

**the work**

a  
public programme  
from the Cinenova collection

**we share**

**Cinenova** presents *The Work We Share*: a public programme of newly digitised films from the Cinenova collection addressing representations of gender, race, sexuality, health and community. The films are mostly captioned by Collective Text, and supported by response commissions from contemporary artists and writers.

**The Work We Share** gathers a number of films which previously existed in precarious conditions; in some cases, with negatives being lost or distribution film prints being the only copy. This programme intends to acknowledge our interdependency: from organisation, to filmmakers, cultural workers, communities, and individuals. How can we acknowledge our interdependent relationships? How can we recognise our place in a network of communications, relationships and resources, particularly as an un-funded volunteer organisation? What different strains of labour does our work rely on? How do we sustain this work mutually?

The programme is touring throughout 2022 at partner organisations including: Pavilion, Spike Island, Brighton CCA, Modern Art Oxford, Site Gallery, Grand Union, Open School East, Rule of Threes, Berwick Film and Media Art Festival, The Essay Film Festival and International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

### **The Work We Share at Anthology Film Archives July 16-20 2022**

**Programme 1:** *Back Inside Herself* by S. Pearl Sharp (1984), *A Place of Rage* by Pratibha Parmar (1991), and *Now Pretend* by L. Franklin Gilliam (1991). July 16 at 5:45 PM and July 18 at 8:45 PM.

**Programme 2:** *A Song of Ceylon* by Laleen Jayamanne (1985), *Loss of Heat* by Noski Deville (1994), and *A Prayer Before Birth* by Jacqui Duckworth (1991). July 16 at 8:00 PM and July 20 at 7:30 PM.

**Programme 3:** *A Question of Choice* by Sheffield Film Co-op (1982), and *Sweet Sugar Rage* by Sistren Theatre Collective (1985). July 17 at 6:00 PM and July 19 at 8:45 PM.

**Programme 4:** *Scuola senza fine* by Adriana Monti (1983), and *Women of the Rhondda* by Esther Ronay, Mary Kelly, Mary Capps, Humphrey Trevelyan, Margaret Dickinson, Brigid Seagrave, Susan Shapiro (1972). July 17 at 8:00 PM and July 19 at 7:00 PM.

**Excerpt from 'A Many Selfed Portrait' by Onyeka Igwe in response to Now Pretend (1991).**

When discussing 'Now Pretend' with L.Franklin Gilliam, their self socialised by their mother in black consciousness, politics and pride, an 'Afrocentric world',<sup>1</sup> can be difficult to reconcile with the same self that played a game with their sibling, as children, which prized the physical attributes of whiteness. It's hard not to recall Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye' and Pecola's outsized and inconceivable wish that works to obscure, from her peers, the trauma and grief of lost childhood.

But that wasn't what Gilliam was doing,

“This game was a very specific thing that we did that drove my mother crazy. And it completely created a whole, kind of like, ideological mess for her. But it was, it was a really unique kind of thing. And when I thought about it later, I was like, we didn't want to be white though, that wasn't actually the goal. It was something about the hair.”<sup>2</sup>

This is sticky, and intricate and loaded and I don't know who I am talking to.

Will you comprehend my shorthand or take it all too seriously? It also feels overdone, like I don't need to retrace conversations about hairstyles, music tastes or dancing technique. I don't want to be at that surface.

I am interested in the self through time and how we can represent them in conflict, humour – relationship – to hegemonic monoliths. There, I said it.

A friend noted that I always write in the first person, because she likes me she hid the observation in a compliment, “you're an I guy”. Because I am critical, I wonder if my writing is up to much if I always fall on the trope of the I. I don't want my writing to be a series of personal critical essays that I look back on and increasingly fail to recognise the self, speaking from a place of some kind of authority. That has the temerity to think their I is an important enough location to pass comment on social predicaments.

In a café, in the city in January of this year, I was asked if I wrote a zine about being bisexual when I was twenty living in Bristol. I have no memory of this writing, not because the description does not match my own, but because I do not recall this self. It could be true, they promised to consult their copy and get back to me, so I may soon have to be accountable for her.

Gilliam, who situates this film in their student days and as a response to their studies

1 Interview with L.Franklin Gilliam, 6 October 2021

2 Ibid

in French philosophy and semiotics, brought up the mirror stage in our conversation and I wonder shamefully if I reside firmly in it.

‘Now Pretend’ traffics in the possibility of multiplicity in the representation of multiple selves, multiple presences, multiple blacknesses through film. Franklin introduced me to the term presence in relation to the production of the film’s soundtrack,

“Something that I’ve always liked [in making sound] is just sampling and then also recording presence, like just using the presence of different environments to suggest or to round out the image. So this was the first time where I just did a lot of presence recording.”

What is the sound of my presence, the sound of my many black selves through time? The sound of the child scared of heights, unable to look down from the Beckton flyover, or the teenager that smashed a brick wall outside a community centre in Hornchurch, in a heady concoction of repressed desire and crushing insecurity, or the adult that reached a hand out to cup a stranger’s face on the floor of Cafe Oto and sang, sang to them with eyes wide open and locked on.

My presences.

Being present.

In presence.

