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Making Waves

Elizabeth Robles

In "Iconography after Identity," a text published as a part of the book *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, art historian Kobena Mercer puts forward a challenge.[1] He calls for artists, curators, and critics to begin the long, overdue process of constructing an art history that maps the dialogues and developments of black British art onto broader stories of British and twentieth-century art as a whole. He urges the reader to confront the critical tendencies that have sidelined comprehensive analysis of black British art, and move beyond narratives that approach the creative production of black artists instrumentally, as a lens through which, at best, to examine (and, at worst, explain) the social and political implications of race and ethnicity in twentieth century Britain. Echoing Mercer's assessment, recent publications by scholars such as Leon Wainwright and, from an American perspective, Darby English have highlighted the ways in which this problematic half-story has been written both by racism's "inventive way of isolating black realities from the spaces whose purity it would conserve by doing so" and also – notably – even by some *countermeasures* against this systemic racism.[2] Returning to British shores, to these two factors we might also add the dominance of voices from the fields of sociology and cultural theory, not least in important foundational works by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, in the establishment of early scholarship around "black art" and black British artists. Arguing for a loosely reconfigured version of Erwin Panofsky's iconographic model, Mercer offers one possibility for object-based engagement. More recently, English, Wainwright and others have looked to frameworks of

materiality and phenomenology (respectively), to de-center narratives of racial and ethnic identity in art historical assessments of works by black and diaspora artists.

But, of course, these critiques are not new, nor is the stilted discourse that they observe. They join the voices of Rasheed Araeen, Sonia Boyce, Lubaina Himid, Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper, Veronica Ryan, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Marlene Smith, and others, a chorus gathering force since the late 1970s, when the constellation of artists, activists, and critics of what has come to be known, in some circles, as the Black Arts Movement burst on the British art scene. Working in relation to questions of "blackness" in Britain and the possibilities and implications of a black British art through visual practice and in art-adjacent practices as artist-curators, artist-critics, artist-researchers and artist-archivists, though somewhat imprecise and contested, the Black Arts Movement laid the foundations for the radical art history that lies at the root of Mercer's challenge: an art history that accounts for the work of black British artists within the context of wider national and international aesthetic, cultural and historical formations, rather than footnotes haphazardly inserted into mainstream narratives of art in the twentieth century, if they (black British artists) are included at all.

This article springs from the interstices of a pair of projects—one that is wrapping up, and the other starting out—which continue the work of excavating this art history, building on a rapidly growing literature around the Black Arts Movement in Britain by tracing its roots from the early 1960s.[3] Following the contours of the first two of what Stuart Hall has called "waves" of black arts activity in postwar Britain, this article takes as a starting point a critical examination of the notion of "black art" in a British context in order to unravel attendant questions around the formation and framing of what has come to be generally known as a Black Arts

Movement. This mode of engagement with the creative products of black British artists must address, as Mercer notes, "the necessity of interpreting the work as a document of the human imagination that exists as an object of aesthetic attention in its own right."[4] This is not to say, however, that we should, or even can, disavow the politics of identity or politics more broadly. Indeed, much of the work created during the broad period from the early 1960s is overtly concerned with the radical possibilities made available by the construction and interrogation of identities that are variously and simultaneously defined by race, gender, class, and sexuality. To disentangle aesthetics and politics entirely in these cases would be futile and tell a different, but still problematic, half-story. Rather, building on and supplementing the work that has been done in this field by earlier historians and critics working within identity-based frameworks, this article, and the projects from which it arises, aim to create a more comprehensive understanding of artworks that at times deal explicitly, *though not exclusively*, with identity, together with wider questions of politics, aesthetics, and the construction of art's histories.

