

AN INFINITY OF TACTICS. HUSSEIN SHARIFFE'S ARCHIVE IN MOTION*

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In January 2014, the Khartoum-based independent production house and film training centre, the Sudan Film Factory (SFF), launched the first edition of the Sudan Independent Film Festival (SIFF), an international event now staged annually in January in multiple venues across Khartoum. Described on the SIFF website as a “gateway” for new channels of exchange between Sudanese and global film cultures, SIFF’s week-long programme of screenings, discussion fora and networking events is designed “to remind people that...Sudan... was once renowned in the field of cinema and....still has its heart beating for this art” (*Arab Weekly*, 2019). References in calls for participation to the “revolution that is our people” align SIFF with the democratic movements that ousted the Islamist autocrat Omar el-Bashir in 2019. But they also reach back to cinematic histories embodied in the film oeuvre that is the focus of this article. The Festival begins annually on January 21st: the date of the passing of the late filmmaker,

artist, poet, writer and public intellectual Hussein Shariffe. Shariffe is “cherished” by the Sudan Film Factory as a filmmaker whose “human and artistic values” the organisation aims to uphold, but whose memory it wishes to “transform” into an annual “celebration for cinema” on multiple sites across the Sudanese capital.

SIFF is not alone in paying such warm tribute to Shariffe. In his lifetime (1934-2005), Hussein Shariffe came to prominence as a contemporary artist working in a cosmopolitan idiom that blended western, North African and Arab visual languages. A vocal advocate of anti-colonial and democratic cultural resistance, Shariffe was also a pioneer of Sudanese independent and experimental film. His artistic career began at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where he studied from 1957 to 1959. He staged his first solo show already in 1957, in London’s Gallery One; after graduation from the Slade, he returned to Khartoum, working as an artist, lecturer, critic and

documentarist, before taking on a role as Head of Cinema in Sudan's Department of Culture.

In 1973, Shariffe returned to London to complete the experimental film *The Dislocation of Amber* (1975), alongside *Tigers are Better Looking*, an adaptation from a short story by the white Creole modernist writer Jean Rhys, and his graduation film from the UK National Film School in 1979.¹ Moving between London and Khartoum through the 1980s, Shariffe eventually fled into exile following Sudan's 1989 Islamist military coup. His final home was Cairo, where he continued to perfect an art practice that roamed across disciplinary boundaries between film, poetry, literature and painting, or indeed cooking and interior decor, art forms that made his many temporary homes "never empty of colour": open destinations, writes his daughter Eiman Hussein, for "everyone, family and friends" (Hussein, 2020: 88).

Hussein Shariffe died in Egyptian exile in 2005. This article centres on attempts since that date to retrieve, archive, and recirculate his extant film works. It presents a film artist whose oeuvre is at once singular in its visual and aural language, resonant of specifically Sudanese histories of an exile and diaspora cinema of mobility, and productive of an archive practice whose point of departure is the very transience of its most cherished objects, including, or perhaps centrally, as we hope to demonstrate, the several unfinished films that made up a significant portion of Hussein Shariffe's film oeuvre. Between 1973 and 2005, Shariffe directed and/or (co-)produced at least nine films: the documentaries *The Throwing of Fire* (1973), *The South-East Nuba* (1982), *Not the Waters of the Moon* (1985), and *Diary in Exile* (co-directed with Attiyat al-Abnoudi, 1993). Alongside the visionary *Tigers are Better Looking* and *The Dislocation of Amber*, Shariffe was working when he died on a further experimental work, *Of Dust and Rubies: Letters from Abroad*. A cinematic interpretation of nine poems of Sudanese exile, *Of Dust and Rubies* would however remain

unfinished, as would two documentary works-in-progress: *Alwathiq*, a portrait of a 1980s Sudanese Robin Hood-esque figure executed by crucifixion during the period of Shari'a law under the military dictator al-Nemeiri; and *Dawood*, a biographical portrait of the singer Abdel-Aziz Muhammad Dawood (aka Abu Dawood).

Shariffe's archive shares with that of film artists from other minor (experimental, independent, diasporic) cinemas the twin problems of material degradation and spatial dispersal (Andersson and Sundholm, 2019: 117-119). Archival locations for several prints have yet to be confirmed at the time of writing, as does their status as negatives, reversal film, or impaired copies which, as Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm have suggested, confound "the ultimate archival goal...of originality and authenticity," since in this as in other archives of migration and exile, original prints are unidentified or lost (Andersson and Sundholm, 2019: 118). Writing on immigrant cinema archives, Andersson and Sundholm point to the apparent "disorder" of migrant archives "where very few objects are related to the canonical, national, auteur-oriented cinema practice" shaping established archive collections (Andersson and Sundholm, 2019: 123). The task facing researchers is thus at once pragmatic—one of assembling and rearranging artefacts disarranged by often traumatic histories of displacement or expulsion—and conceptual, involving the identification of archival logics that might accommodate the uneven and dissimultaneous histories from which the archive has emerged.

That Shariffe's films are as geographically scattered as are Anderson and Sundholm's immigrant archival artefacts is certain. Similarly dispersed are the photographs, scripts, published writings, scrapbooks, festival programmes, correspondence and other ephemera uncovered since 2005 in private and institutional archives across Khartoum, Cairo, London, Oxford, Los Angeles and Berlin. These problems of dispersal and material decay

situate the initiatives we detail below on the one hand within the field of minor cinema archiving as a practice of multidirectional assemblage. Like Andersson, Sundholm and other scholars keen to displace migrant cinemas from “de margin” to “de centre”, in Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer’s famous phrase, our own work on Shariffe has begun by collecting and rearranging in new configurations the films and other material and virtual artefacts that constitute Shariffe’s filmic legacy (Julien and Mercer, 1988: 2). There is an open-source archive in the making as we write; it builds on curatorial ventures to screen and discuss Shariffe’s films in globally interconnected public fora, lending them transnational visibility through mini-retrospectives, online as well as face-to-face discussions, and two film essays exploring the films’ potential for new future lives.

But the work we present below also differs from migrant or diasporic film archiving in European or western milieux. In projects led by European cinema scholars, the effort is often to secure an “archival life” for immigrant, experimental or political cinemas that are conventionally banished to the periphery of national film history and heritage. The specific call in respect of cinemas of migrant mobility is for a “redistribution of space” in the archive that enables recognition of migrant cultural production and immigrant experience within local and national public and film culture (Andersson and Sundholm, 2019: 129).² This model of a displacement of historical attention from periphery to national centre sits uneasily, however, with archive work on colonial cinemas whose constitutive condition is one of extraterritoriality and precarious national cultural sovereignty.³ Sudanese cinema is just one example of a film culture born in colonial territories in the interstices between colonial, ethnographic, military and amateur film; shaped later by anti-colonial and decolonial filmmakers migrating restlessly between postcolony and metropole; and reconfigured repeatedly as the postcolony

succumbs to the duress of neo-imperial geopolitics and anti-democratic forces closer to home.