I love this description of presence, being at a particular time and space as oneself, from Gail Lewis,

‘Presence, or in fact the verb ‘presencing’, which Simpson conceptualises as a process of ‘here-ness’ and ‘aliveness’, is a decolonial move through which counter-histories, counter-spatialities, subaltern epistemologies and modes of being are created and announced.’<sup>3</sup>

‘Now Pretend’ enacts a presencing, one that faintly touches, aligns, resides beside my own presence, over here far away, from Gilliam, and at a different time. The film considers the anti-monolithic through the contrast of John Howard Griffin’s failed, fictional, attempt of a coopted blackness and a portrait of Gilliam’s many selves. Repudiating his misunderstanding through

surface,

rupture,

texture.

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3 Lewis, G. (2017) ‘Questions of Presence’, *Feminist Review*, 117(1), pp. 1–19. doi:10.1057/s41305-017-0088-1.

**Excerpt from 'Breaking ground, crippling mirrors; or lesbians don't waltz by themselves – on Jacqui Duckworth's A Prayer Before Birth' by Nat Raha.**

Isolation, however, is social & material. In particular forms of queer love, in the coincidence of ableism & whiteness & heteronorms that slowly cut marginal crip, black and brown, & queer and trans bodies adrift. It's typically not as glamorous as the table for fine dining at which Marsha tries to enjoy a meal alone, her body animated with tremors, refusing to co-operate with the essential activity of eating. The camera zoom draws us towards Marsha, patient spectators at the table, watching without staring. It's already hard enough being a woman of colour choosing to dine alone in public. We face Marsha's frustration with her body as the intensity of her tremors in her arms crescendo – between the buttering of bread, the tearing of salami, of her hands meeting her mouth, to tear and swallow. Time slows. The longest scene of the film, the four minutes that it runs seem like forty – this includes a three-and-a-half minute single shot (interrupted only with a flash of Marsha and the wheelchair staring each other down), as the sharp edited cuts elsewhere in the film are laid down for this long moment. Exasperated, Marsha swears at her body. If this body cannot enjoy the set up, the menu, if it refuses the pleasures of drinking the nectar of the earth, it doesn't mean that one cannot flip the table, literally throwing over this finesse.

Yet, to be divorced from the world of the white abled norm allows for the unreal to become the central stage of the film, for an/other(ed) world to be drawn into focus. To dive deeper in what Suzanne Césaire describes as the domain of the marvellous, “a question of seizing and admiring a new art which leaves humankind in its true condition, fragile and dependent, and which nevertheless, in the very spectacle of things ignored or silenced, opens unsuspected possibilities to the artist”<sup>1</sup>. To find and create through such explorations and methods to (re)present expressions of joy, affection, anger and upset – to build empathy from within then, to encounter a way towards loving one's body in the context of abjection. To forge aesthetics with and through all of this.

An immense silence, frustration – left with music to occupy rooms, meeting treasures in the solitude of bodymind. It's within an externalisation of the bodymind in celluloid that Marsha encounters a number of black mannequins, their voices echoing with the opening a large padlocked wooded chest, assembling the(ir) bodies which accompany her for the second half of the film. With all of their limbs attached, the mannequins only have whispers about Marsha, who pushes these figures back to floor. The mannequins further elaborate a relationship between disability and Surrealism: Cachia addresses the use of mannequins in the photography of Hans Bellmer and

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Césaire, 'The Domain of the Marvellous', 1941. Césaire's use of the idea of humanity's dependency on the forces of nature could be usefully put into dialogue with the concept of interdependency within disability studies and culture.

other historical Surrealist works, considering if such mannequins are “generally disabled” and challenging the desires of surrealist artists to work with “fictional” disabled bodies over actually existing disabled bodies.<sup>2</sup> She muses, “Why didn’t the fictional disabled body and the real disabled body have a more substantial dialogic relationship?”<sup>3</sup> Duckworth proposes a black crip lesbian desire – to be worked through with its ambivalences – as a means towards such a substantive relationship, both to rebirth the a relationship with oneself and with another. These scenes are undoubtedly about Marsha trying to find a way to love herself, but you also can’t waltz with just yourself. Over the objectifying curiosity that Cachia describes in the work of Bellmer and other non-disabled artists, Duckworth demonstrates how crip imagination can produce both the disabled bodymind and the fictional mannequin as key elements of a surrealist aesthetic and radical affect.

In which dance and affect speak bodies over words. In a mirror, Marsha eyes another of her new styles, checking out her jagged, robotic arm movements with proud lustre. This leads to an invitation: a black plastic arm emerges from the bottom left of the screen, tapping Marsha upon her shoulder, bringing her to dance, Marsha leading a waltz while Patsy Cline loudly plays. It’s a sweet and all too brief moment of affection and respite in the pleasure of bodies moving together, Marsha’s hand holding the back of her dance partner’s upper leg, the mannequins arms jutting out behind her neck, organic and plastic life in sway. Animated in desire, Surrealism’s tightrope draws a crip lesbian, and black, joy. We’re held finally, momentarily by it. Until the record skips, the groove condemned to repeat “nd I fall”, sequence, dance, phantasmal moment of intimacy coming to a crashing break, Marsha pushing her dance partner into a full length mirror in upset.

The depth of Marsha’s frustration, presenting the ambivalence of having to negotiate chronic illness throughout one’s every move, are as central to the film as its aesthetic experiments. The affective drive also open the film up to viewers perhaps less familiar with experimental cinema, encouraging empathy and solidarity from other queer people. Frustration functions to ground the visual unreality of ‘A Prayer’, an emotional real in a film seeking the imagination for direction in coming to terms with MS and crip life.