Black and British

Before embarking on an examination of the critical foundations of a Black Arts Movement, we must unpick our terms. What or who does *black* and *black British* mean, and how are these terms used here? Unlike its usage in the United States—which remains inextricably and directly linked to the racial hierarchies built to support the historical specters of trans-Atlantic slavery and Jim Crow—the formation of *blackness* in postwar Britain has historically spoken to a unique relationship to the hegemonies of, and after, empire. As Stuart Hall notes in his oft-cited lecture "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-War History," by the mid-1970s

“race had finally ‘come home’ to Britain,” marking a shift from the internationalist anticolonialism of the first waves of postwar migrants to the antiracism of their children, born “*in* the diaspora.”[5] By the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, *black* in a British context became a popular shorthand for immigrants from the African and Caribbean diasporas, together with those from the South Asian subcontinent and their British-born children. A catchall term predicated on racialized “otherness,” *black* differentiated the politics of race and colonialism produced within the United Kingdom in the preceding decades from those across the Atlantic. Crucially, this formation of what has come to be known as a political blackness has roots in a longer story of Afro-Asian and, later, ‘Third World’ solidarity woven through the history of Britain in the twentieth century. An early manifestation of this was evident in the remit of the *African Times and Orient Review*, which between 1912 and 1920 published from its offices in Fleet Street an anti-imperialist viewpoint grounded in the recognition of, and struggle against, the shared oppression of Afro-Asian peoples under Empire.[6] Further organizations, including the League of Coloured Peoples, founded in 1931 by Jamaican-born Harold Moody (brother of sculptor Ronald Moody), emphasized the development of internationalist solidarity across the interwar period. Building on this position in a foundational moment for the British Black Arts movement with the publication of his *Black Manifesto* (1978), Rasheed Araeen, artist, critic, and curator, mobilized a black “we” that included people from all over what was then known as the Third World, along with “all those non-European peoples . . . who now live in various Western countries and find themselves in a similar predicament to that of the actual Third World.”[7] He built his position on the frameworks of a black experience rooted in diaspora and lived manifestations of racism: a legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and wider colonial and neocolonial

policies and projects. Though before and after the 1980s this definition of *black* has remained unfixed, with inflections of trans-Atlantic Pan-Africanisms made popular in the 1960s and 1970s by figures such as Maulana (Ron) Karenga visible across and after this period, it will be used here as a reflection of its historical importance to the period between Hall's first and second waves.

Building a Black Arts Movement

To paraphrase David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce, who collaborated to edit *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* and write its foreword, beginnings are notoriously unstable things.[8] Responding to the editors' assertion, this article has as its central concern the complex question of beginnings. Put simply, in order to begin to pinpoint the roots of the 1980s, we must have some grasp of where the "critical decade" begins.[9] In a 2004 lecture that was the culmination of a day devoted to *Black Diaspora Artists in Britain, Past and Present*, organized by the Raphael Samuel History Centre, Stuart Hall characterized the key moments in the story of black artists in Britain as waves. Shifting from the teleologies of the genealogical and/or generational "moment," Hall's formation opens up space for a Gramscian conjunctural approach, one that can be "'mapped' only as the 'condensation' of a series of overlapping, interlocking and non-corresponding 'histories.'"[10] This article looks to the trough between the first two of Hall's three waves, and the places in which they ebb and flow together, meet, and are indistinguishable, to begin to understand the ways in which what has come to be known as the Black Arts Movement came to be formed.

Within this space—between one wave and the next—lies the moment when what Stuart Hall identifies as the second "wave" of black Britons emerged from art

schools up and down the country to assert their own position within and against national and international aesthetic dialogues.[11] The first wave included artists such as Ahmed Parvez, Anwar Shemza, Francis Newton Souza, Frank Bowling, and Aubrey Williams, whose arrival in Britain from newly or not yet decolonized nations was marked by an interest in the transnational possibilities of an international modernism consistent with anticolonialism.[12] Unlike the following waves, artists from this generation were almost entirely educated, and often professionally established, before coming to the United Kingdom. Despite short-lived bouts of institutional and critical recognition, however, over time their achievements (and names) have been written out of narratives of modern art. This critical amnesia is cited by Rasheed Araeen, who can be considered both the last artist of the first wave and the first of the second wave, as impetus for the seminal exhibition *The Other Story: Afro Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (1989–90), the first retrospective survey of the activities of black artists in Britain and a direct response to systematic institutional exclusion of non-European creative voices. The relocation of Frank Bowling from London to New York in the mid-1960s can be considered an early signifier of the British art world's ambivalence to the first wave of artists, and the impossible task these artists faced in overcoming institutional racism. The febrile nature of the period was characterized by widespread manifestations and expressions of racism, and among the black British responses to this racism can be included the trans-Atlantic influences of the Rastafari, African American civil rights, and Black Power movements.[13]

