

# Sensible Ruptures: Towards Embodied and Relational Ways of Knowing

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## Abstract

This paper explores queer and racialized experiences in Danish academia through what we call 'sensible ruptures': affective, embodied and sensory ways of knowing. Taking seriously these modes of knowledge, the article outlines the creation of an online, audio-visual archive. Weaving together text, audio and images to unfold our concept of sensible ruptures, we demonstrate how the audio-visual can meaningfully contribute to capturing the affective and material fabric of racialized and queer experiences with/in Danish higher education. Sensible ruptures underscore the importance of understanding the complex processes of racialization in an institutional and national context saturated by ambiguity and exceptionalism. We contend that thinking not only against, but beyond, disembodied colonial logics offers a different mode of knowledge creation, reconfiguring the self as permeable: constituted through and with our histories and surroundings. We centre friendship as a vital part of this process, harnessing queer epistolary to perform our pursuit of, and argument for, knowledge as always and inevitably relational.

**KEYWORDS:** racialization, queer studies, affect, embodiment, archives, epistolary

## Introduction

We, Gabriella & Maya, an Afro-Danish woman and a queer, Nepalese-Ukrainian person of color, respectively, found each other in the process of navigating higher education in Denmark and learning what it means to become academic researchers. In writing this article, our aim is to explore queer and racially minoritized<sup>1</sup> experiences in Danish higher education through what we conceptualize as 'sensible ruptures': affective, embodied and sensory ways of knowing. Giving weight to these modes of knowing, we created an audio-visual archive with the intention of carving out a different way of co-creating knowledge.

Entering Danish academia simultaneously, we shared a focus on how racialized students create spaces of resistance and belonging within and beyond the university. Confiding in each other and conversing together, our own encounter with the university has also been a reckoning with the ways in which the academy is rooted in violent histories and colonial ideals of objectivity, extraction and productivity that sever theory from embodied and lived experience (de Sousa 2017; Bhambra 2018; The River and Fire Collective 2021). In this environment, knowledge sutured to white, cis, middle-class, able-bodied straightness becomes situated as rational, normative, neutral and thereby able to transcend the confines of the body (Bacchetta et al. 2018; Diallo 2019; Harris and Nicolazzo 2020).

During our first year as PhD fellows we quickly encountered, through everyday interactions, the ways in which our projects were met with: anxieties around the 'controversy' of these students' resistance and themes of de/anti-colonialism as a threat towards the academy; around our stakes and positionality; and around collaborative/creative methodological approaches. We shared experiences of coming up against ideas, customs and behaviors that enforce how the preferred or professional researcher must maintain a relational and depoliticized distance in order to produce a disembodied subjectivity that is so often idealized within academia, and to which innumerable interventions have been made<sup>2</sup>. In 2020,

in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as exacerbated long-standing systemic racist harm towards marginalized groups and a growing national political rhetoric of hostility towards scholars engaged with topics of gender, race and sexuality, the tensions around the (im)possibility of bracketing our subjectivity surfaced in our conversations.

By accounting for our bodies through these conversations, as bodies 'out of place' (Puwar 2004) in the academy, we identified different ways of relating and responding to the institution. We saw ruptures starting to emerge, both in the binary categories we had been taught (of researcher/researched, personal/political, rational/irrational), in the normative ideals of who and what constitutes legitimate knowledge, as well as in our own affective landscapes. On the basis of sharing our positionings and experiences, we developed the term sensible ruptures as a way of resisting disembodied sensibilities in Danish academia and experimenting with ways of co-constituting knowledge. The term - which derives from affective and sensuous ways of knowing and being (Iverson & Renold, 2021; Puwar, 2021) - became a springboard for our desire to create an archive, one where we could map our embodied experiences in an attempt to make sense of research as a process rooted in the bodily and its relation to the world.

In early 2022, we began to meet regularly to outline the beginnings of this online audio-visual archive<sup>3</sup>. Drawing on our experiences as queer and racialized individuals, the archive explores our notion of sensible ruptures, emerging as a collection of video clips, audio recordings and illustrations organized as a form of collage and tethered to different bodily and material locations. Combining these mediums, we created affective atmospheres informed by our senses and embodied experiences. Each audio-visual clip is connected to a wider whole with footage of water serving as both an entry and exit point. In between, there is no linear narrative or trajectory, but five connecting points titled STIMOROL, LINOLEUM UNIVERSAL SOAP, GUT, BREATH and ADRIFT. The latter functions as an anchor; each

clip eventually leads to this conjoining video of our bodies in water.