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This text emerged in the context of multiple dialogues – the author wishes to thank Camara Taylor, Nish Doshi, Sarah Golightley and Cherry Smyth for their insights and knowledge.

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2 Cachia, Amanda, ‘Disabling Surrealism: Reconstituting Surrealist Tropes in Contemporary Art’. In Ann Millett-Gallant and Elizabeth Howie (eds), *Disability and art history*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017. 150.

3 Cachia, Amanda, ‘Disabling Surrealism’, 150.

Excerpt from 'On the Inside' by Sarah Lasoye in response to Back Inside Herself (1984).

Scene 1 - Preamble in the entryway

You always do this. / Do what? /  
Complicate what's simple. / No, I don't. / Yes,  
you do. Now pick yourself up. / It just can't be  
this simple. / Listen, if you keep at that pointless  
question you'll wring every ounce of courage  
from your hands. You hear me? You'll worry  
away the corners of your own lips. Upturned,  
downturned, they'll become the same thing,  
you'll be unrecognisable and then it will be too  
late for even the inside to cure. / You're  
catastrophising. / Let's just get going.

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So, what's the question? / What? / You said  
something just now about, a 'pointless question'.  
/ Yeah. / I haven't been able to capture it in that  
way. It just feels like I'm beneath the ruins of  
something. / Oh. Relation, maybe? / Yeah,  
maybe. But not even trapped. Mostly just afraid  
that what waits above will not remedy anything  
at all. / I'm sorry. / Yeah. / Well, you should have  
said. It's important to name these things, and of  
course it's a question. Something like Can I Still  
Fit? / Too closed. / How Will The Fit Feel? /  
Closer. / Will it have a pain of its own? / Ah.  
That's it. Thank you. / No problem. And trust  
me, after a few days inside, you won't care about  
the answer, I'm sure. Once the mapping is done  
all you'll want to do is explore. Pain or not.

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Mapping? / Yeah, you know, the physical kind.  
No point going back inside if you don't know  
the terrain. / You have to navigate? / Of course,  
so you do this internal mapping. Remember, you  
were into it for a while? Self-positioning.  
Remember? Long name. / Proprioception? /  
That's the one! Bodily recognition if I remember  
correctly. Legs, torso, arms, etc. You said we need  
it to know how to move between sitting and  
standing and running and leaping and sprinting  
and slowing and lying and stilling. / It's actually  
not 'recognition', but yes. / What? / It's not  
recognition, technically. Not cognition, nothing  
to do with the mind at all. It's a sense that the  
body (or being) has on it's own. Some plants  
have it too. Isn't that something? You know, all  
senses are a certain kind of response to a certain  
kind of stimuli so I wonder what exactly is being  
responded to in this case. / What did I just say  
about simple and complicated? / I'm not trying  
to be- / No no, I'm talking about the body and  
it's mapping, and you think we need to go into  
gravity and its causes. / Okay, that's not what I  
was saying. But actually, yeah I do think that!  
Well, gravity definitely, pointless to ask of it's  
causes. / Exactly! Especially where we're going.  
Equally pointless to ask: why does the day feel  
different here? Picking up a glass, tying up your  
hair, lifting your tailbone into downward dog? /  
Okay, you've made your point. / This is a return,  
this is how it is, you're supposed to feel it. That's  
all.

Excerpt from 'I am the daughter of diaspora' by Nydia A. Swaby in response to *Back Inside Herself* (1984), *A Place of Rage* (1991), and *Now Pretend* (1991) .

My name is Nydia A. Swaby. Nydia Ann Swaby. I am the daughter of Grace Ann Huie. The granddaughter of Mary Ann Harvey. The great granddaughter of Edith Ann Kent.

I am the daughter of the diaspora.

I was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1982, six years after my mother, a British subject by birth, emigrated from Jamaica to the United States. I have lived in Britain as a 'foreign citizen' on an immigrant visa for nearly a decade.

I am the daughter of the diaspora.

My mother was born in 1958. That same year, Jamaica and ten other Caribbean countries that were part of the British Empire formed the West Indies Federation with the expressed intention of creating a new political union that would become independent of Britain.

I am the daughter of the diaspora.

My grandmother Mary. She was born at her parents' home in Harvey River, Jamaica a village in the parish of Hanover, named after her grandfather and his brothers, English colonial settlers, who migrated to the island in the mid-1800s. Hanover is also the birthplace of Alexander Bustamante the first Prime Minister of Jamaica who, in 1938, two years after my grandmother's birth, led a labor rebellion in Hanover as part of widespread anti-colonial activities that resulted in universal suffrage rights for Black Jamaicans.

I am the daughter of diaspora.

And my grandmother's mother Edith. Well, she was born in 1896 in Westmoreland, Jamaica, but spent her childhood living on a former sugar plantation in Mount Peace, four miles from Sandy Bay, a coastal village that was founded as an independent community for the formerly enslaved, in 1838, the same year Black Jamaicans received full emancipation.

I am the daughter of the diaspora.

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Throughout my childhood summers were spent with my family in Harvey River, eight miles outside of Lucea, the capital of Hanover. For me and my cousins, who spent summer days at Grandma Mary's house on our family plot 'in country', watching Shirley Temple movies until the 'current went out' or swimming with other cousins in rivers named 'Becky' and 'Kofi', a trip to Lucea meant going out on the town.

