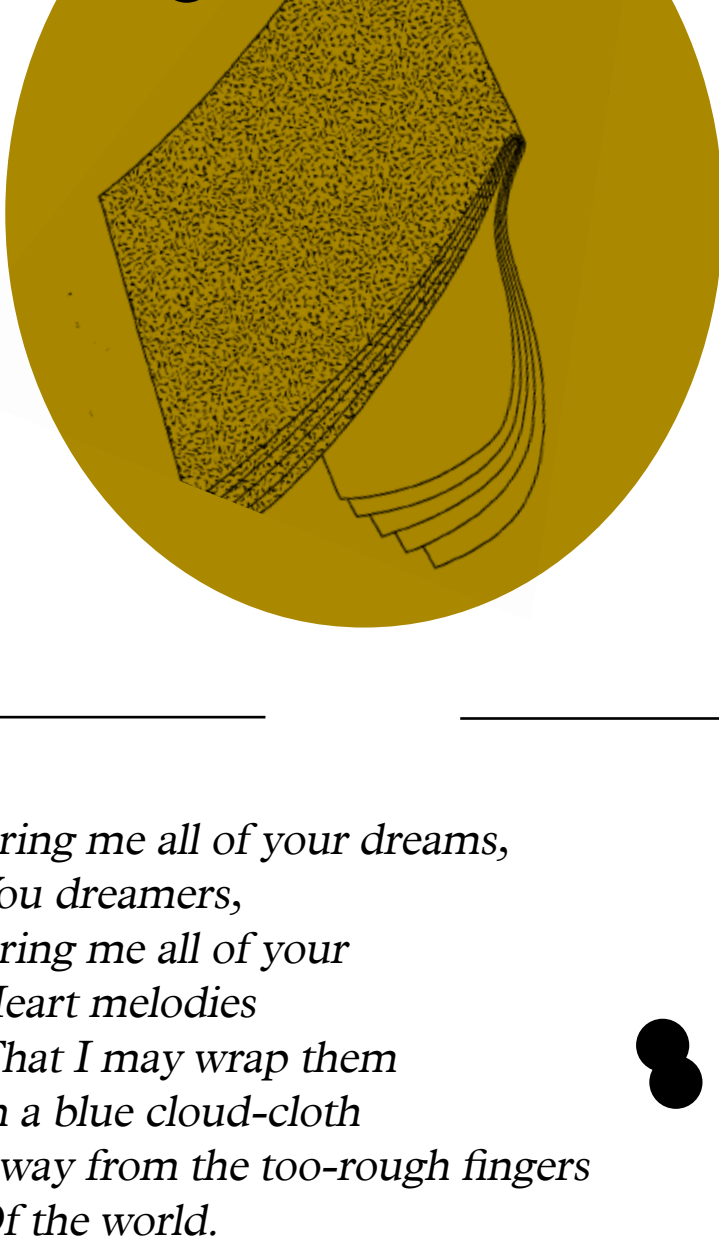


THE ARCHIVE IS A GATHERING PLACE

SYMPOSIUM AND FESTIVAL

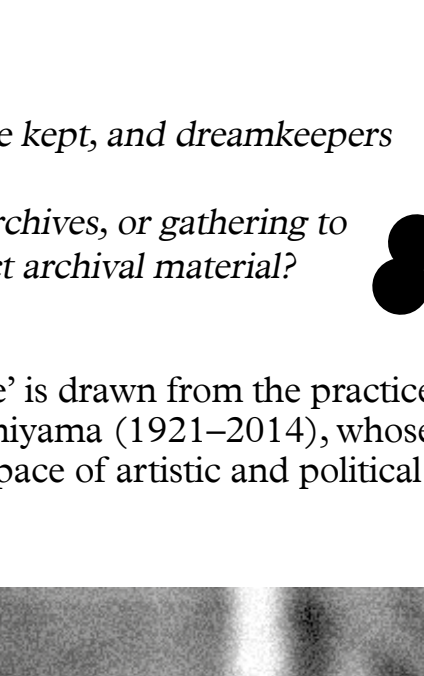


*Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamers,
Bring me all of your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too-rough fingers
Of the world.*

— LANGSTON HUGHES, *The Dream Keeper* (1932)

(INTRODUCTION)

This digital zine compiles fragments from contributions to *The Archive is a Gathering Place*, a symposium and festival held at Tate Modern, London, on 24 and 25 May 2024.



Collective archives arise out of a necessity to document, preserve and mobilise histories, dreams, testimonies and practices that might otherwise be lost, or face active erasure. They gather material and people. These archives are not simply collections of objects and ephemera, but the result of networks and relationships. Archival practices emerge in this context as continuous practices of communing, dreaming, collaboration and resistance, in service of collective memory.

What if...

The archive was a gathering place?

The archive was a place where dreams were kept, and dreamkeepers were at work?

How could histories of gathering around archives, or gathering to archive, inform how we care for and protect archival material?

The title ‘The Archive as a Gathering Place’ is drawn from the practice of the Japanese American activist Yuri Kochiyama (1921–2014), whose apartment in Harlem became a collective space of artistic and political activity in the early 1960s.



