

■
KINOPOLITICS

**Abiba
Coulibaly**
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Gail Lewis said she's just interested in 'what's happening at the bus stop,' and I realise this best encapsulates what compels me too. My father is a bus driver and all things related to mobility obsess me because I often feel my being is defined by transit.

In a week's time I will turn the back of a 322 bus stop/the underbelly of a staircase leading up to the railway into a cinema on Atlantic Road. This will materialise stories from every shore of its pelagic namesake. We'll project *The Cloud Capped Star*, *The People's Account*, *Rapt*, and films by Férid Boughedir and early Sudanese Film Unit. Sometimes we watch a light show of suspended dust because the sun's glare is too strong, eclipsing whatever we're supposed to be perceiving. Sound is projected further than image, and we're heard before we're seen. There is *Darija* and *Misery Business*, Lauryn Hill reading *Concerning Violence*; each acting as flames to very different species of moths. There are needles and iced vanilla matcha lattes.

People end up sleeping in the cinema and Jack makes sure to remind me I'm in his bedroom during a screening.

The council asks us to build a cinema but also asks what we're going to do about 'anti-social behaviour' and we respond with platitudes and telepathic disbelief and ire.

Sometimes I get really annoyed at the people who shit and beg there. Sometimes I spot a crush and avoid them. Sometimes when I'm alone – caught by surprise barely balancing on a bike rack trying to fasten the screen to the scaffolding – I can't decide who is threatening who. Then, I realise there's no hierarchy to our vulnerabilities and remember some words Shon Faye wrote about Lewisham:

*I am not merely made afraid by people who seem out of their minds but by a society where, if such people do become violent, there would be no recourse to help me that won't harm them.*¹

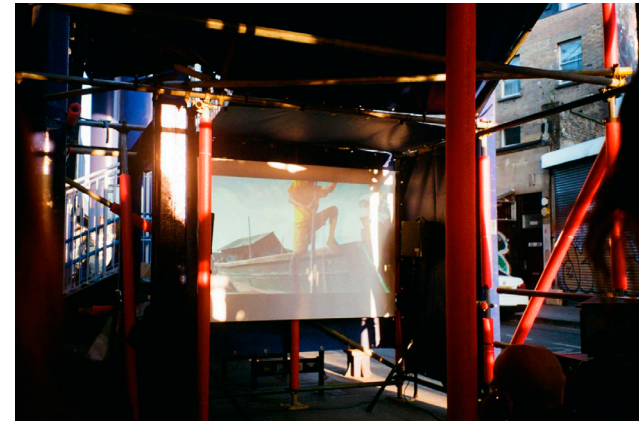
We watch the same story, with the same baddie, play out in the Punjab and Harlem. There's a plantation in a boat inside a Citroën factory on the edge of Paris, and Ashanti performing on a beach in Goa for a reinterpretation of an Austen novel.

¹ [compassion](#) in *Idle Thoughts* by Shon Faye (September 2023)

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We made it so any and everybody could watch these stories yet some friends kindly remind me not everyone wants to, or should, access these images and I spiral a little thinking about misplaced or excessive accessibility. In our efforts to remove physical and financial barriers to sharing stories, democratising cultural access and making public a range of voices and truths, pain and shame and depravity and darkness become two sides of the shame coin. Things can fall into the wrong hands but perhaps also upon the wrong eyes, and when art is in the public domain some of our worst bits are too.

Far more often than not, sitting at that bus stop feels like communion, the visibility of the images in motion feel generative, and the presence of others feels affirming. Even so, to be accessible is to be open, but to be open also leaves both the image being projected and the audience members absorbing it exposed.



Whereas reflection suggests a direct and loyal mirroring, refraction calls to mind distortion and diversion from likeness. A trickster image: what should be reflected taking on a life of its own.

Which one – reflection or refraction – lens-based technologies allow for is often disputed and, as someone working with image in the diaspora, this fork in the road is always at the forefront of my mind.

For some, it is a malevolent, larcenous device, and the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

For me it's:



Others manage to take these sullied tools and alchemise them, pushing their function beyond a mirror to a portal.