In the case of Hussein Shariffe, we are confronted, in sum, with archival objects born into states of displacement, situated temporally in polycentric and overlapping histories of transnational mobility and fracture, and dispersed spatially around Shariffe’s various stations of migration, transnational travel, and exile. Artefacts in this archive have no single or fixed point of origin, no settled destination, and as yet, no singular framing aesthetic or institutional logic enabling coherent strategies of preservation, archival documentation, and recirculation. In the rest of this article, we present a series of curatorial and archival experiments through which the group of archivists, curators, artists, family members and film scholars to which we belong have in recent years explored potential archival logics, strategies and tactics for Shariffe’s film archive-in-motion. Our focus is on three case studies. An opening discussion of a single archival artefact—Issue 1 of Shariffe’s mid-1960s cultural journal *Twenty One*—examines the geopolitics of the exilic archive, highlighting the specific challenges for archive practice of objects born into the political turmoil of decolonisation and Cold War. Turning secondly to Shariffe’s last, unfinished film, *Of Dust and Rubies*, we recentre attention on questions of presentation and curatorship. Since 2018 a series of transnationally circulating workshops and research projects has developed around *Of Dust and Rubies* in collaborations between the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, and multiple partners across Khartoum, Cairo and London. Framed by the Arsenal’s conceptualisation of “archive work as a contemporary artistic and curatorial practice”, these efforts to generate through performative curatorial practice a “living archive” for Shariffe’s oeuvre began with workshop presentations of this remarkable film to a range of international publics (Schulte Strathaus, 2013).

We discuss in this context the state of incompleteness in which *Of Dust and Rubies* remains suspended, and analyse curatorial approaches that unlock the potential of such unfinished works to meet the constitutive instability of Shariffe's dispersed and exilic archive with similarly fluid poetic and mnemonic practices of remediation and historical refiguring. A final section of the article outlines our plans for an open-source, hybrid digital and analogue archive of Shariffe's film oeuvre. That archive remains under construction at the time of writing—so this article itself, analogously to Shariffe's unfinished films, remains in a state of incompleteness, drawing what must be for now only interim conclusions, but pointing forwards in what we hope are constructive ways towards a future of creative uncertainty for his film oeuvre, with all the fears and hopes that such fragile futurity holds. First, however, we move back in time to investigate one small fragment from Shariffe's archive: a digital copy of a 1964 journal issue that marks both a milestone in Shariffe's contributions to Sudanese film culture, and a test case for archive practices adequate to the history of breaks, mobilities and transitions from which his films emerged.

AN ARCHIVAL OBJECT IN TRANSITION: TWENTY ONE, ISSUE 1, 1964

Amongst the documents scheduled for inclusion in our open-source archive is the first issue of what was to have been a weekly journal edited by Shariffe, the English-language *Twenty One. A Magazine from Africa*. The journal launch fell within a period of intense artistic productivity for Shariffe. Following his 1960 return to Khartoum, Shariffe taught for four years at the College of Fine and Applied Art. Here he joined other artists including the friend and mentor who would later recruit him as Head of Cinema in the Sudanese Ministry of Culture and Information, Ibrahim el-Salahi. Like Shariffe, El-Salahi was formed ar-

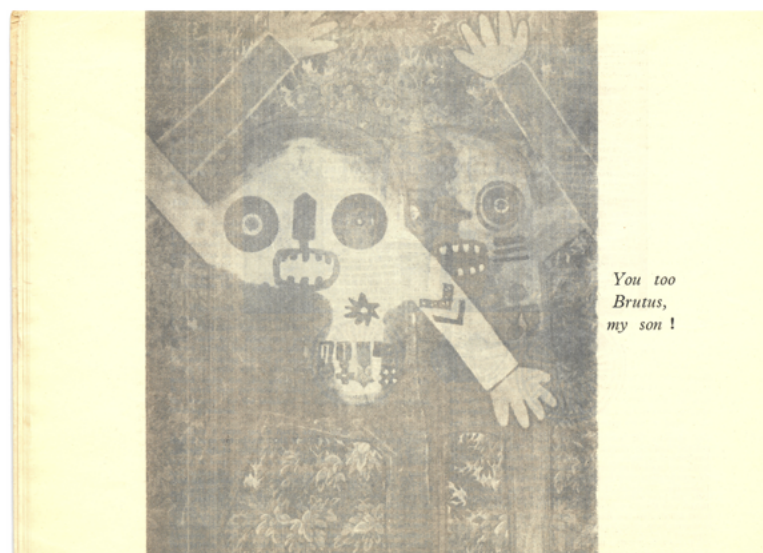


Figure 1. Source: *Twenty One. A Magazine from Africa*, 1(1). Hussein Shariffe Family Archive

tistically through earlier encounters with transnational modernism; he too had studied at the Slade, but also contributed to the influential Mbari Artists and Writers Club, an experimental arts and drama workshop in postwar Ibadan, Nigeria, whose participants included writers Chinua Achebe and Gérard-Félix Tchicaya, playwright Wole Soyinka, and the club's expatriate founders, the writer/editor and painter duo Ulli and Georgina Beier (Hassan, 2012: 10).

El-Salahi was a key figure in the Khartoum School, the loose association of modernist artists who emerged in Sudan in the late 1950s, generating work that married western modes of abstraction and experiment with African art as well as Arabic calligraphy and geometry, decoration and ornament, and poetic or spiritual practice (Hassan, 2012). As the art historian Salah Hassan notes, the group's "complex, multifaceted, fluid" Sudanese modernism disrupted binary distinctions between West and non-West through artistic languages that blended idioms from global modernisms with art forms from the culturally diverse populations of post-independence Sudan. Although polarized "for political and ideological

reasons” into northern “Arabic” and southern “African” cultures, modern Sudan, observes Hassan, boasts a national culture in which “almost every major African ethnic or linguistic group is represented” (Hassan, 2012: 15). The political thinker Ali Mazrui has described Sudan as a nation of “multiple marginalities” (Mazrui, 1969): a country traversed by multifarious divisions and interconnections between Arab-Islamic and African cultural worlds; perched historically on the geopolitical margins between competing empires; and a nation searching still for an identity capable of encompassing what the writer Jamal Mahjoub terms Sudan’s “heritage of criss-crossing cultural hybridity” and “manifold diversity” (Mahjoub, 2018: 118)⁴.

Though Shariffe resisted a positioning of his own practice within defined movements or tendencies, he certainly shared with the Khartoum School a commitment to artistic modes that militated against the “dichotomous duality” of Sudanese national culture (Mazrui, 1969). Visible in the copies of *Twenty One* now available in Shariffe’s emerging archive is thus a striving towards multiplicitous expressive structures and idioms capable of encompassing the pluricultural and complexly geopolitically entangled realities of mid-1960s Sudan. Issue 1 of the journal, for instance, is arranged in a collage structure that intersperses what appear to be Shariffe’s own highly abstract images of political turmoil with unattributed architectural illustrations and design motifs. The images serve as visual commentary on written contributions including Shariffe’s own opening editorial, commissioned articles on topics ranging from Sudanese poetry to contemporary politics, and articles reprinted or extracted from global press organs commenting on the prospects for “much hoped-for unity” in a multi-ethnic and democratic Sudan (Shariffe, 1965).

