of the family are dismissive of Lorraine's truth because they are unable to fully understand the connection between Lorraine's current circumstances and her experience of racial discrimination. Lisa's denial extends to her belief that Lorraine has bad feelings towards their mother because she misses her, 'although she's got a mad way of showing it'.

Alison Peirse believes that there are aural as well as visual markers of Lorraine's difference in Barnard's film. She observes that 'while Lorraine's vocal patterns clearly mark her as from Yorkshire, her delivery is much clearer and more refined. She drops far less of her vowels than Lisa. It is in the local vernacular that family relationships are made apparent: Lorraine's speech is a big marker of her difference' (Peirse 2016: 62), whilst by contrast, Lisa's accent is very similar to the rest of the Dunbar family. Following the work of Peirse, Beth Johnson feels that Barnard's use of the lip-synch technique 'can also be understood to invoke and uncover feminist politics [and] has political resonance in both gender and class terms, allowing voices to speak that would not usually be heard' (Johnson 2016: 287).

My second area of inquiry continues the previous discussion of entangled temporalities but more specifically attends to the ways in which Barnard deals with the parallels between the life experiences of Andrea and Lorraine. The first half of the film draws on the aural testimonies of Lorraine, Lisa and others, but always in relation to their memories of Andrea. The second half of the film centres around Lorraine, but Barnard maintains a consistent use of the same three formal elements. In one particular sequence, Lorraine narrates her experience of meeting a man, falling in love and becoming pregnant. She then goes on to describe the horrendous ordeal of being imprisoned by this man for

twelve days, being raped and tortured with a screwdriver, resulting in her having a miscarriage. This story echoes what we have learned earlier in the film, that Lorraine's father (long before she was born) imprisoned Andrea and beat her until she had a miscarriage. It was this series of events that Andrea depicted in her play *The Arbor;* herself portrayed by The Girl and Lorraine's father by the character Yousaf. In Barnard's re-enactment of the play in her film, Yousaf explains to The Girl how he could easily induce a miscarriage by repeatedly pulling her off a chair. During Lorraine's description of her own ordeal, Barnard shows us a bedroom door that is missing the handle. This visual echo of Lorraine and Lisa's childhood memory depicted at the beginning of the film, further emphasises the temporal enfoldings of the narrative. Barnard then diffracts two of her formal elements, incorporating the lip-synch technique into the filmed restaging of the play on the estate, which until this point had remained separate. We hear Lorraine reading some of the words that her mother wrote for the character of The Girl in *The Arbor*. Initially, these words are lip-synched by Virk as she holds a copy of the script, but as she reads, the image cuts to the outdoor filmed staging of the play on Brafferton Arbor and The Girl (played by Natalie Gavin) begins to lip-synch to Lorraine's voice, as she continues to read The Girl's dialogue. After a brief moment Gavin's own voice takes over and The Girl's dialogue goes on to describe in more detail the ongoing abuse that she has endured at the hands of Yousaf, which eventually led to her miscarriage. This double echo of The Girl's (fictional) and Andrea's (real-life) experiences; both of which already had their respective temporalities, not only resonates with Lorraine's experience – the temporality of which is further complicated by the fact that her historical experience is being mediated via Barnard's audio interview – but all of this undoubtedly finds an affective resonance with (and invites a diffractive listening from) the audience, who would be all too aware that this experience of sexual violence is very real for far too many women. Further, there is a doubling of the visual (dis)embodiment of Lorraine's voice – first by Virk, then by Gavin, both of whom are required to enact a form of diffractive listening – which further accentuates the parallels between Lorraine and Andrea's lives and the 'haunted cycle of tragedy' (Johnson 2016: 284) in which both women found themselves trapped. Barnard's use of these echoic memories to underscore the socio-political

message of her film across multiple temporalities, is exemplified when she recalls:

> Realising the character of Yousaf in Andrea's play The Arbor was Lorraine's father was key. Andrea's play, combined with the interviews with her family means that the film can look across 3 generations of a family and 3 decades of a particular place. I hope that this allows some understanding of the destructive effects of poverty, racism and addiction to emerge. (Barnard 2011: 4)

Barnard's approach to her creative practice resonates with the aspirations that I have for my own. Her methods, which I consider to be subversive and genre-defying, can be considered as a form of diffractive listening. The empathy and compassion that Barnard brings to her engagement with the material is evident and her work offers a way to forge connections between the notion of diffractive listening and my discussion of haptic aurality in the previous chapter. Especially when she elaborates on her decision to use the lip-synch technique to create a disconnect between what the audience sees and hears and how they traditionally think about audiovisual work:

> I hoped the film would achieve a fine balance – so that, perhaps paradoxically, the distancing techniques might create closeness, allowing a *push pull*, so an audience might be aware of the shaping of the story but simultaneously able to engage emotionally. Above all my hope is that the film will provoke compassionate thought and reflection. (Barnard 2011: 4, emphasis mine)

I would argue that this 'push pull' is fundamentally haptic, in the same sense that Marks' haptic visuality relies on the viewer being close to the image and feeling it with their eyes (Marks 2000: xi). The difference here though, is that when considering Barnard's lip-synch technique, we are invited to engage affectively with the sound as well as the image, it is the sound that drives the discussion. This not only evokes the aural equivalent of the 'dynamic activity of viewing' (Sobchack 1992: 15) upon which Sobchack's first theory of cinematic

embodiment relies, but also the reciprocal, intersubjective relations described in her subsequent notion of the 'cinesthetic subject', which we will recall, implicates of all the bodies within the cinematic experience; each one 'exists in a dynamic figure-ground relation of reversibility with the others' (Sobchack 2004: 67). Given that some of these bodies exist only as voice (disembodied, then re-embodied – ventriloquised), the importance of the aural is brought to the fore. Just as a diffractive listening practice was implemented by Barnard and the actors on the screen, so too is it required from the audience. This raises an important point about Barnard's process and why it can be considered within a framework of diffractive listening. The audience is invited to engage with the construction of the work itself, which resists being classified as a mere representation of the life of Dunbar and her family. Key to this is Barnard's lip-synch technique, which is a modification of traditional verbatim theatre techniques which (as in the plays of Max Stafford-Clark mentioned earlier) involve actors learning lines from scripts that have been constructed from verbatim transcriptions of real-life testimonies. Barnard subverts this method by having her actors lip-synch to the audio of the original voices, but the verbatim technique has also evolved in different ways in a theatrical context. One notable technique is the use of headphone verbatim, in which recorded interviews are listened to via headphones by actors who then voice the words (as well as breaths, swallows and any other sounds the interview subject makes in the recording) as close as possible to how they hear them. At this point I will pause once again in order to discuss some first-hand experience of this technique, which took place as part of the aforementioned Listening Summer School, during the week-long trip to Bude in Cornwall in July 2019.[67]

During the planning stages of the Summer School, Dr Cecilie Sachs Olsen and I were paired together to run the 'Voice' strand, primarily because we had a shared knowledge of verbatim theatre and its derivations. When it came time to plan a day dedicated to voice during our week in Bude, we decided that it would be an exciting opportunity to experiment with the headphone verbatim

---

[67] Expanding more on the history of the headphone verbatim technique would take me outside this brief pause and beyond the scope of this thesis. For an interesting overview, see: Wake (2013).

technique. Rather than relying solely on interviews, I proposed three different modes of engagement based on the feeling that some members of the group (including me) might be less comfortable than others when it came time to interact with the local community. The three modes were: interrogators, eavesdroppers and ghosthunters. The interrogators would have the most direct engagement with the local people of Bude. They would essentially be interviewers, but named as interrogators to echo the fact that we were operating in the ominous shadow of one of the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) listening stations.[68] The eavesdroppers (also named in honour of GCHQ Bude) could adopt a medium level of engagement, wandering through the streets, choosing strategic locations that might allow them to overhear interesting conversations. The ghosthunters could avoid any interaction with people if they so wished, delving into archives in the local library to summon the ghosts of Cornwall's past. As is evident from my description of these three categories, this was also an opportunity to infuse the activity with some of the listening practices we had previously experimented with during the soundwalk in March 2019 (discussed earlier in this chapter). No matter which mode of engagement they adopted, each member was required to produce a three-minute piece of audio which would then be performed later in the day by a (randomly chosen) member of the group using the headphone verbatim technique.

In the morning of the voice day in Bude, the group tested the technique in pairs then came together to discuss the experience. Concerns were expressed by one member of the group that the technique potentially strips both the actor and the original voice of any sense of agency, that neither are held accountable for the words spoken and that the original source material might lose its meaning. This sparked an inspiring discussion about the ethics of such a method, during which other members of the group offered insights from their first-hand experience of the technique from a diverse range of performances.[69] Some

---

[68] For a fascinating insight into GCHQ Bude from journalist Duncan Campbell, see: https://theintercept.com/2015/08/03/life-unmasking-british-eavesdroppers/. (Accessed: 11 June 2019).
[69] The examples included Lisa Hammond and Rachel Spence's *Still No Idea*, see: https://royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/still-no-idea/. (Accessed: 3 September 2019).

argued that it was more about the experience of the listening audience, as well as the dynamic interplay between actor, audience and the original voice whose words might not have been heard otherwise. Others argued that the person doing the voicing had to make a profound shift within themselves in order to accommodate the words they are required to speak (and, importantly, have an obligation to care for). Ultimately it became a discussion about complicating the notion of representation; the responsibility of (and to) the voice; and the power and value of performative iteration in relation to listening. All of which gave me much to think about in relation to diffractive listening and the ghostly echoes that are produced through an iterative practice. I could elaborate on the rest of the day: the gathering of material and the evening performances, which all proceeded very well. However, it was the group discussion in the morning that provided the most valuable insights and offered serendipitous connections to my discussions in this chapter. Having paused long enough, I will now return to my analyses.

Although the artworks examined in this thesis so far have all blurred the boundaries between genres – and are able to exist in both cinema and gallery contexts – they are all audiovisual, consisting of moving-image and sound. My next analysis is of an installation artwork that has no moving-image component, but one which embodies many of the themes discussed throughout this thesis: spectrality, water, the haptic, breath, and a sense of queer, collective subjectivity enfolded through multiple temporalities. Like the other artworks examined in this chapter, a form of diffractive listening is not only implemented by the artist but is also required from the audience.

Evan Ifekoya's *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief* (2018) was installed at London's Gasworks gallery in Vauxhall, from 5 July to 2 September 2018. This particular period of time coincided with a very tumultuous stage of my research journey. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, making *E1* felt like a shift in my thinking, towards something more resembling practice-based research and during the summer of 2018, I grappled with making a new artwork (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Those two months in question (and the two months before) were an emotional and intellectual rollercoaster, compounded

by the fact that London experienced record-breaking high temperatures. I had heard about Ifekoya's exhibition from friends and was excited to experience it, particularly because I was aware that the sound system had been created collaboratively, built from scratch by a group including three lead designers and six young, black, queer, female/non-binary artists. This was a deliberate strategy, enacted so that the sound system might become a community resource after the exhibition.[70] I was aware that the audio element had a six-hour duration and had hoped to visit multiple times, but I only managed to make it there the day before the show closed.[71] I had a strong feeling that these aspects of the work – the collaboratively built sound system and the long duration of the piece – would be significant, not just in relation to my research into listening practices, but also as potential inspiration for my future practice. Even from the start of my research journey I had wanted to work collaboratively, but I had not yet created the opportunities to do so (although there was some collaboration during making *AQoM:1&2*). I was very open to listening and learning from other artists' experiences of working collaboratively.

Upon entering the installation space, I am enveloped by a sea of calm. A blue and white vinyl print depicting the ocean covers the floor, extending in waves halfway up the left wall in the main room and barrelling all the way to the ceiling in the next room on the right, where it meets a cloud of silver, orange, black and white helium-filled balloons.[72] Hung on the wall in the second room is a photograph, *Bodybuilder with Bra* (1990) by London-based artist Ajamu X. Both of these visual elements function as a subtle homage to club culture and queer black history.[73] In the main room the bespoke sound system is suspended from the ceiling, with an extra stack of bass speakers on the floor

---

[70] For visual documentation of the creation of the sound system and its life after *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief*, see: https://www.instagram.com/blackobsidian_soundsystem/. (Accessed: 5 June 2019).
[71] I am grateful to Evan Ifekoya for generously providing me with access to the full six hours of audio so that I could analyse the work in more detail.
[72] Images of the installation space can be found here: https://www.gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/evan-ifekoya-2018-07-05/. (Accessed: 4 June 2019).
[73] The balloons are a direct reference to David Mancuso's legendary 1970s New York nightclub called The Loft. Ajamu X has been documenting the lives and experiences of black LGBTQ communities since the early 1990s.

against the far wall. In the middle of the room are two black rubberised mats, stacked on top of each other – life rafts floating on the ocean's surface. I lie down on the mats, finding space amongst the eight or so other people in the exhibition. My legs extend onto the ocean vinyl and I allow myself to be carried on the (sound)waves, floating, listening. After about twenty minutes the other people leave and I am left alone in the space. On the one hand I feel incredibly privileged to be experiencing the artwork without any distractions, but on the other hand I cannot help feeling that an element of the collective experience has been taken away. This raises important questions in relation to diffractive listening. What conditions are required for an audience to enact such a listening practice? As I noted earlier, it requires a level of intentionality, but if we are to explore its potential for allowing collective subjectivities to emerge through the experience of engaging with artwork, then we need to consider the conditions in a more nuanced way. In the case of Ifekoya's work, the collective subjectivities emerge from the artwork itself, as I shall discuss below. Therefore, the fact that I was experiencing the artwork alone did not hinder my intention to listening diffractively. If the other people had stayed the experience might have been very different, but I cannot speculate any further on that. Every artwork (and artist) is different and every individual engaging with an artwork will have a different experience, therefore, a diffractive listening practice has the potential to be defined differently in relation to each experience. Perhaps it is queer that way, always adapting, fluid like waves, morphous like ghosts.

Lying on the rubber raft, I realise that the whole installation generates a haptic push-pull akin to what I described earlier in relation to Barnard's work. Floating on the waves, the sound and various visual elements pull my body from one space to the next. Water is not just a visual motif; it pervades the aural as well. During much of the six-hour audio track there are sounds recorded underwater, as well as splashes and waves lapping, which in turn pulls me back to the work of Akomfrah and Prodger (as well as my own) discussed in Chapter One.

