


**Please cite the Published Version**

Trafi-Prats, Laura  (2024) Fugitive study at university: moving beyond neoliberal affect through aesthetic experimentation with space-times. International Journal of Art and Design Education. ISSN 0260-9991

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12515>

**Publisher:** Wiley

**Version:** Published Version

**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/634836/>

**Usage rights:**  [Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

**Additional Information:** This is an open access article which first appeared in International Journal of Art and Design Education

**Enquiries:**

If you have questions about this document, contact [openresearch@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:openresearch@mmu.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

# Fugitive Study at University: Moving Beyond Neoliberal Affect Through Aesthetic Experimentation with Space-Times

Laura Trafí-Prats 

## Abstract

The article proposes a relational pedagogy centred on *study*, to contest the affective condition of the present and how it shapes narratives of young people being disengaged and with a lack of future. In doing so, it draws from affect theory and black radical studies to outline a more complex approach to affect in university experience. It mobilises the concept of *study*, advanced by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten in their book *The Undercommons*, to direct attention to less linear and transparent space-times where *study*, a practice of affecting and being affected by what others do to you and what you do with it, exceeds the frameworks of the university. Further to this, the article connects study and fugitivity to what Moten calls an *aesthetics of the break* practiced across black studies. In doing so, it links affect to complex spatial-temporal relationalities that emerge from sensuous experimentation and creative speculation, which engage both in university and its escape. These ideas are explored through a participatory study with university students in Manchester, UK called *Sensing the Black Outdoors*. I present the findings derived from radical sensory-spatial experiments, which led to: (a) visual encounters centred in not looking away and staying with the material presence of blackness and (b) the development of collective experiments with sensory media for feeling and imagining alternative experiences of space and time in the city.

## Keywords

affect, aesthetic pedagogy, black studies, fugitivity, study

---

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial](#) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

[T]o feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you. Harney & Moten (2013, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, p. 98)

In England, feelings of isolation and neglect haunt a whole generation of young people. Some claim that largely ungraspable events like climate change, war, migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the uncertainty for a future (Rousell & Chan 2022; Zembylas 2023). While others interpret the sense of dread as an outcome of the systematic destruction of networks central to young people's lives through two decades of austerity (Horton 2016). The university is one of the places where youth have clearly manifested disenchantment, with large numbers of young people opting out from university, and with black and minority students feeling that the university does not represent their identities, histories, and desires. Although the government's response has centred on the psychologisation of young people, portraying their lack of engagement in education as a risk for their lives, my interest is in entertaining more complex understandings of what Berlant (2013) calls the "crisis ordinariness" (p. 10), where people are "forced to adapt to unfolding change" (p. 13).

In response to this, in this article, I explore the potential of pedagogies that are open to grapple with the affective condition of the present seeking to bring up presents and futures that are less disciplined and more open (Zembylas 2023). I suggest that through *study* (Harney & Moten 2013) young people (with adults) create alternative space-times in which life can be experienced beyond the human-as-capital, or beyond models of planning and curriculum reduced to serve and be exploited by the capitalist system (see also, Atkinson 2022). My process to do this takes me into a journey through affect theory and black studies. I consider ways in which these fields have crafted theory, experiments and works of art that in-form how to sense, see and imagine time and space in more dimensional and layered ways beyond the concepts of temporal progression and spatial transparency on which the experience of being at university seems dependent.

In the second half of the article, I further examine these ideas through the study *Sensing the Black Outdoors* (March 2021–June 2022), which pursued: (1) to explore the potential for developing spatial and environmental research in the city of Manchester at the intersections of black, youth, and art studies and (2) to engage a group of young people in the co-creation of and experimentation with aesthetic techniques connected to sensing and imagining space and time in more layered ways.

## The cruel optimism of being at university

In this first section, I seek to complicate the current narrative of young people being disengaged from education by approaching such an event through a perspective informed by affect studies and with particular attention to the work of cultural studies scholar Berlant (2013). For Berlant, affect concerns the processes and effects of how bodies encounter and are impacted by the force of the world. Thinking about affect in the context of neoliberal times, Berlant (2013) describes the contemporary sensorium as one expressing a kind of *cruel optimism*. Cruel optimism emerges from "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of

possibility whose realisation is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic" (p. 24).

Applying the idea of cruel optimism to understand young people's relation with the university is useful. It places the focus on the ways by which the university mobilises imaginaries that are grounded on conditions of possibility, such as the notion that education improves life chances. It also helps us imagine young people in multi-dimensional ways. Indeed, cruel optimism recognises young people as being part of a generation that has grown up experiencing extreme austerity, systemic precarity and the prospect of planetary extinction, and as such knowing that the fulfilment of any good life promise is not guaranteed. Yet, the optimism in such cruelty is that young people continue attaching themselves to university as the object that represents the good life, because, as Berlant (2013) explains, the thought of not being close to it "defeats the capacity of any hope" (p. 24).