Shariffe himself aspires in his founding editorial to a “new national consciousness” that might meld together the country’s often antagonistic

cultural strands. Under the heading, “A Beginning”, Shariffe thus offers the journal as a “bridge between Africa and the Arab World with both whom (sic) we inescapably have so much in common” (Shariffe, 1965: 1). The publication of *Twenty One* in English suggests that this goal is to be served by a politics of address that connects a multi-ethnic and pluricultural Sudanese art practice to global publics. But perhaps most striking about the first issue are the marks it bears of a political catastrophe that threatens such global connectivity. *Twenty One* subsists today only in fragmentary print and digital copies discovered thus far in London and Khartoum. Though occasionally cited in political and cultural histories of 1960s Sudan, the journal is uncatalogued in the electronic indexes of the Global North. This fragile archival imprint, but also the insistent focus in the journal’s opening issue on contemporary politics—on the “problem of the South”, a “hole in the national charter”, “elections and after”—reflect its origins in the then still ongoing struggle against militarization, Arabization and Islamicization policies of Sudan’s first post-independence period of military rule (1958 to 1964). Four months prior to the launch of *Twenty One*, in October 1964, Sudan had seen a revolt against military rule beginning with a civilian strike by university academics and other professionals, carried forward by a political coalition under the umbrella of the United National Front, and culminating in a general strike, the end of military government, and the resignation as Head of State in November 1964 of the military leader General Ibrahim Abbud (El-Affendi, 2012).

Twenty One emerges, then, out of the maelstrom of intellectual and artistic dissidence that triggered political revolution and, eventually, completion of the long transition from Sudanese independence in 1956, to civilian rule and successive elections in 1965 and 1966. The prominence in Issue 1 of the US journalist and writer Melvin J. Lasky accentuates the Cold War context framing this and other anticolonial struggles across the Af-

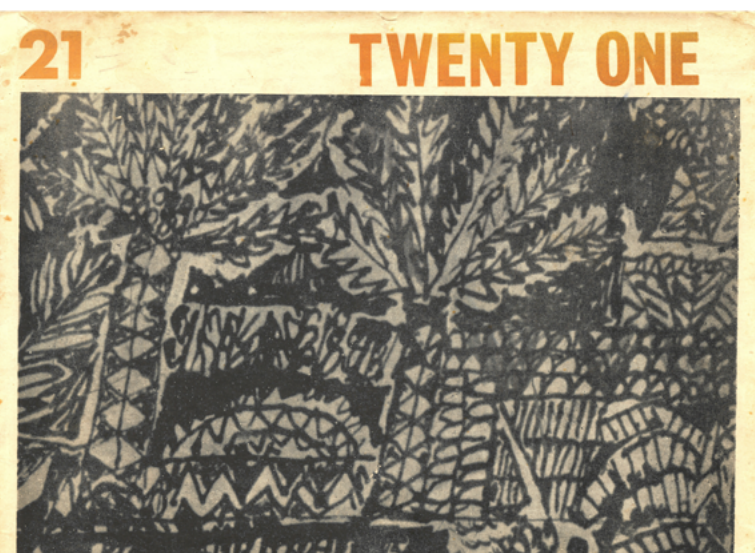


Figure 2. Source: *Twenty One. A Magazine from Africa*, 1 (1). Hussein Shariffe Family Archive

rican continent. A pre-eminent figure within the US anti-Communist Left, Lasky was renowned for his founding editorship of two significant Cold War cultural journals, the German *Der Monat* and the English-language *Encounter*. Lasky also authored the (western, white, liberal centrist) “intellectual’s guidebook” to anti-colonial struggle, *Africa for Beginners* (1962). His anti-Communist commitments in the African context are visible in a lead article for *Twenty One* that proselytises for a new *Farbenlehre* (Goethe’s philosophy of colour): an aesthetic theory and practice that will heal a world “hysterically blinded by whiteness and blackness”, while avoiding the “new fashioned dictatorship of the Left” that Lasky sees emerging under African socialist leaders including Nasser and Nkrumah (Lasky, 1965: 4).

From its very first issue, *Twenty One* bears, in sum, the intersecting traces of convulsive, or what we have termed “catastrophic” geopolitical transitions and revolutionary shifts. Catastrophe as it is understood in classical dramaturgy or liberal history implies an end of days, from the Greek *katastrophē*: an overturning, or precipitous end. In 1965 Sudan, it is however the second meaning the

term acquires in mid-twentieth century mathematics that seems more apposite: catastrophe as a seismic fracture that transverses two-, three- and four-dimensional phenomena, shattering existing geometries, generating unforeseen bifurcations, interruptions, loops, and unstable outcomes. *Twenty One* is bestrewn with the visible debris of such processes of splintering, dislocation and spatio-temporal refiguring. A graphic image of popular uprising accompanies Shariffe’s opening editorial; later, an abstract portrait of Brutus murdering Caesar evokes the intimate violence infesting political orders in militarized states. Notable throughout is the staccato style and inconclusive tone that situates Shariffe’s writing within unfinished histories: “Facts.....The source of the trouble is really.....But this simply cannot be....the damp corners of the cabinet must be sprayed with political flit...The Prime Minister is so far only a conciliatory force” (Shariffe, 1965: 2). Shariffe’s editorial ends meanwhile with a caveat shows historical time itself eluding capture in this moment of turmoil, such that, “Regretfully, and because of circumstances not under our control, some of the material in this issue may be slightly dated” (Shariffe, 1965: 2).

We see in *Twenty One*, in sum, an artefact from Sudan’s 1964 revolution that surfaces in the archive as an object in spatio-temporal transition: one that points temporally back and forth to lost pasts and hoped-for futures, and spatially, through its layering of anti-colonial and Cold War references, to both local and global sites of struggle over viable Sudanese futures. The questions raised for archive practice by an artefact born into this state of contingent volatility relate, moreover, not just to what we are describing as Shariffe’s archive of catastrophe, but to other collections that carry similarly the marks of political turbulence, cultural contestation, territorial dislocation, and of course lost utopias—for surely *Twenty One* embodied a utopian gesture of affirmation, launched as it was in a moment when “so much is at stake”

and the “popular uprising of October” was “only a beginning” (Shariffe, 1965: 1-2).

TRANSITION, COUNTERPOINT, DEIXIS

Some recent observations on film-archival practice by the distinguished scholar of film heritage and digital film culture, Giovanna Fossati, highlight the archival strategies that may be appropriate for artefacts located, like *Twenty One*, within spatio-temporal constellations set in motion by fractures in the historical continuum or a shifting of the tectonic plates of local or national (here, Sudanese), and global histories—in the case of *Twenty One*, the story of a global Cold War and its intersections with struggles for decolonisation, nation-building, and popular sovereignty. Discussing in a different context the convolutions of archive histories (her focus is on media history and the analogue-digital shift), Fossati suggests of conceptions of “transition” in moments of epochal rupture that they should be understood not teleologically, as movements between settled ontological states, but as conditions of “constant in-betweenness”: so the transition from analogue to digital media is marked for instance as much by simultaneities, intersections and recursive loops, as by differences or linear developments from “A” (analogue) to “D” (digital).

Intriguingly, Fossati suggests further that transition, understood now not as monodirectional development, but as “back-and-forth” or circulatory movements around fluid technological, historical and spatial constellations, may be an “inherent characteristic of film (archival) practice” (Fossati and van den Oever, 2020: 133). Fossati continues:

“transition” is a spatial term (derived from Latin *transitio*, “going across”), and therefore also conveys a sense of “back-and-forth” movement...It is that continuous back-and-forth (or dialogue or conflation) between past and present; obsolete and new technologies; old and new practices; and theo-

retical frameworks developed at different points in time and in different contexts, that has been so central to media research disciplines, including those that focus on....archival objects and practices (Fossati and van den Oever, 2020: 133)⁵.