The train clamoring, Yuri’s radio always on, loud laughter and the milling of voices, children racing through corridors, kitchen pots clanging, and passionate debates flowed to the first floor, pulling you up as you climbed three dimly lit stories to apartment 3B. The elevator, recalled activist and artist Tomie Arai, never worked. A corridor covered with posters in Yuri’s felt-tipped pen-womanhood initiated you, detailing petitions that needed signing, rallies that needed attending, theatrical performances that needed an audience, and most urgently, political prisoners who needed support: ‘Free Mumia! On to Jericho!’ the walls incited, pulling you into the fold. The ‘dining table’ bore another kind of sustenance: letters, pamphlets, and envelopes stacked up to 3 or 4 feet. An ironing board supplemented the table, with colour-coded notebooks cataloguing the incoming and outgoing letters. Everyone knew that after the party, when all the dishes were cleaned and children sleeping, Yuri would sit till dawn, continuing to virtually receive and care for guests as they arrived at the radical commons.

Vasundhara Mathur, ‘A Saturday “nite” in Yuri Kochiyama’s living room’, 2025.

(001)

ROSEMARY GRENNAN: BUILDING THE ARCHIVE AS A COMMON RESOURCE

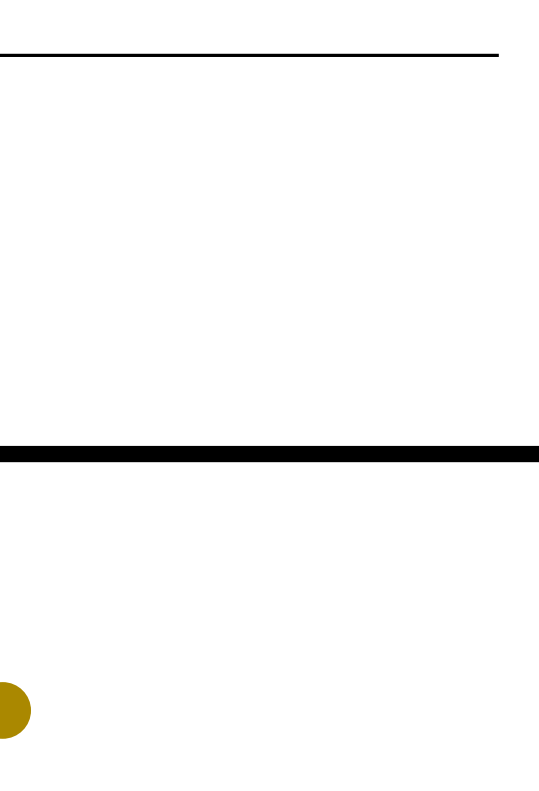
*We stand for use ... we also
think of dissemination
as a form of preservation.*

MayDay rooms is an archive of social movements, mainly from the post-war era in Britain, although we have some international collections as well. And we generally represent the sort of anti-authoritarian left within British social movements.

We are an archive but we have a remit to connect our historical material to contemporary struggles. We don’t see the archive as somewhere things go to necessarily be historicised or movements to die, but something that should be an active resource in the present.

Leftover.rs is a shared online archive of radical, anti-oppressive and working class movements. MayDay Rooms contributes its digitisations to that and sort of initiated the project, but it is by no means the main contributor. We have around 19,000 digitised documents on there and you can download them as a PDF. You can read them. It’s not just information about a document.

We really tried to develop metadata that speaks to that material ... it’s a non-hierarchical system which links to other objects. Most of the fields are hyperlinked. We’ve also made up our own fields. My favourite is called ‘Tactics’. This transforms it from being a repository to a resource. We did a workshop with some people from London Renters Union, looking at every aspect in the archive where ‘rent strike’ is mentioned. We think that that’s a much better way for organising a resource-based movement archive than, actually, probably ‘author’.



‘10 Theses on the Archive’, Padma

NORLA

Leftover.rs

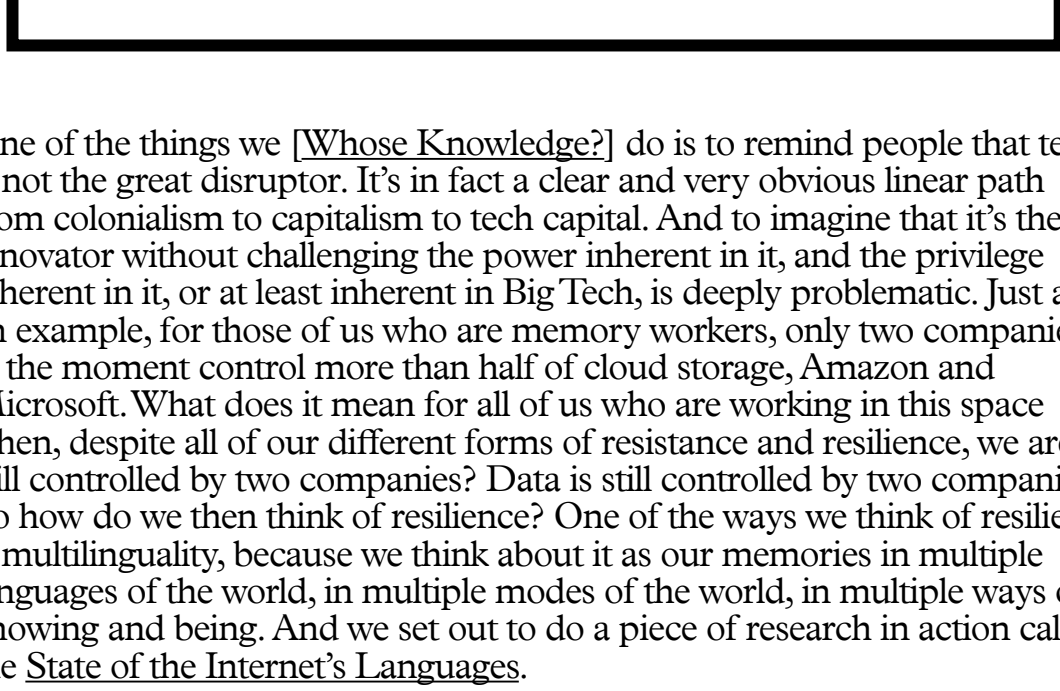
(002)