Perhaps a good starting point for locating an elusive beginning of the "critical decade" might be 1978, the year that Araeen wrote his "Preliminary Notes for a BLACK MANIFESTO," which was published in the first issue of *Black Phoenix* (which after three issues and a subsequent hiatus would go on, in 1987, to be reborn

as the journal *Third Text*) (Fig. 1). [14] The following year seems equally viable, as 1979 ushered in the age of Thatcherism and Britain's first woman prime minister took office on a wave of electoral support stoked in large measure by anti-immigrant rhetoric. The year 1980 might also be regarded as a viable starting point, given that it was the year in which Eddie Chambers and others formed what was for a time known as the Wolverhampton Young Black Artists. The group's first exhibition, *Black Art an' Done*, opened in 1981 at Wolverhampton Art Gallery and included works by Chambers, Keith Piper, Andrew Hazel, Dominic Dawes and Ian Palmer.

Given these overlapping histories, we might assert that the late 1970s and early 1980s was a period in which the Black British Arts Movement began. By 1982, the Pan-Afrikan Connection (sometimes labeled Pan-African Connection) descended from the *Black Art an' Done* project, led by Chambers and Keith Piper, came together for a number of eponymous exhibitions. Together with a changing lineup of young artists, including Claudette Johnson, Donald Rodney, Wenda Leslie, Dawes, Hazel, Marlene Smith, Palmer, and Janet Vernon, they staged shows under variations of the title *The Pan-Afrikan Convention: An Exhibition of Work by Young Black Artists* at galleries in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, and Coventry.[15] By the autumn of 1982, when Chambers, Johnson, Piper, Smith, Rodney, Vernon, and the group's mentor Eric Pemberton convened The First National Black Art Convention to Discuss the Form, Functioning, and Future of Black Art at Wolverhampton Polytechnic (attended by first wave artists such as Frank Bowling, alongside young members of the second wave), the discourses and dialogues that characterize the early concerns of the movement were under way.

This short sketch of early formative publications, exhibitions, and activities suggests a linear quasi-genealogy of a monologic British Black Arts Movement and a

roll call for the historical record. Again, though, beginnings are unstable things. There can be little question that while the "Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto," *Black Art an' Done*, the First National Black Art Convention (Fig. 2) , and the subsequent formation of the BLK Art Group represent watershed moments for the 1980s, they also represent important threads in a much larger tapestry of individuals and activities woven over the course of the decade. In her "Letters to Susan," published alongside the 2011–12 restaging of her 1985 exhibition *The Thin Black Line,* renamed *Thin Black Line(s)*, Lubaina Himid succinctly summarizes the futility in producing a singular narrative of the British Black Arts Movement:

> We did not think about audiences in the same way or use materials the same way. We prioritized differently in relation to politics, money or faith and were brave enough to expose this. We were not a movement, or a group or a sisterhood or even close friends but instead a fluid set of women who were not prepared to be herded into a single way of expressing ourselves.[16]

Even her assertion that "we were not . . . even close friends" highlights the divergent trajectories and experiences of a group of women artists who came together in a number of ways—socially, politically, strategically—with different motivations, ambitions, and outcomes. While the focus of Himid's text and *The Thin Black Line*'s curatorial project is deeply rooted in a milieu of second wave black women artists, the plurality of artistic expression that she places at the center of black women artists' practice can be read as a crucial component of what has come to be known as the British Black Arts Movement. A resistance to racism in society, within institutions and art schools, was supplemented by a resistance to a singular vision of "black art" motivated or dominated by either social, political, or aesthetic interests. Making space

within wider aesthetic dialogues and discourses of representation, modernism, and materials, alongside those of diaspora and the lived realities of black British experiences, the works produced during this period are vocally polyvalent.