We followed Anderson and Sundholm earlier in pointing to the need for revised archival logics capable of framing archive practice in respect of postcolonial, diasporic or exile cinemas-in-motion. Fossati’s observations direct attention towards just such a mobile logic of archival practice and film-historical knowledge production. The shift she proposes from temporal to spatial archival epistemologies allows a conceptualisation of archival objects—in our case, the films and other media artefacts and ephemera that are the legacy of Hussein Shariffe—as objects in transition, located precariously within intersecting local, national, regional and global circulatory flows, and demanding an archival and curatorial practice that meets their immanent, now joyous, now traumatic fluidity with similarly mutable tactics of retrieval, restoration and recirculation in contemporary contexts.

In the case of the founding issue of Shariffe’s *Twenty One*, such a practice would mean investigating the journal, not as the source for an auteurist history of Shariffe as a giant of postwar Sudanese film history (though he was certainly also this), but as an artefact that reveals the constitutive instabilities of the multi-sited and temporally fragmented exilic and diasporic film practice in which Shariffe was engaged. Art and archival historians Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo point the way methodologically for such a spatially and temporally multiform investigation in their study of what they term the “contrapuntal” relations shaping histories of student and alumni practice at Shariffe’s *alma mater*, the Slade (Bruchet and Tiampo, 2021). Focussing on the period “between imperialism and decolonization” (1945-1989), Bruchet and Tiampo trace the careers of numerous students attracted to the Slade “from throughout

the British Empire and around the world” by the institution’s secular ethos and internationalist artistic commitments. Their description of what they term these students’ “contrapuntal” practice derives from Edward Said’s 1984 essay “Reflections on Exile”. Said borrows this musical term to identify exile as a cultural condition involving on the one hand a doubling or pluralising of perception, and on the other, expressive structures that replicate musical counterpoint with what Bruchet and Tiampo describe as “imitative fugue[s]... a reckoning with colonial pasts from which emerges a new polyphony” (Said, 2000: 398; Bruchet and Tiampo, 2021: 6).

Bruchet and Tiampo are keen to extend Said’s notion of contrapuntalism, moving beyond exilic art practice to encompass diasporic and migrant experience amongst the numerous Slade students and alumni who shuttled between stations of migration and remigration in the postwar period of decolonisation and Cold War. This expansion of Said’s insights to include multiple states of migratory mobility seems pertinent to an artist transitioning, as did Shariffe, from the voluntary global journeys of his early career, to exile in Egypt after 1989. Shariffe features accordingly in Bruchet and Tiampo’s research as one of numerous Slade alumni whose “contrapuntal” practice confounded the centre-periphery structure of imperialist cultural thinking by asserting—as for instance in Shariffe’s early London exhibitions—“the presence of Empire in the metropolis”. Artistic productions born of circulatory journeys around routes of postcolonial migration and remigration, exile and diaspora constructed meanwhile precisely that “transnational counterpoint” to Eurocentric art practice to which Said’s term refers. Hence for instance the play of alternating call and response between local and global publics initiated in Shariffe’s urgent call in *Twenty One* for a global and multi-voiced artistic and intellectual response to revolution in Sudan. Hence too his use of hybridizing European-African aesthetic strategies

including remediation (as in his translation in *Twenty One* of a scene from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* into a stark visual commentary on Sudanese political violence); adaptation (viz. his later reworking in *Tigers are Better Looking* of a Jean Rhys story as a comment on London’s black African presence); or creolization, as, again, in Shariffe’s *Julius Caesar* image, whose robotic human figures recall the grotesque political caricatures of European Dada or New Objectivity, while gesturing simultaneously, through the overlay in the image of a delicate leaf motif, to arabesque design elements from Hellenic, Islamic, and Mediterranean Renaissance art⁶.

Bruchet and Tiampo’s repurposing of Said on contrapuntalism allows, in sum, a metaphorical understanding of *Twenty One* as a quasi-musical constellation of notes, chords, voices and melodies that calls out to and is answered by voices from within the multiple modernisms shaping postcolonial cultural futures. The journal stands in this sense as the historical trace of a specifically Sudanese contribution, led by Hussein Shariffe, to global cultural dialogue in a moment of decolonisation and imperial decline. But *Twenty One*’s archival significance is by no means exhausted by its function as a referent or index for postcolonial cultural histories. Such archival ephemera possess a double ontology: they carry the indexical imprint of postcolonial histories, but they have at the same time a mobile and relational quality as signposts, or what we will term in our next section deictic markers (pointers) towards related objects or figures within historical ensembles.

In linguistic theory, deixis has the pragmatic (as opposed to semantic) function of establishing the temporal and spatial location of the enunciating subject. What the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen termed the deictic shifters establishing the situational context of the enunciating subject include pronouns (“I”, “we”, “they”), verb tenses, or adverbial phrases distinguishing “here” from “there”, “now” from “then”, “once upon a time”

from “in the future”, and so on. Such deictic markers are everywhere evident in the first issue of *Twenty One*. Shariffe repeatedly invokes the “we” of a Sudanese people in revolt, repudiating the “they” who are the supporters or fellow travellers of military junta, and inviting the implied “you” of the readerly community to stand in solidarity with artists and public intellectuals fighting for a democratic Sudan. The journal reveals itself thus as a historical object situated deictically within a mobile constellation of relations with local and transnational cultural actors.

Put differently: *Twenty One* is enmeshed within, and also helps direct and shape precisely that back-and-forth movement across sites, practices, human actors and ontological states which is for Fossati a founding condition of archival objects. In our next section however, though we continue the investigation of the archive’s deictic utterances that *Twenty One* prompts, we are concerned no longer with a print document, but a film—Shariffe’s unfinished *Of Dust and Rubies*—and with archival strategies to resituate this remarkable work within the lived relations of contemporary transnational film culture. Deixis will be understood now as a strategy that moves beyond the linguistic, encompassing both tactics within film language—the use of scale (the move from close-up to long shot), onscreen and offscreen looking relations, performance (what Béla Balázs termed the “mute pointing” of the actor’s body), or spectatorial address—and the performative strategies of archival screenings that resituate this neglected film in new spatiotemporal constellations (Balázs, 2010b: 39; Verhoeff, 2012: 572). Our interest centres on *Of Dust and Rubies*’ capacity to gesture beyond its own boundaries, resisting an indexical function as the finished trace or imprint of a postcolonial presence, and pointing instead, again like Fossati’s artefacts in transition, backwards to fractured pasts, laterally or transversally to contemporaneous events and actions, and forward to still unfolding artistic and political futures.

EXILE AND DIASPORA IN THE LIVING ARCHIVE: OF DUST AND RUBIES. LETTERS FROM ABROAD

Initiatives to reassemble, recontextualise and re-present the cinematic archive of Hussein Shariffe began already shortly after his death in 2005. Efforts centred on Shariffe’s third unfinished film project, the experimental *Of Dust and Rubies. Letters from Abroad*. First conceived in 1998 as a visual translation of selected poems of Sudanese exile, the film also registers experiences from Shariffe’s long sojourn in Egyptian exile from 1989 to 2005. Shariffe chose far-flung locations that evoked for him the mountain, urban, desert, plain and riverine environments of his Sudanese home. Like the images of water and sand that also populate Shariffe’s film, locations in *Of Dust and Rubies* serve as metaphorical overlays for the homeland from which he was dispossessed: Sudan is revisited in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria; the Red Sea to Cairo’s east; the White Desert to the west; then back towards the capital for explorations of the ornamental gardens of al-Qanatir. Shot over a five-year period between 2000 and 2005, the film subsists today only as a collection of rushes: cinematic refigurings of rhythms, images and tropes from poems by exiled compatriots including Abdel Rahim Abu Zikra (“Departure in the Night”), Mahjoub Sharif (“The Traveller”), and Ali Adbel Ghayoum (“Whirlpools of the 20th Century”), to name but a handful.