Thus, cruel optimism reveals that the experience of being at university is of a mixed affective nature that simultaneously expresses hope, attrition, and other contradictory feelings. Recent work in education studies shows that attending to such affective complexities is important. Zembylas (2023) has noted that the political role of pedagogy today is to recognise the affective dimensions of capitalism and power. This involves creating educational sites that contest affects that seek to flatten and provincialise identity by experimenting with multiple affective conditions that diversify life in radical and unexpected ways (also see, Ivinson & Renold 2022; O'Donnell 2022; Trafi-Prats & de Freitas 2024).

## University and fugitivity

In this section, I introduce Harney and Moten's (2013) concepts of university, study and fugitivity, developed in their book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, to propose a more complex vision of the affective experience of studying at university, which encompasses both the institution and its escape (fugitivity). *The Undercommons* begins with problematising the notion of the university as *enclosure*, a spatiality that naturalises theft, conquest, and occupation since university buildings and other university facilities grab land away from historic communities disturbing their networks of relation and their right to the city. At the same time, university's concern on objective knowledge and a logistics of efficiency, accountability, and responsibility leaves practically no room for the university to engage with alternative communal projects and ideas. As such, Harney and Moten (2013) affirm that the university as an enclosure "administers away the world" (p. 36, emphasis added) from other collective endeavours not just by taking away space from the community, but also by removing affect from bodies. The neo-liberal university demands from bodies to show readiness (readiness to learn, to have a career, to be future ready), which is the opposite of having "a kind of an openness to being affected by others, dispossessed and possessed by others" (Harney & Moten 2013, p. 116). It is also contrary to an understanding of learning as embodied, sensuous, collective, and spatial.

Their intervention is to counterpose *study* to the university. *Study* is an affective sociality that *insists* in the world's openness and indeterminacy, "where people sort of take turns doing things for each other or for the others" (Harney & Moten 2013, p. 189). Thus, Harney and Moten (2013) approach study as something that unfolds in other spaces, such as the underground and interstices of the

university. Those who practice study are the *university undercommons*, made of the subterranean, anomalous, unprofessional, feminist, queer, carnivalesque knowledges pushed to the margins by university planning. Think of the program closures, reduced offers, and early retirements in the humanities, black studies, diaspora literatures, queer poetry, large art formats, Marxist and feminist theories, teacher education to name a few, and how they are further and further pushed outside the university, under-programmed, under-funded, under-commoned.

Through the adjective “fugitive” in *fugitive study*, Harney and Moten (2013) assert that such knowledges and their associated practices “exceed and by exceeding escape ...[they] are always at war, always in hiding” (p. 30). Fugitive study exists as part of the university but cannot be recognised by its logistics, frameworks, techniques, and as a result it cannot be captured by its planning. Harney and Moten (2013), see the university as a space that is both an enclosure and its escape, planning and study, university and fugitivity. In doing so, they deploy a picture of the university that resonates with the contradictory affects associated to cruel optimism (Berlant 2013). This is so, because in the university of the undercommons planning and logistics seek to remove the possibility that different bodies, like those of students, teachers, mentors affect one another. And yet, the *undercommons* envision maroon, improvisational, and creative fugitive projects of study happening inside the university quietly, almost unperceivably.

## An aesthetics of multiple space-times

In this section, I address how an understanding of space as immanent and fluid is key to think university study and fugitivity as a complexly interrelated space-time. I do this by drawing from the field of black spatial and aesthetic theory, which proposes that in spaces of enclosure and subjugation, black bodies invent and improvise minor fugitive movements of escape (McKittrick 2006; Harney & Moten 2013; Hartman 2019, 2023). Fugitivity has been characterised aesthetically as a sonic dimension (Weheliye 2005), manifested through a quiet sensitivity (Camp 2017) or presented as an expression of abandonment (Moten 2018). In the performative context of the university, such expressions could be likely considered manifestations of disengagement.

Thus, black studies scholars cultivate aesthetic and narrative forms that imagine lived experience through alternative registers. For instance, historian Sadiya Hartman (2023) explores the large format installations of artist Torkawase Dyson noting their disproportionate, monumental, weighty and obscure shapes as evocative of spaces of control and subjugation such as the ship, the hold and the cell. Yet, these same forms incorporate sumptuous reflective and textured surfaces, whose effect is also to multiply blackness, disactivate perspectivism and objectivity and evoke depth, beauty and spirituality. Their rich materiality radiates alternative spaces and times, in the shape of shadows, reflections and mirroring effects. Responding to Dyson’s so-called megaforms, Hartman asks questions such as ‘Is it possible to take flight inside the enclosure, or must every escape or exodus also promise its destruction? Is it conceivable to exist within the uninhabitable?’ (Hartman 2023, 11). Both artworks and questions grapple with the complicated histories and technologies connected to what Hartman calls the ongoing aftermath of slavery as made of complex affective compositions. They propose that the lived

experience of subjection and fugitivity are not opposite, but shaped by the same event in nonlinear, layered, speculative space-times.