Returning to the object-based turn at the centre of Mercer's challenge, it would seem that artworks rather than biographies is, perhaps, the best place to begin to look for a beginning. Araeen, strikingly, pinpoints a single moment for the true genesis of the second wave and the Black Arts Movement that has come to define it: the creation of Eddie Chambers's *Destruction of the National Front* (1979-80) (Fig. 3).[18] The work comprised a visual destruction of a swastika cut from a Union Jack, progressing over four panels of collage until the Union flag/swastika is no more than a scattered collection of unidentifiable shreds. Chambers's deconstructed flag speaks not only to the rampant and racist nationalism of the fascist National Front, but also to broader questions around notions of Britishness that swirled around 1980s politics and popular culture, not least the dueling images produced by the British punk scene on the one hand and the rise of neo-Victorianism on the other.[19] It is important to note that the work is drawn from a specific source image; a poster produced by the Anti-Nazi League which depicted an image of Adolf Hitler underneath the headline 'The National Front is a Nazi Front', with a small banner that conjoins the Union Jack with the Nazi swastika placed at the centre of a mass of marching bodies.[20] For Araeen, this work embodied an agenda that responded "critically to the social and political forces of the time and set an ideological framework for a radical arts movement."[21] Critically, though, it also represents a continued engagement with the radical possibilities of modernist techniques in its use of collecting and collage, a tradition with a long and varied history rooted in the interstices of "high" and "low" art. For Mercer, this "cut-and-mix aesthetic" perforates boundaries between "tendencies that

were otherwise closed to one another in a period when the relationship between art and politics was characterized by sharply drawn frontiers."[22] From synthetic cubism to the acutely political photomontage of Berlin Dada, it is a medium steeped in twentieth-century aesthetics of political dissent and the interrogation and destabilization of national and cultural hierarchies and the identities that accrue to them. However, here Chambers's is an act of progressive destruction, as the conflated symbols are gradually – tentatively even at first, the initial rip to only a small corner of the collage – torn apart. The artist doesn't only collect (the often neglected first step of collage), cut and mix. Rather, here he shreds the ideologies of nationalism together with the product of modernist collage processes, that come to represent, as Jean Fisher writes, an "international modernism and its failure from the particularized perspective of the Black subject."[23] Fig For Oluwale

More recently, in a paper presented at the *Framing the Critical Decade: After the Black Arts Movement* conference, held over two days at the University of Bristol in 2016, Sonia Boyce put forward Araeen's *For Oluwale* (1971–3/5) (Fig. 4) as a starting point of the Black Arts Movement in Britain and among the first "black art" works made in Britain. While Boyce's comments were necessarily brief, they provide a striking point of departure for consideration of Araeen's work, characterized by its location between Hall's waves. Created nearly a decade before Chambers's collage, *For Oluwale* responds to the death of David Oluwale in Leeds in 1969. As a nineteen-year-old student with aspirations to study engineering, Oluwale arrived in Hull as a stowaway on the cargo ship *Temple* Star in 1949. Immediately upon disembarking, however, he was handed over to authorities and charged as a stowaway under the Merchant Shipping Act. He spent his first month in the United Kingdom in Armley Gaol, Leeds, and upon his release was unable to secure a place at a technical college.