An archival document from June 2005—a funding proposal calling urgently for posthumous post-production support—is a first milestone in what was to become the long story of the film’s rescue from the oblivion of incompleteness. Shariffe had died earlier that year, but screening invitations remained open following the film’s acceptance for inclusion in festival programmes at Venice, Locarno and Fribourg. Shariffe’s daughter Eiman Hussein worked swiftly with the Cairo-based artist and curator Heba Farid to assemble

a task force under the umbrella of the film's production house, the Khartoum Sudanese Studies Center. The aim was to complete and premiere *Of Dust and Rubies*; stage an exhibition of Shariffe's paintings; and publish an accompanying volume. Collaborators included three remaining members of the *Of Dust and Rubies*' directorial team: assistant director, production designer, artist and former student of Shariffe Hassaan Ahmed Ali; the photographer Claude Stemmelin; and the production manager and former associate of Egyptian director Yousef Chahine, Mohamed Eissa.

Extant elements of *Of Dust and Rubies* included in 2005, according to Hussein and Farid's proposal, an estimated five hours of colour footage on 35mm and Betacam; stock images scheduled for inclusion alongside photographs of paintings by Shariffe; an original musical score; and a recording of Hussein Shariffe reading the film's nine poems, slated as one possible element in a sound montage that would augment each sequence of *Of Dust and Rubies* with music, song, chant and oral narration (Hussein and Farid, 2005). Hussein and Farid's ambitious timetable foresaw completion of a first edit by November 2005. Post-production, together with a book and exhibition, were to be finalized in time for a March 2006 premiere at the Fribourg International Film Festival (FIFF).

In the event, though FIFF 2006 did stage a brief homage to Shariffe, the tribute took place without a screening of the then still unfinished *Of Dust and Rubies*. It would indeed be fully twelve years before the film would find a public platform and a different life in workshops and screenings led from 2018 to 2022 by the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin. By the end of the 2010s, the Arsenal was known for pioneering experiments in what the institution itself dubs "archive work as a contemporary artistic and curatorial practice" (Schulte Strathaus, 2013). The term signals the core features of the Arsenal's response to a situation at the turn of the millennium in which it had few resources to ride the transition

from analogue to digital film. The Arsenal had begun life as a film club, later an independent art cinema, and, from 1971, instigator and programmer of the Berlinale International Forum, later also Forum Expanded. By the early 2010s, it had amassed a unique collection of some 10,000 international independent, experimental and political films. But the Arsenal had no archival mandate; prints were often degraded after long years serving the institution's principal mission of screening for public access; and funds were lacking for preservation, restoration and recirculating in new formats (Schulte Strathaus, 2013: 25).

Under the guidance of its co-director, the archivist and curator Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, the Arsenal met this apparently calamitous conjunction of scarce resources and archival decay with strategies for a radical reinvention of film archive practice. Since 2011, the Arsenal has staged successive large-scale projects for a living archive that sets film history in motion through creative collaborations with filmmakers, artists, performers, curators, activists, writers and scholars. Akin to other living archives that "marry the archival and the artistic" (Sabiescu, 2020: 63), the Arsenal's three signal projects to date—*Living Archive*, focusing on the Arsenal's own collection (2011-2013), *Visionary Archive*, a "collaborative translocal experiment" in African film history and practice (2013-2015), and the multi-institutional, transnational, interdisciplinary cultural heritage project *Archive außer sich* (Archives beyond/beside themselves, 2017-2021)—conceive the archive not as a site of storage that "arrests time, stops all motion", but a platform for collaborative creative practices that mobilize archival objects to produce new senses of a history on the move (Røssaak, 2010: 12).

The Arsenal's engagements with *On Dust and Rubies* are exemplary both of this commitment to living histories, and of the Arsenal archive's self-definition as a borderless space that reaches "beyond itself" (*außer sich*) into transnational

and global arenas. After an approach by Heba Farid, the Arsenal began archive and curatorial work on this and other Shariffe titles with a two-day workshop followed by a public presentation within the 2019 Berlinale Forum Expanded programme. Participants were Eiman Hussein and Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, alongside Talal Afifi, Director of the Sudan Film Factory, President of the Sudan Independent Film Festival, and a long-term associate of Hussein Shariffe (including as an actor in *Of Dust and Rubies*); the Egyptian filmmaker Tamer el Said; and Haytham el-Wardany, a writing and translator born in Cairo and living in Berlin. The five watched the rushes together and presented first thoughts in a public screening and panel discussion on the film's lived pasts and possible futures. The workshop later itself become peripatetic, following Shariffe's own transnational journeys in December 2020 with a mini-series of online screenings and panels organized within our own London-based research project, *Circulating Cinema. The Moving Image Archive as Anglo-German Contact Zone*. We detail in the final section of this essay our further hopes to bring the workshop to Khartoum, with preparatory steps already accomplished, including a summer 2021 student research project at King's College London, and an essay film presentation by student researchers Deem bin Jumayd, Niya Namfua and Mai Nguyen at the Arsenal's September 2021 archive festival, *Archival Assembly #1*.

On its virtual and analogue journeys since 2005 around new global destinations—Khartoum, Cairo, London, Berlin—the fragmentary constellation that is *Of Dust and Rubies* has created its own glistening dust trail of festival and events programmes, project proposals, databases, correspondence, photographs, new audio-visual documents including event recordings and a 2021 video essay. One such document returns us to questions of trace and deixis: to the capacity of *Of Dust and Rubies*, that is, to point, precisely in its incompleteness, towards modalities of exilic

movement embodied in Shariffe's transnationally dispersed cinematic archive.

The media scholar Nanna Verhoeff suggests a distinction in archival practice between the trace as a (sometimes nostalgically invested) "sign of pastness", and deixis as a function that "unhinges... pastness as an absolute", shifting attention to the "situatedness of [the image's] present", and reinventing the "pastness the trace carries" as "a bond with the present moment" (Verhoeff, 2012: 582). Verhoeff joins Senta Siewert in identifying in the performative practice of archival screening the potential for a re-experiencing of pastness as a "historical sensation" oriented to future time (Verhoeff, 2012: 583; Siewert, 2020: 108). The two scholars are by no means unusual in identifying in film as a time-based medium a capacity to revive dormant historical time through archive screening (Wood, 2010). Specifically pertinent to *Of Dust and Rubies* is however Verhoeff's understanding of live screening as a performance that moves archive film from a status as historical trace, to a state of temporal heterogeneity that binds present to past through "deixis....a destination-index, a trace towards the future" (Verhoeff, 2012: 583).