A very strong sense of 'polyvocality' emerges from the work, which speaks further to the notion of a collective subjectivity. Polyvocality for Ifekoya is about 'thinking through what it means to occupy a subject position that is really in fact made of so many different subject positions, […] embodying and channelling a lot of different voices' (Gasworks 2018: 04:18-05:30). Many of the voices we hear are Ifekoya's own, taken from voice-notes recorded on their phone (stream-of-consciousness recordings that Ifekoya uses as part of their methodology), or recorded during workshops and conversations with friends, all of which are edited alongside specific voiceover recordings. Throughout the piece, Ifekoya's voice makes reference to other important voices, such as Octavia Butler, Fred Moten, Audre Lorde and adrienne maree brown, but we also hear recordings of other spoken-word pieces, including: M. NourbeSe Philip reading her poem *Discourse on the Logic of Language*, Jewelle Gomez reading from the first chapter of her novel *The Gilda Stories*, and Pat Parker reading her poem *Where Will You Be When They Come*.[74] I was able to identify the sources (and full importance) of these recorded pieces during my extended analysis of Ifekoya's work via the audio files, but during my initial listening experience in the installation space I was not familiar with all of them. What I was able to appreciate in that immediate moment was the way in which the words and the multiple voices resonated together, echoing each other. Philip speaks poetically about her 'mother tongue', which echoes Ifekoya discussing their complicated relationship with their mother in the same section. In a later section (as I will discuss below) Ifekoya uses polyvocal techniques to connect their discussion of a problematic artwork to Gomez's story of vampires via the themes of bondage and submission.

---

[74] The M. NourbeSe Philip recording can be found here: https://youtu.be/424yF9eqBsE.
The Jewelle Gomez recording can be found here: https://youtu.be/pSj50Y9rVHY.
The Pat Parker reading was recorded at a rally prior to the March on Washington in 1979 and can be found here:
http://queermusicheritage.com/Videos/Parker-Grahn/Pat%20Parker-where%20will%20you%20be%20when%20they%20come-Oct79.mp3.
Incidentally, Pat Parker also offers a connection back to my discussion of Sandy Stone and Olivia Records in Chapter One, as Stone was the audio engineer on an album of poetry featuring Parker. More details here: http://queermusicheritage.com/olivia-ppjg.html.
(All links above accessed: 4 June 2019).

This polyvocality not only extends across the full duration of the work, but many of these voices emerge at the same time from different channels of the 5.1 surround sound system. Multiple channels of vocal track are delicately mixed with the aforementioned water sounds, as well other recurring sounds such as birdsong and 'floaty' synth-keyboard music that one might identify with a guided meditation track. Other music is introduced in a less delicate way – heavy bass beat, synth snare drum, guitar strings, and snippets of music from genres as varied as rock, pop, disco, soul and techno – much of which deliberately punctuates the soundtrack with moments that reach through the space and touch the listener's body, rocking the gentle balance of the floating raft. Ifekoya's process of categorising and editing the many sounds within the work is based on a system that they refer to as a 'black queer algorithm' (Gasworks 2018: 02:28-03:15). The sounds belong essentially to seven different categories, encompassing themes as varied as birth, mothering and mourning; queer nightlife and dance; intimacy, sexuality, desire and relationships; and spiritual and bodily healing. These extend to (and intersect with) much more politically resonant themes such as gentrification, capitalism and navigating the world as a black non-binary person. Already, it is evident how Ifekoya's process might be easily compared to my notion of diffractive listening. Throughout the duration of the work, some sounds that Ifekoya might have classified within a particular category do not stay confined to their designated sections, many of the sounds and vocals become recurring refrains and riffs throughout the whole six-hour piece. There are two different sets of repeated phrases in particular, that speak to specific areas of inquiry in this thesis and I will now attempt to disentangle these connections, each one in turn.

My discussion of a collective subjectivity above referred mostly to the polyvocality of the audio track. I would like to extend this to attend specifically to some of the recurring phrases spoken by the multiple voices and the ways in which they also give rise to a collective subjectivity. Just over an hour into the audio piece, accompanied by meditative synth-keyboards, Ifekoya's voice (with heavy echo/delay/reverb) speaks the following words:

Am I…You, me… Or are we… We are family… We are family…

Am I…You, me… Or are we… We are family… We are family…

This is accompanied by intermittent sounds of fluttering and birdsong, as well as a mechanical breathing sound that is reminiscent of a hospital life-support system. Then, Ifekoya sings the line 'We are family' twice, very melodically with echo/delay/reverb. The lines above are spoken once again, then a recording from Ifekoya's stream-of-consciousness voice-notes begins in which they discuss the challenges that they faced during the collaborative design and build of the sound system. This overt reference to the collaborative process is yet another moment in which the artwork reveals processual elements of its own construction. Although it occurs in a very different manner to that which I described earlier in this chapter in relation to Barnard's work (and in previous chapters in relation to other artists' work) it is yet one more example of a subversive method that allows the work to move beyond representationalism.

Ifekoya's voiceover discussing their process is intermittently subsumed within the increasing volume of the previous voiceovers repeating the phrases above, both speaking and singing. Towards the end of this brief discussion about the sound system, Ifekoya's melodic vocals reverberate with the optimistic line: 'I got my sisters and me'.[75] Pairing the repeated references to family with a discussion about the collaborative creation of the sound system resonates deeply as I lie on the raft, surrounded by the speakers. I feel the impact of the collaboration through its past, present and future, all of those temporalities converging as I feel the touch of their collective subjectivity moving me gently across the ocean vinyl floor. Through my own diffractive listening practice, I am also able to hear and acknowledge the individual subjectivities that contributed to the collective. Their individual voices have space to breath within the polyvocality of Ifekoya's work, they are given agency, they are honoured, listened to, cared for. As I discussed earlier in relation to our experiments with the headphone verbatim technique, there is a responsibility of caring for the

---

[75] It is worth noting that although the words resemble the lyrics of the famous Sister Sledge song, the melody does not, which offers one explanation as to why Ifekoya sings 'I got my sisters and me' rather than 'I got all my sisters with me'.

voices of others and it is evident from listening to the work that Ifekoya takes that responsibility seriously.

The collective 'We' is invoked slightly differently later, around one hour and twenty minutes into the work, in a section in which Ifekoya discusses a well-known but problematic 19th Century engraving of a masked, enslaved woman, widely believed to be named Escrava Anastácia.[76] When this discussion begins, Ifekoya describes the conflicted history of the image and the pain that it generates for them, seeing 'my own reflection staring back at me'. This dialogue is paired with another voiceover repeated from a previous section, in which Ifekoya poetically narrates their complicated relationship with their mother, ending once again with the line 'We are family'. Shortly afterwards, Ifekoya's discussion of the engraving changes tone and they admit that they, like many other people, are seduced by the image. A new multi-vocal track is then introduced in which Ifekoya sings melodically with echo/delay/reverb: 'She is me. I am her. We', whilst another vocal track speaks almost the same words in a monotone voice: 'She is me and I am her, we'. The two vocals overlap and repeat on a loop as Ifekoya's initial vocal track goes on to make connections between the veneration of Escrava Anastácia in Brazil and Yoruba spirituality in which she is considered as a kind of Òrìṣà, specifically a goddess of wisdom and serenity.[77] Ifekoya goes on to reveal that their real interest in the image is what lies behind the mask, that perhaps Escrava Anastácia's voice was a powerful weapon, that even though she was silenced there is still agency and power to be found. Throughout this description, the speaking vocal track continues with: 'She is me and I am her, we' and the singing voice chimes in periodically with echo/delay/reverb: 'We', along with the meditative synth-keyboards which have been playing throughout. Ifekoya's original voiceover from this section then says: 'We're in this together, like I feel like we're cut from the same cloth. Like, I feel like we are. This is not I/me. This is We.' During this line, new music is introduced, a kind of uplifting synth-guitar. The speaking and

---

[76] For a detailed analysis of the engraving, its proliferation and Escrava Anastácia's subsequent veneration by Brazilian Catholics, see: http://jeromehandler.org/wp-content/uploads/Escrava-09.pdf. (Accessed: 5 June 2019).

[77] For more details on this aspect of Yoruba religion, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orisha. (Accessed: 5 June 2019).

singing tracks continue too, before Ifekoya reiterates the line with very definitive intonation: 'She is *me*, and I am *her. We*'. The guitar music takes us into the next section in which Jewelle Gomez reads from her book and the singing and speaking vocal tracks continue for part of the reading. The segment that I have described above occupies a duration of just over six minutes in the audio piece, but I feel that it is significant in exemplifying the sense of solidarity and kinship that Ifekoya feels with the many voices in their work and yet more evidence that Ifekoya takes responsibility for their care. They are perhaps the kind of voices that Irina Leimbacher describes as 'a sonorous incarnation of embodied, audible relation—relation both as a telling (as in relating an account) and as a […] sonorous thread that links our uttering, perceiving bodies and subjectivities to each other' (Leimbacher 2017: 293). For me, Ifekoya's use of polyvocality (via the implementation of their 'black queer algorithm') not only engages in a form of diffractive listening (and invites one from the audience), but it also allows for a collective subjectivity to emerge.

The second set of repeated phrases that I wish to attend to refers to breath, which was an important element in the previous chapter. There are three different phrases that refer to breath and they are often accompanied by audible, vocalised breath: long, deep sighs; short, sharp breaths in and out; as well as the aforementioned sound of mechanised breathing that is perhaps a hospital life-support machine. The first phrase: 'I was only breathing… Breathing' is often followed by a long, slow drawn out 'Breeeeaaaaathiiiiiing'. It often overlaps with the second phrase: 'Breathing, trying to breathe, breathe', which is spoken in a steady monotone and repeated on a loop. The third phrase: 'Can I catch my breath?' is used much less, but when it does recur it is always in relation to the other phrases mentioned above. These phrases are repeated in different sections of audio that range thematically from sex and relationships, to spirituality and healing, but they are also used in sections with no other dialogue at all, accompanied by music and sounds from nature – rumbles of thunder, rain, birds, and sounds recorded underwater. Often, the sections that refer to breath, also draw on another recurring phrase: 'Be ready to let go', which (as I float on the raft, feeling the haptic push-pull of the installation space) brings back to mind Sara Ahmed's words:

With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe. (Ahmed 2010: 120)

We might also be reminded of Davina Quinlivan's work on breath, which mainly focuses 'on the ways in which breath emerges through the spatial, corporeal and inter-subjective dimensions of the filmic medium' (Quinlivan 2012: 169). How might this cinema-specific theorising be extended to think about Ifekoya's six-hour audio piece in relation to the installation space and the fact that voice is inextricably entangled with breath? If we think of diffractive listening as a listening practice attentive to the sounds of our own bodies and the bodies of others, in and out of time, then attending to the sound of breath, even when recorded, 'creates an aural shudder that is evocative of a sensual bodily being' (Quinlivan 2012: 141), which in turn draws our attention to our own breath, our own bodies, our own subjectivities which are always-evolving through time. In Ifekoya's work, this aural shudder resonates throughout the installation space and the infinite, multiplicitous spaces contained within the audio piece, but these spaces also implicate multiple temporalities and many breathing bodies and subjectivities that once existed and might still exist in spectral form. All of these voices and spatiotemporalities contribute to the collective subjectivity that emerges through the work.

I cannot claim that *E1* successfully generates the kind of collective subjectivity that I have argued is evident in the work of Ifekoya and Barnard. Admittedly, I did not engage in community outreach work as these two artists did, or indeed as Karikis did for *No Ordinary Protest*. There was a practice of diffractive listening involved – in my encounters with Marwan, the Syrian refugee, and the many times I listened to Max Levitas recount his stories – and my collective involvement in protests, but on the whole, I approached the work from my own subjective standpoint. Although I do feel that if approached as an interactive soundwalk the work might have the potential to foster diffractive listening and the emergence of collective subjectivities.

Aside from this work feeling like a shift in my practice, it also forced me to think about the kind of work I wanted to make moving forward. I felt that I had reached the limit of what my *queer-white-male-immigrant* subjectivity could explore within ethical boundaries. I realised that in order to make any kind of difference in the world (in a Harawayan and Baradian sense) and to do so ethically, it would be necessary to find ways of collaborating, in multiple senses of the word. The results of this collaboration (along with the challenges and rewards) will be explored in the next chapter.

My analyses of the work of Barnard and Ifekoya brought forward my contention in previous chapters that when artworks foreground processual elements and reveal multiple practices of engagement, they exceed the limits of representationalism and genre classification. I have given particular attention to aspects of listening and voice in these works to bolster my theory of diffractive listening which, we will recall, is about intentionally listening *through* time and place, listening for ghosts and echoes. It is about feeling the waves of the past lap against the shore of the present as they carry us into the future (and back again). It is about reflecting upon one's situated knowledges (and inherent privileges) and acknowledging our ever-evolving, relational subjectivities. The aural motifs of the echo and the wave will carry us through to the next chapter, although they will be reconfigured for a slightly different purpose.

The diffractive listening practice that I have described – as something that potentially occurs between artist, audience and artwork – is not something that can be fully quantified or defined in exact terms, at least not in our present time. But perhaps in the future it will be determined how such a listening practice allowed for new knowledge and meaning to emerge from such intersubjective engagements and in turn, contributed to a notion of collective subjectivity. These reconfigured, multiplicitous subjectivities might become a force for social justice that enacts meaningful change in order to create a more equitable future. It is the subject of the future to which I shall now turn my attention in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

The Disruptive and Transformative Power of Interference

This chapter deals with disrupted time (as well as disruptive times) and attends to multiplicitous, emergent subjectivities who find themselves precariously in-and-out-of-time. In what follows, I will consider how notions of temporality and spectrality within an audiovisual context can interfere with (or queer) systemic power structures. The aural motifs of the echo and the wave which were prevalent in the previous chapter will be reconfigured in this chapter, in quite different ways. The need for collaboration (and collaborators) that I gestured towards in the close of the previous chapter, is also foregrounded here, particularly in relation to the final film that I have produced as part of this research project, entitled *Queering di Teknolojik* (2019). This film is a companion piece to my preceding film, *Queer Babel* (2018) and both artworks experiment with a digital voice software created by an artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm, which offered an opportunity to explore the potential of voice in exciting new ways. The software, called Lyrebird.ai requires one to read up to three-hundred sentences in order for the AI to create a 'vocal avatar' and once this has been created the user can type any words into the interface for the digital voice to speak.[78] These phrases can then be exported as audio files. During my experiments with the software I encountered recurring sonic artifacts at the beginning and ending of each exported audio file, a form of distortion most likely caused by temporal aliasing due to the sample frequency of the digital signal.[79] I could have eliminated these phenomena using an anti-aliasing filter during the editing process, but I chose to keep them and they gained significant importance in my research process. I will discuss both of the resulting two films in different ways, but these analyses will be linked via the conceptual metaphor of spectrality, which has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis. I will also discuss a third artwork, Wu Tsang's *The Looks* (2015) and I will link this to my discussion of *Queer Babel* via the two films' shared consideration of 'algorithmic oppression'. I will forge further

---

[78] https://lyrebird.ai. (Accessed: 12 March 2018).
[79] For a brief explanation of temporal aliasing, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliasing. (Accessed: 30 July 2019).

connections between *The Looks* and *Queering di Teknolojik* by returning to a discussion of queer temporality and a shared sense of (and resistance to) precarity. All three films will be analysed in relation to the notion of 'interference', which is the pervading concern of this chapter. Interference can refer to unintentional or deliberate forms of disruption and is used across a wide range of fields and disciplines. I will now briefly discuss this term and some of its varied uses.