ANASUYA SENGUPTA

Our findings demonstrate that the web is nowhere near as multilingual as we imagine or need it to be. Roughly 500 of over 7000 spoken and signed languages are represented online in any form of information or knowledge. Meanwhile, 75% of those who access the internet do so in only ten languages. These languages – such as English, Chinese Mandarin, Spanish and French – often have a European colonial history, or are regionally dominant. Historical and ongoing structures of power and privilege are intrinsic to the way in which languages are accessible (or not) online.

ಬೆಟ್ಟದ ಮೇಲೊಂದು
ಮನೆಯ ಮಾಡಿ, ಮೈ
ಗಂಗಳಿಗಂಜಿದೊಡಂತೆ
ಯ್ಯ? ಮೈಗಂಗಳಿಗಂಜಿ
ದೊಡಂತೆಯ್ಯ?

This is a vachana, or a saying, from the 12th century from Akka Mahadevi, a mystic philosopher-poet who fought both the oppressions of patriarchy as well as of caste. And I’m invoking Akka this morning with all of you because of two things. Not just because this vachana, or poem in our current vocabulary, tells us that we should keep calm and archive on. And I believe that when Akka says calm, she means integrity of purpose. But also to remind us that our peoples, our communities, remember in extraordinarily resilient ways, that this vachana, transmitted orally for over eight centuries, continues to be with us today and now has digital archives, now has forms of preservation that are both institutionally supported as well as community collected. And so her 400 and more vachanas and the over 20,000 vachanas of the movement against caste in the 12th century reminds us that we can keep knowledge and memory alive, and while we do this across centuries and continents, we keep alive the discipline of hope, as the abolitionist Mariame Kaba would remind us.



One of the things we [Whose Knowledge?] do is to remind people that tech is not the great disruptor. It’s in fact a clear and very obvious linear path from colonialism to capitalism to tech capital. And to imagine that it’s the innovator without challenging the power inherent in it, and the privilege inherent in it, or at least inherent in Big Tech, is deeply problematic. Just as an example, for those of us who are memory workers, only two companies at the moment control more than half of cloud storage, Amazon and Microsoft. What does it mean for all of us who are working in this space when, despite all of our different forms of resistance and resilience, we are still controlled by two companies? Data is still controlled by two companies. So how do we then think of resilience? One of the ways we think of resilience is multilinguality, because we think about it as our memories in multiple languages of the world, in multiple modes of the world, in multiple ways of knowing and being. And we set out to do a piece of research in action called the State of the Internet’s Languages.

ALIA AL-SABI: CAPTIVE ARCHIVES IN PALESTINE

(003)

It all began seven years ago in 2018 during a trip to my mother's hometown, in the West Bank in Palestine.

I quickly learned from the archivist working there that this collection of books and notebooks originated in various libraries inside Israeli prisons in the West Bank. After the Oslo Agreement in the early 1990s, these prisons were forced to shut down, presumably to make way for Palestinian 'statehood', and the contents of these libraries were then transferred to the newly formed Palestinian Authority, which in turn transferred them to the library in my mother's hometown.