Dyson's example also demonstrates black studies engagement in the theorisation of aesthetic practices that highlight the improvisatory potential of embodied performances such as moving, looking, dwelling and reading. Black scholars pay attention to how vernacular aesthetics (Camp 2017; Hartman 2019), the art of radical artists such as Adrian Piper (Moten 2013), Andrew Jafa (Camp 2021), the fictional narratives of Toni Morrison (McKittrick 2006) and Octavia Butler (Brown 2021) as well as the poetry of Audre Lorde (Quashie 2021) to mention some, engage in an *aesthetics of the break*, which Moten (2013) connects to the 'black radical tradition' (p. 1). With this concept, Moten refers to the ways black improvisation opens and recasts space and temporality by always relaying, expanding, changing one form into another, much of Moten's attention is on sound, more especially jazz.

Thus, my interest in black studies seeks to foreground the potential of the field to envision pedagogies that radically recognise the sensorium as central to being, becoming and knowing. Pedagogical spaces engaged in concepts and practices inspired by black studies carry the potential to approach the feelings experienced by contemporary youth as not only personal, but collective, ecological, and durationally formed in spatial experiences that give certain shapes to the body, anticipate certain dwellings and are felt in the flesh. Conjuring unhabitual sensory registers keeps space open, superseding notions of space-time grounded on black alienation and giving a speculative orientation to thinking. For instance, Brown (2021) sees in the Afrofuturist practices of writer Octavia Butler and musician Sun Ra a potential to move audiences beyond the present condition and inhabit a "different spatio-temporality that is not discoverable along the human timeline" (p. 8). Brown defends the role of radical aesthetic practices in giving form to temporalities in which the future becomes open-ended, relying on unknown and unexpected qualities. Radical aesthetic experiments redirect thinking and action towards forms of expression and elaboration that dwell in the cracks of what appear as inescapable educational frameworks (Atkinson 2022). Thus, they bring the possibility of understanding study and fugitivity as always and already happening in the space-times of the university.

## Hulme and Moss Side

In this section, I introduce the context that informed the *Sensing the Black Outdoors Study* which engaged a group of six students and two staff members at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in an immersive exploration of the neighbourhoods of Hulme and Moss Side through aesthetic and spatial experiments inspired in black studies.

Hulme and Moss Side are geographically connected to the two main universities situated in Manchester's city centre, MMU and the University of Manchester (UM). They have historically been the gateway into the city for different communities in the diaspora. Afro-Caribbeans, who arrived after the 1950s animated by the efforts of rebuilding and modernising England after Second World War, settled in these two neighbourhoods, and developed tight communities that have highly influenced the city's rich urban cultures.

However, urban reforms directed to these two neighbourhoods started as early as the mid 1960s and have prolonged until today with large new blocks of student apartments appearing year after year. This ongoing climate of urban transformation has effectively erased key community enclaves, projects, and histories, connected with what Gilroy (1987) described as *black expression*. With the concept of black expression, Gilroy referred to everyday practices, predominantly in art and music, that syncretised cultural and material influences from the Caribbean, America, Europe, Britain, and Africa in collective lifeforms. Such lifeforms were constitutive of the urban fabric of Hulme and Moss Side in the 1980s. Known regionally and nationally as places marked by social and economic disadvantage, these two neighbourhoods also attracted global flows of cultural exchange, and artistic experimentation (REELMCR 2017).

## Sensing the black outdoors study

One of the outcomes of the *Sensing the Black Outdoors* study was to develop a group to read and discuss literature in black studies stemming from the work of Glissant (1993) in *Poetics of Relation*, and to link this literature with studies of youth, art and education. Another outcome was to use concepts and techniques learned through the readings to develop a series of informal workshops offered at university wide level for extracurricular credit to practice study and explore alternative visions of life at university through creative practices. These four workshops took place between February and June 2022, the year that university slowly went back to face-to-face after the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the call to participate in four extra-curricular workshops did not draw a massive attraction. Nonetheless, we wanted to work with young people who were curious and desired to be part of the project, no matter if they came in a small number.

The participants included four undergraduates, two postgraduate students and two faculty members. The students came from different programmes, including architecture, visual arts, fashion, educational psychology, and childhood studies. Two were international students from different countries in the Asian continent, India and China. Two students were from Afro-Caribbean descent and lived in Moss Side. One student was from Ethiopian descent but spent most of her life in England. Prior to moving to Manchester, she lived in London and Birmingham. One student was white-English. Not all students were able to attend all the workshops.<sup>1</sup>

Yvonne and I (the author) facilitated the workshops. Yvonne is a retired teacher educator and currently a doctoral student concerned with postcolonial approaches to the history of the slave trade and slavery, and how this history is taught in secondary schools in England and Jamaica. She is an Afro-Caribbean English woman. I am an artist educator, interested in arts-based research and research creation. I am a white woman with Spanish citizenship living in post-Brexit England.

The workshops aimed at developing a depth of space and time in and around the university through visual and spatial experiences. Through these experiences we sought to recognise ourselves as implicated, responsive, and accountable to the stories and circumstances of other people who had dwelled and moved in this space before. We aimed to *work with* the abundant local archives of maps, photo and film of Hulme and Moss Side.