In our desire to subvert normative ideals of knowledge creation and emphasize a collaborative process, we make use of letter writing inspired by the concept of 'queer epistologies of repair' (DasGupta et al. 2021). Honoring how letters have historically been a site of learning, knowledge sharing and enacting queer bonds for those in opposition to the conditions of white, cis heteropatriarchy, the authors generously extend their correspondence as a method of solidarity and sustenance: letter writing<sup>4</sup> as "speaking out loud, co-reflecting, caring, and supporting each other" (DasGupta et al. 2021, 491). Evoking the support and hope that queer epistolary offers, our conversation<sup>5</sup> is both a current between our experiences of adriftness in academia as well as a desire to move beyond imposed modes of knowing, productivity and individualism. The following exchange unfolds the concept of sensible ruptures in relation to the experiences encompassed in the archive as well as critically analyzing the process, meaning and implications of its making; together we share considerations on gaze, access, language and closeness/distance. The letters are interspersed with wider methodological and theoretical reflections, positioning our project in relation to an overall contribution regarding topics of racialization, affect, materialism and embodiment.

This paper asks: how can queer and racialized experiences be explored through affective, embodied and sensory ways of knowing? We argue that experimenting with an audio-visual, practice-based approach offers ways of thinking against and beyond colonial logics within Danish academia. We underscore the importance of capturing complex processes of racialization and marginalization, which are not easily fixed and are intrinsically linked to affect, within this landscape. Additionally, in understanding friendship as a crucial part of knowledge constitution through our project, our letter writing and archive propose new forms of relationality that affectively break with disembodiment and alienation in Danish academia.

## Drifting between through letters

Dear Gabriella,

*It's been a little over two weeks since I last saw you. I hope you've arrived well in Cape Town, so exciting to think of you there, carving out new beginnings!!! I'm slowly finding grounding again after returning from my research stay in Vancouver. Glad we had some time to overlap in Copenhagen in between all the transience, to be in the water together, in the residue of summer. Also so glad we ended up choosing that shot of us jumping into the sea to frame our archive. It makes so much sense to me in terms of how we've talked about the project and how it's unfolded. Water as embrace, returning to submerge, cleanse, simply be. Water as both grief and solace; a place to be both adrift and held, where there's space for pleasure and support, as well as devastation and loss. Water as reflection, a way to grasp ourselves, and as refraction, a way to distort and bend this perception into new directions and forms. (Okay, I know I'm a sucker for the water metaphor. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2008) reminds me that although reaching into the metaphoric possibilities of the sea may allow for a type of linguistic queering, we must also not lose sight of the specific material formations, both past and present, of violence, memory and resistance, the sea holds).*

*And that line from the poem you chose, layered on top of the clip ADRIFT. From Adrienne Maree Brown: that "water seeks scale, that even your tears seek the recognition of community" (2017, 109). I found that so beautiful in considering how, for me, this archive came out of a desire for connectivity; that sharing and collecting our experiences like this is not just a way to make sense of them, but a creative project to imagine something new and uncharted, a way of being together beyond the oppressive temporalities and orderings of academia. There is potential in that. Which is to say this friendship, in very real ways, expands my sense of what is possible – that my understanding, (un)learning and knowing is forged within and through intimate processes of relation. It cannot exist separately from these breaks and bonds, which is why*

*I understand our archive, the notion of sensible ruptures, and this correspondence, as a creative intervention enacting possibility against a colonial present. Or, as I read recently, taking the liberatory potential of friendship seriously means a “renewal of our imagination about who we are and who we wish to become” (Banerjea et al. 2018, 2). Which is all really to say, thank you.*

*I think a vestige of (continued) coloniality is the dismissal and diminishing of these forms of intimacy for the same reason that we are taught to swallow the fantasy of an emotionally contained, independent subject, separate and distinct from the rest of the living world. I had this conversation around dinner the other day where we were talking about whether or not we believed in reincarnation, and my friend said something that stuck with me. They said that our bodies are in a constant process of shedding, death and rebirth. In this way we’re porous and permeable, always and inevitably entangled with each other. I’m sure there’s a bunch of hotshot new materialist scholars who would agree.*

*So much of our work, our experiences, and this project itself has orbited around what it means*

*to know. Against the contours of the institution, we have felt bound by hierarchies of legitimacy that determine what knowledge is viable and worthy.*