By 1953, Oluwale was again imprisoned, and over the course of the following fifteen years spent time in prions, psychiatric units, and living on the streets. Sleeping in shop doorways, he became the victim of a sustained campaign of violence from members of the Leeds City police force, who gave him the nickname “Uggie” and “the Lame Darkie.” Accounts of the last known moments of Oluwale’s life, given by witnesses at the trial of the officers suspected of killing him, describe him running from police officers along the bank of the River Aire, having been discovered sleeping rough, at which point the officers had begun to beat him. His battered body was pulled from the river two weeks later, in early May 1969.[24]

For Oluwale is frequently pinpointed as the decisive shift within Araeen’s oeuvre between earlier minimalist and kinetic sculptural works, such as *Rang Baranga* (1969), and the highly political conceptualism he went on to develop, alongside his critical and curatorial practice. Reading about Oluwale, whose story resurfaced in 1971, as Inspector Geoffrey Ellerker and Police Sergeant Mark Kitching went to trial accused of manslaughter, Araeen was “shocked and moved . . . so much [he] decided to do a work dedicated to him.”[25] This coincided with “a period of identity crisis,” wherein he began “to lose interest in formal art activity” and spent time reading postcolonial and anticolonial literature, including Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and becoming interested in radical black political activities.[26] While this turning point is fairly well rehearsed within the existing narrative of Araeen’s practice, it is vital here to point out that Araeen’s “political turn” was not solely precipitated by events outside of the art world such as the police beatings, racist political campaigns, and rousing postcolonial literature happening at a comfortable distance from the sacrosanct gallery space. Rather, Araeen notes that

what he calls his "politicisation" really happened after he won the John Moores Painting Prize at the Liverpool Biennale in 1969. He recalls: FIG Rang Baranga

> I thought I had made it and my friends assumed it would then be easy for me to get gallery representation. In fact, some galleries were interested in my work, but they wouldn't exhibit it. One told me "we love your work, but we only show British and American artists." So, something was wrong.[27]

For Araeen, who had begun his aesthetic interrogations in Karachi before his arrival in London in the mid-1960s when, this raised disturbing questions around the easy relationship between Eurocentrism and a purportedly universalist, internationalist modernism. Reflecting several years later on the apparent incompatibility between his identity and his artistic practice, Araeen told the writer and theorist John Roberts in a 1987 interview,

> I did not know that you have to be *eligible* for a heroic position to achieve . . . recognition. My eligibility, as I became a *black* person in the white society, posed a basic contradiction in the ideology of Modernism.[28]

Though conceived in 1971, when Araeen encountered Oluwale's story in the press, the first iteration of *For Oluwale* was created after the artist was asked to take part in an exhibition, *Artists from Five Continents* (1973), at the Swiss Cottage Library near his home in north London. Taking up the invitation on the proviso that he would be able to do whatever he wanted without interference or censorship, Araeen produced a large (120 x 120 cm.) panel of hardboard, upon which he mounted displays of print media (fliers, newspaper and magazine clippings, et cetera) relating to Oluwale's death, the subsequent trial, and other global antiracist and anti-imperial struggles. Though dealing with explicitly political materials, Araeen notes that

> "the idea was not really to represent politics or produce political art, as has been commonly understood, but to develop a language that challenged the prevailing concept of art and the space in which it was exhibited, which had been depoliticized and privileged in favor of the status quo."[29]

Once a week, for the duration of the four-week exhibition, the artist returned to the library to change the materials on display. This combination and then re-combination of materials collected over the period from1971 and 1973, documenting past and ongoing violence embody a temporal repetition of a Benjamanian maneuver in which "what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation." [30]

Playing in the spaces between image and text, medium and meaning, "high art" and visual culture, art and politics, the fetish object of modernism and the ephemerality that it gave way to, Araeen constructed a weaponized conceptualism. He took aim at a status quo that reified and jealously guarded the boundaries of modernism, modernity, and cultural and political life more broadly—a status quo inextricably linked to the systemic and violent racism that killed Oluwale and the apathy that surrounded the trial of those charged with his death. As he went on to conclude in his seminal text 'Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto', written across 1975-6 and published in the inaugural edition of the journal Black Phoenix in 1978, 'THE DOOR WHICH IS SHUT IN OUR FACE BY A WHITE LANDLADY IS ALSO THE DOOR WHICH OPENS TO THE ART ESTABLISHMENT.'[32]