In using the expression *to work with*, I paraphrase visual culture theorist Tina Campt (2021), who describes a labour of making images matter through physical and affective investments. As Campt explains, images are significant to teach about the black experience through a black perspective. However, she notes that there is important work to do with these images that is not simply seeing the other in a voyeuristic way from a safe distance that continues placing blackness in “the elsewhere (or nowhere) of whiteness” (p. 7). In our study, we followed Campt’s propositions of *not looking away* and asking ourselves what does it mean “to see through the complex positionality that blackness is” (p. 7)? What does it mean to implicate ourselves in multisensory and spatial interactions to make these images matter in our lives?

In the workshops, we cultivated collective practices of viewing beyond optical mastery through forms of intimacy that involved struggle and working with difficult knowledge. We were interested in thinking and feeling with our entire bodies, through a *haptic dimension* (Marks 2000; Bruno 2014) in which encounters with the world intermingle sight, touch, sound, and materiality intensifying affective response-ability. In the next two subsections, I discuss two pedagogic experiments conducted in the workshops that further explore these ideas.

### **Pedagogic experiment #1 – cultivating relational looking through practices of looking again, looking back, and not looking away**

The first of these pedagogic experiments involved a workshop on practices of collectively looking at black life and black space in connection to the visual and textual archive of the Moss Side uprisings of 1981.<sup>2</sup> The Moss Side uprisings coincided with a period of national unrest affecting many other cities, partly as a result of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s intensification of policing in areas of high poverty and unemployment. Important to note here is that we decided on such focus partly affected by the Black Lives Matter mobilisations of summer of 2020.<sup>3</sup> Many young people in Manchester had joined the marches. After months of lockdowns and a sense that formal education was failing those in need, the marches were one of the first post-pandemic moments when young people emerged collectively in the material space of the city (Rousell & Chan 2022). As such, we thought that for a project that considered engaging young people in encountering the university through blackness this event had to be valued. Indeed, the mobilisations of 2020 carried a potential for *looking back* to other practices of resistance that had forged moments in which black life and black spaces had become visible in Manchester city (McKittrick 2006).

Four students signed up for this workshop which we facilitated with the support of two staff members from the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre (henceforth referred as AIU-RACE), who presented us with a selection of archival materials from the uprisings. These documents revealed the perspectives of the Moss Side community on the uprising,<sup>4</sup> including their ongoing denunciation of the continuous, but unrecognised, dehumanising treatment that they received from the police. Few newspaper clippings showed the official history of the uprisings which presented young people, mostly black, as morally questionable, unrespectful to the law, property, neighbours, and violent in nature. The presentation of the documents was followed by a period in which we gave each other time to encounter and respond to them. We proposed our participants to read them while thinking with the question of whether the past has just passed or perhaps it can be a place where to encounter generative and radical practices that can be



reanimated as ways to reframe the present and reimagine the future (Brown 2021). In proposing this, we wanted to provoke ourselves to read/view the documents not only under the matrix of conflict, oppression, and alienation in which blackness becomes visible in the space of the city, but also for how they presented practices of aliveness and potentiality (Hartman 2019; Quashie 2021).

As a further complication, I proposed to look at some photos from the Moss Side uprisings along with some photos of the mobilisations in summer of 2020, which mostly included images taken in Manchester city. I did this, being aware that texts and images are not objective evidence of anything. On the contrary, their terms of legibility and visibility are formed within power and aesthetic relations that on occasions bring black bodies into attention (Hartman 2019). As such, I was interested in forming a collective response to the conditions of visibility and legibility spurred by these images but also by the documents selected by AIU-RACE staff. I wanted us to wonder, what images and imaginings they allowed to appear and disappear (Sharpe 2017), and what were the ways to respond response-ably to them. We wanted to enact practices of *relational looking* that resisted and refused the optics that feed into anti-black worlds (Sharpe 2017) in which black bodies only appear under the rubric of conflict and charity (Hartman 2019). We aimed at cultivating response-ability for *not looking away*, and thus *living with the archives*, with their layers of damage, wounds, pride, beauty and so forth (Campt 2021).

A manifestation of this collective relational looking occurred as we spent time conversing around two images (Figure 1). The first one was of the summer 2020



**Figure 1**

Collectively Seeing and Responding to Images. Manchester Public Library, February 2022. Photo Captured by Laura Trafi-Prats with a GoPro Hero 9. The Image has been Cropped in the Left Side to Preserve Anonymity.