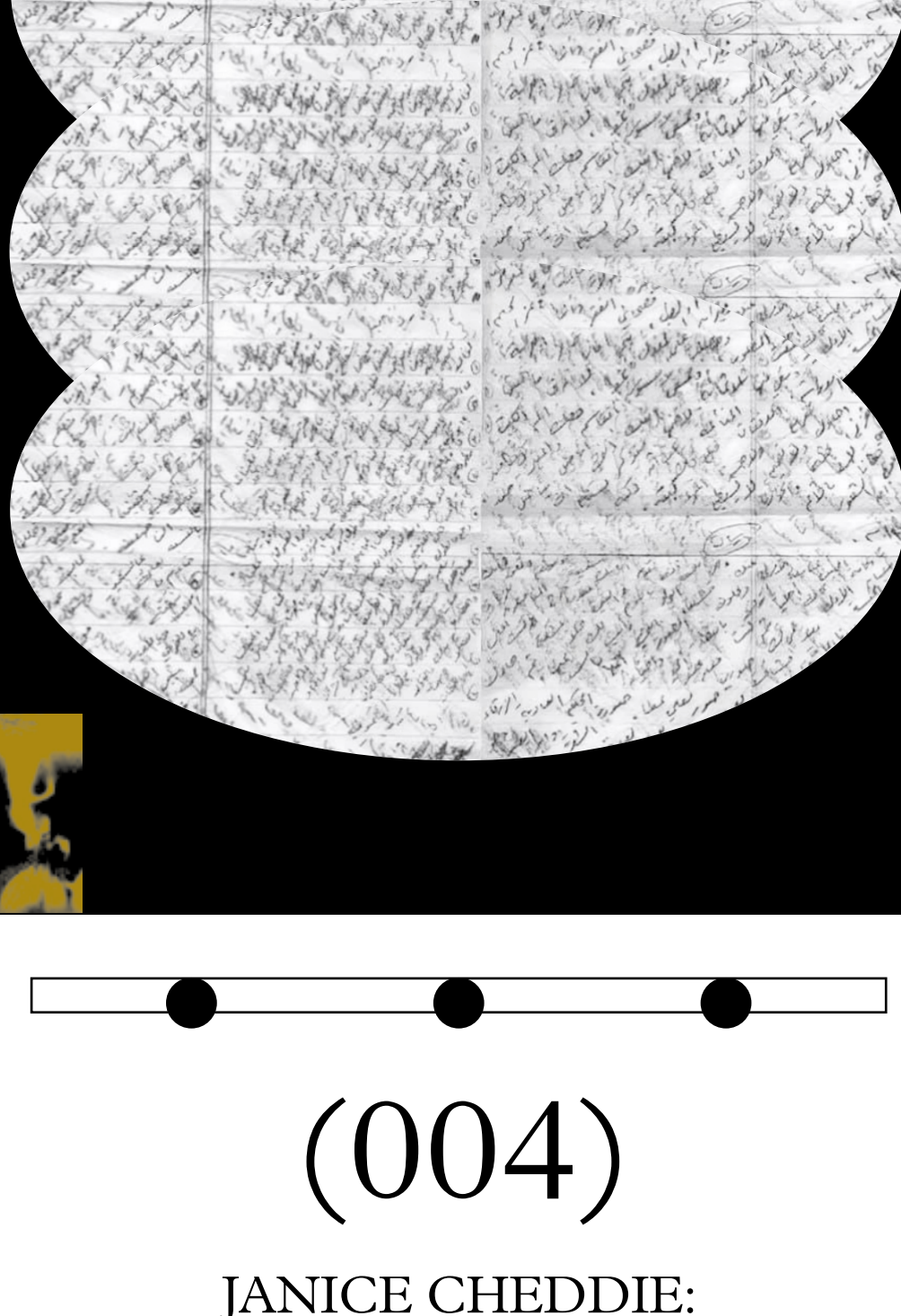
The shelves were adorned with weathered tomes of economic theory, slim volumes of poetry, well-worn novels, textbooks on mathematics and physics, classic works of philosophy and history, and much more. Naturally, I took lots of photos of the many prisoners' journals kept in the archive. Page after page of meticulously handwritten thoughts and reflections penned by men whose faces and fates I did not know. As luck would have it, my hard drive crashed and I lost all photos from that day but one that was somehow still saved on my phone. That photo is of a page from an Arabic translation of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The page shows the

Israeli prison stamp, as well as one underlined sentence that reads, 'The land belongs to those who till it.'

الأرض لمن يزرعون الأرض

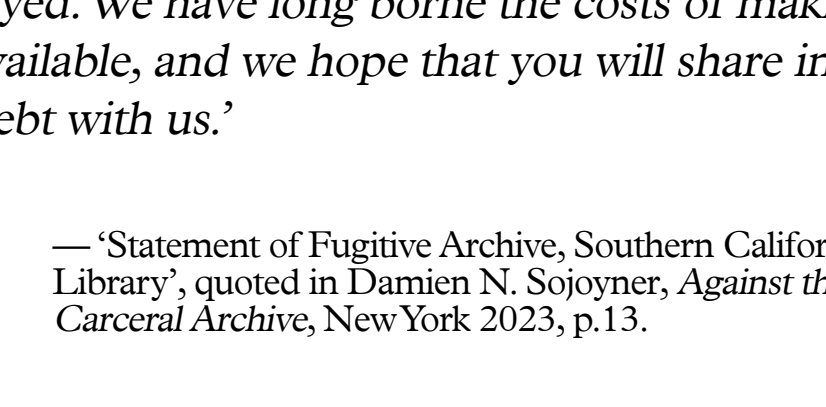
I'm not sure what compelled me to take this photo at the time, but something about the singular line emphasising that one sentence next to a hardly legible Hebrew stamp was captivating. 'The land belongs to those who till it', underlined by a Palestinian prisoner in the darkness of an Israeli prison. I wondered why these words resonated with him, why he marked nothing else on that page. Was it an affirmation, an invocation, a spell? I can only speculate, but I am nonetheless assured by the simplicity of this directive. It's like he knew, in his prison cell, the grain of truth the simple formulation contains and wanted to shine a light on it for himself and for others like me reading it after him.

What I found most moving about the contents of this archive is that ultimately, these prisoners were reading and writing for one another. Even though they were confined to their cells, their words could still travel between them, reinforcing their collectivity.