In later exhibitions of the work, including *Artists for Democracy: Vietnam Festival* (1975), *Art from the British Left* (1979), and more recently *The Place Is Here* (2017), the artist recreated the four original iterations of the panel as four separate displays, hung simultaneously side by side. For Araeen, however, the initial process of art making and re-making was crucial, an act that he describes as a 'movement

from one panel to another inside an art exhibition space.'[33] What is now the left-most panel, which was completed first, is comprised of sheets of paper organised tightly into three registers. The top two registers are made up of eight Xeroxed photocopies of an article from The Guardian about the Oluwale trial.The text is laid out in columns, and a small photograph of Oluwale peers out from among the text that relates the horrors of his death and the unmitigated violence that he fell victim to in the months that preceded it. The photo is off-center and depicts only his head. He stares directly out at the viewer. The bottom register is made up of the same article, this time typed out by hand. There is no photograph here, just the gruesome details of Oluwale's story. The second panel, produced in the second week of the 1973 exhibition, is similarly split into registers, though here there are only two. The bottom register is, again, formed of four copies of the same newspaper clipping from the Oluwale trial, while the top is made up of four different pages taken from a special edition of the Black Workers' Movement publication *Freedom News*. Headlines blare out from these pages—POLICE RIOT IN BROCKWELL PARK, POLICE TERROR MUST STOP, BRING POLICE CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE—which are peppered with images of young black men displaying their injuries, in handcuffs and in mugshots. In the third panel, the *Freedom News* pages are repeated, but Oluwale's story is replaced by anticolonial and antifascist leaflets expressing British support for the ongoing colonialist wars waged by Portugal's then-prime minister, Marcello Caetano. The anticolonial sentiment that, for Hall, defines the first wave, here crashes into the antiracist politics that he locates in the second. The fourth and final panel mixes together the imagery in the previous frame with new leaflets and newspaper clippings advocating action against racist housing practices and immigration laws, colonial wars, and the plight of Palestine.

While *For Oluwale* marks a departure from Araeen's earlier works, and most notably his important contributions to the development of minimalism in Britain, there are a number of striking continuities at play here. The exploration of movement, symmetry, and structure that define the artist's early practice emerges again in the set of collages, a technique he experimented with from at least the mid-1960s across the 1970s and beyond.[34] Reconfiguring the boundaries between radical politics and radical aesthetics, in the careful use of repetition, registers, and grids through the four panels, Araeen brings to the forefront the manifold possibilities opened up by reframing notions of symmetry and movement as inherently organizational structures. Rooted first and foremost in the relationship between objects, here symmetry and movement are presented as aesthetic strategies that cannot, and should not, be entirely disentangled from the political realities that underpin the content of the print material on display. Araeen noted as much in a public conversation around his work held at the Tate in 2012:

> [R]igid symmetry can also be a basis of a totalitarian regime . . . symmetry is imposed on people to control them, that they should remain symmetrical. Whilst the power that is in control provides people with their basic needs, in return it expects them to conform to what is imposed upon them. They have no freedom to break the symmetry which is imposed on them.[35]

This echoes his earlier reflections on the conception of his kinetic and spatio-sculptural works in which he writes that,

> [O]ne of the important factors within this composition which obsessed man is the expression of MOVEMENT through the creation of tension between the RELATIONS of different elements or objects; and this was achieved by reducing the different elements/objects to INEQUALITY and placing them at

UNEQUAL distances/levels. Perhaps this approach unconsciously expressed the inequalities between different members of the society.[36]

In the careful positioning and repositioning of repeated images and registers, which move gradually down and out of subsequent frames, in *For Oluwale* Araeen examines the interstitial spaces between aesthetic and social structures.