BLM mobilisations in Manchester city. It showed a large number of people *taking a knee*; a political expression of peaceful resistance adopted by the BLM movement that goes back to the Civil Rights Movement. The photograph was taken in St. Peter's Square near the Central Library building where we met that day. The second one was from the Moss Side uprising taken at night. It features a line of shielded police on one side of the image, and a crowd of young people in front of them, just hanging out without confrontation (Figure 1). Here, is a passage from the conversation:

- Indeed, it is a crowd of youth, but what else can we see if we look at where their sights are directed, if we pay close attention to their gestures, postures, the ways they stand with one another?
- Some seem relaxed, like just hanging out and chatting.
- They are all young.
- They are not looking directly at the police.
- These here are looking at each other as if in they are in their own world.
- What is the sound of this image?
- Like when you are out in a field waiting for a concert to begin and there are many other people there.
- Are the police talking? What are the sounds of those bodies and shields tight together? Can the youth hear those sounds?
- If they hear them, they do not seem to care.
- They might have got used to them at this point.
- This guy with the hat seems to notice the photographer, since he is looking directly into the camera. What is he thinking? Is he thinking that once again a photographer came to capture black life in distress? Or is he thinking 'oh good someone is documenting this so others can see that we are just young people getting by'? Or maybe something else?
- I like to look at these two pictures together. This one [Moss Side] makes me think of my parents' youth. It makes me wonder how they remember these events since they lived in Moss Side during this time. Who knows maybe they were in this place when this picture was taken. Then this other picture [BLM march] makes me feel of when I went to the marches. I recognise people in this picture. I think this is one of the marches that I attended. I feel that I am inside the image that I am there. It is all coming back. Oh gosh, I get goosebumps!! [She starts crying].
- I came from Delhi to study a master's in architecture. All this is new. In architecture, we are studying different sites and projects in the city. Lately, we have studied The Graphene building. However, I have not heard of any of these histories. It makes me wonder about which histories of the city we learn in architecture studies.

As the conversation reveals, we laboured to *look relationally* (Campt 2021). We constructed questions, comments, and responses that forced us to recognise our implication with the circumstances of others. Our practices of looking and talking entangled sight, touch, and sound, and brought us to feel materially attending to the proximities, the buzz, the weather, the outrage, the silence in the images. We did this by relinquishing mastery and appreciating the sensory limitations in our different positionalities. Some of us had only questions, some had responses, some had more questions, some wondered, some imagined, showing that it is possible to

see in excess of what is captured in the frame (Sharpe 2017), in excess of the current spatial arrangements (McKittrick 2006).

In the conversation, the university disappeared at moments when someone looked simultaneously at her family's and her own personal experience of living and participating in the city. The university appeared at other moments when someone recognised the epistemological dissonances between the city that is affirmed through the architecture studies curriculum, and the lived city manifested through accumulated layers of experience and their invisible geographies (McKittrick 2006). Ultimately, the conversation enacted the possibility to *study* without a plan while cultivated capacity for looking and feeling in relation where complex affective space-times take shape.

## **Pedagogic experiment #2 – seeing-touching-re-imagining black space**

The second experiment involved a walk around Hulme through streets and sites that students traversed daily in their arrivals and departures from campus. Yvonne and I created the itinerary based on our study of local archives and ordinance maps and with a focus on the two massive urban reforms that fully re-landscaped the area in 1965 and 1992. As a result of these reforms, large numbers of houses as well as streets disappeared, while a highway was inserted. The university and the economics that sustain it have been large beneficiaries of these reforms, occupying the land where other communities and alternative projects had previously lived. However, this act of occupation is not clearly visible to those who have recently arrived at this part of the city seeking university degrees.

We walked carrying a Go-Pro camera with us and took turns filming in a continuous tracking shot, not necessarily filming ourselves, but our movement through the city. We sought to experiment with the potential of the *movement-image*, which as Deleuze (1989) argues, enacts an interval between the received and the executed movement. In doing so, the movement-image creates a new sensorio-motor relation to the world where other modes of perception and action not based in continuity and transparency become possible. Deleuze understood that “shared conceptions of the world are inseparable from sensory-motor functions” (Keeling 2007, 20). An idea that film theorist Keeling (2007, 2019) expands by examining how black film practices introduce rhythmic alterations that disrupt the continuity of the movement-image. One of these concerns the smooth transition between the tracking shot and the panoramic present in Hollywood films where land is an important actor. In such films the tracking shot marks unrestricted movement through space while the panoramic defines stasis and an open view of land in a wide shot. The almost imperceivable blending of these two shots reaffirms the agency of the settler and the perspective that space is property. Black cinema populates the interval between these two shots with a different range of potential movements and speeds that stutter, arrest, exhaust, suspend continuity and prevent smoothness. In doing so, black cinema defines errant and aberrant relations with space and time (Keeling 2019). Our experimentation with the movement-image as we walked through Hulme was influenced by these ideas. We used the techniques of the tracking shot and the panoramic as an exploration of how movement and stasis shaped our perception of space, especially in moments during the walk when we were trying to see beyond the current arrangements.