(004)

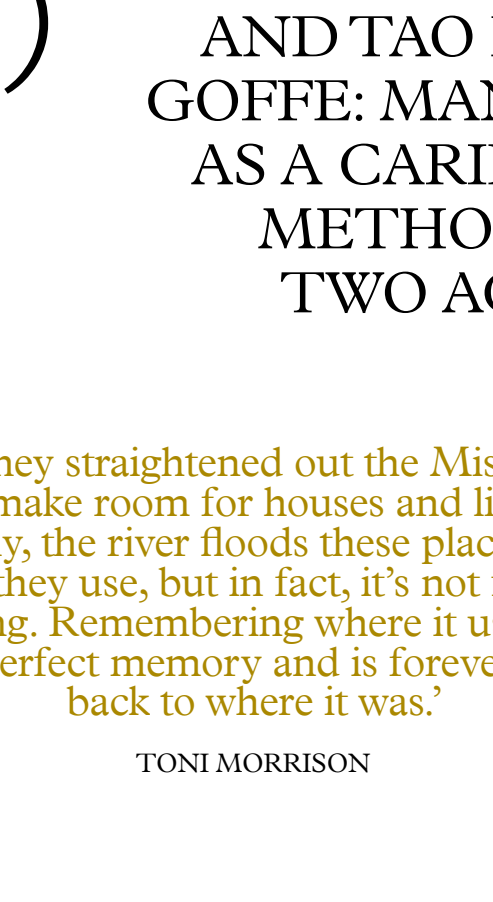
JANICE CHEDDIE: PANEL CONVERSATION



One of the things that comes up across the archives, and which perhaps is a bit more difficult to articulate, is this idea of gratitude ... The Southern California Library Association, which is a collection of radical collections based in the States, have a users agreement and they talk within that, about the cost of collecting this work:

'It is not our desire to track and account for how this archive is used and shared. We seek no credit. But there is a cost to caring for what was to be destroyed. We have long borne the costs of making this available, and we hope that you will share in that debt with us.'

— 'Statement of Fugitive Archive, Southern California Library', quoted in Damien N. Sojoyner, *Against the Carceral Archive*, New York 2023, p.13.



— Image courtesy SITAAD

(005)

EDDIE BRUCE-JONES AND TAO LEIGH GOFFE: MANGROVE AS A CARIBBEAN METHOD IN TWO ACTS

'You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally, the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact, it's not flooding: it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.'

TONI MORRISON

The archives relevant for British colonial indentureship history are strewn throughout the world in the footprints of exploitative commerce. There are indeed colonial records in London, at the UK National Archives and the British Library. Many of those documents relate to correspondence between the East India Company and later incarnations of colonial administration. [But to see] some of the experience of those who were indentured, you'll need to go to the countries that labourers were sent to, including Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, Saint Kitts, among other places ... The holdings in these repositories taken together and digitised would offer a detailed overview of the indentured labourers, where they're from, their circumstancs, their religions, social backgrounds and their names. But they're not digitised for the most part, they're not in the best state, and despite some effort are still in danger of being lost to decay, accidental damage and the colonial half-life of a semi-abandoned racial capitalist project.

SO HOW DOES WATER REMEMBER AS IT TRIES TO GET BACK TO ITSELF?

And how do we remember ourselves using water as a cue? I'm also inspired by Morrison's re-memory, 'recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past'. That's my starting point for engaging with the idea of the mangrove as method, its water and recollection, recollecting. My work on indentureship has involved mainly sitting and reading and not writing. Much to the chagrin of my academic institutions. In silence in the archives, doing genealogical work to fine detail of the banality of the lives that were lived adjacent to those of my own kin, walking streets in unfamiliar places that I had known all my life and familiar ones I'd never been to before.

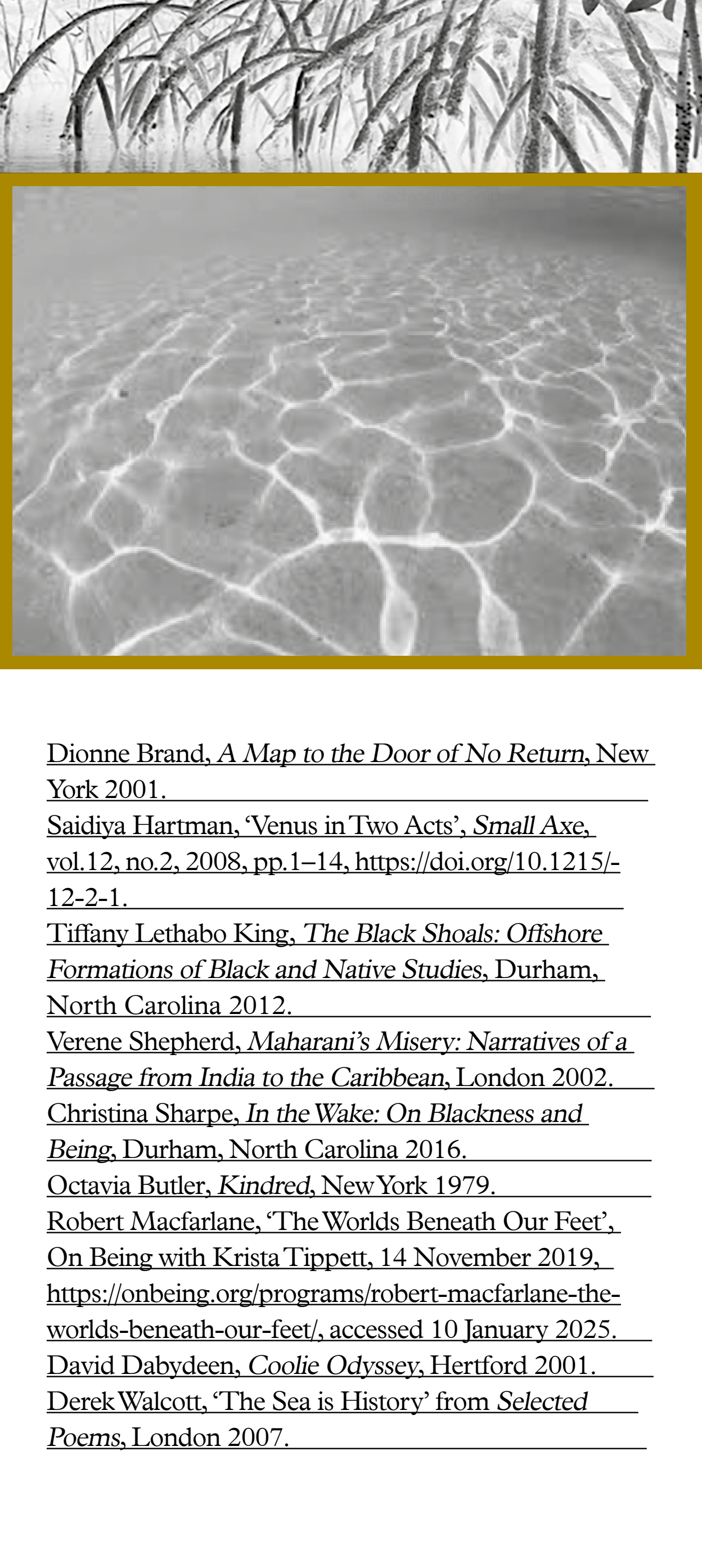
To remember, the process is one of re-memory, piecing together bits of the past and finding remarkable points of clarity in the mundane.