Lucea is where we bought kola champagne and beef patties with cheese, hung out with friends in the bus parking lot or the market, and then, when we were older, went to an all-night dancehall party. During my early teenage years especially, Jamaicans my age, my cousins Archie and Jonell, and all of their friends, fascinated and inspired me. They had the coolest slang words, the best dance moves, and a way of life so different than mine. I wanted to be like them, talk patois like them, dance like them, live like them, my cousins in Jamaica.

Taking a taxi with them to Lucea, down hills, and around windy roads, to eat food and hang out and party with friends, in a country, an island that everyone said was dangerous, was incredibly liberating. Despite what people say about Jamaica, even my parents, who express concern when I travel the island independently, it's one of two places in the world, the other being Ghana, that I have always felt safe, welcome. Jamaica in general, and Lucea in particular holds a special place in my memories and I draw on that energy when I long for that feeling of family, of being at home. I am the daughter of the diaspora.

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My mother belongs to a generation of women who migrated in search of opportunity. She is one of the group of women who migrated to the United States in the 1960s and 70s and worked to ensure that her children had space for growth and access to more resources than she had at home.

She is also a member of a number of overlapping communities – Jamaican, Post-Colonial, Black Americans, American Descendants of Slavery – and with each naming, she is fundamentally inscribed by 'New World' post-/modern identities.

I locate myself through the social and psychic effects of enslavement, colonialism, migration, and settlement and in dialogue with the dominant discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. My own path has included migrations and travels in North America, various African, Caribbean, and European countries. Each place has shifted, re-defined, and re-constituted my identities.

I am the daughter of the diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Written in dialogue with Carole Boyce Davies, *Black women, writing, and identity* (1994).

Excerpts from an introduction presented by Lola Olufemi and Christie Costello (bare minimum collective) as part of The Work We Share programme at The Essay Film Festival 2022, in response to *A Song of Ceylon* (1985), *Loss of Heat* (1994), and *A Prayer Before Birth* (1991).

**CC:** Speaking of HISTORY luv (I will make this transition better), Walter Benjamin writes: The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill. How do the characters in these films deal with temporality and weight of history: histories of the body, of colonial power, and histories that constitute memories? What's the role of fragmentation in these works and the value of it in your own life?

Broadly, I think these films encourage us to think of time as capable of being sliced in half. The use of long, fragmentary and non-linear modes of storytelling point us toward playful instability? We're not quite sure if sequences are intended to follow one another, we're being taken on a ride together. 'A Song of Ceylon' might be thought of more as an experience, the use of song and voice over storytelling gives us a narrative whilst the images and sequences contradict it. Aim is to evoke feeling? We get more of a story in 'Loss of Heat' – makes me think that history is transitional thing, it's not fixed. Experiences of illness muddle our sense of linear temporality, gives the character the ability to speak in tongues. Asks us to move towards the fixity of history towards what we can touch and taste? I think if we are to take Benjamin's provocation seriously, these films aim to disorientate us, by revealing a complex picture of our relationships to our own bodies, a world that makes us sick, a world that is built up on colonial plunder. 'A Song of Ceylon' takes history and mashes it in the filmmakers hands.

**LO:** On this note of the world making us sick—how do the films show sickness as produced by relation?

'A Song of Ceylon'

- Exorcism an attempt to remove a set of symptoms which make the protagonist ambiguously gendered, difficult to control, etc.—she is made sick by those around her who designate these as 'symptoms', her illness is produced by relation made material reality.

- Bare Min: 'Sick doesn't just mean those who are ill. Sick also means abnormal, perverted, unnatural'; resonates w our programme

- The voiceover, which is excerpts from a real anthropologist's observations, sticks to a Freudian psychoanalytic description of her supposed possession. By attributing it to hatred of the mother, etc. the cause of her symptoms are located within the private sphere of the family and outside of time/the material/history in the realm of the 'drives' rather than bc of her existene as a particularly gendered and racialised person in a particular time and place, the solutions are therefore

private—within the individual and the family—rather than in structural/communal abolition + liberation from colonialism. This is fucked up lol - sickness is communal and calls for abolition of everything but care, pleasure + mutual aid like in our manifesto xoxo

‘A Prayer Before Birth’

- But also not: Duckworth’s frustration at her own body, this is positioned as an individual experience, indeed she tells her lover that she can’t be with her, she can’t see herself when she’s with her, she has to come to her sickness, to her body via a certain very intense kind of aloneness.

- Sickness itself is also literally demonised in the case of ‘A Song of Ceylon’, or for Duckworth she wrote about how telling people she has MS now feels like ‘coming out twice’ after having come out as a lesbian 20 years earlier.

**CC:** What are some of the feminist threads you can identify that run between the three films?

Gender turns the body into a site of contestation, that’s been a core concern of feminist thought – that the body is a trap / locks us in - but these films expand our conceptions of what the body is capable of doing. Laleen asks us to see how the body can communicate something about history / ‘Loss of Heat’ takes us on a magical/fictional journey propelled by love / ‘A Song of Ceylon’ tries to think about the consequences of colonialism on diasporic formations of gender, concept of possession is about trying to escape the body as a whole?