We carried the aforementioned Go-Pro camera attached to a monopod, which we held ahead of our bodies. At points of the walk, we stopped to unearth

temporal, spatial and narrative layers not visible in space using maps and photographs. Sometimes the participant carrying the camera stopped recording so to join the conversation. Other times, she continued filming as we stood in place, transiting from the tracking shot into the panoramic. One of the most provocative cases of this transition happened as we were standing on one side of Stretford Road, which for long has been one of the main arteries crossing Hulme. We conversed and imagined the transformation of the landscape over the last 150 years. I pointed across the street, at Hulme Park, and brought up the Hulme Crescents, four massive buildings with apartments for 13,000 people built in Brutalist style erected in that same site where the park stands today. One of the participants grabs and looks at the photographs of the dub and rap bands that were residents in The Kitchen, an internationally known sound studio occupying three apartments in one of the Crescents. Another participant remarks how cities build the worst housing experiments with black communities in mind. She mentions her difficult housing experience in Birmingham, and brings up the Grenfell Tower in London, a 24 story building that burnt down in London in 2017 causing 72 deaths. The conversation seems to dilute. We suddenly start walking again as pulled by the participant carrying the camera who moves onwards until she stops few yards in front of us by the walls of the Hulme's library. Standing in this place, she turns her full attention to a ceramic mural made by potters in the community, which narrates Hulme's history, and films it in detail. Rather than an open wide view, this panoramic is practically a close-up of the materiality of the built environment, which the camera seems to touch, caress, and envelope, creating an intensely embodied and experiential view (Bruno 2014).

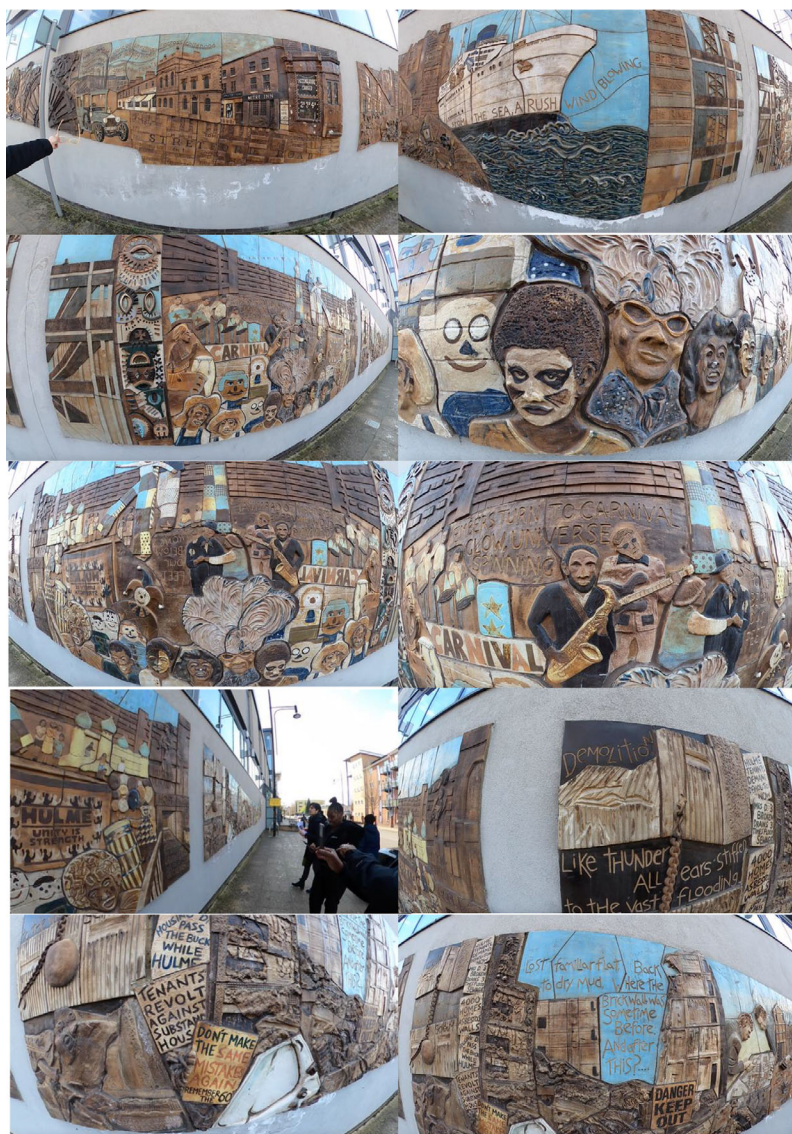
The stills in Figure 2 are selections from 6 minutes of footage just preceding the movement before we turned to the mural, and the camera movements as we stood in this site. As a result of using the wide-lens setting in the Go-Pro Max, the image seems to move at its own pace, moving through the mural and forming an undulating wave over mementos of events that mark the history of Hulme; the cotton mills, the fabrication of the first Rolls Royce engine, the blitzes, the arrival of the Windrush generation, the community that grows out of the encounter, the construction and demolition of the Crescents, the protests for poor housing conditions, and, and, and. Sometimes the camera steps back, turns towards the group, shows that we are all looking touching, and feeling touched in our own ways.

