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

I ended my last book, Images Matters, with a childhood memory of my father’s quiet hum—the hum of a man mourning the loss of his wife. On the night of my mother’s funeral, surrounded by his entire family and all of
his friends in our home, my father hummed my mother's favorite Roberta Flack song. Swaying back and forth while his eleven- and thirteen-year-old daughters sang over the record, he hummed instead of crying. A hum can signify a multitude of things. A hum can be mournful; it can be presence in absence or can take the form of a gritty moan in the foreground or a soothing massage in the background. It can celebrate, animate, or accompany. It can also irritate, haunt, grate, or distract.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Frequency:** In acoustics, the number of complete vibrations or cycles occurring per unit of time in a vibrating system such as a column of air. Frequency is the primary determinant of the listener's perception of pitch. (Harvard Dictionary of Music Online)

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

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

*Listening to Images* explores the lower frequencies of transfiguration enacted at the level of the quotidian, in the everyday traffic of black folks with objects that are both mundane and special: photographs. What are the "lower frequencies" of these quotidian practices, and how do we engage their transfigurative potential? As a vernacular practice mobilized by black people in diaspora, photography is an everyday strategy of affirmation and a confrontational practice of visibility. Vernacular photographs are banal as well as singular; they articulate both the ordinary and the ex-
exceptional texture of black life. My approach to these images, archives, and the image-making practices that produced them revalues the quotidian as a site of cultural formation that Georges Perec designates as “infra-ordinary” — everyday practices we don’t always notice and whose seeming insignificance requires excessive attention. Attending to the infra-ordinary and the quotidian reveals why the trivial, the mundane, or the banal are in fact essential to the lives of the dispossessed and the possibility of black futurity.

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

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

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

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

Building on these counterintuitive suppositions, chapter 2, “Striking Poses in a Tense Grammar: Stasis and the Frequency of Black Refusal,” proceeds from a third counterintuitive contention—that stasis is neither an absence nor a cessation of motion; it is a continual balancing of mul-
multiple forces in equilibrium. The chapter theorizes stasis as a temporal modality of diasporic motion held in suspension, in ways that hover between stillness and movement. It juxtaposes two additional archives of vernacular photography of blacks in diaspora: late nineteenth-century ethnographic photos of rural Africans in the Eastern Cape and early twentieth-century studio portraits of African Christians in South African urban centers. Focusing on the sonic frequency and creative reappropriation of these portraits by the South African photographer Santu Mofokeng in his acclaimed work, *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950*, the essay explores the continuities and disruptions between vernacular portraiture and compulsory photography. Viewed together, these images blur the line between “postured performances” and “compelled poses,” and, in the process, they redefine what it means to “strike a pose.”

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

The through-line that connects each of the chapters is a critique of the limits of contemporary discourses of resistance and a rigorous engagement with the discourse of fugitivity in African Diaspora studies and black feminist theory. I theorize the practice of refusal as an extension of the range of creative responses black communities have marshaled in the face of racialized dispossession. In this context, refusal is not a response to a state of exception or extreme violence. I theorize it instead as practices honed in response to sustained, everyday encounters with exigency and duress that rupture a predictable trajectory of flight. Toward this end, the final chapter of the book is written as a coda that grapples with the grammar of black futurity as it confronts us in the contemporary moment. It assesses the frequency of a very different set of criminal identification photos and their reappropriation by urban African American youth struggling to develop their own practices of refusing the statistical probability of premature black death in the twenty-first century.

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

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

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

Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. “Peaches” and “Brown Sugar,” “Sapphire” and “Earth Mother,” “Aunty,” “Granny,” “God’s Holy Fool,” a “Miss Ebony First,” or “Black
Woman at the Podium**: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented. (65)

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

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

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

In his elegant revisiting of Spillers’s work, Alexander Weheliye describes her intervention as an attempt to theorize “some general dimensions of modern subjectivity from the vantage point of black women” in ways that “develop a grammar [and] create a vocabulary that does not choose between addressing the specific location of black women, a broader theoretical register about what it means to be human during and in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade, and the imagination of liberation in the future anter iod sense of the NOW.” It is in a similarly grammatical sense—a grammar of futurity realized in the present—that I now repeat my opening question: What does it mean for a black feminist to think in the grammar of futurity?

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

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

Some see the realization of such a future in the form of acts and actions. They see it in political movements and acts of resistance like those that have produced fundamental shifts in the status of subordinated, subaltern, and marginalized groups. But I believe we must not only look but also listen for it in other, less likely places. I locate it in the everyday imaging practices of black communities past, present, and future. And I find it, over and again, in some of the least celebrated, often most disposable
archives of photography. They are images that we are compelled or required to take: identification photos. It is an alternative visual archive of the African Diaspora that I call quiet photography.

The Hum of Silence

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

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

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

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

Gulu Real Art Studio assembles an unlikely genre of vernacular portraiture: discarded cutouts of African identity photos, originally taken by Obal Denis, a photographer and the proprietor of Gulu Real Art Studio, the oldest photography studio in the Ugandan city of Gulu, and collected by the Italian photojournalist Martina Bacigalupo. The result is a reinstatement of once-discarded, now-reclaimed images that Bacigalupo compares to "a choral narrative" of the Acholi people of northern Uganda. It is a studio typical of countless others scattered across the African continent—seemingly utilitarian photography studios frequently repurposed by their sitters to create a visual archive of their desire to be agential black subjects.

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

The exhibit could be viewed as a prime example of the type of serial art championed by artists such as Sol Lewitt or the "ready-mades" problematized by Marcel Duchamp. As Lewitt famously maintained, the creator of...
serial art is neither the author nor the agent of the work, but is more of “a clerk cataloging the results of his premise.” Yet the seriality of Gulu Real Art Studio is not Bacigalupo's artistic creation. The seriality of these images is the product of their photographic genre: identification photography. The work is a serial installation of a serialized object, for identification photography is defined by two primary attributes: it is required and it is serially and sequentially (re)produced. They are photographs created to validate and verify identity as a uniform set of multiples intended to produce an aggregate image of a group of individuals.

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

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

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

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

I've been listening to images for years now. In Image Matters, listening to images meant attending to the musical patterns, rhythms, and registers enacted in vernacular photographs of black European communities. My listening practices focused on the affective registers of black family photography; on how and why such photos touch and move people both physically and affectively; and on excavating the gendered narratives of diaspora captured in images of communities, often overlooked in many scholarly accounts. My image-listening practices began in 2007 at the City
Archives in Birmingham, England, where I started listening because I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of images I encountered in a collection of found photographs of Birmingham’s postwar Afro-Caribbean community.

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

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

CHAPTER 1

Quiet Photos, Fugitive Practices

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

Neither silent nor inaudible, these photographs resonate just below the
threshold of hearing. They do not speak, but they are not mute. Both hon-
orific and repressive, these portraits are command performances of a very
specific kind — performances dictated by crown and country of their sub-
jects and citizens. They are passport photos, images that strive to enun-
icate respectability and aspiration, albeit within highly regulated regimes
of social and geographic mobility. They are photographs that engendered
new circuits of movement, relation, and dwelling that reshaped the post-
war culture of the Black Atlantic. They are some of the least audible and,
for many, most ordinary of photos. To me, these sublimely quiet images
enunciate an aspirational politics that are accessible at the lowest of fre-
quencies — frequencies that hum and vibrate between and beyond the
leather binding and governmental pages to which they were intended to
be affixed.

While the passport records the circuits of movement of individuals in
transit, these photos, freed from the frame of a leather passbook, exceed
the transliteration of sites of entry and exit in stamps of date and place.
Passport photos are steeped in history and memory as images invested
with the power to create new lives and histories. They are images that
transmit their sitters’ hopes and dreams prior to travel, along with the
journeys these documents made possible. They register a transnational
circuit of negotiations of transit, passage, and connection mediated
by the state, family, and community. Scholarly histories of the passport re-
count the deep entanglement of this document with the increasing need
of states to track the movement of citizens, identify those who belong,
Exercise control over populations by certifying some and excluding
others. As a technology used to regulate mobility and exercise control over
citizens and subjects, the passport is characterized by Lesley Higgins and
Marie-Christine Leps as “emblematic of governmentality,” as an instru-
ment of biopower that
targets the life of the one and the many, of the population as a whole
and of each individual. It works not only through laws and regula-
tions securing the biological, economic and political health of the
nation, but also through the fostering of individual pleasures and
passions, desires and ambitions — our very sense of who we are.

In spite of the history of the passport’s emergence as what Lily Cho
has called “a document of suspicion” issued by the state and used for
population surveillance, the passport photo has an equally significant
lower frequency. As Craig Robertson notes, the logics of classification,
evidence, and authenticity that made the passport such an effective archi-
val technology and investigative modality also privileged these documents as the basis of a retrievable state memory—"an objective, mobile memory that reduced dependence on the recall of specific individuals." But how is the passport photo implicated in this investigative modality? Are these images inseparable from the regimes of state regulation and surveillance of the documents for which they were made? Put simply, is the passport photo reducible to a mere function of the passport?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The fugitivity of these quiet images lies not in their ability to sanction movement, for, extracted from their context, these photos lack this capacity. It lies in the creation of new possibilities for living lives that refused a regulatory regime from which they could not be removed. These images disorder the strict terms of place and personhood dictated by a passport that reduced them to governmentalized subjects of Empire. Their fugitivity is an insistence on being a postcolonial, West Indian, and British subject—a subject governed by the BNA yet unmanageable and profoundly disorderly because of it.

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

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

The polyphony made audible when listening to these images echoes the accounts of Caribbean migrants who tell stories of dressing up to disembark at Southall or Victoria Station because they had not just landed, they had arrived. Listening, rather than simply looking at them, they offer humbling recitations of their search for employment, being forced to accept
positions below their qualifications, as well as stories of discrimination in housing and on job sites that are in no way “visible” in these images. What is equally invisible is the intersectional topography of Balsall Heath that serves as the backdrop to the fugitive lives and quotidian practices against which these individuals sought to image and imagine themselves and their future. That context becomes audible by way of a slight detour through a very different archive of photos that complicates and reframes the fugitive practices of the passport photos we have just viewed.