All films explore ideas of relationality. ‘Loss of Heat’ is singular in this regard, its focus on the power of queer love to strengthen modes of care is crucial / something very tender about this film. Asks us to know that love is a kind of work which structures our attachments to one another. Each film strives to question imposed boundaries and escape miserable conditions – The orientation of these films outwards: they are critical, question, wondering – seem dialectical, which is part of the feminist radical tradition. They sit in their own contradictions, aren’t didactic, rather exploratory & gently probing.

**CC:** to wrap up w/ this quote as intro/way into thinking about what we’re about to watch together: ‘The rhythmic multiplicity of [poetic] films... are always registered on the surface; it’s not a hidden dimension, more a matter of not seeing or feeling what is always already there, but might need to be sensed subliminally through the imprint left on our body, in our muscles and in our minds.’ She asks us to watch films of the body with our bodies... so enjoy luv x

**Excerpt from a Q&A with Marissa Begonia and Rehana Zaman, presented as part of The Work We Share programme at The Essay Film Festival 2022, in response to A Question of Choice (1982), and Sweet Sugar Rage (1985).**

**RZ:** What I love in ‘Sweet Sugar Rage’ is the workshops, and I think we were workshopping for about eight to nine months, with the group in Leeds [in the context of ‘Some Women Other Women and all the Bittermen’ (2014). A fictional soap opera on the takeover of Tetley’s Brewery during the early 1990s]. There was the big group in London, just domestic workers and we were trying to set up a group in Leeds. And so I was joining those sessions to help run theatre workshops around trust and confidence, but also we were filming and talking about labor rights.

How do you organize everything, how do you build confidence as well to ask for your rights as an employee, but in that situation, which is so impossible because it’s so privatized? In a way you’re in someone’s home? I was thinking about the acting out of things... of situations and what that enables you to do and see and how transformative that can be. I was thinking about this idea of life as rehearsal. I was listening to a talk last week and they were saying that you can through the rehearsal practice, see the world that you want to be in and I really feel like that was part of a lot of our conversations and sessions, particularly in Leeds and what carried on in the ESOL classes as well and thinking about language learning. But also as political language learning in a system that’s very hard with through immigration and the hoops that that they make you jump through. I feel like the film was, in a way, just a way of getting to know you all. And in a way for me, the most valuable thing is that the relationships that came after that, and the film was the start of trying to move away from the issues of labor as being predominantly a white working class issue. And thinking what is the working class? How do we shatter this image of the working class? There were the other elements that had started before we met with a Tetley’s Brewery workers who were predominantly white actually and male. I remember us having a session and you were saying, Oh, I see. I see how our story fits with this because of the character of the secretary. And the character of the Secretary in this soap opera from this film becomes so the the film has a sort of soap opera, made have run out of the interviews with teleworkers and then documentary footage from our meetings. One of the characters is a secretary in the early 90s and she gets pregnant and her job is precarious. I think there was this conversation we had where you’re like, I understand she’s our boss. She’s the one who’s entered the workplace and needs somebody to come and look after her children. And there was this kind of recognition or moment of how do we make these show the interconnectedness of all of these things? Because we’re all we’re all implicated.

**MB:** You gave that justice in combining the two group workers. Yeah. The domestic

workers and the brewery workers. In the beginning, I was kind of wondering how are you gonna put that together?

**RZ:** I mean, I probably do it very different now actually. And I think also thinking about how I really loved how they kept in this film ['Sweet Sugar Rage'] as well so much footage from... like the first film ['A Question of Choice'] is much more kind of classical, traditional sort of voiceover with very distant observations of the workplace, but we didn't have any footage of work actually domestic work.

**MB:** Yeah, I also love the singing and dancing and I think The Voice of Domestic Workers do that. We would dance in the Labor Party Conference... in front of the parliament... we don't need a stage to be able to perform, you know, but the dance, the lyrics and the songs are very much done by by the domestic workers themselves. The role-play. I think there was one role-play that we did. It's about constructive dismissal case, and the difference between unfair dismissal and constructive dismissal. We had to do a role-play to let [participants] understand that they were forced to terminate themselves because that's what the employer wants you to do so that they avoid paying you. If you live there, they're thinking that you're not going to get back at them and get paid unpaid wages. And so we started to dissect how the treatment, the different forms of abuse that the employers was using to force her to terminate herself and instead of employer terminating them, but also how she was forced to terminate. And that said after is a constructive dismissal case, which is very much unfair dismissal. The only difference is you terminated yourself. You feel like you really terminated yourself, but actually, it was the employer who forced you to terminate yourself. Yeah. So I think we have to understand to be able to have that courage. But also in court, they weren't alone. If one of them fighting for decades, we will be there. We may not be able to speak but we will be to support and give them more courage.

**RZ:** In the films as well, I appreciated how they didn't shy away from talking about the difficulties in unionizing. And the kind of the protection you need as an individual employee, but also how the union also recreate so many of these power dynamics and structures and, you know, having been thinking a lot about unions at the moment in my job as a teacher, I'm thinking a lot about these issues at the moment and I was thinking about how you are kind of part of Unite The Union, but you're also very autonomous and how that gives you the power to really connect with your workers in really direct and specific ways.