WHAT IS A MANGROVE?

It's a shrub or a tree that grows mainly in coastal saline or brackish water, and it's found along equatorial climates, so that's in places like Nigeria, Trinidad, and many of the locations where indenture took place in Southeast Asia, hugging the equator. And the mangrove for us gives a kind of new theorisation for the unruly metadata of the British colonial archive and how we navigate it as descendants, and as people who have been told that our archives are not real archives.

This was a refrain that I heard throughout my PhD education from 'capital H' historians ... But I turned to the mangrove because it is a home. It is a gathering place for crabs, for shrimp, it's a fish nursery. You'll find sharks, juvenile sharks that nest within the roots of the mangrove as the trees grow above the water along the coastlines of many islands and coastal areas. The mangrove poses for us a model of metadata and the archive of racial indenture in three ways, as salty, thorny and tangled.

It allows Eddie and I to grapple with a hidden chapter of racial capitalism, and we sit with the question of why there is a cycle of forgetting.



Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, New York 2001.

Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, vol.12, no.2, 2008, pp.1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/12-2-1>.

Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, Durham, North Carolina 2012.

Verene Shepherd, *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*, London 2002.

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, North Carolina 2016.

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*, New York 1979.

Robert Macfarlane, 'The Worlds Beneath Our Feet', *On Being* with Krista Tippett, 14 November 2019, <https://onbeing.org/programs/robert-macfarlane-the-worlds-beneath-our-feet/>, accessed 10 January 2025.

David Dabydeen, *Coolie Odyssey*, Hertford 2001.

Derek Walcott, 'The Sea is History' from *Selected Poems*, London 2007.

(006)

THAI JONES: BEYOND WONDER: TEACHING WITH ANGER AND OUTRAGE IN THE ARCHIVES



Most of the time we worked with students and researchers, people in the community, public school students. We're reading the collections at the institution against the grain, we're often identifying cast away materials that archivists historically did not find important, or looking at things with new questions in mind, re-examining the records of imperial powers and state power to understand how those mechanisms work and to identify moments and opportunities of resistance. So the way we're looking at them, these archives at Columbia and other institutions are providing essential information about gentrification, white supremacy, over-policing, gender discrimination, and we are going into these archives in an

attempt to build new movements, generate knowledge.

And the power of all of this practice was just on full display recently at Columbia during the protests on campus. From the very beginning [students] were thinking about 1968, which was the last, great protest moment on campus. These students were in the archives, you know, many, many, many of the people who were most deeply involved had studied in the archives, understood the records of student activism that shaped their work around Columbia's traditions.

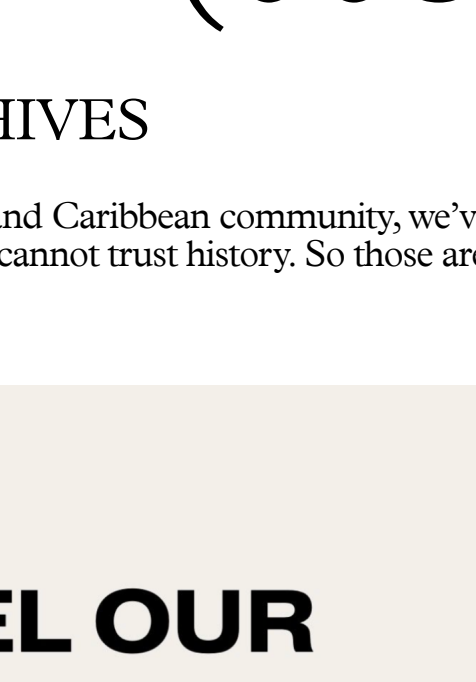


Image courtesy SITAAD

(007)

CHRISTINE EYENE: THE GEORGE HALLETT RESEARCH COLLECTION

George had designed the covers of the African Writers Series ... But the images that George used were ... images that he took before leaving South Africa in a place called District Six, which was, in Cape Town, which is a mixed area ... In 1966 the government decided to declare District Six a white area. So they decided to remove everyone. And George ... decided to document District Six before its demolition. So actually George started to create a visual archive of this community before everyone was expelled and the area was demolished. And my work with these photographs was also to, sort of like consider them as an archive and preserve them.