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

The images are part of an archive of photos shot by Mendelsohn for a 1969 photo essay, “Varna Road,” about a young sex worker she photographed and became close friends with over a two-year period in Balsall Heath— the same neighborhood in Birmingham at around the same time in the mid-1960s as the passport photos we have just viewed.17 “Varna Road” was shot on one of the main streets of Balsall Heath, only blocks away from the Dyche studio; the men pictured in this image could have been neighbors or possibly friends of those featured in the passport portraits taken by the Dyches. The surface narrative of these images seems clear: interracial cooperation. An indexical proclamation of neighborhood tolerance, diversity, and solidarity between the police and Birmingham’s “new Commonwealth citizens.” But the photographer’s notation (on the following image) tells a different story: “pimps and a cop on the street.”
From the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s, Balsall Heath was a magnet for many new migrants to Birmingham because of the cheap housing offered by private landlords who often illegally subdivided the larger, Victorian housing stock that marked the neighborhood's past as a formerly middle-class hilltop district of Birmingham, where more affluent residents settled to get away from the pollution of the factories and manufacturing in the city center. Unlike other residents of the city, newly arrived postwar migrants were not eligible for more affordable, subsidized public housing due to residency requirements and long waiting lists. They were forced instead to seek substandard housing from unregulated private landlords. In Balsall Heath, this led to widespread blight in an area that at the time had become targeted for slum clearance by the city government. The neglect of property owners was mirrored by that of the city council and the police, who turned the blind eye to a growing influx of drugs, crime, and, above all, prostitution. In fact, in the period these images were made (just over a decade after the passage of the BNA), Balsall Heath was well on its way to the dubious distinction of being Britain's most notorious red-light district.

When they met in 1966, Mendelsohn's subject, Kathleen, was twenty-three years old and living with the father of her two children in Balsall Heath. She was the fourth of fourteen children born into an Irish immigrant family, and she had grown up in Balsall Heath with her mother and siblings who lived nearby. According to Mendelsohn's notes, Kathleen supported her children and their father, Salim, a British Pakistani who also grew up nearby and whose family lived a few blocks away. A year before publishing the photos, Salim was stabbed to death in a café. In the four years they lived together, they had a two-year-old daughter and a son who was born while Mendelsohn was shooting her photo essay. Mendelsohn's archive contains excerpts from interviews conducted with Kathleen and Salim, their families, friends, and other men and women working in the sex trade on Varna Road. Their comments offer a complicated account of the lives of the individuals in her photos.
“It was me and him living in this house where this girl was, you see. Well, when I first went with this girl—I ran away with her, you know. We both ran away. What we did, we got a room and started doing it. I think he brought me back about three times. Mind you, he was working then, you know. He was working in a biscuit factory and he got the sack. Got another job and then he brought me back about three times. I kept taking off because I thought the money was nice then. In the end he took time off from work looking for me again and got the sack so we just drifted into it together, you know? Or I pulled him.”

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

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

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

“When [my son] is older, I’ll tell him—look, my life is no good. I don’t know no reading, no nothing. I’m an engineer but I can’t read, so what’s the use to be an engineer? So if he learns properly he could...
be a doctor or could be pilot or anything, you know, so that people will say—there is Salim's son—and I'll be proud."

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

Against this backdrop, do the passport photos we have just viewed register differently as a consequence of this unexpected stroll just a few blocks down the road into the broader social geography of Balsall Heath? Do the same sartorial echoes suddenly perplex us? Do suits and skinny ties still perform respectability, or do they now register "swagger"—or possibly both? Attending to the lower frequencies of these images, we must ask whether they depict different diasporic subjects or whether we are encountering instead different strategies of diasporic survival. For our passport sitters could also have been the "brothers on the block"—brothers who were also lovers, husbands, fathers, and sons, perhaps maintaining children, siblings, and extended families. What were their respective strategies for survival and what were their possibilities for futurity? Do we "see" them in these images? Or must we expand the sensorial register of the image to perceive them? And what becomes audible in them when the practice of listening is not just about hearing, but an attunement to different levels of photographic audibility, many of which register at lower...
frequencies through their ability to move us? Attuning oneself to such frequencies and affects is more than simply looking and more than visual scrutiny. To look or to watch is to apprehend at only one sensory level. Listening requires an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact. It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer.

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

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

This detour is an essential juxtaposition because what we apprehend when we listen to both sets of images together is a common thread: desire—a desire to be seen, to be photographed, to be visible, and to matter. In each case, it is a desire to live a future that is now, because of the precarity of black quotidian life wherein tomorrow is fleeting and often too risky to wait for or imagine. Those desires were sometimes enabled by fugitive performances of respectability; sometimes they were lived illicitly, through alternate economies of sex and desire. Listening to this ensemble of images together registers a dissonant yet resonant refrain of black futurity that allows us to encounter them much differently. Their futurity is the quiet, yet intense fugitivity of Black Atlantic transfiguration—a quotidian practice of refusing to stay put or to stay in their designated place, and a refusal to accept the rejection of and limitations on black futurity many ultimately confronted in the United Kingdom.

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

Returning to the images with which this chapter began, the Dyche and Mendelsohn photos register at a similarly low frequency as the Gulu cutouts. While the transfigurative politics of the cutouts were structured neither by the rigidity of the passport photo nor by an inverted postcolonial migration, their aspirations to dignity, humanity, and futurity in postconflict Uganda are instantiated in equally profound ways in these images.
Both Gulu and Balsall Heath were sites of diasporic arrival and transfiguration made differentially visible or wholly erased in each of the respective genres of identification photography their residents were required to produce. In a city riven by the violence of decades of civil war, many of the faceless individuals photographed in the Gulu Real Art Studio were people who had been driven out of their homes miles away who found shelter in Gulu. Their portraits enunciate quotidian claims to survival, resilience, and possibility in the aftermath of violence. Similarly, Balsall Heath was also a place of struggle and survival, a complex site for the convergence of exigency and aspiration. Like the cutouts, they make these claims not visually, through absent faces and expressions, but at a much lower, infrasonic frequency.

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

It would be easy to focus on their eyes. To attend exclusively to the direction of their gazes downward or forward. To read them as signifiers of status or station, establishing or rejecting connection and relation. Do their gazes situate them closer to us or place us at a distance? Do they command attention or seek to avoid it instead? These are queries we direct, at least initially, to the eyes, and the looks and gazes they create or appear to disrupt. But let's not attempt to intuit too much. Let's place these looks and gazes in a larger context, for they are defined not simply by the direction of the eyes. They are images we recognize from a familiar catalog of ethnographic portraiture. They capture striking poses staged under the direction of a photographic operator. These photos were not taken at the behest of their sitters. They are images intended to classify types rather than identify individuals. While those in the photos may have given tacit sanction or approval, they are at best coerced and at worst compelled.

This chapter begins and ends with two confessional moments. Confession #1: This archive of images vexes me. They are photographs that affect me and images in which I see a multitude of things. I'm conflicted by the beauty I see in them, perplexed by the quiet introspection they so hauntingly depict. I see images of black women with dignity and stature. I see
regal and penetrating gazes downcast, looking outward, or focused on the camera. Yet viewed in their historical and institutional context, they witness a transliteration of beauty into racialized cultural categories and confront us with a vulnerability that also frames each of these women’s photographic presentations. In and around their strength and vulnerability, I see, as well, what most viewers take for granted: their stillness.

It is this complex set of tensions—the tense grammar of photographically stilled presentations of vulnerability twinned with proud defiance—that I explore in this chapter. These images visualize a tense grammar of colonization and black self-fashioning, as well as the tense relations of photographic subjects to the ethnographic gazes engendered by the history of colonial dispossession. A complex entanglement of social, historical, political, and perhaps most important, visual tensions structures these images’ depiction of their African subjects. They are tensions Frantz Fanon suggested we engage by way of the black body, in particular, through its muscles.

In his brilliant parsing of this central metaphor for articulating the experience of the colonized, Darieck Scott reconstructs the salience of “muscular tension” for theorizing an alternate vision of black futurity and possibility. For Scott, muscular tension represents the paradoxical power of the black body in subjection, for, as he contends, “even within the lived experience of subjugation perceived to be at its worst, there are potential powers in blackness, uses that undermine or act against racist domination.” Scott’s reading illuminates the forms of possibility found in the “meager resources and the failed and even abortive strategies that flow from them, because even in meagerness and failure they are rich, and not without effective capability.” For Scott muscular tension constitutes a state of black powerfulness in the midst of debility, a form of resistance expressed through a refusal to accept or acquiesce to defeat.

Returning to the images, what if, following Scott’s lead, we direct our attention to the affects of these women’s looks? Stilled faces and stunning profiles with chins held high or tilted at an angle. They capture a profound stillness that suggests thoughtfulness and interiority. Or do they? What appears to be motionlessness is in fact an effortful placement that never arrives at a true state of stillness. Scott’s insights encourage us to consider the embodied postures of the subjugated as visible manifestations of psychic and physical responses (rather than submission) to colonization and the ethnographic gazes it initiated. Widening our view beyond their faces, we witness a visual enactment of the tensions Scott (citing Fanon) invokes: women with jaws clenched, brows tensed, lips pursed, and nostrils flared—in muscular tension. Scott refers to an arrested activity held back by “a restraint, on the edge of a new consciousness.” It is a consciousness “that readies itself to direct the body in activity” and a tension indicative of what he describes as a “reservoir of resistance to the colonizer’s acts of subjugation and enslavement.”

These photos visualize a similarly tense set of relations. Taut skin stretched over engaged musculature, tightly pursed lips, a horizontal indentation between cheekbone and jaw—these are not poses or expressions of relaxation, comfort, or ease. The tensions imaged in these portraits denote a state of being and becoming I describe with a different vocabulary. I call it “stasis.” What changes in our apprehension of these women’s images and their communities more broadly, when we move beyond stillness and immobility and engage them through the lens of stasis?

**stasis:**
1. an act or condition of standing or stopping.
2. a state of balance or equilibrium among various forces.

**stasis** (my definition):
1. tensions produced by holding a complex set of forces in suspension.
2. invisible motion held in tense suspension or temporary equilibrium; e.g., vibration

Engaging these portraits as depictions of stasis rather than stillness means that, rather than motionlessness, what we see is an effortful equilibrium achieved through a labored balancing of opposing forces and
flows. These images require us to do more than just see stasis, for they capture invisible forms of motion held in tense suspension. Their stasis registers beyond what we see, like the vibrations that form the fundamental basis of sonic frequency. We must thus attend to the muscular tension imaged in these portraits as a performance of stillness that holds the complex forces that surrounded and produced these images temporarily at bay or in equilibrium. Their stasis requires us to listen to the infrasonic frequencies of images that register through feeling rather than vision or audible sound.

Each of these photos is numbered, dated, and stamped with the text "Mariannhill-Sued-Africa 1894." But one word is missing that is ever-present in other images belonging to this series: "Trappistenmission" (Trappist Mission). Here we must pose an obvious question: why? Why are these images of South African women inscribed in German and identified not by their photographer or collector but by their institutional site of origin? What was the intention behind embossing these sitter-subjects with the civilizing stamp of German-speaking missionaries? The answers to these questions can be found in the larger archive and its relationship to the history of Christian evangelism in southern Africa.