Laying bare the complex systems and relationships across and between the images and stories on display, the work is rooted neither in the representation of politics *nor* the politics of representation. Rather, here Araeen disrupts this simple binary to open up wider dialogues and discourses around an aesthetics that operates simultaneously across both fronts. Like Chambers he draws on a personal archive of collected anti-racist print material to produce and re-produce a constellation of simultaneously subjective and objective political, aesthetic and historical relationships. But, to repeat the mantra, beginnings are unstable things. Whether *For Oluwale* or *Destruction of the National Front* are categorized as the beginning of a British Black Arts Movement is impossible to determine and ultimately immaterial. Rather, they represent flashpoints in the assemblage of an avant-garde rooted in the act of making space for the possibilities and implications of being, and making work from being black, British, and an artist all at once. It is perhaps unsurprising that an emphasis has been placed here on works that call on the aesthetic maneuvers of montage. Mercer's "cut-and-mix" aesthetic, whose notable presence in the US Black Arts Movement is outlined both by Mercer and Margot Natalie Crawford, who remind us of its prominence in transnational formations of radical black aesthetics.[37] Indeed, in his Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Hall asserts that montage formed a central part of a "polemical and politicized art" that emerged with the second wave in which "the 'message' often [appeared] too pressing, too immediate, too literal, to brook

formal delay," unlike the painterly abstraction that preoccupied prominent first wave artists such as Williams, Bowling and Souza .[38] Nevertheless, looking into the trough between the waves—the place where one imperceptibly becomes the other—this assessment becomes less certain. Moving towards an object-based approach, we see the highly formalist concerns of the first wave ebb and flow, weaponized but not neglected, into the work of the second.

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Notes

[1] Kobena Mercer, "Iconography after Identity," in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, ed. David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005).

[2] Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) p.7. Also see: Leon Wainwright, *Phenomenal Difference: A Philosophy of Black British Art* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

[3] The first set of projects arise from my doctoral research for a thesis entitled "Disruptive Aesthetics: Black British Art after the 1980s" and includes a monograph (in preparation). The second project is the focus of a three-year British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, which I embarked on in the autumn of 2017, entitled "Making Waves: Black Artists and 'Black Art' in Britain from 1962–1982."

[4] Mercer, "Iconography," 55.

[5] Stuart Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain, Past and Present," Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Raphael Samuel History Centre, University of East London, November 2004, reproduced as "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-war History," *History Workshop Journal* 61, no.1 (2006): 6.

[6] See Ian Duffield, "Duse Mohamed Ali, Afro-Asian Solidarity and Pan-Africanism in Early Twentieth-Century London," in *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain: From Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1992), 124–49. It is notable that a young Marcus Garvey worked for a time at the *African Times and Orient Review* publishing early works there, including "The British West Indies in the Mirror of Civilisation," included in its October 1913 edition. Other notable contributors included Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Booker T. Washington, and the poet Sarojini Naidu, who was associated with Yeats's Monday Evening Circle.

[7] Rasheed Araeen, "Preliminary Notes to a Black Manifesto", *Black Phoenix,* No. 1, republished in Araeen, *Making Myself Visible* (London: Kala, 1984), 1.

[8] David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce, "Shades of Black: Assembling the 1980s," in *Shades of Black*, xii.

[9] The term *critical decade*, not inconsequentially, surfaces in reference to the 1980s in the final issue of *Ten. 8* photography journal.

[10] Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-war History", 3.

[11] Hall, "Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge—and After," in *Shades of Black*, 5.

[12] While a comprehensive, art historical account of the complexities of this first "wave" remains unwritten, and it is beyond the remit of this text to produce one, it is vital to note its existence in order to signal its presence, however incompletely documented, in a wider history of British art. Slowly written out of narratives of modernism in Britain, despite a short-lived bout of institutional and critical attention and, more recently, a resurgence of scholarly interest around some of these artists, the fate of this generation remains unresolved.

[13] It was during this mid-1960s to early-1970s time that the Caribbean Artists Movement emerged and functioned.

[14] The year 1978 was also when Edward Said's formative postcolonial text *Orientalism* was first published.