*Repeatedly, DK academia has asked me to justify (too) closeness; to extrapolate my body from my work, as if they are not one and the same. This has been framed in terms of academically hazardous proximities to the students I’m engaged in research with, to methods of carrying out this research, to the themes of racialization and social justice, to investments in identity, affect and politics. This perturbation is often tied to an implication of bias or lack of rigor, and a consistent imperative to explain and justify, which itself can be seen as a mechanism of structural oppression. It’s been noted that there is often backlash towards work that engages experience as theory as naive, static, or essentialist (Calafell & Moreman 2009, 128) as well as a skewed expectation toward marginalized scholars, whereby “especially BIPOC, but also trans, gender non-conforming, queer and disabled researchers are expected to reflect on their position to avoid being accused of bias and navel-gazing” (The River and Fire Collective 2021). I’m holding on to closeness, to our archive.*



*Still from video ADRIFT, 2022*

*I notice I keep referring to the project as an archive. I still feel kind of cringe about using that term but also not sure if 'audio-visual un-fucking project' is right either lol. So much has been written about the archive, a word laden with notions of authority, binding what and who can be known, how things come to matter. What I'm really interested in is what creatively crafting this kind of space can do. Julietta Singh tells us that "no archive will restore you, no text but those we cannot read" (2018, 23). She writes about the body-archive, attending to her own history and its bodily traces, material and felt. I'm drawn to this idea of tracing the untraceable, the corporeal, accounting for that which cannot be read or comprehended in a literal sense. I wonder if that is what we are doing in the gathering and manifesting of these ruptures, in our project?*

*Somewhere in transit,  
Maya*

*Hi Maya,*

*Your letter gives me a sense of home - thank you! I hope your journey back has been gentle and that you're finding your place and rhythm.*

*Thank you for naming closeness. I wanted to note that we've talked about how writing these letters to each other is a way to deliberately choose closeness as a minoritarian method (Gagnon 2021). Materially (attending to our surroundings), relationally (centering friendship), methodologically (favoring proximity through embodiment and epistolary), and ethically (as an avowal of the vulnerable and connected, as well as a critique of distanced subjectivity).*

*Your reflections on the value of friendship and the desire for relationality in academia deeply resonated with me. For me, our friendship has been a space of intellectual intimacy, rest and joy and created moments where I regained a sense of self. There is a poignant bell hooks quote I wanted to share, which I think hits at the heart of our desires to create different forms of relational knowledge: "to heal the splitting of mind and body, we marginalized and oppressed people attempt to*

*recover ourselves and our experiences in language. We seek to make a place for intimacy. Unable to find such a place in standard English, we create the ruptured, broken, unruly speech of the vernacular" (hooks 1994, 175). From our own individual and shared experiences, we also chose to make sense of and theorize the broken – we stayed with the ruptures, interrogated them, cried and laughed about them together. I see our archive as having emerged out of our friendship where we held each other in our needs to explore and make meaning of our experiences, but also, as you write, a making space for possibilities of knowing otherwise. Our weaving together of similar yet different affective experiences – joys, pains and curiosities – and supporting each other through different ways of knowing, seeing and listening has been one of the most exciting and challenging learning spaces.*

*In particular, the archive became important because it gave us a practice-based and visual medium for us to explore what it means to exist, think, argue and work in Danish academia: a context which is dominated by color blindness (Lagermann 2013), colonial amnesia (Marronage 2021) and racialized exceptionalism (Danbolt & Myong 2019). Where experiences and knowledge of structural oppression are so often rendered invisible and the subtle mechanisms of racism veiled in ambiguity. And a wider societal context where marginalized groups are still developing and experimenting with language in order to make sense of their experiences and break with forms of alienation (DCN & Marronage 2020; Löwe Hunter 2021). These types of harm inflict self-doubt/self-blame, second-guessing whether instances of discrimination and harm occurred or not, and if they are individual, institutional or structural (Khawaja 2023). I really think this is why our audio-visual approach has been so important for us, because it not only allowed us to denormalize harmful words/phrases/questions in academic contexts, but also to take seriously felt and material experiences beyond words – sitting with the affective and sensory dimensions of these instances working with a 'show don't tell' approach. We played and experimented with images and sounds and voice-over narration, stitching together fiction, poetry or diary excerpts. And although*

words, both spoken and written, are a part of the archive, they function more to create an affective atmosphere than to 'explain'.