Brought to the Eastern Cape in 1880, the Trappists were recruited to South Africa to build a model farm intended to convert Africans to Christianity by educating them in the Christian faith and efficient farming methods. Founded by a charismatic Austrian priest and future abbot of the monastery, Franz Pfanner, the mission at Mariannhill was established in 1882 in Pinetown, near Durban, in what is currently KwaZulu-Natal. As Christoph Rippe’s extensive research on the photographic practices of this mission has shown, photography played a central role in the activities of these Austrian friars. While the Trappists are a contemplative order known for their commitment to physical labor and a vow of silence and isolation, the Mariannhill brothers directly engaged local communities in and around the mission, which eventually led them to exit the Trappist order in 1909. By then, however, the mission had expanded well beyond the monastery, with mission stations throughout Natal and neighboring provinces, making it the largest Trappist mission in the world at the time.

One of the many workshops built as part of the brothers’ efforts to be an autonomous, self-sustaining enterprise of Christian conversion in the colony was a photography studio, where, during its early years of operation prior to World War I, two of the brothers served as photographers, documenting daily life in the mission and among the native communities in and around the mission through portraits and other photographic depictions of their inhabitants.

While many of their images were published in the mission’s periodi-
Photographs were a foremost staple within a religious economy, existing between Europe and South Africa. Religious faith, as well as the appearance and conduct that supposedly came with it, was something that Christian missionaries wanted their subjects to attain, and equally the mission needed to convince their benefactors in Europe that this very experience had really taken place. Faith was the very promise that missionaries gave to European benefactors, for which the latter provided financial aid in return. Whether the promise was ever fulfilled, was, for many benefactors, impossible to check up on in person. One way of showing to European audiences that it was indeed possible to “civilize” Africans by exposing them to the constituents of Catholic faith was photography. With photographs, missionaries could present the “raw material,” of what they would have considered the dystopia existing before the arrival of Europeans.6

The photographs of these five women clearly belong to the group of images that circulated within the traffic between the mission, the collector, and the museum. But I would argue that these images register at a different frequency—one that resonates in tension with many other photos from this archive.

The portraits of these five women are not photos of everyday routines or native practices. They are not enactments of Christian iconography, demonstrations of faith or western respectability. They are portraits (some in the format of cartes de visite), albeit ones accompanied by ethnographic attributions affixed to their opposite sides. Their annotations do not identify these women by name; they label them instead as “Kaffervrouw,” “Kaffermweib,” or “Itombi Maedchen.” They classify them according to jewelry, headdress, hairstyle, and skin markings, thus appropriating their subjects’ chosen adornments of self-fashioning as references to their place in an ethnographic catalog. While they are photos created within the “religious economy” between Europe and Africa, Christianity and colonization, missionaries and ethnographers, their annotations translate these striking figures into a set of visual indices that produce them as objects of a desiring western gaze.

But once again, I think these photos register at a different frequency. They are atmospheric and aestheticized. Some appear to be almost beatific representations of aura and inwardness. They resonate at a frequency that recalls a more (in)famous analog—a collection of images taken almost thirty years later elsewhere in Zululand: Alfred Duggan-Cronin’s photographs of the Bavenda, published in 1928 in the first volume of his Bantu Tribes of South Africa.
Like the Mariannhill photos, Duggan-Cronin's images share an aesthetic of soft focus framed by gentle lighting, which Michael Godby compares to the Pictorialists' use of photogravure. Godby describes the effect of Duggan-Cronin's stylization of statuesque Africans as producing a sense of nostalgia that positions its subjects in the past, in ways that tempted viewers at the time to believe they were seeing figures from a bygone era. As he writes, "Duggan-Cronin used the elements of his art to create images of a society that was evidently present in front of the camera, yet simultaneously both past and present."

But the photographic aestheticization of black South Africans into a temporal elsewhere outside of history was neither a benign nor romantic act in the photography of Duggan-Cronin or the Mariannhill missionaries. The depiction of timeless Africans frozen in an unspoiled wilderness was deployed to invoke an idyllic image of authentic native culture that required "separation" and "protection." Such depictions were visual representations of the central arguments used to justify the Native Land Act of 1913, which displaced thousands of black South Africans from their land and laid the ideological groundwork for racial restructuring and segregation that became the backbone of apartheid. As James Campbell notes,

Such ideas would survive longer in South Africa than anywhere else on the continent, providing the intellectual underpinnings of segregation and later of apartheid. A primary rationale of "separate development" (one of South African officials' serial euphemisms for apartheid) was that it shielded the distinctive cultures and traditions of the nation's different "peoples" from the corrosive effects of modern, urban life, even as it satisfied the white economy's voracious demand for cheap black labour.

Juxtaposing the stillness imaged in Duggan-Cronin's "frozen figures" against the Mariannhill images, the stasis figured in the latter portraits resonates in friction with the Duggan-Cronin photos and in friction with the classifications affixed to the back of the photographs. It is a friction that requires us to read their stillness through the gaze neither of the photographer who shot them nor of the ethnographer or collector who acquired them. We must engage them instead as tension—a tense self-fashioning of stasis. These are not women frozen in time or by the camera. Their taut demeanor is an active, tense, and expressive practice of both restraint and constraint. Each of them appears to hold back, hold in, or keep something in reserve—in preparation or anticipation of something to come. The muscular tension they display is an effortful balancing of compulsion, constraint, and refusal that vibrates invisibly yet resound-
ingly through these images. They are tensions that are not necessarily accessible when we focus on the visualization of stillness. They become perceptible only when we attend to the quiet frequencies of stasis.

The Mariannhill portraits capture each woman tensely posed in stasis, sometimes with a thatched structure in the background. These are not the masonry walls of the mission compound. They are the hand-hewn shelters of Zulu farmers who worked the lands in and around the mission and its satellite stations. These muscular female subjects were working women—women who farmed fields and tilled land. While their lives were circumscribed by the imperial-religious economy of the mission, they were also a primary line of defense for their indigenous cultural practices, as wives and mothers in polygamous domestic arrangements and as laborers whose role maintaining their communities was both emotional and physical. Muscular tension was not simply a visual display for the camera; it was not always held back or at bay. It was mobilized as an everyday survival practice for indigenous African women.

Engaging the women in these portraits as tensely embodied, muscular subjects shifts the meaning of self-fashioning in important ways. Highlighting the tense forms of stasis that these ethnographic images capture means reading them as neither inherently transgressive enactments of resistance nor thoroughly abject supplicants. My intention is to provoke a more radical and potentially less satisfying question: what might be gained by uncoupling the notion of self-fashioning from the concept of agency? Put another way, what shifts when we think of self-fashioning as not necessarily an inextricable expression of agential intention or autonomy? What if we understand it as a tense response that is not always intentional or liberatory, but often constituted by minuscule or even futile attempts to exploit extremely limited possibilities for self-expression and futurity in/as an effort to shift the grammar of black futurity to a temporality that both embraces and exceeds their present circumstances—a practice of living the future they want to see, now?

What I'm suggesting is that we think of self-fashioning in these images as complex articulations of self that resist easy categorization and refuse binary notions of agency versus subjection. These photos present a striking instantiation of Scott's idea of “powerfulness in debility.” Their tense expressions of self-fashioning register quotidian practices of refusal—a refusal to engage the colonial, ethnographic, and missionary gazes that produced these photos and to allow those gazes to subsume their black subjects. Moving beyond stillness to engage the muscular forms of stasis they enact makes audible both the uncomfortable frictions embedded in the visual economies in which these images circulated, as well as those between the mission and its indigenous communities.

The tense grammar of these photos reminds us that photography and the portrait in particular are neither wholly liberatory vehicles of agency, transcendence, or performativity nor unilateral instruments of objectification and abjection. They are always already both at once. Like Scott, I too see possibility in such a mode of engaging the full complexity of what con-
stitutes self-fashioning for subjects inhabiting prolonged states of exigency or duress. It is a mode of engagement that creates the possibility for what I describe as a process of “reassemblage in dispossession”: everyday micro-shifts in the social order of racialization that temporarily reconfigure the status of the dispossessed. Reassemblage in dispossession emphasizes the practices through which racialized subjects redeploy relations of power in unintended ways, with unexpected consequences. Similar to Scott’s conception of powerfulness in debility, reassemblage in dispossession is a quotidian practice through which the dispossessed reconfigure their status as subjects within a field of limited and often compromised resources. Here a final archival juxtaposition is necessary. For, in addition to Duggan-Cronin’s ethnographic frame, it is profoundly illuminating to view the Mariannhill portraits in tandem with a third archive of images.

Striking Poses

The volume is weightier than most books. Its cover and pages are heavy, cloth leaves. It is a photo album, but one that begins with an epigraph and a three-word demand: “Look at me.” Three pages later, a question follows: “Who is gazing?” Respectable men, women, and children populate its pages. The classic Victorian poses and props of their portraits place them at odds with the black subjects we have viewed until now. Yet their postures are equally striking and equally taught/taut. They strain to project class and cultivation in images composed as a family album. But whose family is it? What is their relation to one another? The album’s captions pose similar questions: “What was the occasion? Who were these people? What were their aspirations?”

The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950 is an album assembled by one of South Africa’s preeminent artists, the photographer Santu Mofokeng. The images it contains were collected from family members, some of whom knew or could identify their sitters, some of whom had scarcely
any information about them. The images pictured here were commissioned by their sitters in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, and produced in private photography studios scattered throughout the country. On the surface, they share nothing at all with the Mariannhill photographs, except for their national location, adjacent historical context, and the provocative questions with which Mofokeng frames and intersperses the images. A more profound connection emerges in the most pointed question he poses: “Are these images evidence of mental colonisation or did they serve to challenge prevailing images of ‘The African’ in the western world?”

Black men in jackets and waistcoats; women in high collars and long skirts; baby boys and girls swaddled in white linen or muslin. Why would black folks striking poses in fine clothes signify a capitulation to mental colonization? Setting these images in dialogue with the Mariannhill portraits, why would the tensely posed black women refusing the gaze of a missionary’s camera signify the same? While separated by a decade of social transformation, industrialization, and the cleft between the rural missionary outpost and the urban centers of the Cape Colony, the muscular tensions of empire and conversion connect these respective archives of images, albeit at different orders of tension and different frequencies of audibility.

Mofokeng’s album and his probing captions expose the same tensions I have attempted to explore in the Mariannhill portraits: the paradoxical limits and possibilities of photographic self-fashioning in colonial South Africa. While the images in Mofokeng’s album reproduce what he calls the “evocative artifices of Victorian photography,” he insists that we see them “in the terms determined by the subjects themselves.” Rather than dismissing them as evidence of mental colonization, he presents them as expressions of both aspiration and capitulation to a regime in which their history positioned them in conflicted and contradictory ways. It is a history that links this album in counterintuitive ways to the Mariannhill mission portraits—portraits produced just six years before the earliest images included in his collection. Mofokeng identifies the individuals
pictured in the lower two images as “inboekselings,” abandoned children forced into so-called apprenticeships that most often took the form of indentured labor. Juxtaposing them with the ethnographic images of the Mariannhill mission, Mofokeng’s album assembles portraits of the black working- and middle-class people they might have become in the 1890s and 1900s. For they depict both domestic workers and property owners, most of whom had acquired education at Christian missions like Mariannhill.