In biology, interference has been found to randomly occur in the biological process of meiosis (cell division).[80] Biologists have studied this unintentional interference and developed a deliberate form of interference called RNA interference (RNAi – also known as gene silencing).[81] In the field of cognitive psychology, the term interference pertains to memory function, or more specifically forgetting. 'Proactive Interference' describes the situation in which old memories interfere with an individual's capacity to form new memories. 'Retroactive Interference' describes the opposite situation, wherein new memories interfere with an individual's ability to retain old memories.[82]

In physics, the term interference is used in relation to the superposition of waves. Any kind of wave (light, sound, water, gravity, etc.) that travels in a linear direction can superpose with another wave of the same frequency and their mutual interaction can produce either constructive or destructive interference. Consider for a moment, the shape of a continuous sine wave that oscillates up and down in peaks and troughs. If two waves with the same shape are in-phase (the peaks and troughs of the respective sine waves are aligned) they subsequently produce *constructive interference* and their amplitude is increased. However, if the peaks and troughs of the waves are not aligned (out-of-phase) then their interaction produces *destructive interference* and their amplitude (volume, in the case of sound) is decreased, sometimes to the point

---

[80] See: Hillers (2004).
[81] See: Sledz and Williams (2005).
[82] See: Darby and Sloutsky (2015).

of being cancelled (as in the case of noise-cancelling headphones).[83] Things become decidedly more complicated in the quantum realm, where particles can behave like waves and create interference patterns (also known as diffraction patterns), but that would take us far outside the scope of this chapter.[84]

Within the history of queer theory, interference can also be thought of as queer, especially in relation to the admission by Canadian educators Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell that their method of queer pedagogy was 'a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately *to interfere* with, to intervene in, the production of "normalcy" in schooled subjects' (Bryson and de Castell 1993: 285, emphasis mine). Interference can sometimes be an effective method for use by marginalised communities to make their voices heard.

If we extend this line of thought to think about electromagnetic interference (EMI) or radio-frequency Interference (RI) this allows for a consideration of the spectrum along which this interference occurs.[85] A return to the etymological roots in Latin of the word spectrum then allows us to think of interference as spectral in the ghostly sense, not just in relation to the visual and sonic.[86] This can be further extended to thinking across the political spectrum and the ways in which the political left is haunted by events throughout history in which marginalised voices were silenced. If we recall the description of sine waves above, we can think of voices with the same amplitude and frequency on the (political) spectrum potentially causing productive interference, combining their force of their waves and becoming louder. Conversely, voices that are out of phase, with a different frequency (at opposite ends of the political spectrum)

---

[83] For a clear and detailed explanation of wave superposition and constructive/destructive interference, see: http://salfordacoustics.co.uk/sound-waves/superposition. (Accessed: 12 September 2019).

[84] For a detailed discussion of the famous two-slit experiment and the ways in which it informs Barad's theory of agential realism, see: Barad (2007: 247-352); or for a simple and more brief explanation by Barad, see: Dolphijn and Tuin (2012: 48-70).

[85] Radio spectrum: 'the range of electromagnetic frequencies used in radio transmission'. See: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/radio-spectrum. (Accessed: 22 June 2019).

[86] Latin *spectrum* (plural *spectra*) "an appearance, image, apparition, specter," from *specere* "to look at, view" […]. Meaning "visible band showing the successive colors, formed from a beam of light passed through a prism" first recorded 1670s. Figurative sense of "entire range (of something)" is from 1936. See: https://www.etymonline.com/word/spectrum. (Accessed: 22 June 2019).

produce destructive interference and cancel (or drown) each other out. My deliberate reference to drowning gestures towards a return to the wave metaphor that is to come, but my reason for pondering the political spectrum is because it raises an important point in relation to the collective subjectivity that will be discussed in this chapter. Particularly in relation to those who have been part of various movements on the political left – fighting for anti-racist, feminist, ecological and LGBTIQ rights – who might agree with Ben Pitcher when he contends that 'the ethical resources of progressive discourses have served to establish the credibility of centrist (and even right-wing) projects, thus serving to neutralize the possibility of critique' (Pitcher 2011: 89). Political agendas that were once considered radical are now mainstream, having been appropriated by the neo-liberal machine. It must also be acknowledged that all of the subversive strategies identified in this thesis could easily be co-opted by those with pernicious plans.[87]

All of this is to say that a great deal of interference occurs across a broad spectrum of phenomena in this world which affects us biologically, psychologically, socially and politically. Interference is therefore a useful metaphor to consider in relation to the recurring sonic distortion that emerged from my experiments with the digital voice. In relation to my own films, I will be attending to forms of interference that were initially unintentional disruptions, which I have harnessed and implemented in a deliberately disruptive manner. In some cases, as I shall discuss later, this disruptive interference has the potential to become a powerful force when thought through the conceptual metaphor of the wave. In this regard, I will draw on the work of Tara Rodgers, who acknowledges the fact that Western technoscientific culture has traditionally privileged a distanced and visual perspective over an embodied experience, even when it comes to the study of sound and water waves. Rodgers suggests that rather than observing wave phenomena from a distance, 'feminist epistemologies of sound might begin from perspectives within the waves, attending to the politics of human and nonhuman encounters and

---

[87] See Paul Mason's thoughts in this regard:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/11/chaos-normalised-boris-johnson-pernicious-plan-democracy. (Accessed: 11 September 2019).

interconnections' (Rodgers 2016: 197). Whether we think about waves literally or figuratively, Rodgers contends that 'sound waves also offer ways of imagining situated knowledges and partial perspectives that *depart from merely visual senses and metaphors*, in part by signaling contingent and open-ended processes of touch and movement' (Rodgers 2016: 207, emphasis mine). This is a welcome echo of my criticism in the previous chapter of Haraway and Barad's reliance on visual metaphors, but it also builds on Rodgers' earlier writing which (as I will discuss in detail later) reconceives the history of successive feminist movements as 'interactive sound waves' (Rodgers 2010: 18).

Firstly though, I need to discuss some thoughts on my research process. As I noted in the previous chapter, through the making of *E1: Stories of Refuge & Resistance*, I was attempting to adjust my methodological approach to this project from what was effectively theory-led practice, to something more resembling practice-based-research. The quest to understand and clarify the difference between these terms has continued during the process of making my latest two audiovisual experiments that I will discuss below. I have also continued my interest in exploring different configurations of time and subjectivity. The notion of a collective subjectivity that was nascent in *E1* began to evolve and emerge in interesting ways from my two subsequent films, particularly in relation to (dis)embodiment of voice(s) and different forms of collaboration.

When I began this research project (even before the university application and acceptance stages in 2015/2016) I intended to form a collaborative focus group comprised of queer artist and activist friends. I wanted to make films that addressed issues of social justice, but I was acutely aware that to do so – to amplify the voices of the most marginalised communities – would require collaborating with (and most importantly, listening to) members of those communities. My initial proposal was to make a feature project dealing with the mythology of the Giants Causeway, centred around the experience of a queer person of colour as they made a journey of discovery, not just about the history and mythology of that particular landscape, but also about themselves.

The idea of a collaborative focus group felt necessary for ethical as well as creative reasons. *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* was the first in what was intended to be a series of short audiovisual experiments which would eventually culminate in a long-form work. Early on in the process I had asked a long-time friend, filmmaker and activist Campbell X, if they might like to be part of the collaborative focus group and they agreed, as did some other friends. After making *AQoM:1&2*, however, my research took on a momentum of its own, the subsequent audiovisual experiments took me in different directions (as I have discussed in Chapters Two and Three). It did not seem appropriate to involve any potential collaborators until I had a more suitable project. Another reason for the delay in bringing the group together was a feeling of trepidation, based on my belief that I needed the group much more than they needed me. I was acutely aware that in these precarious times in which many marginalised folk are already feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the everyday struggle of simply existing – in addition to any activism in which they may already be involved – it would be a lot to ask for them to contribute their intellectual and emotional labour to a project such as this.

Between May and October 2018, I had a great deal of productive correspondence about possible collaboration with another long-time friend; writer, academic, poet and activist, So Mayer, who guided me towards the 'visionary fiction' body of writing that has recently emerged, inspired by Octavia E. Butler's work. The 2015 anthology *Octavia's Brood,* edited by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown was a significant starting point, which then led me to explore other work by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, such as her 2016 book *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugivity* and her 2018 book *M Archive: After the End of the World.*[88] So Mayer and I both felt that it was important for the project to embrace a positive, utopian way of thinking, as a much-needed antidote to our mutual feeling that the current global situation is already starting to resemble a lot of dystopian science-fiction. During this period of correspondence, London experienced an excruciatingly hot summer (as I

---

[88] The Brown Sisters' podcast was also an inspiring resource:
https://www.endoftheworldshow.org. (Accessed: 22 May 2018).

touched on in the previous chapter in relation to Evan Ifekoya's exhibition) and it was also the period in which I produced *Queer Babel*. Immediately after making that work, I made a second film, tentatively entitled *Echoes of Narcissism*. I had hoped to eventually complete a trilogy of works that explored the potential of the digital voice in different ways. This second film was a single-screen work that experimented with two virtual 'screens' within the video frame, angled slightly towards each other and placed against a backdrop of CGI stars. On the left screen I 'projected' archive footage of the 1963 March on Washington and this was 'mirrored' against Super 8 footage on the right screen that I had shot myself at the anti-Trump demonstration in London in July 2018. Paired with this imagery was a complex soundtrack including my digital voice reading from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about the story of Echo and Narcissus, my own voice echoing some of that dialogue, and other vocal sounds of breathing. If this sounds confusing, I can assure you that it was. My attempt to critique the narcissism of white supremacy resulted in an overload of meaning and a political message that might be easily misinterpreted. I am mentioning this because although this second experiment was not successful, going through that process and acknowledging the failure was important insofar as it reinforced my desire to work collaboratively. The digital voices that I used for *Queer Babel* and the second experiment were both created from my own voice recordings. I wanted to push the technology further, to subvert the expectation that the vocal avatar needs only one voice. I needed to *queer the machine* even more so than I had already done with *Queer Babel.*

I reached out to my potential collaborators in mid-November 2018, all of whom I have known as friends for many years: curator and activist Teresa Cisneros; intersex activist and writer Valentino Vecchietti; filmmaker and activist Campbell X; and (as mentioned above) So Mayer.[89] We came together in January 2019 and queered the machine by taking turns reading the sentences that the Lyrebird.ai software offered us. That same night we created and tested our

---

[89] For more about Teresa Cisneros, see: https://www.bdewittgallery.com/about; for more about Valentino Vecchietti, see: https://twitter.com/ValentinoInter; for more about Campbell X, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campbell_X and https://twitter.com/CampbellX; for more about So Mayer, see: http://independent.academia.edu/SoMayer and https://www.bfi.org.uk/people/so-mayer. (All accessed 21 June 2019)

collective digital voice and we were pleasantly surprised by the result. In the weeks that followed, I wrote a first draft of the script and received invaluable feedback from So and Teresa, particularly on how to make the dialogue more poetic whilst addressing some of the political concerns that we all felt were important. During our first meeting, Valentino had conveyed their concerns about the ways in which intersex bodies are treated within

medical and institutional environments; particularly in relation to the fact that babies born with an intersex variation are still routinely operated upon without their consent and assigned a gender that they may not identify with when they are fully grown.[90] Campbell had expressed concerns about relying on colonial languages when considering the dialogue in the film. These considerations were always in the back of my mind. Through the second and third drafts of the script I began to shape a vision of a future world and in hindsight, perhaps I jumped a bit too far ahead in the process; suggesting sounds and imagery alongside wild speculations about our future societies and technologies. I was still struggling with how we (as in humanity) arrived there. It was moving in the right direction, but still carried some problematic elements, such as references to colonial structures, without any critical commentary as to how and why they still existed in the future. It was at this stage that So Mayer encouraged me to consider developing a unique vocabulary for the film, one that acknowledges that English may not be the dominant language in a more equitable (and truly decolonised) future. This feedback inspired me to write an extensive, detailed backstory about the future, as well as the forms of protests, revolutions and technologies that propelled us there. This process helped me to then think about what kind of language we might speak in the future and led to me devising the dialect and writing the fourth draft of the script, which was then approved by the group in mid-March 2019. The dialect that I have created for the film hinges on the premise that a message is being sent from the future, but via broken translator technology from the present time, which has been found and repaired by the senders of the message. This premise allowed me to formulate a dialect that would be mostly intelligible when heard, whilst allowing

---

[90] For an excellent discussion of this issue (with a reference list of important further reading), see: https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/private-practice/march-2018/understanding-intersex/. (Accessed: 15 November 2019).

me to convey (via the subtitles) that what we are reading is not entirely English. I chose a blend of Haitian creole and Jamaican patois, primarily because although these languages are both results of colonialism and slavery, they are also a form of resistance to those atrocities – a living symbol of survival. The Haitian creole influence is evident in the script when a hard 'c' is replaced with 'k', for example 'catalyst' is translated as 'katalis' and 'connection' becomes 'koneksyon'. Therefore, other words in the script also needed to conform to this rule. Similarly, Jamaican patois translates 'this' to 'dis', 'they/them/their' to 'dem', 'thing' to 'ting' and 'we' to 'wi', so in keeping with this, I modified all other words in the script beginning with a hard 'th' to a 'd' and a soft 'th' to 't'. Other terms from Spanish and Turkish were added for specific reasons. Although Spanish is a colonial language, naming the global uprising the 'Revolución mundial' suggests that impending change may very well come from a South American country. The Turkish word 'Teknolojik' was chosen mostly for aesthetic reasons but also felt compatible with Haitian Creole in which a hard 'c' is replaced with a 'k'. I will elaborate more on the dialect and the subtitles in my analysis of the artwork later in this chapter.

The guidance and support that I received from the collaborative group was invaluable. The multitude of their lived experience and knowledge provided indispensable insights and ways to think more critically and intersectionally; and in a way, to listen diffractively – which, as we will recall from Chapter Three, includes an element of critical reflexivity. Ultimately, I am very happy with the finished work, not least because I have had the validation of the film being accepted into festivals and nominated for an award. I am in no doubt that it was the guidance and feedback from the collaborative group that helped achieve this and I am immensely grateful for the support that they were able to offer me. I cannot deny that the process had its challenges, but I always knew that I would be much more invested in the project than anyone else in the group and that their busy lives and more pressing commitments would naturally take priority. Due to my urgent PhD schedule I was forced to push the project ahead on my own, which raised concerns in my mind about whether or not the process was truly collaborative. I was conscious of the risk that my editorial voice might

dominate the narrative and that the rest of the group might feel that their voices were not being heard. Thankfully, these concerns have proved unfounded.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Although this chapter claims to be about disrupting temporality, I would like to keep the analyses of my artworks in chronological order. I will return to a more detailed discussion of *Queering di Teknolojik* later, after I discuss *Queer Babel* and Wu Tsang's *The Looks*.