**Excerpts from a conversation between Carolina Ongaro and Adriana Monti in response to Scuola Senza Fine (1983).**

**CO:** I'd like to touch upon the other films you made, where the condition of women is always investigated through small groups, and relations between women - to look into experiments in organising and types of groups that are generated through a different way of working, living, learning. Some of your films in particular, 'Filo A Catena' and 'Gentili Signore' for example, contextualise women in the work environment and the inclination to create new kinds of economies that prioritise different dynamics, as well as values, from the male-dominated ones: cooperation, exchange, solidarity, friendship - that regrounds care as the core valuable aspect, rather than a devalued and naturalised one. Today, in the midst of an unprecedented climate crisis, with wars still happening, hostile policies still oppressing people - one can feel the tension in the body and the idea that learning from a feminism that is intersectional right now is very important.

These films, most importantly, were developed in parallel to your practical experiences as teacher, writer, filmmaker, and feminist organiser. I'm interested in understanding these forms of organising economy that have very little space to emerge because under the heavy weight of capitalism, yet they have been brewing under the surface for a long time—and succeed in shifting small parts of the mechanism for the better. 'Scuola Senza Fine' was my entry point into a series of narratives and histories that advanced this purpose in a moment when radical change was sought - the women in this film as well as other films of yours, were somehow mapping the economy through their own experiences. They were beginning to re-shape their understanding of their spaces, relations and value systems, and how capitalism was affecting their lives. The courses gave them the tools to redefine their understanding of things.

Today, a reorientation and reconfiguration of the economy is urgent than ever, so those solutions you were actively working with - solidarity, cooperation, small scale - need to be recuperated. There is nothing new, the tools have been building over time - we just have to put them into practice as a collective.

**AM:** Small groups are very important. Also to give people time to think and to learn, that is the other important aspect of working in this way. And the other thing is, I always start to work on themes close to me. I try sometimes to work on topics that are not very familiar with me but it doesn't work. And even though people devalue the work I'm doing because it's not easy to do a sort of minimalist film - you are frequently dismissed as a person of no value - I keep going. I want to work on women's memory, education. It's difficult to find funds from television, because they dismissed it as small work, very local, not much value. I want to work on the silent aspects of humanity, not the screaming group. So it's a different kind of work.

When I was making the films in the 70s I was working in the textile industry with Teresa, who was working on the assembly line for a while. Before I left the big factory, we perceived that change was coming, so we pushed to get out and open the workshop where she was training the girls, working with them: a lot of immigrants from the south were involved. 'Filo a Catena' is the documentation of this. Teresa recreated the same kind of groups - allowing them to work in a familiar and comfortable place, not in a sweatshop.

Working in small groups and giving time to women to think about their lives and conditions, asking questions, is very important - because it helps them to reflect and rethink what they are doing and why. Education is based on that. Give the time. You need to give the students the time to find themselves. At the University of Women I led some courses with young women who went on to work in the film industry and it was important to push them close to their talents. Albedo was the first school in Italy where half of the students were women, and a lot of DOPs that are now getting recognition went through Albedo - it's a long time work, it took 30 years!

**CO:** The work you do in small groups, where the learning is slower, creates the necessary space for personal and shared growth, and creates the conditions for people who otherwise would not have the opportunity to fully express themselves, it's something I've been thinking a lot about, and has been a source of inspiration. Giving value to this type of learning amongst small groups is what we really have to recuperate I think. I keep going back to the notion of economy - what has to make a new economy happen - an economy of attention to one another, of defending the value of coming together in our differences, again recuperating feminist thinking in an intersectional way. Recognising the very struggles that different people and communities go through and the fact that we live in a world that is inherently interdependent - we have to be there for each other. It's something that I keep reflecting on, especially when thinking about our relation to nature and to our spaces.

Excerpts from an introduction presented by Barby Asante as part of The Work We Share programme at The Essay Film Festival 2022, in response to *Scuola Senza Fine* (1983) and *Women of the Rhondda* (1973).

Amalia's essay in 'Scuola Senza Fine' speaks of the myths being created by humans for protection as a form of ignorance and perhaps escapism. Also that these ideas help people to feel calm and protected. I'd like to propose the idea that through this kind of study, the kind of study that we've been doing this weekend, being here and being with these films that have been so beautifully restored and digitised, we could be thinking about the possibility of a new mythology, and I use the term mythology because it's associated either with storytelling associated with prehistory, often involving some form of powerful supernatural being, fighting evil or maligned storytelling of others, usually associated with the idea of myth being something that misrepresents the truth or is an imaginary. I want to reclaim mythmaking as a practice something like Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation work, taking fragments from archives to build a picture of Black women in the book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval of Black Girls Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. Or as adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha wrote in the introduction of *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories For Social Justice Movements* of 'visionary fiction'. Walidah Imarisha writes that 'visionary fiction' offers social justice movements a process to explore creating those new worlds, although not a solution, that's where sustained mass community organizing comes in, I came up with the term visionary fiction to encompass the fantastical cross-genre creations that help us bring about those new worlds. The term reminds us to be utterly unrealistic in our organizing, because it's only through imagining the so-called impossible that we can begin to concretely build. I think about that in relation to 'Scuola Senza Fine' (The School Without An End) because I think that's what they were really thinking about, like doing something that was other. For Amalia and her sisters in 'Scuola Senza Fine', their participation in the school allowed them to position themselves to envision themselves as contributing to culture and knowledge, something that history has taught us, that well over half the population of the world do not do. Where's the myth in that? She speaks of myth as a kind of divine protection passed on by ancestors.