While these photos were taken primarily in cities and towns in Gauteng and Orange Free State, these portraits portray educated, urban, Christian Africans, whose entanglements with the missionary movement in South Africa would later situate them in a tense relation both to colonial settlers as well as to their own black communities following the dispossession imposed under British colonial rule and the Land Acts that “reserved” only 7 percent of the land for Africans, granting the rest to whites. This history establishes a much-less-visible connection between the subjects of Mofokeng’s Black Album and those of the Mariannhill photos, as the tense “natives” we see at Mariannhill could later have posed for their own portraits in the studios that produced these portraits of urbanized African subjects transformed through their conversion to Christianity and the education they received at the mission into working- and middle-class subjects. Conversion was not simply a religious reorientation; it meant relinquishing traditional beliefs and customs, sartorial transformations to western clothing, and a shift to a lifestyle of monogamy and nuclear families. As Campbell explains, “Mission Christianity introduced far-reaching changes in African life, new forms of identity, new consumption practices, new patterns of enterprise and stratification”—changes that produced a new class of African workers and property owners, teachers and evangelists. Christian evangelism thus went hand in hand with the colonizing mission of empire by “domesticating” indigenous populations through faith rather than force.

What we witness in these images is the arc of this transformation and the tense modalities of self-fashioning that articulate the frictions inherent to this process. Attended to in tandem, these portraits register the transformation of these native subjects into “progressive Africans” and “school people,” or, as they were called in isiZulu, “AmaKholwa”: “people who believe.” As Campbell notes, later they also came to be called “AmaRespectables” (respectable people), a derogatory term for converts who were chastised for being educated above the proper place for blacks as laboring masses in South Africa’s rapidly industrializing mineral economy.

While the forms of quiet stasis enacted in these photos are of a qualitatively different order than that of the Mariannhill portraits, they share a related sense of tension. The image-making practices of the community of African Christians collected in this album embody the consequences of missionary conversion and education in which the women in the Mariannhill portraits were engaged. In this context, Mofokeng’s album is not simply a “family album”; it is an archive of reassembly in dispossession that catalogs complex and creative forms of indigeneity and dwelling practiced by this community as acts of refusal—a refusal to capitulate to the status of outsider or to be made invisible. They are refusals that mobilize the colonial portrait as a site of fugitivity through forms of self-fashioning that enunciate quiet but resonant claims to personhood and subjectivity in the face of dispossession.

What registers in these images’ staging of quiet refusal in stasis is not a family in motion or on the move. They display families effortfully and purposely being, staying, and maintaining themselves right here, in this place. Their refusals are defined in and through deliberate practices of colonial dwelling. They are practices of homemakering that function as a kind of “home-o-stasy”—an active and effortless balancing of multiple flows that produces motion even in stillness. The forms of stasis Mofokeng captures in The Black Photo Album image these families’ quotidian practices of refusal—practices of stasis and fugitivity through which they inhabit colonization as an ongoing wound of dispossession, while at the same time refusing to accept the impossibility of blackness lived in dignity and with respect.

Let me end with a final confession that is more of a cautionary tale
about the fact that the tensions between the ethnographic gaze and black self-fashioning remain alive and well, and that some of us encounter them in unlikely places, in moments when we least expect them.

A day after viewing the Mariannhill images, I stood pondering an exhibit of J. D. Okhai Ojeikere’s stunning photos of black women’s hair. I was thinking about my encounter in the archive and the images of the five women I had just seen. My reverie was interrupted by a delighted Dutch visitor who asked to photograph me in front of Ojeikere’s images. But she didn’t really want to photograph me: she wanted to photograph my hair. “It’s perfect,” she exclaimed. “It’s like having the real thing here!” Shocked by her request and uncharacteristically paralyzed by it, I allowed her to photograph me with the images.

Confession #2: I hate taking photos. I freeze up and go rigid as a board. And while I’ve taught myself to smile and sometimes even look like I enjoy them, tension permeates my body. When viewing images of myself like those presented here, I feel something others do not: tension. I carry those tensions with me in viewing the images of these five women. But then again, we all do, because that’s how affect works. It is what connects us to particular images and what makes our responses to them matter. But the question remains: what tension and what modes of self-fashioning do these images capture? Do they capture moments of agential self-fashioning or its paradoxical limits and inevitable reappropriation? Most likely, it’s both at once. In the end, perhaps we must return to Mofokeng’s provocative question: “Are these images evidence of mental colonisation or did they serve to challenge prevailing images of ‘The African’ in the western world?”
Quiet Touches

Elaborately scripted or stoically labeled for utility, adorned with gold leaf or lacking all embellishment, leaves of heavy black paper or yellowing parchment bound between covers of leather or cardboard — photographic albums vary from ornate to monastically austere. Images affixed with adhesive or anchored in place by delicate photo corners, their arrangement is a meticulous study in memory and narrative. The photo album is an indisputably haptic repository of recollection. Haptics, or the multiple forms of contact and touch that characterize any encounter with a photo album, commence the moment we feel their weight, open their pages, or inhale the musty smell of worn, aged, or deteriorating paper, plastic, or hide. They touch us as we run palms or fingers over glossy squares of paper, albumen, or metal prints carefully positioned and inscribed with sentimental notations, dates, and places. But do all albums catalyze such affects, and do they catalyze them in the same way?

This chapter continues the grammatical explorations of the visual archive of the African Diaspora begun in the preceding chapters by attending to an additional frequency of photographic images. It extends my conception of the sonic frequency of images to include the haptic temporalities through which quiet photos also register. Returning to the scientific conception of frequency introduced in chapter 1, this chapter focuses on the impressions that register when we engage in a haptic encounter.
with the lower frequencies of photographs. I define the haptic as multiple forms of touch, which, when understood as constitutive of the sonic frequencies of these photos, create alternative modalities for understanding the archival temporalities of images—temporalities I have referred to as the grammar of the archive. Here, as previously, what is crucial to the listening practice I have developed in these pages is an understanding of photographs—even those as formulaic and mundane as identification photos—as deeply affective objects that implicate and leave impressions upon us through multiple forms of contact: visual contact (seeing), physical contact (touching), psychic contact (feeling), and, most counterintuitively of all, the sonic contact that I have described as a frequency that requires us to listen to as well as view images.

The photographs on which this chapter focuses are in many ways a fundamental inversion of those with which this book began. They are a collection of images made not to enable movement, but instead to radically disable it. Yet it is an archive defined by a similar will to track, catalog, and account for its photographic subjects as the passport and ethnographic portraits we have just viewed. Its lower frequencies are equally mediated, though; in this case, they are mediated by the materiality of the archive itself. The haptic temporalities of the archive in question are composed of moments of contact when photographs touch us and animate reflections and responses. These temporalities include, but are in no way limited to, the moment of photographic capture; the temporality of the photographic reproduction of material objects; their assembly and reconfiguration as nodes of state, social, and cultural formation; and the present and future temporalities of their interactions with researchers, archivists, and the broader community.

This album and the photos it contains were neither held nor caressed by their sitters or their loved ones. They enjoyed no haptic relation to it, for they never had access to or possession of the images that reside on its pages. The album was not made for public or private display for the friends or family of those imaged within it. Dated February 1893, its provenance is announced by the label that appears, partially ripped, on its cover.
“Prisons. Convict Department. Church Square.” It is an album of prisoner photos from the Breakwater Prison in South Africa, an artifact brought to my attention by a remarkable archivist named Erika le Roux at the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town, South Africa.

I had not requested it. I had come to the archives in search of a very different collection of photos: images of blacks in diaspora, like the Dyche passport photos, used to claim the right to move and dwell; to create new forms of home and belonging; and to inhabit the status of citizen and subject. But while sorting through the two boxes of documents I had requested, Ericka came over to my table and whispered hesitantly, “You wouldn’t be interested in convict photos, would you?” “Of course I would,” I said. There was one word she did not say when she posed that unexpected question and returned to her desk to submit my request: album. To me, that one detail made all the difference.

Convict photos are a genre of identification photography that Susanne Regener describes as “compelled photos”—images taken without the permission of their subjects. Assembled here, however, they are a haptic archive of reollection, albeit one constituted in the service of the state. Measuring approximately 24 × 36 inches and encompassing sixteen images per page, these albums share the haptic materiality of similarly weighty tomes that we engage through embodied encounters with the senses: the physical touch of hands, the olfactory touch of smell, and the forms of institutional memory each instantiates.

Like the passport photo and their original exemplar, Alphonse Bertillon’s mug shot, these images were also made to identify, classify, isolate, and distinguish. Yet they are photographs that capture the transition from freedom to incarceration, from suspects to convicts, from individuals to captives. Convict photos are part of the larger genre of compelled photos that constitute criminal identification photography.

Developed in the mid-nineteenth century, early on in the history of photography, these rigidly formatted, serial images were used as visual evidence of group traits and identity through their static systematization of physical attributes. Lauded as a superior means of reproducing forms
of scientific observation, description, and representation, photography was what John Tagg refers to as "images whose truth was guaranteed ... as a 'perfect and faithful record.'" Similarly, Allan Sekula has demonstrated that photography was critical to the exercise of biopower in the mid-nineteenth century. As he famously argued, the camera was an instrumental tool brought to bear on the body to produce images with the exceptional legal status of visual documents that furnished irrefutable evidence of what came to be defined as the "criminal body."3

Yet what shifts when we not only focus on the classificatory and documentary power of the photographic archive to account for and criminalize individual bodies, but also engage the images through their haptics? What is the affective frequency of this particular collection of criminal identification photos and what are its haptic temporalities? What do we see differently and how does it complicate our understanding of the prison album as an archival practice? To understand these images, their haptics, and their affective frequencies, it is perhaps most revealing to consider both what these images and albums are, as well as what they are not.

Unlike the family albums from which this archival genre derives, these albums were not intended to depict relations of kith or kin. They do not detail genealogical bloodlines or shared physical affinities of family relations. They are not the status objects of their nineteenth-century cousins, so often displayed to signify lineage, heritage, and belonging. They are equally distinct from older examples of earlier genres of convict photography.
In the late nineteenth century, such images were not made within the institutional setting of the prison or the police station. The convicted were initially brought to photographic studios and shot by professionals like the well-known Tasmanian photographer Thomas J. Nevin, who began his professional career in the 1860s and produced a significant number of stereographs and cartes de visite in his commercial practice. Yet Nevin also generated a substantial archive of prisoner photos through government contracts, traveling alongside constables and prisoners and making many of his images at the Hobart Supreme Court and Gaol during prisoner sentencing or release.

Nevin's photos are not significantly different from those made for his middle-class clients. They too were dressed in the sartorial wardrobe and postures of respectability that included props such as columns and tables, and they were posed seated or standing against studio backdrops. While prison albums like those created at Breakwater would later become an efficient means of cataloging these images, these albums are markedly different from earlier images, which were frequently produced in the popular format of cartes de visite, though both were made with the explicit intent of identifying criminals both within and beyond the confines of the prison.