One film work generated since 2005 by the Arsenal's *Of Dust and Rubies* project illustrates well this capacity of archive screenings to unanchor and spatio-temporally reorient what Shariffe himself dubbed the "unhoused...energies" of his exilic film practice (Hussein and Farid, 2005: 5). The 2019 Berlinale panel on Shariffe's unfinished film was recorded on film, and the footage edited into a quietly reflective film essay by Tamer el Said, *Of Dust and Rubies: A Film on Suspension* (2020). The film intercuts presentations by panel participants in the 2019 workshop with silent sequences replaying extracts chosen by each speaker from Shariffe's original rushes. Each panelist is prompted by the extracts to reflect on memories and meanings unleashed as Shariffe's long dormant footage comes finally to new life. For Eiman Hussein, shots of marching feet, an uniden-

tified corpse, a skeleton in the sand recall an experience of exile that was endured personally by her father, but that remains pervasive in other global experiences of dislocation, exile, isolation and loss. Haytham el Wardany finds in Shariffe's rushes by contrast, not the gaze of an exile, but of an immigrant filmmaker writing "letters from abroad" (the film's subtitle). *Of Dust and Rubies*, observes el Wardany, reconfigures not only Sudanese but also Egyptian memories as it breaks free of Egyptian cinema's stock urban locations, ranging instead across desert and mountain landscapes, and prompting through its evocation of a Sudanese experience dispersed across Egypt's own most remote locations, what he terms in his contribution to the Berlinale panel new forms of "solidarity with other forms of life".

For Stefanie Schulte Strathaus similarly, the seascapes she selects for screening evoke transnational, indeed global meanderings. The sea as a place of unruly movement is a regular trope in Shariffe's film. It appears at times in turbulent close up, at times in long shot as the scene of action for figures of myth and fantasy: sirens, mermaids, mermen—queered, outlandish, other-worldly bodies that surge into the image foreground, disrupting "systematically secured" identities, suggests Schulte Strathaus, and aligned in that sense with Shariffe's own resistance to the nativist identity politics of authoritarian regimes.

Knowledge in Shariffe's film, Schulte Strathaus concludes, derives as it has in ancient mythologies since the Odyssey "from the experience of migration". Yet as Talal Afifi reminds the Berlinale audience, there is also a counter-movement in Shariffe's film: not Ulysses' circular journey, nor indeed any narrative arc suggesting a single return, but instead a scattering to dispersed havens within the mobile "counter-space" of a global Sudanese diaspora (Gilroy, 1995). Afifi's evocative commentary on his re-encounter with *Of Dust and Rubies* is worth reprising in some detail, since it shows more precisely the pertinence of

accounts of deixis in the archive for a film that enfolds the viewer, during what Francesco Casetti terms the "effectuated act" of its exhibition, in a shared experience of both present transnational mobilities, and diasporic pasts (Casetti, 1998: 44). Casetti's seminal account of deixis in film draws on the speech act theory of J.L. Austin to stress the relational nature of film spectatorship (Austin, 1962). Filmic enunciation, Casetti observes, mobilizes both the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimension of communication: the capacity of image and sound to assert, commit, declare, warn, direct attention (illocution), and through "perlocution", to effect change in the viewer through persuasion, inspiration, imagination, remembering and so on (Casetti, 1998: 44).

Exactly this pattern of deictic call and response is traced by Afifi in his description of his own viewing process. Though he is the film's lead actor, Afifi will wait almost two decades before seeing *Of Dust and Rubies* for the first time in the Arsenal's viewing room. The shock is immediate: the film, he tells the Berlinale audience, was "something I knew very well, but I was seeing it with my eyes for the very first time....myself, my face and features from years ago, my body". One reel (perhaps but not certainly Shariffe's first) begins *in medias res*: feet running on sand, Afifi's face in extreme close-up, two cuts that increase the shot distance as he looks steadily to camera. The look is ambivalent: it holds the viewer's attention first through the many inferences of immediacy that are characteristic of direct address—the suggestion of intimacy, honesty or authenticity, agency, stillness (Brown 2012). Afifi's look also has decolonial significance, engaging the viewer as it does, through looking back, in what Paula Amad terms a "visual riposte" to an order of Eurocentric and colonial vision that claims uninterrupted voyeuristic access to views of subordinate African bodies (Amad, 2013)⁷.

As Afifi looks to camera, he issues however not just a challenge, but also an invitation to fu-



Watching *Of Dust and Rubies* furnishes for Afifi, then, a memory of diaspora as a space of possibility: the location of an identity that is “humane”, he says, because it is revealed in this film through playful experiment and tentative movement across the imaginary landscape of a pluricultural, multi-ethnic and democratic Sudan. Afifi’s observations recall the British Caribbean scholar Stuart Hall in their recognition of diaspora as what Hall engagingly calls a “Humpty Dumpty phenomenon.” Humpty

Figure 3. Talal Afifi. Source: *Of Dust and Rubies. Letters from Abroad*

ture audiences, effecting a melding of past and present by engaging us as viewers, and Afifi himself in an unmediated encounter with the face of his own lost past. Direct address is also not the only source of a deixis that situates viewer and viewed in Afifi’s chosen extracts in an experience of simultaneous historical time. A shot of Afifi on horseback galloping across a desert landscape reengages him in a visceral experience of the pace and tempo of a young life in Cairo: a mix of “adventures, joys, sorrows,” and what he mischievously dubs “mysterious socialist groups.” Further facial close ups, meanwhile, are no mere mirrors for self-identification, but perform instead for Afifi a social function as an expressive ensemble whose movements and rhythms articulate collectively shared temporalities and “supra-individual” affects (Kappelhoff, 2016: 5-7; Balázs, 2010b: 109). Close shots of his own face, Afifi comments, “flooded me with memories, scenes and pictures”: a mnemonic stream that becomes a torrent as later images of his own walking body, or of children playing in Cairo streets and byways evoke for Afifi a diaspora of “four million Sudanese” escaping al Bashir’s Sudan, “scattered across the alleyways, nights, days, furnished apartments, transport and cafés....”

Dumpty tells a story, Hall reminds his readers, of a shattered body that “can never be put back together again” (Hall and Schwarz, 2017: 199). Such irreversible shattering is the fate of diasporas; yet for Hall, as for Afifi, this violent dissemination of bodies and cultures constitutes the diasporic condition also as a site of resistance: the source of a challenge to the “deadly, pathological impulses” fuelling autocratic fantasies of the “elimination of difference”; an “emergent space of enquiry” that sustains (and herein lies the affinity between diaspora and the formal operations of filmic deixis) a “double consciousness” of “being both here and there”; and the destination-image for a future that embraces the “double inscriptions” of metropole and colony, centre and periphery, national and transnational belonging (Hall and Schwarz, 2017:140-143).).