The images are not just a representation of us doing study, they carry the material intensity of its slow, errant, and thoughtful focus, the lingering in the small sticky details, the feeling that one is with others who are affected too. We take notice that black space is not necessary a given place, but it is the space that is re-casted and re-imagined "through a struggle rather than a complacency, with space and place" (McKittrick 2006, 29). It is also a moment when we witness how the university belongs to a world "that has profited from black displacement" (p. 29). It is a moment when university, study, fugitivity juxtapose in space-time.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have articulated a pedagogical approach that grapples with the current affective conditions of studying at the neoliberal university. For this, I have problematised the narrative that characterises a generation of young people as being disengaged and that features students from brown and black communities as





**Figure 2**

Stills from Video of the Walk-Through Hulme, May 2022. Images Generated by Participant with a Go-Pro Max

in higher risk of dropping out from university. It is a narrative that questionably has become normalised with practically no interrogation of the other part of the relation, the university as institution.

University curricula function prescriptively for those who are ready, and correctively for those who are not, telling them what they need to fix in order to progress. Curriculum is forced upon subjects who do not want correction, but seek having a voice, creating projects, doing things with others. Many students do not want to dissolve themselves in a unidimensional student identity, regardless of this

one being presented under benign ideas such as *belonging*. And yet, the university is getting rid of courses and entire programmes in the arts, humanities, and cultural studies that for the last 50 years have effectively envisioned critical and experimental pedagogies dedicated to understanding and creating diverse and pluralistic worlds.

Following Harney and Moten (2013), I have proposed *study* as a concept that escapes what university planning encloses. Study happens in the interstices, underground and negative spaces of the university, and brings people to work together in projects and ideas that concern them, so to think with one another in mutual affection. Study approaches affect in multidimensional ways undoing binaries like engaged/disengaged, hope/dread, belonging/alienation. Study considers practices of being quiet and not-performing not in terms of disengagement, but as affective manifestations of the uninhabitability of the university as a non-pluralistic space. In such context, quietness could be a form of resistance to not give more than necessary to an institution that actively excludes and aims to correct inclinations, desires, imaginaries, practices, projects that do not follow the norm.

Further, I have connected Harney and Moten's (2013) concept of study with other scholars from the field of black studies to develop the idea that study requires of pedagogical projects and experiments that play with non-progressive temporalities, and more layered spatialities. Drawing from radical practices in the visual arts, narrative, poetry but also everyday expression, black scholarship foregrounds sensorial experimentation and creative speculation as ways to embody alternative rhythms and move out of acquired habits of dwelling, moving, attuning to space. Whoever wants to approach young people's (lack of) performance in the university in complex ways, can find in black studies important understandings of the rich expressions and elaborations that grow out of living in highly controlled and restricted spaces and times. These expressions and elaborations, which remain unrecognised and fugitive to university planning, are significant practices of study.

I have further demonstrated my engagement with these ideas by focusing on a specific study project with university students. The *Sensing the Black Outdoors* study used aesthetic techniques connected to black studies to encounter alternative projects, expressions and aliveness that the presence and expansion of university in the city of Manchester has displaced when not eliminated. More particularly, it addressed how the university has dramatically disrupted spaces where the Afro-Caribbean diaspora had, and continues having, a critical presence.

To conclude, I want to highlight two central contributions that give extra significance to this study. The first of these contributions centres on the importance of creating pedagogical spaces where to encounter difficult knowledge with others through practices of witnessing, connecting, not looking away, staying with the material presence of blackness, not in an appropriating way in which, in my case as a white academic I master the other, but as a way of building implication, response-ability, while engaging in the speculation of what does it mean to see oneself through "the complex positionality that blackness is" (Campt 2021, 7).

The second of these contributions focuses on the relevance of aesthetic pedagogies that develop experiments with sensory media, like video, to foster interruptions and dissonances between sensation, perception, and the world. Immersing in such pedagogical experiments collectively, as we are materially situated in spaces that concern us, makes possible that alternative layers of space and time resurface. In turn, this moves us away from our present condition and the space-times and knowledge that sustain it.

In summary, pedagogic practices that involve new genres of existence through sensory experimentation and speculation can support young people to develop less monocultural experiences of university study and to understand how university, study and fugitivity exist in a complex affective relationality that they can contribute to expand, play with and re-imagine. It can also help to develop pedagogies that rather than teaching a set of narrow skills and ideas for future employment, engage in creating and curating situations of sharing the world with others in implicated ways, so to affect and be affected by what others think, feel and do, and thus participate in the nurturance of pluralistic and diverse futures (O'Donnell 2022).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although this article is single authored, I could have not done the study discussed here just by myself. I want to thank my main collaborator in this project Yvonne Sinclair for planning and facilitating the workshops with me. Also, my gratitude goes to all the participants in the Black Atlantic Reading Group, most specially to Professor Elizabeth de Freitas and Dr. Stephanie Daza for helping in its organisation and delivery, along with Professor Aislinn O'Donnell and Dr. David Ben Shannon. The reading group nurtured many of the curiosities and ideas developed in this project. I want to extend my appreciation to the students who participated in the workshops and to the members of the community who augmented our understanding of local histories. Dominique Tessier directed us towards important archival material in film and visual format connected to the Afro-Caribbean community in Manchester. Similarly, the staff in the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre partnered with us in the facilitation of the first workshop and in making available parts of the Elouise Edwards Collection. Their input was invaluable. Finally, I want to thank Professor Dennis Atkinson and Professor John Baldachino for their feedback and their invitation to be part of this issue. This study was funded through Manchester Metropolitan University's Internal Research Funding 2021–2022.