(008)

ALEEMA GRAY: LIBERATE THE ARCHIVES

Speaking from the realm of the African and Caribbean community, we've unfortunately come to a place where we cannot trust history. So those are those issues around trust and care.

WE FEEL OUR HISTORIES

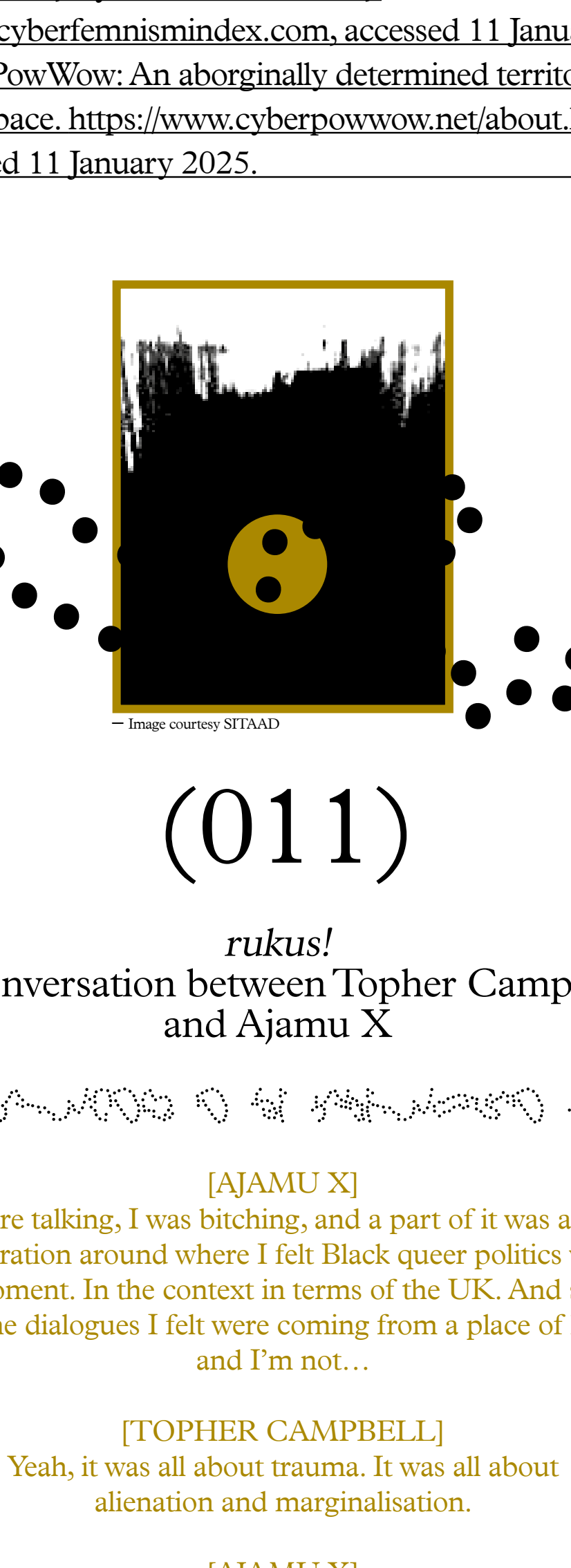
A lot of the work that I do is, as an oral historian recording a lot of people's stories, gathering these archives, gathering these living histories. And so I say [WE FEEL OUR HISTORIES] because one of the things that an elder said to me when I was recording his story, he told me, 'We have been plundered, our memories have been plundered, things have been taken that need to be reclaimed. We must repossess what has been taken from us in every way, so that we can be clothed in the dignity that we deserve.'

Part of this work that we're doing around archives and practice is also reckoning with the fact that sometimes we can be part of the problem as well as the solution. And so we have to always critically check ourselves. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? Who are we doing it for? Who is our work really in conversation with?

(009)

ABEERA KAMRAN: URDU NEWSPAPERS: THE ARCHIVE IS STILL IN PRINT

As a native Urdu reader who grew up in a house where everyone read Urdu newspapers I was absolutely shocked to discover that we were handwriting our newspapers until as late as 1981. Mechanical printing was invented in East Asia as early as the eighth century.



In the Arabic-speaking world, mechanical printing was in use because they accepted a simplification of their script ... the same idea was pitched to ... Pakistani printers and publishers, and they printed a similar simplified Urdu font for a week. And there was such uproar ... nobody tried again for the next 20 years.

So invested are we in this specific aesthetic that the Urdu's data economy online is entirely made of images. So if you go to any newspaper website, you will see a printed scan of the newspaper and then each of these is hyperlinked, and then you click on a section and then it leads you to another image.

The study of Urdu newspapers feels like a gift to me, to know that despite sometimes the seemingly totalising forces of imperialism and hostile Eurocentric technologies, Urdu newspapers maintain a sophistication and complexity that is both historical and modern and that the archival mode of designing is still in use because the community of readers refuse to accept anything less than what they consider to be beautiful and true.