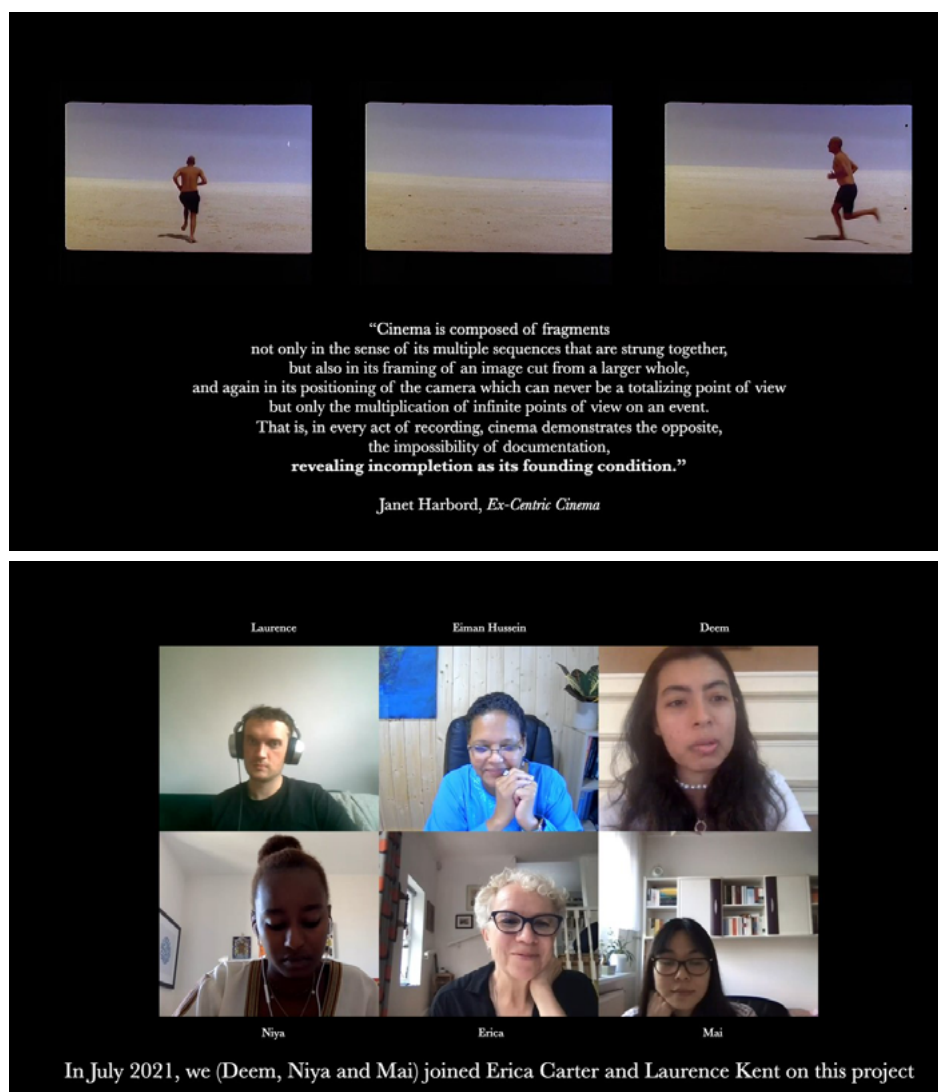
UNFINISHED FILM, UNCERTAIN ARCHIVE

Hall reaches for a filmic analogy to describe what he finally summarises as a mode of “diasporic thought” whose “lifeblood” is montage (Hall and Schwarz, 2017: 177). As an unfinished film, however, *Of Dust and Rubies* suggests the rather different, and perhaps more uncertain understanding

of film in its relation to diasporic thinking with which we now conclude.

Pivotal to the experience of watching unedited rushes is, *contra* Hall, precisely the absence of purposive montage. No sealed connections exist between shots, sequences, times and spaces, sound and image; the film has no sequential logic; the silence that fills the screen evokes the absent aural presences of music, street noise, voices, ocean waves, the rustling wind. Filmmaker Tamer El Said speaks in the 2019 Berlinale panel of the ethical questions raised by exposure of a work in such unfinished form. Is this, he asks, too intimate a revelation of the filmmaker in his fragility and nakedness? Or does the film's unfinished state mirror Shariffe's approach to film itself as a medium in flux? Does it merely evoke more keenly an approach to cinema as what Eiman Hussein calls Shariffe's modernist "tapestry" of image, music, painting, poetry, sound, movement, noise? Does it highlight more sharply his films' conditions of emergence in states of displacement; does it make manifest in generative ways the "infinity of tactics" mobilized, suggests Shariffe's anthropologist friend and collaborator, Sondra Hale, by artists experimenting in extraterritorial locations with new relationships to a sense of home (Hale, 1996)?

These questions of the ethics, aesthetics and historicity of the unfinished film as one amongst many archival fragments from Shariffe's deterritorialized life are addressed in the two further initiatives to which we now finally turn. In summer 2021, funding was granted by King's College London for a student research project on Shariffe's archive. Deem bin Jumayd, Niya Namfua and Mai Nguyen were recruited to help assemble and



Figures 4 and 5. Source: *Towards a Cinema of the Incomplete: A Video Essay on Hussein Shariffe's Of Dust and Rubies*

archive the digital artefacts amassed during our twelve months of previous research on Shariffe. At what became, despite pandemic conditions, an exhilarating live event, the Arsenal's September 2021 *Archival assembly #1* in Berlin, bin Jumayd, Namfua and Nguyen presented their collaborative *Towards a Cinema of the Incomplete: A Video Essay on Hussein Shariffe's Of Dust and Rubies*.

The essay intercuts fragments from *Of Dust and Rubies* with citations from the film's poem cycle, other archive documents, and recorded conversations amongst the project group. Its title

gestures to reflections from the film scholar Janet Harbord that are quoted in an opening montage. In her book *Ex-Centric Cinema*, Harbord draws on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben to explore films resonant of “[a]n un-lived history, that is... not confined to a parallel track or the discrete margins of existence but operates forcefully in giving contour to the life that is lived, to the cinema that has come to be”. In Harbord’s account, the “cinema that we have” appears as a social machine or *dispositif* framed by the container logic of narrative or genre conventions, and by the industrial strictures of copyright law, global production and market norms (Harbord, 2016: 2). Those normative arrangements, suggests Harbord, banish to the realm of the “ex-centric” films by amateur, experimental and otherwise “unauthorized” practitioners of the past. Of unfinished films, she suggests that these are by contrast exemplary of an unauthorized shadow that haunts the object we call cinema, and whose fragmentary condition reveals an ontological feature that is in fact immanent to the film medium. Harbord continues:

Cinema is composed of fragments not only in the sense of its multiple sequences that are strung together, but also in its framing of an image cut from a larger whole, and again in its positioning of the camera which can never be a totalizing point of view but only the multiplication of infinite points of view on an event. That is, in every act of recording, cinema demonstrates the...impossibility of documentation, revealing incompleteness as its founding condition (Harbord, 2016: 47).

Framing *Towards a Cinema of the Incomplete* with this citation from Harbord, Bin Jumayd, Namfua and Nguyen explore in their essay the quotation’s pertinence to archive work on Shariffe’s *Of Dust and Rubies*. The essay’s slow pace enables close attention to what Harbord might term Shariffe’s ‘unauthorized’ experimental aesthetic. “I see myself essentially as a painter,” wrote Shariffe, “but I also come to life as a filmmaker” (Khalid, 2020). This intermedial commitment is visible

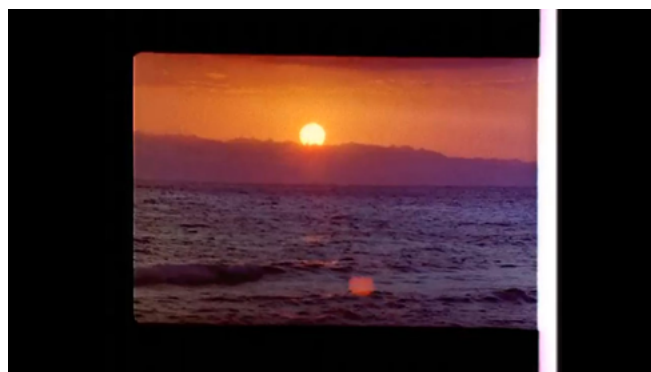


Figure 5. Source: *Of Dust and Rubies: Letters from Abroad*

in painterly images of the sea that blur into abstract patterns of reflections and hidden colours; or camera tilts upward to a setting sun, vibrant lens flares dancing on the image surface as Shariffe searches for the perfect contingent effect of light. While these passages reveal *Of Dust and Rubies* as structured around the interlinked visual logics of modernist collage and abstraction, and arabesque mosaic, repetition, scrolling and intersecting line, the film’s debt to lyric poetry is visible in travelling shots and montage sequences whose rhythms mimic the cadences of its poetic antecedents. The “grassy meadow of pomegranates/With ripe branches, moist, joyful” of poet Mohammed el Mekki Ibrahim’s “My People” thus becomes in Shariffe’s rendering a playful montage of fruit trees whose “branches and leaves tremble in the breeze and glitter when touched by the light”; the “suns that have fallen” in Mohammed al Fatory’s lament for a tyrannised people, “Sacred Dust”, assumes visual form meanwhile as a “shivering sea”, with circles of light “resembling quivering suns” (Shariffe, n.d)⁸.