*I was wondering, how have you experienced the creative possibilities and limitations of text/language in exploring our experiences through the archive?*

Settling in,  
Gabriella

Dear Gabriella,

*I think language is – like closeness – fraught. Filled with potential for harm, as you describe. Closeness feels like a signal, a move towards collaboration and feeling which extends not only through the archive but also our writing. Basically, the writing itself is embodied, coalescing with and performing our argument. Which reminds me of Ocean Vuong's (2020) observation of the epistolary form – that it demands the reader enters a conversation that is inherently excluding and that this disorientation is important: we are not speaking to an external 'you' but, first and foremost, to each other.*

*Reflecting on closeness and the encounter between the bodily and the material, I'm wondering if you noticed how, in the archive, each rupture (with the exception of ADRIFT) is titled with either a bodily location or a material (BREATH, LINOLEUM UNIVERSAL SOAP, GUT, STIMOROL)? I know this wasn't a premeditated choice; however, it carries meaning in terms of our epistemological framing – how we insist on knowledge as material and bodily, and in doing so reveal something about the assumed proximity/distance of these materials to the knowing (human) subject.*

*There's also a connection to language here, often neglected in the literature, about how material and language are co-constituted, and therefore how the discursive contours of what we can and cannot articulate, matter. Which is a long way of getting back to what you named about how the audio-visual gives us room to engage with sensory and affective knowledge beyond language as narration. This is meaningful in reflecting not only*

*on the conceptual usages of sensible ruptures, but also the dominance of colonial languages; what it means to be at home in a language that is not your own, and the limits of what kind of home that can be (Ramayya 2019, 19). Articulation is sticky. I think this relates to how we have given a name to something in an attempt to make it tangible, and that us speaking the concept of sensible ruptures into existence is testimony to the ways in which language constrains the experience of racialization in this landscape you describe; how these experiences become illegible through the negation of the affective and bodily. Which is why it was necessary for us to turn to other mediums to attend to those silences, to what is effaced by this linguistic worldview. As Natalie Diaz notes, "if language is a technology, speech is only one way of it. It is not the body but an estimation of the body" (2020, n.p.). I see our reach for sensible ruptures as striving towards a different type of technology, towards sensory and affective vernaculars that are built with and through an unfolding bodily lexicon.*

hugs (not words),  
Maya

## Affect, Racialization and Danish institutions

This paper is premised on an understanding of the university as a space in which colonial histories are deeply entrenched in a way that is not relegated to the past but rather ongoing and, importantly, felt; universities are spaces in which certain bodies are 'at home' while other, minoritized bodies, are made 'out of place' (Puwar 2004; Ahmed 2012). Following these scholars, we emphasize the affective dimensions of racialization within academic institutions. Increased attention has been paid to affective approaches in examining racialization in Denmark (see for instance Myong & Bissenbakker 2014; Andreassen & Vitus 2016; Vertelyté & Staunæs 2021; Goankar 2022, among others). However, there is a limited and lacking body of literature around processes of racialization within Danish universities, particularly by

those with lived experience of racism. Important interventions have been made by scholars such as Oda-Kange Midtvåge Diallo (2019) and Bontu Lucie Guschke (2023), while Copenhagen-based collectives such as Marronage & DCN (2020)<sup>6</sup> have also done vital work in outlining how processes of racialization unfurl within and against Danish institutions. Contributions from Mira C. Skadegård (2017) and Iram Khawaja (2022) expand on universities and pedagogy as spaces of institutional whiteness, while Tess Skadegård Thorsen (2019) and Khawaja (2023) meaningfully address the affective tolls of being minoritized in Danish higher education through the concepts of minority taxation and minority stress, respectively.

We bring affect and embodiment to the forefront of discussions of racialization precisely to underscore the importance of understanding these processes in socio-political contexts where they are obscured. This paper builds on the aforementioned studies through our collaborative, practice-based approach, yet diverges in its attention to affect and embodiment as sites of resistance and epistemic possibility. Through this pursuit of creating knowledge otherwise, we also insist on the entanglement of affect and material, inscribing ourselves into perspectives that bring materiality to the fore, complicating relationships between subjects and objects, human and non-human (Chen 2012; Weheliye 2014).

Specifically, we align our project with the argument that committing to a more capacious understanding of what is animated (imbued with life), or “what and who counts as human, and what or who does not” (Chen 2012, 30), allows us to queer our subject positions. Additionally, we understand knowing itself as materially implicated, that human subjecthood is underpinned by racial hierarchies of anti-Blackness and the colonial construction of humanness as White (Wynter & McKittrick 2015; Jackson 2020; Wilderson 2020). We therefore recognize that different racialized subject positions have different relationships with different types of matter according to ideological, economic, historical and political processes. In doing so, we orient towards materiality as an entry

point for exploring sensible ruptures, thus conceptually expanding the archive itself to include the more-than-human.