[15] It is also worth noting that, according to documentation from BLK Art Group meetings, these gatherings were open to other invited guests and attended by a wider range of nonmembers, including John Akomfrah and Lubaina Himid. See minutes from BLK Art Group meetings held in the BLK Art Group Research Project Archive is digitized at: **http://www.blkartgroup.info/**

[16] Himid, "Letters to Susan," in *Thin Black Line(s)* (exhibition catalogue) (London: Tate Britain, 2012), 11.

[18] Rasheed Araeen, "The Success and Failure of the Black Arts Movement," in *Shades of Bla*ck, 22. The narrative that supports *Destruction of the National Front* as a genesis for later developments in the 1980s can be seen more recently in Sophie Orlando's *British Black Art: Debates on Western Art History* (Paris: Dis Voir, 2016) where she refers to the work as: 'the groundbreaking work of this movement (and not only of the Blk Art Group). Indeed, this work is like a magic key and a reference with respect to which artists would subsequently position themselves.', 55.

[19] For more on Thatcherism and Victorian values, see Raphael Samuel, "Mrs. Thatcher's Return to Victorian Values," in *Victorian Values: A Joint Symposium of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy, December 1990*, ed. T. C. Smout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[20] Lucy Steeds, 'Retelling 'The Other Story' - Or What Now?' *Afterall: Exhibition Histories*, 30 September 2018, https://www.afterall.org/exhibition-histories/the-other-story/retelling-the-other-story-or-what-now, accessed 20 January 2019.

[21] Ibid., 21.

[22] Mercer, "Perforations," keynote lecture delivered at Reframing the Moment: Legacies of the 1982 BLK Art Group Conference, University of Wolverhampton, October 27, 2012.

[23] Jean Fisher, 'The Other Story and the Past Imperfect', in *Tate Papers*, no.12, Autumn 2009, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/no-12/the-other-story-and-the-past-imperfect, accessed 20 January 2019.

[24] For a more detailed account of Oluwale's life and death, see Ron Phillips, "The Death of One Lame Darkie," *Race Today* (1972). See also Kester Aspden, *Nationality: Wog: The Hounding of David Oluwale* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), reissued as *The Hounding of David Oluwale* (London: Vintage, 2008
). Oluwale's death is situated within a wider context of police violence against black people in Britain in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), 391–95.

[25] Rasheed Araeen in conversation with Tim Smith-Laing, "A Question of Knowledge," *Frieze* 183 (2016).

[26] Rasheed Araeen, "Biographical Notes," *Making Myself Visible,* 174.

[27] Araeen and Smith-Laing. "A Question."

[28] Interview excerpt published in John Roberts, "Postmodernism and the Critique of Ethnicity: The Recent Work of Rasheed Araeen," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Rasheed Araeen: A Retrospective: 1959-1987* (exhibition catalogue) (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1987), n.p.

[29] Rasheed Araeen, "The Artist as a Post Colonial Subject and This Individual's Journey Towards 'the Centre', *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, ed. Catherine King (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 240.

[30] Walter Benjamin, “Convolute N,” in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 462.

[32] Rasheed Araeen, “Preliminary Notes to a Black Manifesto”, *Black Phoenix,* No. 1, republished in Araeen, Making Myself Visible, 82.

[33] Rasheed Araeen, “In Conversation: Nick Aikens and Rasheed Araeen”, *Rasheed Araeen* ed by Nick Aikens (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2018), 203.

[34] There is, for example, a collage from 1965 reproduced in *Making Myself Visible* on page 27. Another example of collage in Araeen’s practice is *Disaster* (1974–75).

[35] “Rasheed Araeen in Conversation,” December 13, 2012, Tate Britain, www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/rasheed-araeen-conversation.

[36] Araeen, *Making Myself Visible*, 64.

[37] For more on the importance of montage, see Mercer, “Perforations,” and Margot Natalie Crawford, “Black Public Interiority, Chicago Style,” conference paper, *Black Art, Black Power: Responses to Soul of a Nation*, Tate Modern, London, October 13, 2017.

[38] Hall, “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments,’” 17.