My grandmother called the name of every one of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren every night in her prayers before she slept. I'd like to think about this as her dreaming me into being dreaming us into being especially significant for those that were those of us that were far away or she'd never met. Keeping the lines open the protection and inspiration, breathing us with her breath, like the line in Maya Angelou's poem 'Still I Rise, I am the dream and the hope of the slave'. The thing with myths is despite the supposed cultural dismissal of the myth, these stories are persistent and powerful and this is what I am thinking about when I'm thinking about redefining

myth, perhaps thinking about this mythmaking as a kind of emergent strategy. Ada in 'Scuola Senza Fine' speaks about herself, but couldn't find herself and how through the process of being in the 150 hours project. She was writing her own story, writing frees her. 'Women Of The Rhondda', tell their stories through their collected narratives, Circles and Cinema of Women collected and collated these stories and many more told by women in film and video, some of which we've been watching this weekend.

So it's in the spirit of this remembering and revering that we are present here, I will draw on my own kind of cultural background, and the spirit of Sankofa, go back and get it, go fetch it go seek it, go take it. It is not taboo to learn from the past to fetch or is at risk of being left behind. So it's this in this sentiment that I will invite you to remember all those that labor for us: women, trans queer, non-binary workers, especially those that are of color and black and migrant, casual, undocumented, illegal working for us within the prison system, who are working tirelessly in jobs that are barely visible. As the Combahee River collective statement states 'If Black women are free, it would mean that everybody else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression'.

So this is a dedicated declaration.

This is for the mother servants as Tereza in 'Scuola Senza Fine' described, those ones holding up communities, families, and domestic workers. factory workers, sugar planters, home workers, and herbalists, cleaners, carers, growers, feeders, preparers of the way. midwives, doulas, health workers, pleasure givers and pleasure activists, mutual aid as volunteers, organizers, activists, healers, protesters, protectors, priestesses, pastor mothers of the church, the comforters, the storytellers, culture makers, project creators, dreamers, diviners, the mourners, the celebrants, the negotiators, the peacekeepers, the rabble-rousers, the conspirators and co-conspirators. This is for us for those of us. Those who contribute to us, inspire us to keep us alive. Our mothers, lovers, siblings, cousins, children, comrades, and today because they stepped up so gracefully, and tirelessly brought this work that we have shared this last couple of days, being custodians of the precarious and perhaps now a bit less precarious, Cinenova archive. And I want to end and invite you to a party, so we all know what to do at parties right?

## films

### **Back Inside Herself, S. Pearl Sharp (USA, 1984, 4 mins)**

S. Pearl's first film, it is a lyrical visual poem that urges Black women to reject images placed on them by others, and to discover and invent their own identities. Features Barbara-O.

### **A Place of Rage, Pratibha Parmar (USA/UK, 1991, 54 mins)**

Pratibha Parmar weaves the story of the 1960s civil rights movement and 1980s LGBT rights movement together in a reminder that the struggle continues because of such leaders. June Jordan's 'Poem about Police Violence' is just one of many moments that still hit home.

### **Now Pretend, L.Franklin Gilliam (USA, 1991, 10 mins)**

Now Pretend is an experimental investigation into the use of race as an arbitrary signifier. Drawing upon language, personal memories and the 1959 text, *Black Like Me*, it deals with Lacan's "mirror stage" theory of self perception and the movement from object to subject.

### **A Song of Ceylon, Laleen Jayamanne (AU, 1985, 51 mins)**

This stylized non-narrative film presents an audio/visual montage of 'possessed bodies' by staging and interpreting a Sri Lankan ritual of spirit possession and cure.

### **Loss of Heat, Noski Deville (UK, 1994, 20 mins)**

The film is an evocative portrayal of queer love that challenges preconceived notions on the 'reality' of living with the invisible disability of epilepsy. It is a poetic, immersive interpretation exploring the interplay of the emotional and the physical, across boundaries of sexuality, dependence and desire.

### **A Prayer Before Birth, Jacqui Duckworth (UK, 1991, 20 mins)**

The film confronts debilitating illness with creative vitality, simultaneously desperate and defiant.

### **A Question of Choice, Sheffield Film Co-op (UK, 1982, 18 mins)**

A documentary portrait of two cleaners, a dinner lady and a lollipop lady drawn in terms of the limited choices available to women with family commitments.

### **Sweet Sugar Rage, Sistren Theatre Collective (JM, 1985, 42 mins)**

The film shows the work of, and explores the methods used by the theatre

collective *Sistren* to highlight the harsh conditions facing female workers on a Jamaican sugar estate.

**Scuola Senza Fine, Adriana Monti (IT, 1983, 40 mins)**

*Scuola Senza Fine* shows how the experiment extended into the lives of women taking the course, most of whom were housewives. The film was produced in collaboration with these students as part of their studies for the class, turning the curriculum's question about the representation of women into the questions about the representation of themselves.

**Women of the Rhondda, Esther Ronay, Mary Kelly, Mary Capps, Humphrey Trevelyan, Margaret Dickinson, Brigid Seagrave and Susan Shapiro (UK, 1973, 20 mins)**

*Women of the Rhondda* turns much needed attention to the role played by women in the gruelling Welsh Miners' Strikes of the 1920s and 1930s.