Queer Babel is about becoming. A voice embodying language. An artificial intelligence embodying thought (and grappling with the thoughts of another AI). A body that may never be flesh. Existing (or not) in and out of time and place. From the subatomic to the infinite and all of the fleshy, visceral, resonant spaces in-between. In other words, *Queer Babel* is an exploration of artificial intelligence and embodiment, as well as a rumination on the nature of humanity in relation to the universe. I was drawn to an exploration of AI because it felt like a unique way to complicate notions of subjectivity, identity and representation. Attending to 'other-than-human' forms of embodiment, within the virtual realm that AI alludes to, also allows for a departure from (and potential disruption of) earlier theories of cinematic embodiment (such as those explored in Chapter Two). There are many questions that could be asked in relation to the AI entity that *Queer Babel* has potentially created, questions that the entity might very well ponder themselves, not least of which, these questions from Olga Goriunova:

> What is the ontological status of this digital subject? Is it an artificial person? A mere representation? A collection of images? […] If its ontology is one of making, of epistemology, what are the relations between knowledge practices that make it up and the environments within which it constantly evolves and acts? (Goriunova 2019: 5)

These are pertinent questions to bear in mind when thinking about the potential subjectivities that might emerge from all three artworks in this chapter and particularly useful in acknowledging that they are always evolving. The fact that the AI entity in *Queer Babel* emerges first and foremost as a voice, before they

become associated with any visual referent, raises further questions. What new knowledge might be gleaned from a subject/object existing solely as voice, particularly when that voice is derived from my own? How is the subjectivity of the AI entity transformed when it is forced to interact with another AI system? How many other subjectivities are implicated in this process?

Visually, *Queer Babel* switches constantly between micro and macro perspectives, within an aural environment partly composed of elements derived from the digital voice that narrates the piece. The soundtrack offers aural gestures that hint at the presence of a body, inviting the audience to consider their own body in relation to the work. The sequences in which large coloured pixels float around the screen, I created myself (more on that process later). All other footage in the film was sourced from online archives or stock footage websites, which is intended to further reinforce the association between the digital voice and an emergent entity that would logically have access to the entirety of the world's knowledge, archived on the internet.

My experimentation with the Lyrebird.ai digital voice software began after an article about a different AI voice software serendipitously appeared in my social media feed.[91] It sparked my interest and I soon found myself down many different research rabbit-holes exploring similar software and the ethics of AI, eventually leading me to find the Lyrebird.ai software with which I began experimenting. During these experiments I discovered that some vocal techniques worked better than others. The FAQs on the Lyrebird.ai website state that an American accent will achieve better results, and this did prove to be the case. During tests of my first digital voice (which I created using my regular intonation and accent: an unrecognisable Australian accent, diluted from living in London since 1998), the digital voice struggled to pronounce words beginning with the letters 'A' or 'P'. When I re-created the voice, I found myself speaking with a slow American drawl, over-pronouncing the vowels and beginnings of each word, as if I was channelling William Burroughs or Iggy Pop.

---

[91] See: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3k7mgn/baidu-deep-voice-software-can-clone-anyones-voice-with-just-37-seconds-of-audio. (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

The resulting digital voice worked much better at pronouncing the words I typed into it and came with the added benefit of sounding significantly different from my own voice. Even at this stage, before I queered the machine with the collaborative group, this felt like a form of collaboration; as if through this engagement with the AI, together we had created a new, other-than-human subjectivity, derived from my voice but dislocated from my own subjectivity. Then came the question of what this disembodied voice might be able (or want) to say.

I returned to the rabbit holes and discovered another AI interface called BABEL, designed by researchers at MIT and Harvard.[92] The sole intention of this software was to generate non-sensical essays that would then be submitted for assessment by Automatic Essay Scoring (AES) software. The supposedly non-sensical essays were given consistently high scores by the AES software and this, according to the researchers, proved that AES systems are flawed.[93] This is a valid endeavour, but I became much more interested in what I perceive as an inherent flaw in the BABEL software, which generates the essays using three keywords as well as synonyms of those words. My many research rabbit-holes had led me to the work of Alan Turing and the queer history of computing, so this had become one of the main themes that I wanted the artwork to explore.[94] The three keywords that I chose to input into the essay generator were 'queer', 'Turing' and 'suicide', and the synonyms that the AI algorithm subsequently drew from to generate the text are as follows:

- Turing: "Alan Mathison Turing" "Turing" "Alan Turing"
- suicide: "self-annihilation" "suicide" "self-destruction"
- queer: "queer" "poove" "nance" "fag" "poof" "pansy" "fairy" "faggot" "fagot" "queen" "pouf"

[92] The essay generator can be found here: https://babel-generator.herokuapp.com. (Accessed: 31 May 2018).
[93] For more details about the MIT research, see: https://www.chronicle.com/article/Writing-Instructor-Skeptical/146211/. (Accessed 31 May 2018).
[94] See Jacob Gaboury's series on the queer history of computing here: http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/feb/19/queer-computing-1/. (Accessed: 31 May 2018)

I still find the resulting essay (which I have used for the narration) both absurdly humorous and violently disturbing. I am aware that AI and machine-learning algorithms cannot be homophobic, racist or misogynistic in themselves, but the algorithms need to be programmed and trained by humans, and it is at this stage that certain biases and prejudices can become embedded into the algorithm. In her recent book, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism,* Safiya Umoja Noble argues that the same kind of discriminatory biases that underlie most aspects of social inequity are also inherent in the computer code that is used to create certain AI technologies. Although Noble's research primarily attends to the Google search engine and its associated algorithms, it can be extended to a consideration of other technologies, as she contends:

> Part of the challenge of understanding algorithmic oppression is to understand that mathematical formulations to drive automated decisions are made by human beings. […] The people who make these decisions hold all types of values, many of which openly promote racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy, which is well documented in studies of Silicon Valley and other tech corridors. (Noble 2018: 1-2)

Noble's claims can be backed up by a very recent report into discrimination within the AI sector, which not only concluded that certain AI systems 'are replicating patterns of racial and gender bias in ways that can deepen and justify historical inequality' (West et al 2019: 3), but that the root cause is a lack of diversity in the industry. The researchers of the report go further though, stating that this 'diversity problem is not just about women. It's about gender, race, and most fundamentally, about power. It affects how AI companies work, what products get built, who they are designed to serve, and who benefits from their development' (West et al 2019: 5). This field of research interests me greatly (and would be a wonderful topic for post-doctoral research) but I also feel that delving deeper into it here would take me outside the boundaries of

this project.[95] I am highlighting the issue though, in the hope that it hovers in the background like a malevolent hum, haunting the rest of my discussion about this artwork.

Whilst I acknowledge that the disturbing nature of the text can be somewhat attributed to my choice of three keywords, there was something within the overall text that affected me. It was not just the combination of feeling deeply disturbed whilst still being able to find the humour. There was something about the nonsensical aspect of the text that provided the opportunity to reflect, speculate and ruminate on the *feeling* rather than the meaning that was evoked when listening to the digital voice read the script. Perhaps this feeling is akin to Sianne Ngai's concept of 'stuplimity', which she describes in her book, *Ugly Feelings*, as 'the synthesis of boredom and shock' or 'excitation and fatigue' (Ngai 2004: 9, 36). Later in the book, Ngai further defines stuplimity as 'a tension that holds opposing affects together' (Ngai 2004: 271). This tension is a helpful way to think through the disturbing and humorous nature of the voiceover in *Queer Babel*, as well as the nonsensical aspect of the script and the other audiovisual elements within the work. Could we think about this tension as a form of interference that disrupts notions of representation and allows the work to be considered as 'postrepresentational'? The forced interaction of two AI systems might be considered in relation to Gozde Naiboglu's articulation of 'a postrepresentational approach which aims to push beyond signifying structures, putting emphasis on the affective potential, creation, transformation and the production of the new' (Naiboglu 2018: 194). Together, these two AI systems have produced a new relationality, from which emerges a vocal utterance that both resists and creates meaning, a sonic phenomenon that exceeds their individual potential.

I wanted to embrace the ambiguity of the spoken text and allow it to invite the audience to also reflect, speculate and ruminate on whatever feelings and thoughts the artwork might conjure up. This is why in the opening sequence we

---

[95] See also, Joy Buolamwini's important work with Algorithmic Justice League: https://www.ajlunited.org. (Accessed 11 January 2019).

hear the sound of typing as the AI entity begins to find and test their voice. This sound of typing begs the question: whose fingers are they? At other times, the typing is accompanied by sounds of swallowing and breathing, which raises questions about whether or not these bodily sounds are human or other-than-human. These aural moments create an opportunity to make connections with the subsequent visual references to corporeality, but also draw attention to the human involvement in the process; not just in the creation of the digital voice, but also the process of constructing the artwork itself. This revealing of processual elements is yet another attempt to resist representationalism, much like the examples from the other artists that I have discussed in previous chapters.

The mysterious sonic distortion that I mentioned in my introduction to this chapter became a source of fascination to me. It occurs at the beginning and end of each recording of every line spoken by the digital voice and is perhaps the most material and haptic aspect of my collaboration with the AI. It can be heard most obviously as glitchy static whenever the voice speaks, but it is perhaps less noticeable when it takes its various other forms. It can be thought of as a trace of something, but of what, exactly? I could speculate on its origins, as to whether this is a remnant of my own voice or a fault in the algorithm (or as I noted earlier, a result of temporal aliasing), but I prefer to think of it in terms of 'interference'. This interference was initially unintentional; a serendipitous happy accident, much like some of the sounds that I encountered during the production of *E1*, which I described in the previous chapter. This interference is disruptive, but it can also be thought of as spectral, like a ghost in the machine. Perhaps the spectral interference is coming from the other-than-human subjectivity created from my collaboration with the AI, or perhaps it is the ghost of Alan Turing himself.[96] Going further, we could think of this interference as

---

[96] There is a link (albeit a tenuous one, hence its relegation to a footnote) that could be explored between Turing's research and the digital voice. Turing was briefly involved in the development of SIGSALY, the digital speech encryption system that the US and UK used during WWII. The system incorporated Homer Dudley's pioneering Vocoder speech synthesis technology and inspired Turing to develop his own voice encryption system called 'Delilah'. Although it was never taken into production, some of Turing's ideas were implemented in SIGSALY. See here for more: https://www.cryptomuseum.com/crypto/usa/sigsaly/index.htm. (Accessed: 30 October 2019).

coming from the collective subjectivity of the ghosts of all those queer people who were subjected to the same if not worse treatment inflicted upon Turing. We could think of the interference coming from the voices of all the women who worked during those early years of computing, whose contribution was not recognised. Marginalised voices once silenced, now gaining the power to haunt.

I have harnessed this unintentional interference and used it to compose two other forms of deliberate interference, designed to queer the film's soundtrack. The first sound effect is used to accompany the visual 'blip' in two different sequences that use archive film footage showing heart monitor activity (from 00:41 and 03:36). The second is the semi-constant drone that oscillates between the left and right audio channels at various points throughout the film. The drone sound is also an echoic response to the voiceover's statement (from 05:32) that *the pendulum is not the only thing interference oscillates*, but if we think of it in spectral terms, perhaps it is the aforementioned malevolent hum of the oppressive algorithm coming back to haunt us.

The sound of the heart monitor blip is yet another aural gesture (along with fingers typing and sounds of swallowing and breathing) towards the possibility that the AI entity might have a body, or at the very least wish to attain one. Let us consider Brandon LaBelle's notion that the voice '*promises* a subject; it excites or haunts a listener to recognize in the voice a "someone." An *implicit* body on the way toward an explicit drama: the anticipation or expectation every voice instigates, that of a figure soon to appear' (LaBelle 2014: 6, emphasis in original). Does a digital voice function in the same way? The pixelated anatomical footage used at various points throughout the film also hints at the possible creation of a body for the AI entity and at this point I would like to take a slight digressional turn to different fields in an attempt to flesh out the connection between the digital voice and a possible body.

Although Rebecca Collins writes very specifically about performance art and the reciprocal relationship between the audience and the artwork, I find useful her claim that 'sound produces affective relations which operate on and between bodies, objects, and sound; none are exclusive, presented instead as mutually

entangled, contagious, and somehow unavoidable' (Collins 2018: 175). Add to this what we know from Salomé Voegelin in relation to sound art, that 'it is the action of sound on the listening body, which triggers this body into the action of perception that produces the work and the body itself' (Voegelin 2010: 177), and we might find ourselves moving further towards a speculative notion that the AI entity might be able to attain a body, with the help of other listening bodies.

Whilst we are on the subject of reciprocal relationships between bodies (which inevitably reminds us of Vivian Sobchack's theories on the mimetic exchange between the body of the film and the body of the audience that I discussed in Chapter Two), I would like to make a connection between affect and cognition. In her book *Affect and Artificial Intelligence*, Elizabeth Wilson offers an insightful observation of Alan Turing, whose ground-breaking work was instrumental in the development of AI:

> Rather than simply placing thinking and feeling side by side, Turing supposes that each contains the trace of the other (thoughts are felt, feelings are thought). These two capacities don't just abut or supplement or lean on each other. Rather, they are projected and introjected *into* each other. Cognition inhabits and modifies feeling, as feeling inhabits and modifies thinking. (Wilson 2010: 22, emphasis in original)

Aside from being a welcome interference to those theorists who insist on a separation between affect and cognition, this resonates with Collins' and Voegelin's thoughts about the relationality of voices/sounds and the bodies that listen to them and I find it useful in thinking about the possibility of a body for (or at least the subjectivity of) the AI entity.