The increasing popularity of Bertillonage and the rigid rules he created to systematize and categorize the criminal body fueled a proliferation of convict photographs. The resulting emphasis on standardizing and controlling the photographic image, coupled with a desire to delineate convict photos from respectable photographic portraits, initiated a shift in the site of production for these images. It brought to an end the practice of allowing prisoners to be photographed in studios and sent professional photographers inside the walls of the prison and the precinct. In the process, convict photography became a performative photographic genre that sought to capture what it intentionally produced: a stylized framing of "criminal difference" through serialized photographic portraits. The shift from the studio to the site of incarceration produced a parallel transformation in the images themselves. No longer posed with props or backdrops, subjects were shot standing or seated in front of the austere facades of brick or mortar prison walls. Techniques such as placing a mirror in the frame of the photo to simultaneously capture the subject's profile in its reflection were developed to facilitate the cheapest and most efficient reproductions of the rules of Bertillonage, although the purist orthodoxy of this school shunned such techniques on the basis of their "inauthenticity" and inadequacy for precise anthropometric recording.

Though closely related, such photos are not the same as those contained in the Breakwater album, which are distinguished by the uniform...
miry of white walls and dark uniforms. Whether affixed to index cards or mounted on the pages of an album, what they share is the fact that they were made for the purpose of accounting—to account for and to hold accountable. The affinities they were intended to show were constituted through their adherence to the serial reproduction of a full frontal headshot, most often paired with a profile.

Some men are shaved and shorn, as if to reveal features that might have been hidden or disguised by excessive facial hair or perhaps for more practical reasons of hygiene. Yet these images also show signs of aging in their photographic subjects, and differences in lighting suggest a temporal difference. Running gloved hands gently over the surface of the photos reveals that unlike most of the others, although displayed side-by-side in the album, these are distinct images, shot in different sittings. In other images, men lean into the camera as if directed to give a fuller view of the ear: a Darwinian hallmark and one of the most significant body parts in Bertillon’s physiognomic arsenal. The prominent display of the ear is a gruesome echo that links the mug shot to the passport photo. Even today, the rules of passport photography in many places continue to require the display of the ear. And then there is the showing of hands...

Hands uniformly placed upon uniforms themselves. The positioning of these hands is more than purposeful—it is both prescribed as well as literally transcribed onto the uniforms themselves, where we see painted white marks that seem to indicate exactly where these hands should be placed. Presented as prominently as the faces, heads, and ears of these captive subjects, hands were scrutinized for distinguishing marks and attributes, carefully documented on intake, and used to identify and recapture. Unlike the equally striking hands of the Gulu sitters, these hands are signifiers. Here it bears emphasizing that these are not arrest photos. Nor are they photos of individuals suspected, wanted, or sought for crimes not yet prosecuted. They are images created to capture subjects deemed guilty and sentenced to serve, to facilitate capture in the case of future crimes or possible flight. They were made to provide visual evidence of criminality and incarceration and to telegraphically inscribe that evidence onto the future of their photographic subjects. The grammar of this archive is an anterior tense of present and future capture, and its first haptic temporality is this initial moment of capture: compelled to pose for a compulsory photo, confronting the unreturnable gaze of the camera, an individual is transformed into a number that will capture him for years to come.
A second haptic temporality is initiated by this same moment of photographic capture: the temporality of the image and the album's production. After the physical encounter of the sitter with the photographer, there is the interval of the production of the image itself, the time lag between the making of the image and the creation of the photograph, and the time lag between the making of the images and the assembly of the album. The tense of this haptic temporality resounds in the anteriority of the future subjunctive: "If you are ever released, you will still be ours." But who made these albums and where were they constructed? How do we "account" for the haptic frequencies of this archive? For such an accounting, we must turn to their supplement: the ledgers.

Each of the albums held by the Western Cape Archives is supplemented by three ledgers: an index, a nominal register, and a descriptive return. What is the relation between these individuals' photographic capture and the forms of state, carceral, and colonial accounting that occur in these ledgers? Why record this information in three separate places? Where did each reside, and through whose hands did they pass? Did they accompany their captive subjects on the journey from the courthouse to their site of incarceration? Or did the state require different modes of accounting and recording at each of these sites and elsewhere along the way?
It felt a lot like cracking a code. I was convinced I'd solved it several times. I thought this at least once a day for the first two weeks of my second visit to the archives, only to return the next day to watch a new pattern emerge from the puzzle. It started with the dates. Inscribed in graceful script below each pairing of photos were a name and date. In the upper corner, a second inscription was etched by hand onto the negative: a letter followed by a series of numbers. But the key to the code lies in the dates: consecutive dates that moved forward in time.

The first album commenced in February 1893 and the last of the volumes ended in 1904. The handwritten index in the back cover of each album alphabetized the men's names and assigned them a serial number. I had no idea where to begin, so I shifted to more familiar terrain (a fallback strategy from my training in oral history): transcription. Type it all up and see what patterns emerge. What emerged were patterns that synchronized and decoded the serial black visages in the albums, ledgers, and numbers that assembled them.

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<td>E4049</td>
<td>3.2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jantjie</td>
<td>E4101</td>
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<td>Qondrive</td>
<td>E4073</td>
<td>3.2.93</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Although the albums contained photos of black, brown, and white prisoners, the dates divided them. Each date comprised a set of inmates in groups of varying size, segregated by race. February 2, 1893: two black inmates; February 3: thirteen; February 5: sixteen. But the dates did not correspond to the ledgers. They were dates of neither arrest or sentencing, nor intake or release. They were dates of photographic capture: dates when photographers visited the prison to photograph a designated group of inmates. Their sequence was irregular, with no fixed or identifiable interval. But patterns did begin to emerge in the serial numbers, though seeing them required the ledgers and, for this album, one in particular. Its leather spine was stamped in embossed gold letters that read “Nominal Roll of Convicts.” Yet this volume was unlike the others. Its excessively worn cover gave it a different name. Burned by hand into its face were four unsettling words: “The Book of Innocents.” Was this an ironic renaming of this ledger by a sarcastic prison administrator? Was it a cynical joke among the prison staff? Regardless of its origin or meaning, and as eerie as it was to encounter it in the present, once I read it, I could no longer refer to it in any other way.
My archival detective work deepened through the transcription of the Book of Innocents. I traced each black prisoner in the album to his entry in the ledger and recorded the information contained on him in the ledger. Some inmates had been photographed just days or weeks after sentencing. Others were photographed years or even decades following their convictions. Like each of the other volumes of the nominal rolls, the Book of Innocents was organized alphabetically by serial number. Serial numbers beginning with E were for men convicted of lesser crimes such as "theft of stock," "housebreaking," "storebreaking," or "theft of money." D indicated individuals convicted of multiple offenses: "assault and attempted rape," "housebreaking, theft and murder," "housebreaking and theft," "attempted rape and escape." Serial numbers starting with B or C corresponded to more serious infractions with heavier sentences: "culpable homicide," "sodomy," "manslaughter," and sentence terms ranging from life, to "death commuted to life" to "28 years and 75 lashes."

How do we probe the interstitial space between the ledger and the portrait? To piece together the relationship between the columns of accounting contained in these ledgers and the faces captured in the portraits cataloged in their corresponding volumes, we must first return to their haptics and the implications of both their materiality and their temporality as albums.

The Frequency of Archival Touch

The first moment of archival capture (Haptic Temporality #1) is found in the "Descriptive Returns of Convicts" (1866-1900, vols. 8859-8945). Each volume compiles a roster of fourteen columns of detailed descriptions of prisoners' bodies in what are designated as "Description Registers." Organized externally by year of conviction and internally ordered by prisoner serial letter and number, the ledgers construct a tabulated inventory of the physical attributes of each prisoner in the following categories:

- race
- age
- hair
- occupation
- height barefoot
- eyes
- complexion
- marks
- religion
- can read/write
- married/single
- nearest friend
- list of effects
- remarks
- list of effects
- remarks

A second moment of capture (Haptic Temporality #2) transpires in the "Nominal Rolls of Convicts" (1869-1902, vols. 8983-8991). Each volume compiles a list of data and statistics on the circumstances of a prisoner's crime, conviction, and release. Organized externally by year of conviction, and internally by the prisoner's serial letter and number, each roll lists nine categories of data on each prisoner:

- race
- court location
- crime
- sentence
- escapes
- previous convictions
- station confined
- date of release
- remarks

The third moment of capture (Haptic Temporality #3) is the taking of the photograph itself, which is followed by a fourth moment of capture (Haptic Temporality #4) in the cataloging and assembly of the images in the nine volumes of the "Photograph Albums of Prisoners" (1893-1904, vols. 6978-6987). Unlike the respective ledgers and registers, the albums...
shift the mode of capture from data collection to visual representation by mobilizing the visual as both evidence and proof of criminality. The albums serialize and aggregate the criminal body through photographs that standardize individuals and assign them a number. Organized externally and internally by the date of the photo session, each page of the album assigns a criminal identity and visual uniformity indexed through the following information:

- name
- serial number
- clothing
- pose
- sequential date of photo

A fifth haptic temporality is the temporality of my own archival contact with the images and the albums. The albums have a sensuousness that, to me, felt almost illicit. It felt wrong to have access to intimate details of bodily markings, illnesses, whippings, closest relatives, attempted and successful escapes. It was overwhelming to track these men from one ledger to the next and resist the seductions of the data and descriptions the albums contained. In fact, it was frustratingly easy to succumb to the original intent of the archive: to reduce the individuals to statistics. And it was literally dizzying to shift back and forth between the four tables Ericka had assigned me, on which I had placed the three ledgers corresponding to the photos of inmates in each album. As I wheeled myself on a rolling chair from one table to the next to connect each black or brown face with the compromised details of an identity assigned to him through the categories of the ledgers, this haptic encounter forced me to encounter them through a different sensory modality in an attempt to resist the silencing effects of the serial bureaucratic grammar of the archive. It forced me to the quiet frequencies of austere images that reverberate between statistical data, and state practices of social regulation.

Each ledger was intended to catalog different forms of “informants,” their sitters, the haptic temporalities of each album archived a physical encounter with an incarcerated subject rendered mute in the pages of the ledger. Each ledger silenced its subjects by drowning them in an excess of data and statistics and the accumulated knowledge the ledgers so relentlessly compiled. Yet while the photo albums paradoxically provide the least amount of data, they move their subjects from mute to quiet subjects who refuse the silence imposed upon them in the effort to reduce them to a concatenation of criminal statistics. The images visualize the expressive faces of men who, in the lists and tables of the ledgers, appear as merely an aggregation of data. The photos render them fleshly individuals with presence and affect. Passive supplicants? No. Stern or mocking in confrontation; frightened, weary, or confused; cocky or menacing; haggard or hyped—not a single face is docile. Listening to the lower frequencies of these images, what emerges is neither uniformity nor statistical equivalence. Rather than an aggregate mass, the seriality of the photos individuates and personifies them. In the process, they become enlivened, improvised impersonations of prisoners.