Philosophically then, Shariffe’s film appears in *Towards a Cinema of the Incomplete* as aligned with the “aesthetic of open-endedness” that the unfinished film embodies (Harbord, 2016: 25). The questions posed in our project of the ethics and politics of archive work with *Of Dust and Rubies* are by contrast less satisfactorily addressed in Harbord’s account. ‘Ex-centric’ cinema is for Har-

bord an untimely phenomenon that, while it exhibits a potential to grasp realisable futures, also sustains in what she calls its “impotentiality”—its refusal of absorption within the cinematic machine—a “resistance” to immediate imperatives “to be productive, compliant and identifiable as subjects within a system” (Harbord, 2016: 25).

Harbord’s observations have clear purchase for the minor forms that are the “underbelly” of commercial cinema cultures in the Global North (Harbord, 2016: 25). They have a more troubling resonance in postcolonial or exile cinemas caught in too many instances between contemporary states of industrial fragmentation, economic precarity and violent dispossession, and in the case of historical film, decay, dispersal and loss. The dialectic of absorption and expulsion that Harbord identifies in western cinema cultures shapes differently independent cinemas of the South that emerge from their inception—and this most poignantly, in the context of this current article, in contemporary Sudan—into contexts of infrastructural fragility, artistic compromise, and political violence. Harbord’s observations on the archive, too, downplay the ambivalences of the Foucauldian account on which she draws: so there is little in her book on what Foucault terms the archive’s heterotopic quality—the state of joyful disorder in the archive that fosters unforeseen kinships amongst artefacts and bodies—and arguably too much on the archive’s disciplinary functions: its arrest of historical time, its spatial closure as a “scrap heap” that suspends film in a state of unbelonging and loss (Harbord, 2016: 25).

We hope to have shown by contrast in this article the capacity of archive work to deploy exactly that “infinity of tactics” which is for Sondra Hale the hallmark of exilic practice amongst artists “no longer bound by the “homeland”,...nourished by the metaphor of return” and “freed up” to engage, as does Shariffe in *Of Dust and Rubies*, with the exilic hauntings, but also the cultural possibilities of new locales (Hale, 1996: 2). We

have presented a range of projects to repossess and reanimate artefacts “on suspension” in Shariffe’s archive, restoring their quality as objects in spatio-temporal transition that gesture (“deictically”, we have proposed) backwards to submerged pasts, sideways to unorthodox elective affinities, and forward to future pasts. Our work continues from early 2022 with development work on a bilingual Arabic-English AtoM (Access to Memory) open-source archive combining artefacts from our existing digital repository, Hussein Shariffe’s family archive, and newly collected or donated materials. Our plans for an analogue repository allowing public access to Shariffe’s physical archive for audiences, researchers and practitioners in the Northeast Africa region remain, like Shariffe’s films, “on suspension”. In what remains at the time of writing a moment of agonising political turbulence in Sudan, we glimpse both in Shariffe’s films, and in the networks of solidarity and friendship generated by work on his archive, a resource nonetheless for the cultural futures to which Shariffe was dedicated, and that endure in his still emergent archive-in-motion. ■

NOTES

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1 Now the National Film and Television School, following renaming in 1982.

- 2 See also, Dagmar Brunow on migrant archives and women's archive (Brunow, 2017).
- 3 Cf. Ozgur Cicek on Kurdish cinema as that without national territory (Cicek, 2016)
- 4 See also, (Woodward, 2003: 2-13); (Mahmoud, 2018: 118).
- 5 Cf. Fossati, 2018
- 6 Cf. Brunow on remediation (Brunow, 2017)
- 7 See also, Fanon, 1994
- 8 Thank you to Mai Ngyuen for her "Of Dust and Rubies, Shot List" (2021)

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AN INFINITY OF TACTICS. HUSSEIN SHARIFFE'S ARCHIVE IN MOTION

Abstract

The filmmaker, artist and poet Hussein Shariffe died in Egyptian exile in 2005. This article centres on attempts since that date to retrieve, archive, and recirculate his extant film works. It presents a film artist whose oeuvre is at once singular in its visual and aural language, resonant of specifically Sudanese histories of an exile and diaspora cinema of mobility, and productive of an archive practice whose point of departure is the very transience of its most cherished objects. We discuss in this context the state of incompleteness in which many of his films remain suspended, and analyse curatorial approaches that unlock the potential of such unfinished works to unlock the unrealised potentials of Shariffe's dispersed and exilic archive. We further outline our plans for an open source archive of Shariffe's film oeuvre. That archive remains under construction at the time of writing—so this article itself, analogously to Shariffe's unfinished films, remains in a state of incompleteness, drawing what must be for now only interim conclusions, but pointing towards a future of creative uncertainty for his film oeuvre, with all the fears and hopes that such fragile futurity holds.

Key words

Hussein Shariffe; Living archive; Unfinished film; Deixis; Sudanese film; Exile; Diaspora.

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UNA INFINIDAD DE TÁCTICAS. EL ARCHIVO EN MOVIMIENTO DE HUSSEIN SHARIFFE

Resumen

El cineasta, artista y poeta Hussein Shariffe murió en el exilio en Egipto en 2005. El presente artículo se centra en los intentos realizados desde entonces por reunir, archivar y volver a poner en circulación las obras cinematográficas que aún se conservan de él. Presenta a un artista cinematográfico cuya obra destaca por emplear un lenguaje audiovisual particular, remitir a historias específicamente sudanesas de un cine de movilidad del exilio y la diáspora y generar una práctica de archivo cuyo punto de partida es la propia transitoriedad de sus objetos más preciados. En ese contexto, repasamos el estado inacabado en el que muchas de sus películas permanecen suspendidas, y analizamos perspectivas curatoriales que dan rienda suelta al potencial que esas obras inacabadas tienen para, a su vez, dar rienda suelta a los potenciales del archivo disgregado de exilio de Shariffe. Más adelante resumimos nuestro plan de creación de un archivo abierto de la obra cinematográfica de Shariffe. Durante la redacción de este artículo, el archivo sigue en construcción, de modo que este mismo artículo, de forma análoga a las películas inacabadas de Shariffe, permanece en estado inacabado, extrayendo lo que por ahora deben ser tan sólo conclusiones provisionales, pero apuntando a un futuro de incertidumbre creativa para su obra cinematográfica, con todos los temores y esperanzas que alberga un futuro tan frágil.

Palabras clave

Hussein Shariffe; archivo viviente; película inacabada; deixis; cine sudanés; exilio; diáspora.

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