But what can be gleaned from the materiality of the digital voice about the gender of the AI entity? Can it be assumed that just because the digital voice is a vocal avatar of my own that the AI entity also adopts my gender? A brief examination of some debates around 'The Turing Test' might help to answer this question. An oft-ignored aspect of Turing's famous test is that it does not

simply pose the question of whether or not a machine can think. In fact, in his 1950 paper on computing machinery and intelligence, Turing deliberately refuses to address this question. Instead he proposes an imitation game, which is offered in various forms, the first of which involves three participants: a man pretending to be a woman, a woman telling the truth and an interrogator (of either gender) isolated from the other two and tasked with determining which is the man and which is the woman. Turing subsequently poses the question of what might happen when a machine takes the place of the interrogator: if it behaves like a human (and guesses wrongly) then this might prove that it is intelligent. This is just one of many interpretations of Turing's imitation exercise, for as Tyler Curtain observes, there is a 'contradictory stance taken by every single essay in the body of literature about the Turing test' (Curtain 1997: 141), with many dismissing the importance of the sexual guessing game component altogether. Curtain is more concerned with a wider issue, however, that

> the critical claim for the epistemology of "intelligence" has built into it […] an assumption of normative gender roles and an assumption by the computer of a normative gender role […], that "intelligence" and "humanity" can't be defined outside of sexual difference and the phenomenology of the sex-gender system. (Curtain 1997: 142)

Jack Halberstam raises an equally salient point and gestures towards missed opportunities when they observe that

> Turing's point in introducing the sexual guessing game was to show that imitation makes even the most stable of distinctions (i.e., gender) unstable. By using the sexual guessing game as simply a control model, however, Turing does not stress the obvious connection between gender and computer intelligence: both are in fact imitative systems, and the boundaries between female and male [...] are as unclear and as unstable as the boundary between human and machine intelligence. (Halberstam 1991: 443)

Elizabeth Wilson claims that 'Turing was having fun. He wrote this paper quickly, with enjoyment. It was designed to provoke' (Wilson 2010: 45), which invites the temptation to believe that Turing's queer sensibilities were at play. Halberstam offers a further observation that links the above discussion about 'intelligence' back to the notion of interference:

> Turing claimed that in both the human and the electric mind, there is the possibility for random interference and that it is this element that is critical to intelligence. Interference, then, works both as an organizing force, one which orders random behaviors, and as a random interruption which returns the system to chaos: it must always do both. (Halberstam 1991: 442)

This consideration of the dual behaviour of interference offers a way to think about the sonic interference embedded in the digital voice and the potential it holds for being both disruptive and an organising force. Halberstam goes even further by offering a link between interference and gender by discussing the ironic and tragic events that saw Turing subjected to female hormone treatment as a result of his 'gross indecency' conviction. Halberstam notes that the hormones made Turing impotent and he began to grow breasts, but as soon as the treatment was finished his queer desires returned. This leads Halberstam to conclude that 'the body may be scientifically altered in order to force "correct" gender identification, but desire remains as interference running across a binary technologic' (Halberstam 1991: 444).

If the discussion above has not adequately answered my earlier question about the gender of the AI entity, I defer once again to Tyler Curtain, who adamantly states: '*Whatever their subjectivities, present or future, computers have no gender*' (Curtain 1997: 146, emphasis in original). Although technically the AI entity is born from my interaction with a computer and is not a computer itself, this still applies because gender is a social (and sometimes a technological) construct. This does not mean that the AI entity is not able to *perform* a certain gender role, or even create an entirely new gender as yet unknown to us. Anything is possible.

Returning to the artwork itself, the film attempts to engage with the materiality of various technologies and their histories. The spectral interference from the digital voice, as I have discussed, is perhaps the most material aspect, but I have also used other deliberate aural interference such as clicks and switches to accompany transitions between different scenes: an aural bridge between the different 'zones' within the film. These 'haptic' switches between different scenes raise questions not just about the location of each environment in relation to the previous one, but also about their respective temporalities. Not just *where* are we, but *when* are we? There are (at least) three different zones and they do not necessarily exist in a fixed time or place.

The first zone references computing technology, most obviously depicted by the archive footage of early computers, but it also encompasses the computer-generated visuals that evoke various aspects of the body: skeletal, circulatory and brain footage, as well as other CGI footage that evokes neural and cellular activity. The most visceral reference to the body (both aurally and visually) comes during the CGI sequence in which we enter the mouth and travel down the oesophagus, whilst the digital voice, combined with other sound effects, reverberates within this cavernous space (from 06:39). Despite being edited digitally, the soundtrack also references analogue technology, using a variety of audio filters and plugins to manipulate certain sound effects. I deliberately paired sounds with filters that imbued the resulting sound with an incongruity, for example: the sound of wind blowing through trees was passed through an analogue radio filter. Other 'haptic' sounds such as 'dry' electronic crackling, 'wet' bubbling, 'moist' inner-body squelching, as well as sounds of breathing, swallowing and wind blowing, have also been treated with analogue effects. Many of these sounds are the same as those used in *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda*, which offers an aural (and perhaps spectral) connection to my previous work and offers further evidence of *PMG*'s status as a research artifact.

The second zone deals with space exploration and space itself; referenced through archive footage (astronauts training in G-force simulators and extreme

heat conditions) and the CGI footage of stars and space-dust floating across the screen. These visuals, combined with the repeated references in the voiceover script to humanity, humankind and human society, encourage the audience to expand their consideration of the work from the micro to the macro and beyond.

A third zone is also evident and exists somewhere in-between; a liminal space that emerges from the growing awareness of the AI entity. This zone is depicted by the large, coloured pixels moving about the screen. This footage was filmed as sunlight shone through the trees outside my windows, projecting shadows of leaves blowing in the wind, through a slight gap in the blinds and onto my living room wall. The interplay between the sun's light and the leaves on the trees outside was echoed by the shadows that were cast inside, on the wall. These two very visual events, one an echo (or ghost) of the other, existed in different spaces at the same time. It is during these scenes in the film that we hear the incongruous pairing mentioned earlier, of the sound of wind in trees filtered through analogue radio. When considered in the context of how the unpixellated footage might be experienced with the unfiltered audio, it does not seem so incongruous: the audio and video filters were chosen for their relationality to analogue technology.

The pixelisation of this imagery further references computing technology, linking this third zone with the first. I have also applied this pixelisation to the skeletal, circulatory and brain footage. My use of this technique pays homage to the special effects work of John Whitney Jr. in Michael Crichton's 1973 film *Westworld,* in which pixelisation is used to represent the vision of Yul Brynner's Gunslinger robot.[97] Although *pixellation* has recently become synonymous with censorship, I am embracing its historical links to experimental video art and the early years of computer-generated special effects. I am also borrowing the notion from *Westworld* that the pixellated vision is the viewpoint of the AI entity.

---

[97] For more on Whitney's technique, see: https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/how-michael-crichtons-westworld-pioneered-modern-special-effects. (Accessed: 26 July 2018).

Despite the disturbing, sometimes brutal language from the digital voiceover, the final few lines of dialogue in *Queer Babel* gesture towards something more uplifting and hopeful. Lines such as 'Turing will always be a component of human society' and 'Queer is the most expedited utterance of human life' are combined with synth music and the CGI imagery of a revolving brain, suggesting that the AI entity might be close to attaining their body.

It is this hope, via the notion of queer futurity (or a queering of future memory), that *Queering di Teknolojik* explores, along with themes of protest and resistance. But before I analyse that film, I would like to discuss a work that stays with the theme of algorithmic oppression, but also deals with the theme of resistance and offers a queer understanding of temporality, gender, subjectivity and technology.

I experienced Wu Tsang's *The Looks* (2015) when the work was installed as part of a large group exhibition entitled *Strange Days: Memories of the Future,* in London in late 2018.[98] The ten-minute, two-channel film was installed in a pristine white room with soft white carpet (visitors were instructed to remove their shoes so as to maintain the cleanliness of the space). The room was separated into two equally-sized spaces by a square partition wall, one side of which also functioned as a screen, onto which was projected one half of the film. I hesitate to suggest that this is the first half of the film, even though the square screen was the initial thing that the audience encountered when they entered, because the work was shown on a loop. Many audiovisual artworks are presented on a loop in galleries, but the difference here is that this mode of presentation, combined with the design of the installation space and the audiovisual content, all work together to interfere with (or queer) our spatiotemporal understanding of the work, allowing for multiple meanings to emerge. The other half of the film was projected onto a much larger screen on

---

[98] *Strange Days* was the third major commission by The Store X and The Vinyl Factory, comprised mostly of audiovisual artworks installed in a former brutalist office block at 180 Strand. For more details, see: https://thevinylfactory.com/news/strange-days-memories-of-the-future-the-store-x/. (Accessed: 16 January 2019).

the far wall in the space on the other side of the square partition. Just as I noted with Evan Ifekoya's work in the previous chapter, the installation space is an integral aspect as to how the work is experienced, and I will elaborate on this in more detail below.

The film is part of a larger project entitled *A Day in the Life of Bliss*, which Tsang has been working on since 2013, based on a short science-fiction story that she wrote. This series of works (which includes performances and installations) revolve around the premise that an AI surveillance system exists in the near future, called 'the Looks'. The AI entity has supposedly evolved from the same algorithms used by many of the social media platforms currently in use and emits a parasitic frequency that feeds off humanity's narcissistic obsession with social media. It is controlled by a global corporation called PRSM (pronounced 'prism') which uses the Looks to track, monitor and control the world's citizens.[99] The main protagonist in all of the works is a character called 'Blis', played by Tsang's partner and frequent collaborator; artist and performer, boychild.[100] Blis is a famous pop star who performs at large concerts organised by PRSM, but there is a suggestion that she is other-than-human and not under the same kind of control from PRSM as the rest of society. In a 2014 installation of *A Day in the Life of Bliss* it is revealed that whilst Blis is a pop star by day, she performs in underground clubs at night and in this earlier narrative iteration the club is raided. During a struggle with the police, Blis learns that she has a previously hidden power that can disrupt the parasitic frequency transmitted by the Looks. With this information in mind, I will return my attention to the installation of *The Looks.*

Projected onto the square screen (evocative of the aspect ratio we have become accustomed to on Instagram) in the first partitioned space of the all-white room, the film offers an intimate connection with the private life of Blis. A long shot of a cityscape at sunrise dissolves into a close-up of Blis' sleeping

---

[99] For an artist statement and more details about the wider project, see: https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/a-day-in-the-life-of-bliss-berlin-mexico-city-los-angeles-amsterdam-hong-kong/. (Accessed: 16 January 2019).
[100] Both boychild and Tsang use the pronouns she/her. See boychild's Instagram page here: https://www.instagram.com/boychild/. (Accessed: 16 January 2019).

face and we hear a digital voice (or perhaps just a digitally manipulated voice) gently telling her: 'Wake up darling Blis. Was last night real?' The voice takes on a more sinister tone when it demands: 'Open your eyes […] let us inside.' During subsequent shots of Blis moving choreographically around a spacious apartment, the voice proffers words that echo ominously with what we have learned above about the algorithm, that it feeds (and feeds on) society's addiction to social media:

> Just a few Looks to fill the void.
> Do you feel safe Blis?
> Feels like paradise, doesn't it Blis?
> This is what you've always wanted, the biggest audience...

Later moments, however, imbue the voice with more compassion, implying that the voice might be the inner monologue of Blis:

> Responsibility weighs heavy.
> Listen to your heart
> Your heart is beating.
> Your hearts are beating
> Feel your twin hearts beat and let it go Blis.
> Listen to your heartbeats.
> Hear yourself.

During these moments of digital voiceover, we see more of Blis' body-movement work around the apartment, then she lies on the floor and the imagery transitions into other footage of Blis, sometimes lying on what looks like a football pitch, other shots staring into the camera as the image ripples as if underwater. The reference to her two hearts also gestures towards the notion that Blis is other-than-human. If these words are voiced by the algorithm, it might be unaware of Blis' power.

When this half of the film comes to a close, the image on the square screen dissolves to white at the same time as the projection and sound in the second

space (on the other side of the square screen) fills that space with white light. The projection on the square screen stops and we are pulled into the next room. This operates in very similar way to the haptic push-pull that I described in the previous chapter, in relation to Evan Ifekoya's installation space. Anyone who has resisted being pulled into the next space is enticed there when R&B music with a heavy bass beat kicks in.

This section begins with Blis performing on a stage in front of a live audience, wearing a white long-sleeved, zipped shirt, white shorts, leggings and boots. Her hands, face and head are entirely covered in silver glitter, which reflects the blue and green lights that shine on her. As she sings (mimes to) the song and moves lithely around the stage, we see that her mouth is filled with flashing LED lights. The lyrics to the song gesture further towards the ubiquity of social media, exemplified when Blis both raps and sings the word 'Content, Content' as a multiple refrain throughout the song. She also sings other lines that highlight the problematic nature of fame, such as:

> Drunk off all the power, feels wonderful...
> Never let them see me be vulnerable...
> I'm untouchable...

The live audience are filming Blis' performance on their mobile devices, presumably uploading their 'content' to their social media accounts. Towards the end of Blis' performance, the lighting changes from bright stage lights to a slow strobing light. The blue and green lights are joined by red and purple and the glitter on Blis' face become darker. The R&B rhythm is consumed by a swirling, synthesised, ambient style of music. Suddenly, flashes of bright light spark off Blis' glitter-covered face and the LED lights in her mouth. This visual interference is synched with audio interference in the soundtrack; loud, disruptive static and crackling. Blis' bodily movements match the interference, as if each one is inflicting pain. Her glitter-covered face is shrouded in darkness, even while it continues to sparkle. Eventually the screen fades to black and the sound and light from the previous space pulls us back to the projection on the square screen and we begin again – or are we halfway? Does linear time even

exist in this installation space? The work offers itself up to ambiguity and allows for multiple interpretations, depending on where and when one decides to anchor themselves (spatiotemporally) in relation to the work. The ambiguous ending of Blis' onstage performance could be read as Blis displaying her ability to disrupt the Looks' mind-control feed, suggesting that she has the power to overthrow the totalitarian regime and free society from its control. Alternatively, it could be read as Blis (and her superpowers) being suppressed by the Looks' algorithm. The latter interpretation feels more feasible when we allow ourselves to be pulled back into the previous space and we see Blis waking up in bed once again. Perhaps her mind has been wiped and she is forced to relive this experience all over again, endlessly…via the temporal loop. It all depends whether or not we interpret the interference as something that Blis is producing, or something that is being inflicted upon her and this, in turn, is influenced by how and when we locate the beginning and ending of the work.

The interference is an integral component in relation to how the work is interpreted, as is the temporal moment one enters the work – which, in turn, determines which space one is push-pulled into. The work also disrupts our expectation of how the 'white cube' gallery space is supposed to function. Tsang's film doesn't shy away from the dystopian realities of our current society and offers a hopeful suggestion of resistance. However, given the openness of the narrative to multiple interpretations as discussed above, this hope is also precarious. But perhaps, as we shall explore below, a sense of precarity can be a driving force for change. This is the moment in this chapter (via the moment of ambiguity in Tsang's film) in which the conceptual metaphor of interference gathers transformative as well as disruptive potential. I will now attempt to make the relationality between disruptive and transformative interference more explicit.