"The Book of Innocents," Revisited

Both their faces and their demeanor are markedly different. Most notably, they are significantly younger. We might expect to see fragility and vulnerability in these young faces. Rather than fear or confusion, they exude confidence and intention. Uniforms are replaced by dignified button-down collars, suits, and ties, or the feminine outline of blouses and dresses. While these images were produced over a half century later, the pairing of full frontal and profile portraits remains consistent. Serial numbers are transposed from the edge of the frame to black and white boards at the center of the image. While they are not displayed in order, each set contains a series of numbers that reflect the sequential intake of arrest and processing. They are not convict photos; they are classic examples of mug shots. What are their haptic temporalities?

The journalist who published this collection recounts an archival encounter that echoes my own. Inquiring whether there were photographs...
included in the collection of documents released to the public by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Eric Etheridge was told by a staff member that, yes, there were a number of photos in the collection, "but most of them were just mug shots." The majority of their subjects were young: 40 percent were aged eighteen to twenty-one; 75 percent were aged eighteen to thirty. They came from thirty-nine states and ten foreign countries: fifty-four from New York; seventy-eight (almost 25 percent) from California; and ninety-five (nearly 30 percent) from the Deep South (Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia). Of these southerners, 95 percent were black; of the rest about 50 percent were black and 50 percent white, and 25 percent were women. They are Freedom Riders: 328 men and women arrested in Mississippi on buses, in stations and parks, or at lunch counters and hotels, and jailed for participating in a seven-month protest campaign begun in May 1961 to desegregate transportation in the US South from Virginia to Texas.

In his moving catalog assembling these images with contemporary interviews with the sitters about arrest photos few had ever seen before, Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders, Etheridge presents the images as a rich historical record of "the emerging civil rights movement plunging forward, adeptly taking its strategy of non-violent direct action to the national stage." Like the Breakwater albums, these mug shots were criminal documentation of the "breach of peace" for which these individuals were detained. They were collated and filed on index cards containing similar data to the Breakwater ledgers: name, height, hair and eye color, race and sex, birthday, birth city, current address. Unlike the albums, this information was affixed to the Freedom Riders' mug shots.

While the original site of data collection was the police station, the data was compiled by a different government agency—one established by the state of Mississippi as its "segregation watchdog." Convened in 1956, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was founded two years after the US Supreme Court's landmark ruling ending segregation in public schools. The commission was created with a mandate "to do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary to protect the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi, and her sister states, from the encroachment thereon by the Federal Government." With the arrival of the Freedom Fighters two years after its creation, the practical work of the agency consisted of collecting names and pictures of the participants in the protests which were distributed to sheriffs and police departments across the state. Officially abolished in 1977, the files were transferred to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) twenty years later.
following a protracted lawsuit brought by the Mississippi ACLU. In 2002, the MDAH published the complete archive of documents online.

Juxtaposing the Freedom Riders’ photographs with those of the Breakwater inmates, we see two different engagements with the photographic practices of state surveillance. As Etheridge suggests, the Freedom Rider mug shots challenge the dominant Foucauldian reading of criminal photography articulated by Tagg and Sekula through their reappropriation of “the power of the state’s criminal system against itself . . . hijacking the booking process, enabling the state to produce its own strategic blunder, its own tragic actions.” They enact instead powerful forms of subversion. “They give us a chance to take the measure of these men and women in the very heat of battle, and perhaps to take measure of ourselves in their responding gaze.”

Similarly, engaging the gazes of the Breakwater convicts forces us to grapple with the haptic temporalities and quiet frequencies of the archival encounter in ways that challenge the facticity of the archive and interrupt, at least temporarily, its power to constitute subjects through the visual tropes and archetypes it so frequently naturalizes. Theorizing the anterior grammar and quiet frequencies of this archive’s haptic temporalities allows us to interrogate the relations and associations criminal identification photography relies upon to catalyze its claim to capture the “truth” of an individual through its deployment of standardized, measurable visual evidence that, rather than documenting or identifying individuals, creates the very subjects it purports to record: criminals.

Analyzing the Breakwater albums and the Freedom Rider mug shots’ respective cataloguing of their photographic subjects reveals their serial instantiation and reproduction of fugitive subjects, in ways that helps us unpack the logic of capture and the modes of knowledge these images authorize. It lays bare the fissures, gaps, and contradictions that emerge when we resist accepting the truth of the subject that criminal photography seeks to proffer through its framing of so-called criminal bodies posed to portray guilty or convicted fugitives. It also makes it possible to consider the desire for photographic capture as itself a pernicious instru-
ment of knowledge production used to subjugate black bodies both in the present and into the future.

Highlighting the multiple temporalities of photographic capture that these images simultaneously deploy, naturalize, and consequently erase is my method of engaging these archives in a way that makes audible the quotidian practices of fugitivity they also capture. As the preceding chapters make clear, the concept of fugitivity I am invoking is not an act of flight or escape or a strategy of resistance. It is defined first and foremost as a practice of refusing the terms of negation and dispossession, and it is these same practices that my own archival method seeks to convey.

While the disciplinary and archival grammar of the Freedom Rider mug shots and the Breakwater convict albums are closely related, they also diverge in at least one significant way. The criminal archive of the Freedom Riders was made in the temporality of dismantling the racist social order of Jim Crow in the US South and the perceived threat of racial integration that desegregation was seen to pose. In contrast, the Breakwater albums were created in the temporality of establishing racial segregation in the Cape Colony. In this way, the Freedom Rider mug shots and the Breakwater albums archive antithetical moments in the history of racialized dispossession. The year 1961 marked the beginning of the struggle for African American civil rights and the nonviolent tactics of protest and civil disobedience deployed by the movement to achieve this goal, while 1893, the year of photographic capture for the convict photos, collected in the first Breakwater album and cataloged in the ledger of the Book of Innocents, marks an equally significant moment of transition in the colonial prison system and racial segregation more broadly in South Africa.

One year earlier, in 1892, Breakwater expanded its practice of separating inmates by “character” (e.g., recidivist vs. first-time offenders; penal vs. probationary prisoners) and began segregating inmates by race at night. While the groups of convicts sent daily to labor on the Table Bay Harbor Board’s breakwater program continued to be racially mixed, the prison introduced new codes that required prisoners’ sleeping accommodations to be segregated. Full segregation was achieved by 1901 with the completion of a new facility at Breakwater, the Industrial Breakwater. The Industrial Breakwater was the first convict station in the Cape Colony created for whites only. It was a facility built specifically to train white inmates in skilled trades such as tailoring and carpentry.

Segregation at Breakwater coincided with the beginning of racial segregation in Cape Town, and it was directly related to the growth of mining and industrialization in the Cape Colony more broadly. The need for a substantial industrial labor force led to a racialized division of the labor market into skilled, largely white laborers and unskilled, manual black laborers. As Harriet Jane Deacon argues, Breakwater Prison was a model for other prisons and a testing ground for practices at other South African penal institutions. Unlike in the European prison system, where the aim of detention was to reform inmates and deter others from criminal acts, an additional motivation fueled the prison system in the Cape Colony. Like other prisons at the time, Breakwater served the crucial function of providing free labor for public works. Later, in the 1880s during a period of rapid industrialization and a boom in mineral mining, the prison became a major source of labor, as an institution that transformed the indigenous populations of Khoi, San, and African natives into cheap, available manual laborers needed to sustain the expanding economy of industrial capitalism in the Cape Colony.

Against this backdrop, what becomes increasingly audible at a lower frequency is the intended objective this archival practice sought to accomplish: the reduction of its photographic subjects to criminals and nothing more than criminals. It hums in the background with the persistent rhythm of a work song. Their photographic capture was deployed to accomplish a mode of accounting that purported to produce an end to violence, rebellion, recidivism, and criminality. But the anterior grammar of these images guaranteed both their fugitivity and the futurity of that fugitivity, as the opposite was in fact their outcome. Both their physical and photographic captures were never intended to be temporary. They were intended to document the transformation of their subjects into a proletarian labor force managed by the penal system and placed at the disposal...
of industry, capital, and the state. These photos guarantee the futurity of these subjects’ fugitivity as instantiations of their perpetual pursuit as once and future criminals and manageable units of labor. Yet like the fugitivity of the Freedom Rider mug shots, the fugitivity of the Breakwater albums is a refusal of those cataloged in their pages to be completely captured or reduced to the archival grammar of criminality or the seriality of type. What emerges through an engagement with the lower frequencies of these quiet photos is the fact that they are at once inseparable from, yet always exceed, the archival and affective technology of criminal photography. For even their seriality and their supposed interchangeability are themselves a fiction.

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, my intent has been to stage an encounter with the haptic temporalities and sonic frequencies of two archives of quiet images, and to consider the radical archival practice that they force me to enact. I’ll conclude by posing the same counterintuitive question with which I ended the first chapter of this book. It is the question that counterintuition always solicits and that I, as a practitioner of it, confront over and over again: why? Why use the sonic and the haptic, the temporal or the grammatical to understand the affects of photos, particularly photos that can neither “speak” for themselves nor be “seen” on their own, outside of the visual or discursive lexicon of the state? Why engage the touch of images never meant to be touched and never intended to have an affective life, or the sonic frequencies of images of intentionally muted subjects? As ever, my answer requires another embodied encounter with the visual archive of diaspora.

Unbeknownst to me, this photograph was taken by my husband on my final day at the Western Cape Archives at the end of my first visit in December 2013. It was his first visit to an archive and I had begged him to accompany me because, quite frankly, I was desperate. The device on which I had stored all the photos I had taken the week before had been stolen, and I was scrambling to re-photograph as many images as possible before returning home the following day. While he diligently photographed, I sorted and selected the most important pages of the albums for him to record. Though he said nothing about it at the time, he showed me the image on the plane home and described what touched him about these photos. His hands frame the photos of “Meyer Gluckman.” He was struck by the resemblance between his hands and Meyer’s and, more specifically, the lack of resemblance that might still be randomly deployed to classify them both as Jews or “Hebrews” in the idiom of the ledgers. His hands were a link to the arbitrary racialization of a mere show of hands. As he described it, his Jewish hands cradle Meyer’s Jewish hands. This image juxtaposes the hands of a Jewish craftsman against the hands of a Jewish criminal. Through this truly touching image and the hands that frame it, the convict album is transformed into what it sought to distance itself from all along: a family album.

What is haptic about these archival temporalities? The haptic is not
merely a question of physical touch. It is the link between touching and feeling, as well as the multiple mediations we construct to allow or prevent our access to those affective relations. These haptic relations transpire in multiple temporalities, and the hands are only one conduit of their touches.