**Laura Trafí-Prats** is an education researcher whose work is situated in the fields on the visual arts and cultural production. She is a Reader at Manchester Metropolitan University's School of Education, a member of the Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI), and a former associate professor at the University of Wisconsin -Milwaukee's Department of Art and Design. Her pedagogical and research interests include youth participation in urban environments, eco-sensory approaches to arts-based social inquiry, and the relation of art education to young people's digital life. She is co-editor with Aurelio Castro-Varela of *Visual Participatory Arts-Based Research in the City: Ontology, Aesthetics and Ethics* (2022, Routledge). She has recently completed as PI the ESRC-funded project *Mapping spatial practices and social distancing in smart schools: Sensory and digital ethnographic methods*. Laura has published more than 25 peer reviewed articles and academic chapters.

## Endnotes

1. Our workshops explicitly called for the participation of students from minoritized communities.
2. With the help of staff at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre, we worked with papers from the Elouise Edwards Collection. Edwards was a West Indian British activist, community organiser and social worker who also collected the history

and stories of the West Indian communities in South Manchester.

3. The BLM marches exploded globally following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May of 2020. They coincided with an intensified sense of dis-possession, loss and precarity that the COVID-19 pandemic brought into black and brown communities. Manchester was not an exception to this situation.
4. The selection of documents included a press release statement by the Moss Side Defence Community to the Hynter

Report, which was the government commissioned inquiry, a letter by a community worker to the editor of *The Guardian*, xeroxed newsletters generated by the Moss Side community which offered their perspective on police violence and other issues concerning the community, transcriptions of a radio interview with youth, and few newspaper clippings featuring the uprisings. All of them were part of the Elouise Edwards Collection.

## References

- Atkinson, D.** (2022) *Pedagogies of taking care: art pedagogy and the gift of otherness*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Berlant, L.** (2013) *Cruel optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Brown, J.** (2021) *Black utopias: speculative life and the music of other worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bruno, G.** (2014) *Surface: matters of aesthetics, materiality, and media*. Chicago: Chicago University press.
- Campt, T.** (2017) *Listening at images*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Campt, T.** (2021) *A black gaze: artist changing how we see*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Deleuze, G.** (1989) *Cinema 2: the time-image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gilroy, P.** (1987) *There ain't no black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation*. London: Hutchinson.
- Glissant, E.** (1993) *Poetics of relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Harney, S. & Moten, F.** (2013) *The undercommons: fugitive planning and black study*. New York: Minor Compositions.
- Hartman, S.** (2019) *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women and queer radicals*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Hartman, S.** (2023) Crawlspacemanifold, in D. Brand, L. P. Brooks, T. Dyson, S. Hartman, J. Mansoor, C. Sharpe & M. O. Wilson [Eds] *Torkwase Dyson: a liquid belonging*. New York: Pace Publishing, pp. 9–14.
- Horton, J.** (2016) Anticipating service withdrawal: young people in spaces of neoliberalisation, austerity and economic crisis, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 349–62.
- Ivinson, G. M. & Renold, E.** (2022) Emplaced activism: what-if environmental education attuned to young people's entanglements with post-industrial landscapes? *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3-4, pp. 415–30.
- Keeling, K.** (2007) *The witch's flight: the cinematic, the black femme, and the image of common sense*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Keeling, K.** (2019) *Queer times, black futures*. New York: NYU Press.
- Marks, L. U.** (2000) *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- McKittrick, K.** (2006) *Demonic grounds: black women and cartographies of struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.



- Moten, F.** (2013) *In the break: the aesthetics of the black radical tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Moten, F.** (2018) Erotics of fugitivity, in F. Moten [Ed] *Stolen life*. Durham: Duke University press, pp. 241–68.
- O'Donnell, A.** (2022) Sharing the world without losing oneself: education in a pluralistic universe, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 5, pp. 666–85.
- Quashie, K.** (2021) *Black aliveness or a poetics of being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- REELMCR** (2017) *The spirit of hulme*. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EK9UWW9ilhs> [Accessed 10th November 2021]
- Rousell, D. & Chan, K. K.** (2022) Activist ecologies of study in the learning city: deformatisations of educational life, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 5, pp. 702–22.
- Sharpe, C.** (2017) *In the wake: on blackness and being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Trafi-Prats, L. & de Freitas, E.** (2024) New possibilities of spatial research: re-animating the built environment through speculative maps and models, *Qualitative Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004241240809>
- Weheliye, A. G.** (2005) *Phonographies: grooves in sonic afro-modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Zembylas, M.** (2023) Fugitive pedagogies of dread for radical futurity: Affective, ontological, and political implications, *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2023.2230850>