In its Latin roots, the verb 'transform' is comprised of the elements *trans* (across, beyond) and *formare* (to form).[101] Therefore, a transformative interference allows for the formation of alliances between disparate groups and

---

[101] https://www.etymonline.com/word/transform. (Accessed: 16 September 2019).

moves across and beyond differences that have previously been considered as dissimilar, as binary opposites, or as insurmountable. If we attend solely to the roots of *trans* we find that this word-forming element not only means 'across, beyond, through, on the other side of, to go beyond' but it is also a possible variant of the verb 'tere-' which means 'cross over, pass through, overcome'.[102] The notions of crossing over and passing through immediately conjure spectral thoughts of ghostly spirits crossing over to the other side, but to also 'overcome' gestures towards the struggles that marginalised people are forced to contend with in order to make their voices heard, particularly trans people and even more so trans people of colour. This can then be considered alongside Jack Halberstam's thoughts that

> trans* can be a name for expansive forms of difference, haptic relations to knowing, uncertain modes of being, and the disaggregation of identity politics predicated upon the separating out of many kinds of experience that actually blend together, intersect, and mix. (Halberstam 2018: 4-5)[103]

This speaks to the concerns of this whole research project and its desire to complicate notions of identity, subjectivity and representation, but it also offers much in the way of thinking through interference.

In order for the disruptive interference that I have been discussing to gain transformative potential, it might be better thought of as a wave. Given that the source of the interference discussed in this chapter is predominantly sonic (albeit accompanied by visual echoes within the audiovisual works), it is imminently feasible to think of it in relation to sound waves. But I would like to

---

[102] https://www.etymonline.com/word/trans-. (Accessed: 16 September 2019).

[103] Halberstam applies an asterisk to the term because it 'modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk […] makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations' (Halberstam 2018: 4). Later, Halberstam elaborates that the asterisk 'is a diacritical mark that poses a question to its prefix and stands in for what exceeds the politics of naming and recognition. Trans* also signals the insufficiency of current classificatory systems, many of which we inherited from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (Halberstam 2018: 50).

extend that analogy to include the waves of feminist and queer protest movements and the struggle(s) for equal rights that have not only been important throughout our recent history but are also the crucial driving force that propels us to the queer utopian future of *Queering di Teknolojik.*

In her book *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*, Tara Rodgers takes a decidedly intersectional approach to the artists she interviews and acknowledges that the traditional division of historical feminist movements into temporally successive waves and other rigid categories can sometimes ignore the complexities of these positions and the shared goals that feminism(s) strive to achieve. 'Feminist waves might better be conceived as interacting sound waves' suggests Rodgers, because 'the wave reverberates through space indefinitely, continuing to intersect with and influence the trajectories of other sound waves as physical matter in ongoing interactions. Likewise, feminisms and the reactions to them do not go away but continue to reverberate in shared discursive spaces' (Rodgers 2010: 18). Whilst the 'feminisms and reactions' discussed in Rodgers' book are largely harmonious, it must be acknowledged that there is also a long history of conflicting feminist thought that could be considered as disruptive interference in some shared discursive spaces. I am thinking particularly of the rise (both historical and more recent) in anti-trans sentiment and vitriolic hatred put forth by so-called Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs). There is arguably nothing radical at all about that particular kind of feminism, even if it does have a long history within lesbian separatist movements.[104] Jack Halberstam addresses this concern specifically, suggesting that

> as we enter new eras of terror, and as social media networks continue to buzz with sexist, misogynist, and transphobic chatter, perhaps it is time to retire the old antagonisms and seek common ground. […] It is time to rethink the politics of trans* gender, […] to consider whether the foundational binary of male-female may possibly have run its course.

---

[104] As I briefly touched upon in Chapter One in relation to Prodger's work and Sandy Stone.

When the male-female binary crumbles, what new constellations of alliance and opposition emerge? (Halberstam 2018: 108)

I write this in 2019, fifty years after the rebellion at the Stonewall Inn in New York that ignited the LGBTIQ rights movement. Despite many of those subsequent struggles being led by trans women, it feels like little progress has been made to make the lives of transgender people less precarious. They have been at the sharp end of an increase in recent violence towards LBGTIQ communities, with the number of transgender hate crimes in England, Scotland and Wales in 2018-19 rising by eighty-one per cent.[105] A 2018 report published by the charity Stonewall reveals that twenty-five per cent of trans people in Britain have experienced homelessness, which is yet another example of this precarity.[106] As I shall discuss below, a shared sense of precarity might be that which unites us, especially given that the future itself is becoming an increasingly precarious notion, at least in relation to all life on this planet.

In her book, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler combines (and clarifies) her well-established theory of gender performativity with a theory of precarity that she defines as

> the rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, the differently abled, and the stateless, but also religious and racial minorities: it is a social and economic condition, but not an identity (indeed, it cuts across these categories and produces potential alliances among those who do not recognize that they belong to one another). (Butler 2015: 58)

---

[105] See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48756370. (Accessed: 4 July 2019).
[106] See: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-trans-report. (Accessed: 4 July 2019). I would also note here that I include the 'I' in LGBTIQ because I feel a responsibility (and response-ability) to amplify voices within the intersex community. Stonewall, unfortunately, have made a deliberate decision not to do so. See (p.23 of):
https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/trans_people_and_stonewall.pdf. (Accessed: 15 November 2019).

These necessary alliances can most likely be formed on the streets, through the collective action of protest gatherings, which Butler argues are performative because they are 'a way of acting from and against precarity' (Butler 2015: 58). A sense of precarity is also imbued within *Queering di Teknolojik* – expressed in no small measure through the film's use of interference, both aural and visual. The film begins with sonic interference that I have harnessed from our collective digital voice. It enters in the right channel then gains momentum (and volume) as it swirls around to the left channel. This spatial movement heralds an equally powerful temporal movement as the signal travels to us, through time, from the future. The INTERFERENCE carries the message and is the driving force of the message.[107] The aural interference is quickly followed by visual interference in the form of a disrupted analogue television signal. The first lines of onscreen text also experience disruptive interference, accompanied by yet more sonic interference. Subsequent transitions using shadow and light return the notion of the spectral to its etymological association with the spectrum of colour and light. Two transitions in particular, both lasting less than two seconds each (from the 00:43 mark and the 01:17 mark respectively), were created using a glass filled with liquid to create a prism, allowing the sun to shine through it onto a wall. This light-play is accompanied by the interference that haunts our collective digital voice, but it operates on a noticeably different temporal scale to the visual. In both transitions I chose less than half a second of audio, then layered and stretched their duration to match the two second transitions. I then applied distortion filters and panned the sounds from the right to the left channels. This creates a deliberate spatiotemporal tension between the aural and the visual that is intended to invoke a haunting hapticity in the audience.

Another visual moment that operates both spectrally and haptically occurs at the 03:54 mark. Just after CGI footage of waves move gently in the lower half of the screen, a globe appears. The subtitles inform us that we are KONNECTED AKROSS DI WORLD BY OUR DEEP KOMMITMENTS AND OUR TEKNOLOJIK. The globe's tentacles begin to reach downwards, literally connecting with the

---

[107] I am using the font and colour of the subtitles from the film as a form of interference within the text of this thesis.

subtitles, transforming their material properties from solid to liquid. This is a gentle, fluid haunting, a caress, a wave of transformative interference. This reach through time, from the future to the present moment in which we are receiving the message, also draws attention to the materiality of the artwork itself, disrupting our expectations of the usual function of subtitles. Then suddenly, with a loud click, we are rushing through space and told that DIS PROCESS TOOK A LONG TEMPORALITY, which reminds us of our precarious present and that we still have a lot of work to do. A less gentle caress occurs at the 05:00 mark as the visual interference from the solar flare causes a ripple of transformative interference in the subtitles. This is accompanied by spectral interference derived from our digital voice, triple-layered and distributed to different audio channels.

Curiously, the interference from our collective digital voice was not always confined to the beginning and end of each recording, as it was with the voice that I created for *Queer Babel.* Perhaps because my collaborators and I only fed the AI sixty recordings from our respective voices as opposed to the three-hundred sentences that I read to create my previous digital voice. This might be the reason why there are times when the interference creeps in and haunts other parts of the narration and I have embraced the serendipity of this interference. One such moment occurs at the 04:47 mark, ironically just after we are told that a new language was created that was RESPEKTFUL OF ALL DEM LANGUAGES IN DI WORLD. The accidental aural interference in the first word is accompanied by yet another rippling wave of transformative interference in the subtitles.

The message that is carried by the interference is one of hope for a queer utopian future. This message is necessarily unambiguous and contrasts with the narrative ambiguity of the other artworks that I have discussed in this thesis. As I noted earlier, it was a deliberate decision that the work would steer clear of an overtly dystopian message. I approached this as if I was conjuring the ghost of José Esteban Muñoz, hearing the echo of his argument that 'we must insist on a queer futurity because the present is so poisonous and insolvent' (Muñoz

2009: 30). The question still remains, however, of how to offer a sense of hope to those living precarious lives in the present. It also raises more questions, such as: what strategies can we employ to ensure that any disruptive interference achieves its transformative potential?

Addressing the conflicts within queer and feminist groups will not be enough to conjure forth the future imagined in *Queering di Teknolojik.* Indeed, as Butler argues, 'it is necessary to realize that we are but one population who has been and can be exposed to conditions of precarity and disenfranchisement' (Butler 2015: 66). We will need to form more, stronger, unexpected alliances that interfere with and transform notions of identity and subjectivity. Through the use of our collective digital voice and archive footage, the film broadcasts a message that resonates with Butler's claim that

> the rights for which we struggle are plural rights, and that plurality is not circumscribed in advance by identity, that is, it is not a struggle to which only some identities can belong, and it is surely a struggle that seeks to expand what we mean when we say "we." (Butler 2015: 66)

This raises an important point in relation to the notion of a collective subjectivity, particularly regarding our collective digital voice which does not (indeed, cannot) claim to be speaking on behalf of multiple communities, identities and subjectivities. But through its creation and use in the film, the digital voice gestures towards the possibilities of other collective alliances, akin to the one formed by my collaborators and myself. But as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, nefarious forces at the other end of the political spectrum are also forging alliances and although they might be able to co-opt the strategies outlined in this thesis, they may not be able to harness their transformative potential. Despite their anti-establishment claims, right-wing nationalist and populist groups generally seek to reinforce a racist, anti-immigrant agenda and maintain structural inequalities that keep marginalised voices silent (whilst claiming to be marginalised themselves). Ben Pitcher proposes a strategy that those on the left might be able to adopt to counter this, arguing that 'to get to grips with right-wing populism, antiracism must involve itself in the contestation

of the category of "the people". Antiracist populism thus becomes a way of breaking with the political grammar of right-wing populism and its entrenchment in British politics' (Pitcher 2019: 7). Whether or not the category of 'the people' can be defined is a crucial question in relation to collective subjectivity. Given how fractured and divided people are (not just here in the Brexit-weary UK, but in many other countries), it feels like the world is a long way from being able to forge the kinds of alliances needed in order to even begin to think about a collective 'we'. If it is going to happen, it will begin on the streets and there is evidence that it is already happening, echoic ripples growing into waves. Just one inspiring example is the 'Fridays for Future' movement led by climate activist Greta Thunberg.[108]

In his latest book, *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*, Brandon LaBelle discusses 'The People's Microphone' technique implemented by the Occupy movement. This involves the words of the person onstage being repeated by those at the front of the crowd, so that those in the back may hear them. LaBelle describes this process as

> a manifestation of a type of "echo-subject," a collective body constituted in the gaps generated by being expelled from the political. […] In throwing the voice into the crowd, and into the bodies of others, the People's Microphone stages an inter-lingual voice, one that problematizes political speech as one of singular declaration, mobilizing instead the power of the collective subject and its echoic promise. (LaBelle 2018: 114)

I find similar echoic promise in the recent (currently ongoing at the time of writing) protests on the streets of Hong Kong. Unlike the 2014 'Occupy Central' and 'Umbrella Movement' protests, these have been organised collectively and anonymously in order to avoid any leaders being arrested. This collective organisation has largely occurred via various encrypted social media apps, but

---

[108] See: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/greta-thunberg-and-fridays-for-future-receive-amnesty-internationals-top-honour/. (Accessed: 16 September 2019).

the protestors have developed a fascinating strategy for communication on the streets during confrontations with the police. They have invented their own form of sign language in order to communicate to protesters at the back of a large group that the people at the barricades need equipment or supplies.[109] Hand signals are sent back through the crowd, much like the People's Microphone, then a human supply chain passes helmets, gas masks and whatever else is needed to the front lines. Another interesting aspect of this movement is their strategy to 'be water', adopting Bruce Lee's famous interview quote in which he describes the transformative properties of water: 'it can flow, or it can crash'.[110] This evocation of water returns us to the waves of Tara Rodger's and her encouragement that we might 'adopt perspectives of being carried by, moved with, or submerged under the waves. [...] This subject position within the waves, far from being detached and controlling, is characterized by being affected by, and connected to, modes of experience beyond the boundaries of oneself' (Rodgers 2016: 208). Thinking about the actions of these protesters in this way gestures towards the possibilities of a reconfigured, collective subjectivity.

This gesture towards the possible is reinforced by the diverse range of communities depicted in the protest footage that I have used in the film, all of whom contribute to an expanded understanding of 'we'. All of these groups are united in their `DEKOLONIAL, ANTI-KAPITALIST AND ENVIRONMENTAL` approach. These three facets are inextricably linked and if we are even going to attempt to achieve a future like the one described in the film, we are going to have to solve some seemingly insurmountable problems, all of which are interconnected. The first step towards solving these problems is to forge alliances between other precarious communities, as Butler argues:

> Alliances that have formed to exercise the rights of gender and sexual minorities must, in my view, form links, however difficult, […] with other populations subjected to conditions of induced precarity during our time.

[109] For details of the sign language and other tactics, see: https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2019/08/be-water-seven-tactics-are-winning-hong-kongs-democracy-revolution. (Accessed: 1 August 2019).
[110] Watch a clip from the interview here: https://youtu.be/cJMwBwFj5nQ. (Accessed: 1 August 2019).

> And this linking process, however difficult, is necessary because the
> population of gender and sexual minorities […] draws from various class,
> racial, and religious backgrounds, crossing communities of language and
> cultural formation. (Butler 2015: 67-68)

Butler's viewpoint might seem obvious to many, but the motivation to make these links is often overshadowed by individualism and identity politics, making the necessary alliances a challenging prospect. Someone who understands the complex interplay between these issues and has long argued for the forging of such alliances is Angela Davis. In her 2016 book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, Davis makes many salient points, not only in relation to the interconnected struggles for freedom and equality, both historically and in the present, but also to 'living with the ghosts of our pasts' (Davis 2016: 115). This is a welcome link to spectral thinking to which I will return, after I pursue further connections to *Queering di Teknolojik*. The first pieces of archive footage that I have used in the film are from the 1963 March on Washington, a key turning point in the civil rights movement in the USA. Davis argues that the naming of this movement as such was inherently problematic, as it suggested that they were demanding to be given rights in a system that is fundamentally uncivil. Most of the movement's participants were actually demanding the freedom that was never offered by the abolition of slavery, as Davis elaborates:

> Had slavery been abolished in 1863, through the Emancipation
> Proclamation, or in 1865, through the Thirteenth Amendment, Black
> people would have enjoyed full and equal citizenship and it would not
> have been necessary to create a movement. (Davis 2016: 115)[111]

There are many systems and power structures within the world of which the USA's white-supremacist foundations are but one example, but these systems are often the reason that minority groups find themselves living precariously.