CODA

BLACK FUTURITY AND THE ECHO OF PREMATURE DEATH
Growing up in the DC suburb of Prince George's County in the late 1970s, the only identification photo I remember was an image taken in 1978 of a fifteen-year-old black teenager who, at the time, was just a year older than I was. It's a photo that feels like it was seared into my memory like one of those select few images one recalls involuntarily and usually with visceral effects. I remember it as a mug shot: an austere arrest photo of a beautiful brown-skinned boy with wavy hair and hazel eyes. His name was Terrance Johnson.

Stopped with his older brother while driving to the movies because they forgot to turn on their headlights, Johnson and his brother were taken into custody because their car was identified in connection with a robbery committed earlier in the day, when his brother had stolen $29.75 from a nearby laundromat. They were taken to a police station less than ten minutes away from my childhood home, where the younger Johnson was separated from his brother, handcuffed to a chair, interrogated, and, in the process, brutalized by police. He was then arrested and moved to a processing room to be fingerprinted, where he testified that the beating continued. Fearing for his life after an officer reportedly placed him in a choke hold and slammed his head against a wall, he grabbed the policeman's gun from his holster and shot and killed him and another officer.
before being captured attempting to flee. Johnson was tried as an adult on two counts of murder and additional charges related to the deaths of the two officers. He was acquitted of both murder charges but found guilty of two counts of manslaughter. Johnson was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.

When I began researching the convict photos from the Breakwater Prison, I was reminded of the mug shot of Terrance Johnson I remembered so vividly from my youth. But I couldn't find the photo anywhere. I searched archives and databases of newspapers and periodicals, and scoured article after painful article describing the events of June 26, 1978. Reading those articles brought back the anguish I felt at the time, and I found myself wincing as I read each one. When I described the photo to my aunt in Maryland, she said she remembered it too, but her search was as fruitless as my own. Some time later, I found the photo I was looking for, but it was nothing like I remembered it. It was not a mug shot. It was a black-and-white newspaper photo of a tearful and desperate fifteen-year-old in handcuffs and a jumpsuit in the backseat of a police car on his way to jail. The mug shot I remembered so vividly was a creation of my emotional and affective attachment to a boy whose short life shaped much of my early political consciousness.

As a fourteen-year-old girl, this image undid me. Terrance Johnson could have been any of the boys I had grown up or gone to school with. PG County, as we called it, had a well-documented history of police brutality and in the fluid borders that traversed DC, Maryland, and Virginia, it was the place black folks never wanted to get stopped by what my dad to this day still calls "John Q. Law." My sister and I went to protest marches and vigils demanding justice for Terrance Johnson. Our church organized carpool to rallies and demonstrations at the courthouse and police station to show our support for Johnson and his family throughout the trial. Our pastor organized the Terrance Johnson Defense Fund, which led to a cross being burned on the lawn of the church. And we kept photos and clippings (some even made scrapbooks) of Terrance Johnson—a boy we saw as tragic, but "so fine."
This book was written in a particular place and at a particular time that shapes it in profound ways. Each chapter is intended as an exercise in feminist theory, method, and politics, yet they also emerge in relation to an accumulation of memories and impressions, affiliations, and associations with identification photos like those that produced my distorted memory of an arrest photo of Terrance Johnson—photos that remind us of how photography is mobilized by, as well as against, black communities.

My false memory of a mug shot of Terrance Johnson was a poignant and painful reminder of the power of photographic images to interpellate black bodies. My memory of the injustice visited upon Terrance Johnson transfigured the only image I remembered of him into evidence of his conviction. I transfigured an image that captured his fear and vulnerability into a visual epitaph of the forfeiture of his life and future to the prison industrial complex. But what compelled me to confront this memory of Johnson and my connection to my early activism on his behalf, was the fact that my work on convict photos coincided with the events of 2012, and the murder of an unarmed black teenager two years older than Johnson in Sanford, Florida, while he was walking home from a convenience store where he'd just bought candy. The photo of the soft face and doe-like eyes of a seventeen-year-old looking out from a light gray hoodie emblazoned posters and fliers calling for justice for his killing and the prosecution of his assailant.

This very different but equally powerful image provoked in me an uncomfortable continuity within my all-too-present past. For despite the efforts of his hoodie-clad supporters who rallied and marched across the country with his photo in hand or on T-shirts, his assailant was acquitted, and justice for Trayvon Martin remains elusive. In the years since Martin's death, the relentless rhythm of horrifically similar murders of unarmed black cis, trans, queer, and gender nonconforming youth and the unlawful arrest and brutalization of black folk of all genders by police officers across the U.S. has unfolded with a rhythmic seriality before our eyes in Sanford, Staten Island, Ferguson, North Charleston, and Baltimore, and the list continues to grow. The seriality of the untimely forfeiture of black and brown lives to incarceration or premature mortality has become an urgent refrain that echoes backward and forward in time. It is a refrain that cuts to the core of the relationship between black feminism, precarity, and futurity, for the structural precarity and disposability of a generation of black and brown youth is the most urgent question of reproductive justice faced by black feminists of our time. It is a generational issue of the first magnitude that threatens both the futurity of the next generation as well as our own.

While each of the preceding chapters explored different tenses and frequencies of futurity, it is impossible for me to conclude without returning to the grammar of black futurity that confronts us in the contemporary moment. But I want to pose the question once again in the grammatical terms with which I began, that is, in the grammar of black feminist futurity: How does a black feminist grapple with a future that hasn't happened but must, while witnessing the mounting disposability of black lives that don't seem to matter? What constitutes futurity in the shadow of the persistent enactment of premature black death? The line of continuity I trace from a police station in Hyattsville, Maryland, in 1978 to the back of a police van in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2015 makes it difficult to theorize black futurity in the face of the bleak facticity of this present and that past. So, how do we live the future we want to see now when confronted with the statistical probability of premature black (particularly male) mortality? How do we create an alternative future by living both the future we want to see, while inhabiting its potential foreclosure at the same time?
It was a collection of photographs I couldn't touch, and I'll admit, I'm not really comfortable with that. I prefer to handle and touch photos as much (or little) as an archive or their owner will allow. It gives me a feel for the image, and the contact intensifies the impact and impression they leave on me. In this case, rather than gentle handling, I scrolled, tapped, and clicked in and out, and up and down on my trackpad. This collection of images was a Tumblr—one of the self-made, collaborative, digital archives that have become ubiquitous and addictive, thanks to the technologies of the Internet and social media. Having spent two years studying mug shots and prison photo albums, I couldn't help but compare them to this very different archive of twinned images of the same individual posed side-by-side in two paired images.

But the Tumblr photos shared none of the institutional formality of the rigidly shot, compelled portraits with which I originally compared them. They were not pairings of faces full frontal and in profile. They were not jailed or incarcerated men forced to pose for the camera. They were young black men and women reveling in and lamenting the act of photographic capture as a memento mori. The difference enacted in the transition between each photo was a contrast created by an intentional juxtaposition: a juxtaposition that taunts its viewers to “see” a difference and, in doing so, engage the consequences of imposing or resisting the implied narrative that would justify a distinction between them.

#If They Gunned Me Down, Which Picture Would They Use? began as a Twitter feed created in response to the proliferation of negative photographic representations of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and (retrospectively) of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida.

“They wouldn't show the smiling girl who graduated abroad at one of the best schools in the country. The media would portray me as a hard and mean-looking girl who was asking for it.”

“Would they mention my troubled past or that I occasionally smoked weed ... or would they mention that I was a responsible university student interested in creating a society in which young people aren't getting gunned down due to our fears, judgment, and lack of understanding?”

“They'd make sure my pictures of my achievements not only in academics but in life would never see the light of day.”

Young women and men in graduation caps and gowns, military uniforms, medical scrubs, prom dresses or coats and ties, alongside photos of those same individuals performing menacing stereotypes of black urban life. Refusing to wait passively for a future posited as highly likely or inevitable for black urban youth, the sitters actively anticipate their premature deaths through these photos. In doing so, they enact anterior practices of fugitivity through their refusal to be silenced by the probability of a future violent death they confront on a daily basis. Through these images they fashion a futurity they project beyond their own demise. Rather than fleeing or submitting to a future imposed upon them, they face down the image that would negate the complicated truth of the lives they have lived, in order to interrupt the narrative of their own demise that threatens to extinguish their capacity to claim a life lived in dignity and complexity. Rather than accept the narrative of black urban depravity ascribed to them, their photographic juxtapositions disrupt and disorder the terms of life imposed upon them even in death. This collection of twinned photos simultaneously reclaims respectability and swagger, filiality and disobedience, dignity and rebellion, mourning, loss, melancholy, and lament. They reassemble a photographic archive of dispossession that enacts a future they anticipate will be robbed from them—a future they must image and reauthor in the present in the face of impending death. Their praxis of refusal consists of transforming mundane acts of image making into quotidian practices of fugitivity.

I have argued throughout this book that practicing refusal means embracing a state of black fugitivity, albeit not as a “fugitive” on the run or seeking escape. It is not a simple act of opposition or resistance. It is neither a relinquishing of possibility nor a capitulation to negation. It is a fundamental renunciation of the terms imposed upon black subjects that
reduce black life to always already suspect by refusing to accept or deny these terms as their truth. It is a quotidian practice of refusing the terms of impossibility that define the black subject in the twenty-first-century logic of racial subordination.

Refusing the impossibility of black futurity in the contemporary moment demands extremely creative forms of fugitivity. Performing the imperiled state of one's own future through photographs that simultaneously image both who you are and how your life will be effaced in death is at once a refusal and an affirmation of one's capacity to inhabit a future against all odds. It is as brave an act as looking into the eyes of police officers surrounding you, seeing the certainty of a lifetime of incarceration, and deciding to create an alternate future ("line of flight") than the one they have in store. The line of flight depicted by the sitter-subjects of this Tumblr series constitutes a praxis of futurity that simultaneously images and refuses the probability of premature death they confront as their imposed destiny. They redeploys this predictive anterior probability by way of a photographic enactment of death as a fugitive practice of refusal. They are photographic enactments that force us to reflect on the historical continuities between black folks' past, present, and future use of photography to embrace the future they want to see—now.