*Me, myself, personally,
I don't look for*

*my reflection in no
muddy water, you know?*

– Yellow Mary

*If an object is placed
between two mirrors,*

*inclined at right angles, an
image is formed in each mirror.*

*Then, these mirror
images are in turn*

reflected in the other mirror,

*forming the appearance of four,
symmetrically-shaped objects.*

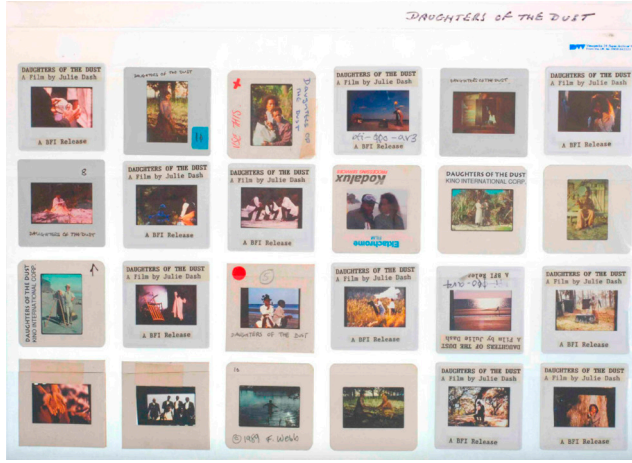
*Oh, I think it's just
a wonderful discovery.*

*It's beauty,
simplicity, and science*

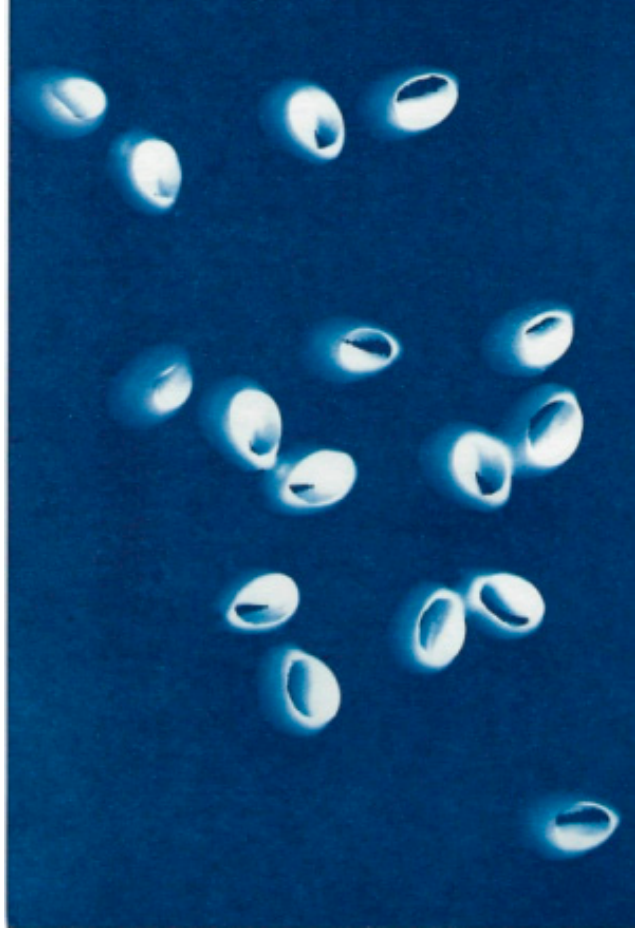
all rolled into one small tube.


(women laughing)

– Mr Snead



Once, I tried to look for ways around it. I watched Laurence Attalis' *La trilogie des amours: Baobab* and cast shells, immortalising jubeero – a Mandé divination ritual – via cyanotype, as an experiment in other ways of committing something precious to image.






Other times I have no control over, or foresight into, how something hereditary is mediated. It's the second week of 2015 and my surname is being catapulted into global notoriety on screens across the world. A brimming genealogical place marker is now an omen. In the 24-hour news cycle I'm seeing an avatar of how others are about to see me. I'm thinking about how I don't really look like a terrorist, do I? I'm thinking about how the shift from a war on drugs to a war on terror has meant that the Western world's public enemy number one has somewhat shifted from the Black man to the Muslim man, but some of us sit in between. And what does it mean to pass as an infidel? I'm reminded of the pang at the beginning of summer when I'm about to take an exam and the invigilator has to quip, "Oh that's unfortunate" after asking my name.

It's 1998 but Abderrahmane Sissako has been asked to imagine that it's the new millennium already. The scene described next pulls from his 1998 film *La vie sur terre*.

Phone lines connect Segou to Bamako and Paris. My name registers and I'm seeing an avatar

of how others have been seeing me: one of many descended from the brothers who were fleeing until they got to the banks of the River Niger. There, they befriended a catfish and rode on the back of it, or no – did it turn itself into a bridge? Either way, somehow they were able to traverse it and found an empire, but not that kind of empire. And *kulu* means boat. And *bali* is a negation. And now we give thanks by not eating catfish.