---

[111] For a detailed examination of the ramifications of the Thirteenth Amendment, particularly how the legacy of slavery is perpetuated through the prison-industrial complex in the USA, see Ava DuVernay's powerful documentary *13th* (2016): https://www.netflix.com/title/80091741. (Accessed: 4 July 2019).

Along similar lines as Butler, Davis also argues for alliances between precarious groups and she makes connections between Black Lives Matter; the anti-capitalist demonstrations of the Occupy movement; the ongoing struggle of the Palestinian people; and many other struggles around the world. She observes that 'there is vast potential with respect to the forging of transnational solidarities […] to emerge from the individualism within which we are ensconced in this neoliberal era' (Davis 2016: 137). This encouraged shift away from individualistic thinking is not just pertinent to the present, it is also what is needed to actualise the kind of future that our collective digital voice speaks about in the film. As Davis contends, 'we have to learn how to imagine the future in terms that are not restricted to our own lifetimes' (Davis 2016: 117). We must therefore think collectively and across multiple temporalities.

However, forging alliances between precarious groups in the spirit of transnational solidarity may not be enough to deliver the future that *Queering di Teknolojik* conjures forth, although it certainly cannot happen without them. The systems and structures of power that are interconnected with these problems must become precarious themselves in order for the solutions to these problems to become achievable (or at least perceived to be achievable). The system (if I can name it as a whole) could be made precarious in a number of ways, either through action or inaction. The collective WI of our future alliances knows that eventually, when the world reaches DI BRINK OF KATASTROPHIK ENVIRONMENTAL KOLLAPSE the system will have no choice but to acknowledge its own precarity, although by then it might be too late to act. Alternatively (or rather, additionally, as these two approaches are not mutually exclusive) the precarity of the system might be brought about through deliberate interference. A necessary disruption (or destruction) of the system in order for a transformative interference to emerge. We are all the interference that the system is trying to silence, because it is afraid that we might gain enough

162

momentum to expose DI PHALLUSY OF WHITE SUPREMACY.[112] Only when this is achieved will we be able to instigate significant productive change.

It is no coincidence that Davis and Butler are two of the INFLUENTIAL TINKERS who our future selves ONLY KNOW SPEKTRALLY NOW. Just as they have inspired the queer utopian future that our temporality will hopefully BEKUM, they (along with many others) have inspired me throughout my research journey. The brief sequence in the film that pays homage to these thinkers – Judith Butler, Angela Davis, bell hooks, James Baldwin, Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin and Audre Lorde – is preceded and accompanied by yet more footage of shadows gently moving across the screen (from 02:48). This was filmed in the same way as the pixellated shadow footage in *Queer Babel*, which I argued was depicting the viewpoint of the AI entity. In *Queering di Teknolojik*, the shadow footage operates spectrally, remembering these influential thinkers, some of whom are already ghosts in our present. I have also used the shadow footage during transitions before and between some of the protest footage, once again working spectrally to conjure forth these brave people who have fought (and are still fighting) on the front lines of various resistance movements and will be remembered as ghosts in our TEMPORALITY YET-TO-KUM. Thinking of the protest footage in the film as conjuring up and paying homage to ghosts of the past, present and future might remind us of these words from Avery Gordon:

> the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. […] From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope. […] We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice.* Out of a concern for justice would be the only reason one would bother. (Gordon 1997: 63-64, emphasis in original)

---

[112] Although this spelling of fallacy did not strictly adhere to the rules of the dialect that I created, it was a deliberate gesture towards the need for playfulness in a queer utopian future, as well as a reminder that white supremacy is inextricably linked to patriarchy (and capitalism).

A concern for justice and a shared sense of precarity are the primary driving forces of social justice movements (and the main motivation of my research). The film closes with some Super 8 film footage that I shot during the anti-Trump demonstration in London in July 2018 – remember that long, intolerably hot summer? We were mad and determined to make our collective voice heard. The footage begins at the 07:08 mark, just after we have been immersed in an ethereal depiction of the future and then told by the digital voice that our possibilities and impossibilities are being both determined and undetermined WIT EVERY RESPIRATION YOU TAKE. We are suddenly propelled backwards through time and space as a heart beats loudly, tearing us away from the queer utopian future and reminding us once again of the precarious present. The disruptive interference from the sound of a projector reinforces this harsh reality check and once again draws attention to the materiality of the work.

The projector sound also functions as a spectral echo of my previous work. It is the same sound that accompanies the Super 8 footage in the final moments of *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2*, and this particular footage was originally shot for a short film that I made in 2007, entitled *Le Weekend*.[113] The temporal and spectral connections reach beyond the boundaries of this research project, into the past and hopefully far into the future. Collaboration will be key to my future creative endeavours, as will the foregrounding of issues pertaining to social justice.

---

[113] The film garnered multiple awards on the film festival circuit: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0985686/awards. (Accessed: 15 November 2019).

Conclusion

In my introduction I described the theoretical framework of this thesis and clarified my stance on some key terms such as queer, affect, representation and subjectivity. I also introduced the twelve artworks that have been discussed throughout the last four chapters.

Through my analysis of four different artworks in Chapter One, I examined how specific audiovisual devices can complicate notions of subjectivity, identity and representation when considered in relation to temporality and spectrality. I discussed the ways in which my film, *A Queering of Memory: Parts 1 & 2* shares connections with Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* and John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses*. All three films use similar audiovisual motifs of water and various modes of transport such as trains and boats to convey a fluid sense of time and subjectivity. Further connections were forged between these three works through their shared interest in mythology, the notion of ancient time associated with it, as well as the naming practices and narratives that have emerged from their respective landscapes. It was through an attention to geological deep time in mine and Prodger's work that allowed for queer subjectivities to emerge spectrally from the landscapes depicted in our films. I also discussed how spectral subjectivities not only emerge from the landscape in Akomfrah's film, but also through his use of archive footage, a strategy that was echoed through the use of archive footage in my work. All of the methods identified within these works serve to reclaim lost narratives and amplify silenced voices through a Queering of Memory. Although Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins* did not share the same temporal concerns as the other works, it did allow for an alternative consideration of landscape – as well as spectral, (un)queer(ed) subjectivities – via the notion of the silenced, disembodied voice. In the case of the latter film, it is my reading of the work that might be considered as a subversive method (a queering of an unqueering of memory), rather than any particular techniques found in the work itself. In the case of all four works, I argued that their shared strategy of narrative ambiguity and hybrid form helps them to resist being classified in any particular genre, which invites the audience to engage in the process of making meaning from the work.

Chapter Two slowed things down, taking some time to construct a complex theoretical filter that infused established theories of cinematic embodiment with a much-needed consideration of sonic matters. I traced the development of the 'body' of the film from a hypothetical concept to something more material as it came into contact with notions of the haptic, viscera, affect and resonance. I pushed theories of the haptic, filmic body further, adding elements of listening and voice to further develop the notion of Haptic Aurality so that it could be useful in considering the tripartite relationship between audience, artwork and artist. The fully formed theoretical filter was then applied to my analyses of three artworks. I examined the ways in which Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* can be considered as a piece of queer haptic cinema through the use of breath and embodied touch. I also argued that the asynchronous sound and colour-block transitions in my audiovisual experiment *Phylum Mollusca: Gastropoda* gave material form to the in-between, liminal space created during the intersubjective encounter. I further argued that Mikhail Karikis' *No Ordinary Protest* emphasised the power of a collective voice through the use of haptic and visceral sound. All of the three artworks examined in Chapter Two foregrounded their processual elements, thereby revealing multiple practices of engagement. This, I argued, allows for meaning to be generated within the liminal space and further complicates thinking around representation and genre. Chapter Two also gave embodied form to the spectral subjectivities of Chapter One and I argued that they emerge from the liminal space and are reconfigured with the potential to inspire collective action.

I constructed another complex theoretical filter in Chapter Three which I used to develop the notion of Diffractive Listening. After a detailed examination of both Donna Haraway's understanding of diffraction and Karen Barad's diffractive methodology, I argued that their use of diffraction as a solely optical metaphor missed opportunities to include sound in the discussion. I adopted Anni Goh's theorisation of the echo in order to reinstate aspects of a reflexive methodology that, when combined with a diffractive methodology, allowed for a more nuanced discussion of subjectivity, identity and a further complication of representationalism. The echo, along with the equally important metaphor of the

wave, opened the door for the inclusion of Lisbeth Lipari's work on compassionate and ethical forms of listening and also a return to spectrality, allowing me to develop a form of listening that I defined in simple terms as *listening through time for the voices of ghosts*. I further argued that if the audience brought the required level of intentionality to the encounter (with artworks that deliberately reveal their processual elements), a diffractive listening practice has the potential to generate a collective subjectivity that could make a difference in the world. I offered a number of examples from my own experience of the ways in which my practice has informed my research and the ways in which new understandings (and the potential for new knowledge) have emerged from this practice. By contextualising my audiowalk experiment *E1: Stories of Refuge & Resistance* within the wider history of soundwalks, then relating it to my experience of devising a group soundwalk, I was able to evidence how diffractive listening might work in practice. My analysis of Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* revealed how her unique approach to her material is informed by a listening practice based on empathy and compassion and a deep respect for the voices she is intent on amplifying. I argued that Barnard implemented something akin to diffractive listening, as did her actors who performed the verbatim lip-synch technique. I grounded this once again in my own practical experience of experimenting with headphone verbatim, which revealed the ways in which new knowledge can come from fruitful group discussion and collaboration. My analysis of Evan Ifekoya's *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief* provided the opportunity to apply my theory of diffractive listening to a sound installation work. I argued for the ways in which a diffractive listening practice was evident, not just during my own immersive experience of the work but also through Ifekoya's collaborative practice and the respectful care they gave to the many voices within the work. I also argued that the haptic push-pull that I identified in Barnard's lip-synch technique manifested in more material and physical ways through Ifekoya's installation. The potential of a collective subjectivity that was discussed in Chapter Two (as emerging from the liminal space in the embodied moment of the present) was made more expansive in Chapter Three to encompass multiple temporalities, collectively amplifying the echoes of spectral voices from

the past and the present as their waves gather momentum, propelling us towards the future.

Echoes and waves carried us into Chapter Four, but these conceptual metaphors were reconfigured in relation to the notion of Interference, which began as disruptive phenomena but gained transformative potential as the chapter progressed. Through my analysis of *Queer Babel,* I examined how my experiments with (and forced interaction of) two AI systems were able to further complicate notions of embodiment, identity, subjectivity and representation. Wu Tsang's *The Looks* offered yet another example of the way an installation space can be reconfigured by an artwork to exert a haptic push-pull on the bodies of the audience. These two works not only shared a disruptive form of interference, but also a narrative ambiguity that left them open to multiple interpretations. If the sense of hope in *The Looks* was somewhat precarious, the message in *Queering di Teknolojik* was necessarily unambiguous and hopeful. Through my analysis of this final film I revealed the ways in which disruptive interference might gain transformative potential. A sense of precarity was discussed as an essential foundation for the alliances that we will need to collectively forge in the future. Chapter Four also continued my discussion of how my understanding of practice-based research has developed, in particular how new knowledge has emerged not only from working collaboratively, but also from experimenting with new technology. The mysterious sonic distortion in the digital voice led me to theorise about the notion of interference.

Throughout this thesis, I have developed and discussed various theoretical concepts, such as Queering of Memory, Haptic Aurality and Diffractive Listening – all of which can be considered as forms of Interference. Although they may have seemed like separate entities, they were designed to be considered relationally. If we lift these theoretical elements from the widely divergent temporal configurations of their respective chapters and place them in a linear fashion, we can see how they develop, how they build on and depend on each other. We were always going to arrive at this moment.

Queering of Memory interfered with hegemonic notions of history, cultural memory and subjectivity. Haptic Aurality interfered with established theories of cinematic embodiment by attending to sound, breath and voice. Diffractive Listening not only created interference in previously ocularcentric approaches to diffraction, but it brought a hauntological method of listening that interferes with our understanding of time and voice. Collectively, these forms of disruptive interference form the foundation of a form of interference that is transformative and has the potential to reconfigure our understanding of collective subjectivities. It invites us to think collectively across multiple temporalities, to listen for the ghosts of the past and the present and to amplify the hopeful voices of the future. I have implemented these methodological filters in the creation and discussion of my own films as well as my sustained analyses of the works of seven other artists. Through the publication of this thesis I now put these theoretical tools out into the world in the hope that they might be used by other artists and academics who wish to apply them in a similar way.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2006) *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2010) *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2014a) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2014b) *Willful Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Akomfrah, J. (2010a) *Q&A for The Nine Muses*. London: British Film Institute. Available at: https://youtu.be/9zrsJJYufLU. (Accessed: 21 October 2019).
- Akomfrah, J. (2010b) *British Cinema: Breaking with Convention*. London: British Film Institute. Previously at: https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/52017745f369f. (Accessed: 12 February 2018, no longer available online).
- Akomfrah, J. (2012) 'Chiasmus - Interview with John Akomfrah'. *The Nine Muses* [DVD]. London: New Wave Films.
- Amad, P. (2012) 'From God's-eye to Camera-eye: Aerial Photography's Post-humanist and Neo-humanist Visions of the World', *History of Photography*, Volume 36(Issue 1), pp. 66–86. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03087298.2012.632567. (Accessed: 5 May 2016).
- Amin, K. (2014) 'Temporality', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(1–2), pp. 219–222. Available at: https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq/article/1/1-2/219/91812/Temporality. (Accessed: 16 May 2018).
- Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. (2010) 'Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come', *Derrida Today*, 3(2), pp. 240–268. Available at:

http://www.euppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/drt.2010.0206. (Accessed: 28 February 2019).

- Barad, K. (2014) 'Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart', *Parallax*, 20(3), pp. 168–187. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623. (Accessed: 13 September 2019).

- Barker, J. M. (2009) *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Barnard, C. (2011) 'Director's Statement'. *The Arbor* [DVD Booklet]. London: Verve Pictures.

- Barrett, E. (2010) 'Foucault's "What is an Author": Towards a Critical Discourse of Practice as Research.', in Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp.135-146.

- Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (2010) *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. London: I.B. Tauris.

- Bassel, L. (2017) *The Politics of Listening: Possibilities and Challenges for Democratic Life*. London: Palgrave Pivot.

- Bergson, H. ([1896]1991) *Matter & Memory*. Translated by N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer. New York: Zone Books.

- Beugnet, M. (2007) *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Blanco, M. del P. and Peeren, E. (eds) (2013) *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Brinkema, E. (2014) *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Browne, K. and Nash, C. J. (eds) (2010) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Surrey: Ashgate.

- Bryson, M. and de Castell, S. (1993) 'Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect', *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de*

l'éducation, 18(3), p. 285. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1495388. (Accessed: 20 June 2019).

- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (2004) *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (2015) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Candy, L. and Edmonds, E. (2018) 'Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line', *Leonardo*, 51(1), pp. 63–69. Available at: https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/LEON_a_01471. (Accessed: 11 November 2019).

- Callard, F. and Papoulias, C. (2010) 'Affect and Embodiment', in Radstone, S. and Schwarz, B. (eds) *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 246-262.

- Cavarero, A. (2005) *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Translated by P. A. Kottman. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- Chamarette, J. (2012) *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Chen, M. Y. (2012) *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Collins, R. (2018) 'Aural Spatiality and Sonic Materiality: Attending to the Space of Sound in Performances by Ivo Dimchev and Alma Söderberg', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 28(2), pp. 165–178. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10486801.2017.1412952. (Accessed: 31 August 2018).

- Coulthard, L. (2012) 'Haptic Aurality: Resonance, Listening and Michael Haneke', *Film-Philosophy*, 16(1), pp. 16–29. Available at: http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/266. (Accessed: 1 September 2015).

- Crenshaw, K. (1994) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', in Fineman, M. A. and Mykitiuk, R. (eds) *The Public Nature of Private Violence: Women and the Discovery of Abuse*. New York: Routledge, pp. 93–120.

- Curtain, T. (1997) 'The "sinister fruitiness" of machines: Neuromancer, internet sexuality, and the Turing test.', in Sedgwick, E. K. (ed.) *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 128–148.

- Cvetkovich, A. (2012) *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Darby, K. P. and Sloutsky, V. M. (2015) 'The cost of learning: Interference effects in memory development.', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144(2), pp. 410–431. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4388774/. (Accessed: 12 September 2019).

- Dave, P. (2011) 'Robinson in Ruins: New Materialism and the Archaeological Imagination', *Radical Philosophy*, 169, pp. 19–35. Available at: https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/wp-content/files_mf/rp169_article4_robinsonruins_dave.pdf. (Accessed: 1 September 2015).

- Davis, A. Y. (2016) *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

- del Río, E. (2008) *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Dinshaw, C. (1999) *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Dinshaw, C. (2012) *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Dolphijn, R. and Tuin, I. van der (2012) *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11515701.0001.001 (Accessed: 29 October 2019).

- Enszer, J. R. (2016) '"How to stop choking to death": Rethinking lesbian separatism as a vibrant political theory and feminist practice', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 20(2), pp. 180–196. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10894160.2015.1083815. (Accessed: 17 February 2019).

- Eshun, K. and Sagar, A. (eds) (2007) *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective, 1982-1998*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

- Fanon, F. (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*. 2008 Edition. Translated by R. Philcox. New York: Grove Press.

- Fineman, M. A. and Mykitiuk, R. (eds) (1994) *The Public Nature of Private Violence: Women and the Discovery of Abuse*. New York: Routledge.

- Freccero, C. (2006) *Queer/Early/Modern*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Gasworks (2018) *Interview with Evan Ifekoya: Ritual Without Belief at Gasworks*. Available at: https://vimeo.com/280750191. (Accessed: 4 June 2019).

- Goh, A. (2017) 'Sounding Situated Knowledges: Echo in Archaeoacoustics', *Parallax*, 23(3), pp. 283–304. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13534645.2017.1339968. (Accessed: 15 February 2019).

- Gordon, A. (1997) *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. 2008 Edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Goriunova, O. (2019) 'Digital subjects: an introduction', *Subjectivity*, 12(1), pp. 1–11. Available at: http://link.springer.com/10.1057/s41286-018-00065-2. (Accessed: 21 June 2019).

- Gumbs, A. P. (2016) *Spill: scenes of black feminist fugitivity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Gumbs, A. P. (2018) *M Archive: After the End of the World*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Halberstam, J. (1991) 'Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine', *Feminist Studies*, 17(3), pp. 439–460.

Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178281. (Accessed: 11 April 2018).

- Halberstam, J. (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

- Haraway, D. J. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

- Haraway, D. J. (1997) *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience.* New York: Routledge.

- Hemmings, C. (2005) 'Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn', *Cultural Studies*, 19(5), pp. 548–567. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09502380500365473. (Accessed: 5 October 2018).

- Hezekiah, G. A. (2010) *Phenomenology's Material Presence: Video, Vision and Experience*. Bristol: Intellect.

- Hillers, K. J. (2004) 'Crossover interference', *Current Biology*, 14(24), pp. R1036–R1037. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982204009273. (Accessed: 12 September 2019).

- Howard, P. Thompson, I and Waterton, E. (eds) (2018) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

- Ifekoya, E. (2018) *Ritual ~~Without~~ Belief* [Installation]. Gasworks, London (Viewed: 1 September 2018).

- Imarisha, W. and brown, a. m. (2015) *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

- Jarman-Ivens, F. (2011) *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Johnson, B. (2016) 'Art Cinema and The Arbor: Tape-recorded Testimony, Film Art and Feminism', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 13(2), pp. 278–291. Available at: https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/10.3366/jbctv.2016.0313. (Accessed: 29 January 2018).

- Karikis, M. (2018) *No Ordinary Protest* [Installation]. Whitechapel Gallery, London (Viewed: 23 August 2018).

- Keiller, P. (2012) *The Possibility of Life's Survival on the Planet*. London: Tate Publishing.

- Kozel, S. (2007) *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- LaBelle, B. (2014) *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*. London: Bloomsbury.

- LaBelle, B. (2018) *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*. London: Goldsmith Press.

- Laine, T. (2006) 'Cinema as Second Skin: Under the Membrane of Horror Film', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 4(2), pp. 93–106. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17400300600768414. (Accessed: 5 May 2017).

- Laine, T. (2013) *Feeling Cinema*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Laine, T. (2015) *Bodies in Pain: Emotion and the Cinema of Darren Aronofsky*. New York: Berghahn Books.

- Landsberg, A. (2015) *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Leaver-Yap, M. (2017) 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics in Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT*'. Available at: https://leaveryap.com/2018/01/02/aesthetics-and-anaesthetics-in-charlotte-prodgers-bridgit/. (Accessed: 11 January 2019).

- Leimbacher, I. (2017) 'Hearing Voice(s): Experiments with Documentary Listening', *Discourse*, 39(3), pp. 292–318. Available at: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/682916. (Accessed: 9 January 2018).

- Leys, R. (2011) 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry*, 37(3), pp. 434–472. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/659353. (Accessed: 17 November 2017).

- Leys, R. (2017) *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Lipari, L. (2014) *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

- *London* (1994) Directed by Patrick Keiller [Feature film]. London: British Film Institute.

- Lorde, A. (2017) *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. London: Silver Press.

- Love, H. (2007) *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

- Macpherson, J. ([1773]2009) *The Poetical Works of Ossian*. The Ex-classics Project. Available at: https://www.exclassics.com/ossian/ossian.pdf. (Accessed: 22 November 2016).

- Maddern, J. F. and Adey, P. (2008) 'Editorial: spectro-geographies', *cultural geographies*, 15(3), pp. 291–295. Available at: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1474474008091328. (Accessed: 5 November 2019).

- Marks, L. U. (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Marks, L. U. (2002) *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Massey, D. (2010) 'Landscape/space/politics: an essay'. Available at: https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/. (Accessed 15 September 2015).

- Mayo, C. (2017) 'Queer and Trans Youth, Relational Subjectivity, and Uncertain Possibilities: Challenging Research in Complicated Contexts', *Educational Researcher*, 46(9), pp. 530–538. Available at: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X17738737. (Accessed: 31 July 2019).

- McMahon, L. (2012) *Cinema and Contact: The Withdrawal of Touch in Nancy, Bresson, Duras and Denis*. London: Maney Publishing.

- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *The Primacy of Perception*. Translated by J. M. Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

- Muñoz, J. E. (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

- Naiboglu, G. (2018) *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema: Work, Globalisation and Politics Beyond Representation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Nancy, J.-L. (2007) *Listening*. Translated by C. Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press.

- Ngai, S. (2005) *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Noble, S. U. (2018) *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.

- O'Riordan, T. (2011) 'Producer's Statement'. *The Arbor* [DVD Booklet]. London: Verve Pictures.

- Paasonen, S. (2011) *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Peirse, A. (2016) 'Speaking for herself: Andrea Dunbar and Bradford on film', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 20(1), pp. 60–72. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14797585.2015.1134060. (Accessed: 29 January 2018).

- Pitcher, B. (2011) 'Radical subjects after hegemony', *Subjectivity*, 4(1), pp. 87–102. Available at: http://link.springer.com/10.1057/sub.2010.26. (Accessed: 1 August 2019).

- Pitcher, B. (2019) 'Racism and Brexit: notes towards an antiracist populism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, pp. 1–20. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2019.1623410. (Accessed: 6 August 2019).

- Plantinga, C. (2009) *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Power, N. (2011) 'Counter-Media, Migration, Poetry: Interview with John Akomfrah', *Film Quarterly*, 65(2), pp. 59–63. Available at: http://fq.ucpress.edu/cgi/doi/10.1525/FQ.2011.65.2.59. (Accessed: 7 February 2018).

- Prodger, C. (2016) *BRIDGIT* [Installation]. Tate Britain, London (Viewed: 14 December 2018).

- Prodger, C. (2016) 'Transcript of *BRIDGIT*', Bergen Kunsthall (2017) NO.5 (13), pp. 87-88. Available at: http://www.kunsthall.no/Dokmntr/NO5_13_FINAL_DIGITAL_1.pdf. (Accessed: 11 January 2019).

- Quinlivan, D. (2012) *The Place of Breath in Cinema*. 2014 paperback edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Quinlivan, D. (2015) 'On How Queer Cinema Might Feel', *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, 9(1), pp. 63–77. Available at: https://online.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/msmi.2015.3. (Accessed: 12 November 2018).

- Radstone, S. and Schwarz, B. (eds) (2010) *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. New York: Fordham University Press.

- Rawlinson, M. C. (ed.) (2016) *Engaging the World: Thinking after Irigaray*. Albany: SUNY Press.

- Robertson, L. (2012) *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, the Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias.* 2nd Edition. Toronto: Bookthug Press.

- *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) Directed by Patrick Keiller [Feature film]. London: British Film Institute.

- *Robinson in Space* (1997) Directed by Patrick Keiller [Feature film]. London: British Film Institute.

- Rodgers, T. (2010) *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Rodgers, T. (2016) 'Toward a Feminist Epistemology of Sound: Refiguring Waves in Audio-Technical Discourse.', in Rawlinson, M. C. (ed.) *Engaging the World: Thinking after Irigaray*. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 195–213.

- Rutherford, A. (2011) *What Makes a Film Tick?: Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Innervation*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Schafer, R. M. (1997) *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books.

- Sedgwick, E. K. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (ed.) (1997) *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Shaviro, S. (1993) *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shaviro, S. (2010) *Post Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: O Books.
- Sobchack, V. (1992) *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sledz, C. A. and Williams, B. R. G. (2005) 'RNA interference in biology and disease', *Blood*, 106(3), pp. 787–794. Available at: http://www.bloodjournal.org/cgi/doi/10.1182/blood-2004-12-4643. (Accessed: 12 September 2019).
- Smith, T. (2010) 'British Cinema: Breaking with Convention' in *54th BFI London Film Festival.* [Event copy in festival brochure]. London: British Film Institute.
- Sobchack, V. (2004) *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sobchack, V. (2005) 'When the Ear Dreams: Dolby Digital and the Imagination of Sound', *Film Quarterly*, 58(4), pp. 2–15. Available at: http://fq.ucpress.edu/cgi/doi/10.1525/fq.2005.58.4.2. (Accessed: 7 September 2017).
- Sobchack, V. (2012) 'Fleshing Out the Image: Phenomenology, Pedagogy, and Derek Jarman's Blue', *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, 3, pp. 19–38. Available at: http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/906805/25604307/1414697715347/3.pdf. (Accessed: 10 January 2019).
- Stone, A. R. (1994) 'Split Subjects, Not Atoms; or, How I Fell in Love with My Prosthesis', *Configurations*, 2(1), pp. 173–190. Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/content/crossref/journals/configurations/v002/2.1stone.html. (Accessed: 20 February 2019).
- Stone, A. R. (1996) *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Tate (2018) *Charlotte Prodger – Turner Prize Winner 2018 – TateShots*. Available at: https://youtu.be/AsVWk5DlbCE. (Accessed: 20 March 2019)

- *The Arbor* (2010) Directed by Clio Barnard [Feature film]. London: Verve Pictures.

- *The Nine Muses* (2010) Directed by John Akomfrah [Feature film]. London: New Wave Films.

- Thompson, M. (2017) *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism*. New York: Bloomsbury.

- Thrift, N. (1996) *Spatial Formations*. London: SAGE Publications.

- Thrift, N. (2007) *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. London: Routledge.

- Tsang, W. (2015) *The Looks* [Installation]. The Store X, London (Viewed: 23 November 2018).

- Voegelin, S. (2010) *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards A Philosophy of Sound Art*. London: Continuum Books.

- Wake, C. (2013) 'Headphone Verbatim Theatre: Methods, Histories, Genres, Theories', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29(4), pp. 321–335. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S0266464X13000651/type/journal_article. (Accessed: 3 September 2019).

- Waterton, E. (2018) 'More-than-representational landscapes.', in Howard, P. *et al.* (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, pp.91-101.

- Weis, E. and Belton, J. (eds) (1985) *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- West, S. M., Whittaker, M. and Crawford, K. (2019) *Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race and Power in AI*. AI Now Institute., p. 33. Available at: https://ainowinstitute.org/discriminatingsystems.html. (Accessed: 14 June 2019).

- Westerkamp, H. (1974) 'Soundwalking', *Sound Heritage*, 3(4), pp. 18–27.

- Wetherell, M. (2013) 'Affect and discourse – What's the problem? From affect as excess to affective/discursive practice', *Subjectivity*, 6(4), pp.

349–368. Available at: http://link.springer.com/10.1057/sub.2013.13. (Accessed: 6 November 2019).

- Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, E. A. (2010) *Affect and Artificial Intelligence*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.