**contributors**

**Onyeka Igwe** is an artist and researcher working between cinema and installation, born and based in London, UK. Through her work, Onyeka is animated by the question — how do we live together? — with particular interest in the ways the sensorial, spatial and non-canonical ways of knowing can provide answers to this question. She uses embodiment, archives, narration and text to create structural 'figure-of-eights', a form that exposes a multiplicity of narratives. Onyeka is part of B.O.S.S., a sound system collective that brings together a community of queer, trans and non binary people of colour involved in art, sound and radical activism.

**Dr Nat Raha** is a poet and activist-scholar, based in Edinburgh, Scotland. She is the author of three collections of poetry, *of sirens, body & faultlines* (Boiler House Press, 2018), *countersonnets* (Contraband Books, 2013) and *Octet* (Veer Books, 2010). Her creative and critical writing has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *MAP Magazine*, *The New Feminist Literary Studies* (Cambridge UP, 2020), and *Transgender Marxism* (Pluto Press, 2021). Her poetry has also been anthologised in *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics* (Nightboat Books, 2020), *ON CARE* (MA Biblioteque, 2020), *What the Fire Sees* (Divided Publishing, 2020) and *Makar/Unmakar: Twelve Contemporary Poets in Scotland* (Tapsalteerie, 2019).

**Sarah Lasoye** is a poet and writer from London. She is an alumna of the Barbican Young Poets and a current member of Octavia – Poetry Collective for Women of Colour. Her debut chapbook, *Fovea / Ages Ago*, was published by Hajar Press in April 2021.

**Nydia A. Swaby** is a Black feminist researcher, writer, and curator. Her practice engages archives, ethnography, photography, the moving image, and the imagination to curate programmes and visual narratives, write essays and performance texts exploring the gendered and diasporic dimensions of Black women's being and becoming. Nydia is an editor of *Feminist Review* and co-edited an issue on Archives (July 2020). She is Curator of Learning at the ICA (on sabbatical), where she co-curated *echoes, feelings, and meanings* (2021), *Five Volumes for Toni Morrison* (2020), and several projects as a member of the Politics of Pleasure Collective (2018-2019).

**Lola Olufemi** is a black feminist writer and Stuart Hall foundation researcher from London based in the Centre for Research and Education in Art and Media at the University of Westminster. Her work focuses on the uses of the feminist imagination and its relationship to cultural production, political demands and futurity. She is author of *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (Pluto Press, 2020), *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Hajar Press, 2021) and a member of 'bare minimum', an interdisciplinary anti-work arts collective.

**Christie Costello** is an art historian, writer and curator. She is currently an OOCDTTP PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge, where she is experimenting with alternative ways of thinking through (and with) the archival materials and histories of US-based sex radical lesbian\* cultures c. 1975-1985. She is a member of the queer anti-work art collective Bare Minimum, which is currently in residence (2021-2022) at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts.

**Marissa Begonia** is a Founding Member and Director of The Voice of Domestic Workers. The Voice of Domestic Workers (formerly known as Justice For Domestic Workers) is an education and support group calling for justice and rights for Britain's sixteen thousand migrant domestic workers. They provide educational and community activities for domestic workers - including English language lessons, drama and art classes, and employment advice, and provide support for domestic workers who exit from abusive employers. and empower migrant domestic workers to stand up and voice their opposition to any discrimination, inequality, slavery and all forms of abuse.

**Rehana Zaman** is an artist from Heckmondwike based in London. Her work speaks to the entanglement of personal experience and social life, where moments of intimacy are framed against cultural orthodoxies and state coercion. Conversation and cooperative methods sit at the heart of her practice. She has exhibited widely in the UK and Internationally. In 2019 she co-edited *Tongues* with Taylor Le Melle,

published by PSS and was shortlisted for the Film London Jarman Award. She is currently a board member of not/nowhere artist workers cooperative and her films are distributed by LUX.

**Barby Asante** is a London based artist, curator, educator and occasional DJ. Her work is concerned with the politics of place, space memory and the histories and legacies of colonialism. Asante's work is collaborative, performative and dialogic, often working with groups of people as contributors, collaborators or co researchers.

**Carolina Ongaro** is curator, writer and researcher based in London. Since 2014 she has been running Jupiter Woods, an arts organisation focused on research and collaborative practice based in South East London, where she has been initiating multiple projects, individually and collectively. Through her work she explores formats and methodologies of making, organising and learning—in the cultural sector and beyond—that prioritise forms of cooperation, solidarity and active engagement, looking at possibilities for alternative systems of economy and relations to grow. The formation and generative potential of feminist spaces, in particular, has been a central part of this inquiry — accompanying various projects and collaborations.

## **about Cinenova**

**Cinenova** is a volunteer-run charity preserving and distributing the work of feminist film and video makers. Cinenova launched in 1991 following the merger of two feminist film and video distributors, Circles and Cinema of Women, each formed in 1979. Cinenova currently distributes over 300 titles that include artists' moving image, experimental film, narrative feature films, documentary and educational videos made from the 1910's to the early 2000's. The thematics in these titles include oppositional histories, post and de-colonial struggles, representation of gender, race, sexuality, and other questions of difference and importantly the relations and alliances between these different struggles.

Current Working Group: Tracey Francis, Emma Hedditch, Charlotte Procter, Irene Revell, Reman Sadani, Moira Salt, Louise Shelley.

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