(010)

MINDY SEU: CYBERFEMINISM INDEX IS INCOMPLETE AND ALWAYS IN PROGRESS

For us, it was really to ... switch this emphasis between what is considered a legitimising document. Typically, books are seen as if they are more authoritative and more stable, whereas websites are maybe more ephemeral. But in this case, the website really acts as a living index that's constantly crowdsourced, whereas the book acts as a snapshot of a moment of the website's mutation.

'Before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home. Prior to the preeminence of sticks, swords, and the hero's killing tools, our ancestors' greatest invention was the container, the basket of wild oats, the medicine bundle, the home, the bag of stars.'

— URSULA K. LE GUIN,
'THE CARRIER BAG THEORY OF FICTION'

I like this because it basically posits that the first tool was not the spear, which is a tool of dominance, but rather the basket, which is a tool of gathering.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 2nd edn, London 2024.

Corey Tegeler, 'Radical Google Docs', Are.na, <https://www.are.na/tegeler/radical-google-docs>, accessed 11 January 2025.

Mindy Seu, *Cyberfeminism Index*, <https://cyberfemismindex.com>, accessed 11 January 2025.

CyberPowWow: An aboriginally determined territory in cyberspace. <https://www.cyberpowwow.net/about.html>, accessed 11 January 2025.

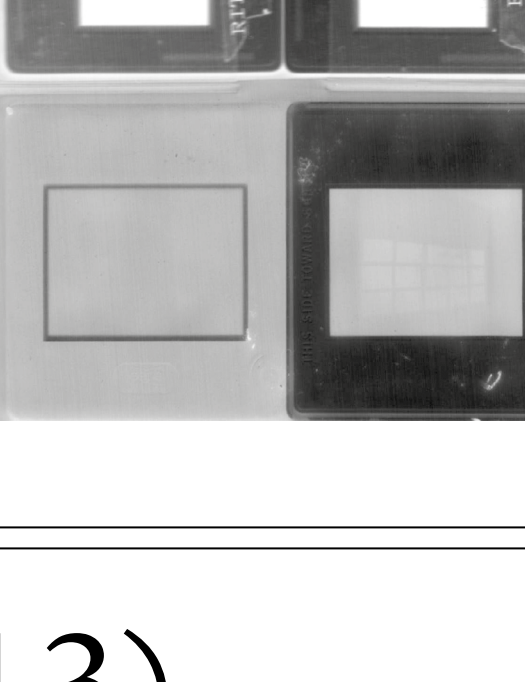


Image courtesy SITAAD

(011)

rukus!

A conversation between Topher Campbell and Ajamu X

[AJAMU X]

We were talking, I was bitching, and a part of it was around a frustration around where I felt Black queer politics was at the moment. In the context in terms of the UK. And so lots of the dialogues I felt were coming from a place of lack and I'm not...

[TOPHER CAMPBELL]

Yeah, it was all about trauma. It was all about alienation and marginalisation.

[AJAMU X]

Yeah.

[TOPHER CAMPBELL]

And activism.

[AJAMU X]

Yeah. And for me it's not to dismiss people's lived experiences, but I felt that there had to be another conversation around aspiration and celebration and...

[TOPHER CAMPBELL]

And artists' practice as well.

[AJAMU X]

Yes so *rukus!* is like, an artistic endeavour. But also *rukus!* also like comes out of a long friendship. And the reason why we then chose the name *rukus!* was to try and capture the kind of energy that we felt kind of *rukus!* was at the particular moment. And so *rukus!* comes out of the word raucous.

(012)

RITA KEEGAN AND LAUREN CRAIG: PRESERVATION AS CREATION

But we gather, and in this gathering we continue to bring things together.

Rita Keegan:

Quite often I'm amazed at some things that have managed to stick with me because it wasn't by choice. They just did.

What also helped was back in the day ... banana boxes. Because banana boxes were strong, they had a divide down the center so you could have your files on both sides. And they generally had a lid, and even if they didn't, they were sturdy enough. It's amazing how many archives you can have in three banana boxes.

Lauren Craig:

The archive is a mundane place mostly, as everyday things pass through: receipts from the post office, invoices, memos, emails, magnets. There's lots of things in the archive that are everyday. But as those days pass, their weight and their importance begin to lay heavy ... the responsibility to make sure that the next seven generations are able to access this.

We think of legacies as a will, a conversation, an absence, a silence, catalogs, abundance, leaflets. We try to ask the questions:

Why do we document?

Who is it that will be here to know?

Who are the gatekeepers?

Who are the knowledge givers?

Who amongst us, are the wayfinders?

How can we document and keep things going?

How do we want to?

What is it that we need?

Unless otherwise credited, all texts and images are fragments drawn from the presentations and performances given at The Archive is a Gathering Place at Tate Modern, London, 24 and 25 May 2024. Images have been collaged and reinterpreted by Rose Nordin.

Designer: Rose Nordin
Editor: Vasundhara Mathur

This excerpt deliberately preserves Italian and Somali text in its original form. Transmigrating Cassettes, as a project, resists the impulse of translation-as-extraction, and instead affirms the importance of opacity and the epistemic integrity of language.

Toolmoonihii Maxammad baw tegay Ilaaheene
Tii uu na faray looxayaday noogu taal walaye
Safar waa la taakulin jiree la ma tayiisayne
Tii uu na faray looxayaday noogu taal walaye
Ma Talyaanigaasaa Mahdiya tanuna waa yaabe!