The frequency of the Tumblr photos may be different from the images explored in the preceding chapters, yet their sitters also faced the probability of premature death in their own contexts. The difference between them is that the Tumblr sitters deploy the anterior enactment of death as a fugitive practice of refusal. They are photographic enactments that force us to reflect on the historical continuities between black folks' past, present, and future use of photography to embrace the future they want to see—now. Like Michelle Koerner and Alexander Weheliye, I too trace this notion of an anterior fugitivity back to the "lines of flight" invoked by George Jackson in his revolutionary classic, Soledad Brother. As Koerner writes, "Jackson's line 'I may run . . . ' announces that fugitivity, rather than simply being a renunciation of action, already carries with it an active construction: a line of flight composes itself as a search for a weapon."
Disrupting the opposition of ‘flight or fight’ that has often troubled the political understanding of fugitivity, Jackson’s line affirms a politics where escape is always already a counterattack.⁴

Returning to the photo of Terrance Johnson I misremembered as a mug shot, and placing it in conversation with the Tumblr images has a chilling effect. It reanimates the uncomfortable link between 1978 and 2015; yet is also brings into view the equally visceral effects of a third date: 1995. It was in 1995 that Johnson was paroled after serving nearly seventeen years in prison. During his nearly two decades in incarceration, he earned a GED and associate’s and bachelor’s degrees in business, and he had been accepted to Howard University School of Law, where he began his studies shortly after being released. Two years later, following his divorce, facing eviction, and having had to withdraw from law school due to financial difficulties, Johnson and his brother were surrounded by police after robbing a bank in Aberdeen, Maryland. When told to surrender and lie on the ground, his brother obeyed. Johnson responded by taking a step toward the officers and shooting himself in the head. He died on his thirty-fourth birthday.

This book began with a black feminist mapping of the grammar of black futurity—a grammar of anteriority I defined in the tense of the future real conditional, or that which will have had to happen. I began by describing my accountability to the forms of black feminist capture described by Hortense Spillers as an “American Grammar Book,” which continues to structure the lives of black folks in the contemporary moment. As surprising as it may seem at this juncture, I remain committed to a black feminist praxis of futurity and the grammar of the future real conditional. More specifically, I feel a deep accountability to the had to of this tense and the necessity of its (grammatically implied) “must.” For I believe that the challenge of black feminist futurity is the constant and perpetual need to remain committed to the political necessity of what will have had to happen, because it is tethered to a different kind of “must.” It is not a “must” of historical certainty or Marxist teleology. It is a responsibility to create one’s own future as a practice of survival. The future real conditional is an
essential component of a black feminist praxis of futurity as an existential grammatical practice of grappling with precarity, while maintaining an active commitment to the every labor of creating an alternative future. Indeed, it is this grammatical practice of futurity that constitutes my definition of freedom.

What is the frequency of these images? Some photos are not quiet at all. Some reverberate loudly through the complex multimodal frequencies of black fugitivity and black futurity.
NOTES

Introduction

3. One of the most moving examples of the affective tactility of sound is the experience of deaf people listening, responding to, and producing music. There are numerous instances of deaf people experiencing sound and enjoying music in particular through physical sensations. This capacity to experience sound in ways that bypass hearing and the ears has been explored most notably by the National Orchestra of Wales, which staged a series of workshops and concerts for deaf children who passionately responded to the music of the orchestra by lying on specially designed “sound boxes” through which they “listened” by feeling the contact of sound waves on their bodies. Aharona Ament describes these embodied sonic sensations as “feelings that hum along the body when the music infiltrates the molecules in the walls and in ourselves as well.” See http://gapersblock.com/transmission/2010/07/22/beyond_vibrations_the_deaf_musical_experience/; http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-21601130.
4. Perec, Species of Spaces and Other Pieces. My thanks to Anne Garreta for pointing out this useful reference.
5. In her 2011 essay, “Photography,” Ariella Azoulay argues that no individual is ever in sole control of what she describes as the “event of photography.” She explains, “The camera generates events other than the photographs anticipated as coming into being through its mediation, and the latter are not necessarily subject to the full control of the agent who holds the camera” (70). Azoulay further differentiates between the event of photography and the photographed event that a photographer attempts to capture. “Both the
camera and the event that it catalyzes are for the most part restricted by the skilled gaze of the spectator in order to see the 'thing itself,' that is to say, that which will become the photographed event. But the rendering marginal of the event of photography, displays of indifference toward it or even the attempt to ignore it altogether can never obliterate its existence or the traces that this event which occurs between the various partners of the act of photography leaves on the photographed frame” (75). Azuolay makes two significant conclusions that undergird my own approach to engaging quiet photography. First, “The photograph is a platform upon which traces from the encounter between those present in the situation of photography are inscribed, whether the participants are present by choice, through force, knowingly, indifferently, as a result of being overlooked or as a consequence of deceit” (76). Second, “The event of photography is never over. It can only be suspended, caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualization: an encounter that might allow a certain spectator to remark on the excess or lack inscribed in the photography so as to re-articulate every detail including those that some believe to be fixed in place by the glossy emulsion of the photograph” (77).

1. Quiet Soundings

1. Weiniliev, Hadeed Vus, 39, emphasis added. The future perfect tense (e.g., future anterior in French) expresses action in the future before another action in the future. It can also be described as the past in the future. For example: The train will leave the station at 9 am. You will arrive at the station at 9:15 am. When you arrive, the train will have already left the station.

2. Prefiguration refers to the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest. It was coined by Carl Boggs as the desire to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement . . . those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.” Prefiguration is the attempt to enact prefigurative politics. See Boggs, Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control, 100.


4. See Lewitt, "Serial Project #1, 1966."

5. See the interviews conducted by Bacigalupo with customers of the studio published in the exhibit catalog, Gulu Real Art Studio (110-167).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1
18. Mendelsohn, "Varna Road."
19. I am grateful to Saidiya Hartman for encouraging me to name and engage these uncomfortable ambivalences and seductions.
20. The granting of equal rights of transit and residence for all citizens of the Commonwealth was both a hotly debated and strongly contested extension of citizenship rights that was challenged at different points by both liberal and conservative politicians, as well as a variety of other interest groups. Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi offer a nuanced and critical assessment of the extent to which the act was either motivated by or achieved its egalitarian objectives, and in what ways it facilitated a more fluid circulation of labor or addressed chronic labor shortages that characterized Britain at the time. Their study and the research of black British social scientists in particular document the contradictory role of race in parliamentary and cabinet-level debates and discussions before, during, and after the passage of the BNA, and the stakes of different groups in whether nonwhite citizens of the Commonwealth should be entitled to the same access to the "Mother Country" that white citizens (e.g., in Ireland and the home countries) had. See Carter, Harris, and Joshi, "The 1951-1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration" (55–72), and Clive Harris, "Postwar Migration and the Industrial Reserve Army" (9–54), in James and Harris, Inside Babylon. The work of these scholars also details some of the many negative responses to the presence of black citizens in the workplace, in shared housing accommodations, and in attempts to hinder access to social welfare resources such as education, healthcare, and unemployment benefits. For a comprehensive overview of historical literature on these debates, see Perry, "Black Migrants, Citizenship and the Transnational Politics of Race in Postwar Britain."
21. Gilroy famously describes the Black Atlantic as a formation characterized by a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure" (The Black Atlantic, 4).

2. Striking Poses in a Tense Grammar
1. "The native's muscles are always tensed. You can't say that he is terrorized, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter" (Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 53).
2. Scott, Extravagant Abjection, 38–39, 58, 64, 39.
3. Scott, Extravagant Abjection, 64.
4. See also Harvey Young's exquisite discussion of the performance of stillness in Embodying Black Expression.
5. Rippe provides the following overview of the archive: "The photographic collection of Mariannhill contains some 3,000 images for the years 1882–1914. It is divided between albums, carte de visites [sic], and glass-plate negatives. A professional and commercial photographic studio existed at the Monastery between 1894 and 1939, but was not operational during World War One. By the mid-1920s photography was also taken up by more (non-professional) members of the community, but generally received less attention and care than in the early years. The collection of the later years is also dispersed over several archives, and less well documented" (Rippe, "Histrionic Zulus"—Photographic Heterotopias at the Catholic Mission Mariannhill in Natal, 181).
10. Anna Tsing theorizes "friction" as the "awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Friction, n.p.). As Gina Ulysse explains, Tsing's concept of friction enunciates "the condition that promotes and circulates global capital and commodities as well as the resistance that the power of globalization encounters." While friction denotes what Tsing describes as the "kinetic tensions of global connection" that keep aspirations to global power and local-global relations operative, my own use of the term applies to the tense relations between an ethnographic framing of colonial submission and the colonized subject's capacity to disrupt the deployment of this ethnographic gaze as an uncontested instrument of colonial mastery.
11. The process I describe here takes a different trajectory than the theory of racialized assemblage developed by Wemeliye in Habeas Viscus. Wemeliye defines this term as articulating "relational intensities between human physiology and flesh, producing racial categories, which are subsequently coded as natural substances, whether pure or impure, rather than as the territorializing articulations of these assemblages" (50–51). While Wemeliye's concept of racialized assemblages and my own notion of reassembly in dispossession originate in different epistemological points of departure, they converge on a shared commitment to theorizing what I attend to as fugitive practices of refusal and Wemeliye later describes as the surplus line of flight "that evades capture, that refuses rest, that testifies to the impossibility of its own existence" (51–52).
3. Haptic Temporalities

1. Regenr, Fotografische Erfassung, 16.
2. Tagg, The Burden of Representation, 255.
4. Thomas J. Nevin began his professional career in the 1860s. He produced large numbers of stereographs and cartes de visite within his commercial practice, as well as prisoner ID photographs on government contract and in civil service. He was one of the first photographers to work with the police in Australia, along with Charles Nettleton (Victoria) and Frazer Crawford (South Australia). His Tasmanian prisoner vignettes (mug shots) are the earliest to survive in public collections. Born near Belfast, Ireland, on August 28, 1842, Nevin arrived in Hobart from Plymouth on board the convict transport Fairlie in July 1852, accompanied by his parents and three younger siblings. He died in Hobart on March 12, 1923. He was the only commercial photographer in Hobart to receive a commission on contract to provide the municipal and territorial police with prisoner ID photographs for the central registry of the inspector of police. Nevin traveled in the company of constables and prisoners for his police work, but the majority of his prisoner ID photos were taken at the Hobart Supreme Court and Gaol (also called the Campbell Street Gaol) on the occasion of the prisoner’s sentencing and release, and at the municipal police office, where tickets of leave were issued and renewed. See http://tasmaniaphotographer.blogspot.com and http://thomasnevin.com/category/19th-century-prison-photography.

5. In 1879, Bertillon invented a method that combined detailed measurement and classification of unique features with frontal and profile photographs of suspects, and he recorded the information on standardized file cards. Bertillon’s system was based on five primary measurements: head length, head breadth, length of the middle finger, length of the left foot, and the “cubit,” which was the distance of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. His system depended on a complicated filing method that cross-referenced a standardized set of identifying characteristics, making the information retrievable. From a mass of details, recorded on hundreds of thousands of cards, it was possible to sift and sort down the cards until a small stack of cards produced the combined facts of the measurements of the individual sought. The cards were arranged to maximize the use of space, and the identification process was entirely independent of names, which was confirmed by the photographs included on the individual’s card. While Bertillon’s system was later replaced by fingerprinting, the mug shot clearly endures. See https://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/technologies/bertillon.html.


Coda


Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study. N.p.: Minor Compositions, 2013.


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Passport photography guidelines, United Kingdom Home Office website.

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Courtesy of Tyne and Wear Archives. P.R. NC/6/1/1125.

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