Beautiful with the characteristic arrogance of the Kulibaly, whose totem was the mpolio fish. - Segou: A Novel (1984) Maryse Condé





In times of doubt, I try to think of who mobilises tools of reflection best.

It's 1982 and Israel invades Lebanon, destroying and looting the archives of the PLO Film Unit, an arm of the Palestinian Liberation Organization dedicated to utilising cinema as a revolutionary tool in their struggle. The Israeli military still controls access to this archive whose state and fate remain undisclosed and unavailable to Palestinians for viewing. In 2004, a young Palestinian filmmaker, Azza El-Hassan, documented her meticulous and surreal search for them. She concludes:



It's 1934 and Pierre Laval identifies the militant potential and threat of cinema, deciding all those subject to colonial rule in France's possessions in Sub-Saharan Africa are better off without the right to film; a decree is duly passed. In the decade to follow he will become a Nazi collaborator (during that bit in wartime history that France likes to gloss over). Another decade or so later, Mamadou Touré defies the decree becoming one of the first Black Africans to make a film, the famed *Mouramani*, and of course France ends up with his archives (as they do many things that are not theirs to covet) and, eventually, let his reels rot.

In 2022, a young Guinean filmmaker, Thierno Souleymane Diallo, begins an illusive quest for them. He learnt some people have told themselves:



It's the early 70's and a factory worker from Mali called Bouba Touré picks up a camera. He's exasperated by xenophobia in France and galvanised by the droughts affecting his native Sahel. He documents Black-led organising around civil rights and militant permaculture traversing continents and millennia.



He amasses 80,000 negatives and stores them in a
bedsit until the carpet disappears, passing on be-
fore something is made of them. But it's OK because:



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I think about my father and the bus stop again. I have a favourite bus stop that conjures many beginnings, yet no ends, as I started life there and it's continued to play on loop. I went home on the 109 at 6 hours old, shahada-whispered and Streatham-bound. Nothing is more familiar than a London skyline made smudgy by condensation on the top deck. I went home on the 109 at 6 hours old because no taxi would stop for Mr Coulibaly and I think about how we get to where we're going, about how transnational mobility regimes manifest in localised urban transit systems.² Now it's he who drives a bus through Westminster and Parliament Hill, Clerkenwell and Bloomsbury, across Battersea Bridge.

² see "Chapter 3 Beyond Automobility and Transport Justice" in *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* by Mimi Sheller (2018)



I get a bit obsessed with the 12 cameras on every bus, omnisciently capturing us while TfL lets us know:

We are the Highway Authority for London's red routes. You need to get permission from us before you start to film or photograph on our network. This is true for everyone, no matter what subject is being filmed, the equipment being used, or size of crew.

And when an adult-man-in-a-bad-costume³ does an awful thing and gets certain demographics to understand the urgency of conversations around defunding and abolition, and people are trawling through my local park looking for the worst, it's a bus that does the forensics. It's offering answers just as wanted as they are unwanted. Some friends named a film night *Are We There Yet*, and say they'll be using moving image to make their way. I think about how TfL's surveillance network monopoly makes me feel. In motion, cyclical scenes and familiar imagery unfold in repeat loops, using moving image as a vehicle, conjuring beginnings with no ends. What isn't going on at the bus stop?

³ see Meera Shakti Osborne, *Adult-men-in-bad-costumes-with-dogs harassing children* (2024)





Credits

Still credit: Daniella Valz Gen & Tobi Adebajo

Photo credit: Sandra Liemantoro

Bye Bye Africa (1999) dir. Mahamat Saleh Haroun

Daughters of the Dust [contact sheet] (1991) Julie Dash

Stills: *Trilogie des amours: Baobab* (2004) Laurence Attali
cyanotype (2021) Abiba Coulibaly

BFMTV January 2015

La vie sur terre (1998) Abderrahmane Sissako

Bouba Touré, date unknown, courtesy of Archives Seine-Saint-Denis

Kings and Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Image (2004)

Azza Hassan

The Cemetery of Cinema (2023) Thierno Souleymane Diallo

Crossing Voices (2022) Bouba Touré and Raphaël Grisey

Bouba Touré, 58 rue Trousseau, Paris, France (2008) by

Bouba Touré and Raphaël Grisey

CCTV from London bus showing final sighting of Sarah

Everard March 2021

The Horse in Motion (1878) Eadweard Muybridge, chronophotograph

TfL CCTV camera Westminster Bridge/South August 2024