Hi Maya,

Thanks for your letter! I hope you're well :)

*I have been thinking it is also important to reflect on the limitations of the audio-visual in terms of which senses can actually be mediated; photo and video is obviously for hearing and seeing and not for example smelling, tasting and touching. I remember how we grappled with this, since our different experiences were based on so much more than hearing and seeing.*

*For example, in my video clip titled LINOLEUM UNIVERSAL SOAP, I try to mediate the affective experience of a particular kind of Danish institutional scent. A creeping scent born of the combination of linoleum floors and universal, odorless soap – which reminds me of something that is trying not to smell, but is made conspicuous by its insistence on being absent. In making the archive, I sat with this feeling of a smell-pretending-to-be-a-non-smell, connecting it with institutional homogeneity, or an ‘odorless’ (‘colorblind’ and ‘innocent’) society – distant from and clean of colonial wrongdoings (Wekker 2016). Audio-visually, I mediated this experience – sensory despite itself – through the style of the video, using handheld point of view shots of feet running up and down grey linoleum stairs that loop indefinitely. I layered these moving images with repetitive mechanical sounds of a printer, giving a distinct character and ‘soundscape’ to the academic institution itself. Against this backdrop, a voice-over narrates embodied memories of Danish institutions and how we learn about places differently through our bodies. Reflecting on how smell can unveil structural issues, and how for some it might go unnoticed, and for others it might reek. The process of making this video made me think of how ruptures are stored in the body, stretching across time and space. Here I consider Christina Sharpe’s assertion that what is relegated to the past is a question of how we are unevenly located in the present (2016), contending that “the past that*



Still from video LINOLEUM UNIVERSAL SOAP, 2023

*is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (9). A rupture then is not something that just occurs in the moment but it lingers, like a longing, a warning or curiosity and communicates something about how the body is always-already connected with its social, cultural, historical, political and material surroundings, stirring together time and space. Our archive has become a way of weaving together a sort of ‘affective material fabric’ by making use of our different embodied experiences. Perhaps in this way, our archive is a rupture in of itself? How was it for you exploring your ruptures through images and sound?*

*with gratitude,  
Gabriella*

## Between Theory and Practice: On Cracks and Fissures

We are indebted to and stand on foundations laid by the manifold de/anti-colonial and Black feminist theorists who have historically challenged and fought against heteropatriarchal, white supremacist and colonial forms of oppression (Lorde 1984; Collins 1989; Harrison 1991). Our project is situated within older and on-going debates circulating objectivity and subjectivity and informed by long-standing issues around closeness/distance, neutrality and disembodiment in research (Dillard 2000). As the letters allude, we are inspired by the liberatory potential of theorizing from lived experience through practice (hooks 1994). Breaking with detached ways of producing knowledge, we align ourselves with hooks’ merging of theory and practice as a reciprocal process. Our concept of sensible



ruptures and archive go hand in hand; we not only theorize our memories, encounters and everyday experiences, but in order to do so, we center the process of creating the archive itself as an experiment in examining possibilities of knowing.

Ruptures emerge as the result of contradicting forces; they can move slowly, lingering for years in a state of potentiality or accelerate and tear a building apart when contradictions can no longer be absorbed (Forensic Architecture 2022). In challenging colonial systems of thought, the idea of breaking with, cracking open and fissuring have been applied as conceptual lenses and metaphors to analyze the relationship between knowledge, power and border thinking (Fanon 1967; Mignolo & Walsh 2018), and as ways of creating decolonial possibilities. Decolonial cracks and fissures are locations of thinking and doing practice-based decolonial work within modern/colonial/heteropatriarchal systems. In the book *On Decoloniality Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018) Walsh develops the notion of cracks by categorizing herself as a militant/activist intellectual, whereby cracks can lead to radical forms of pedagogy that challenge these systems within academia. Although we, too, challenge disembodied colonial sensibilities centered around distance, our conceptualization of ruptures is less geared towards an intellectual activism within the institution. Rather, our practice-based approach to sensible ruptures allows us to think through the generative potential of creatively co-constituting knowledge against as well as beyond the disembodied colonial logics of academia.

*Hi Gabriella,*

*I love the way that you describe the archive as an affective fabric, weaving together collectively and distinctly! Your understanding of the way the format reflects this, underscores the possibilities of the audio-visual in allowing us to layer different moments and histories in such a way that they touch, interlace and commune with each other.*

*Thanks for asking about my clips. In the archive, there is the segment called BREATH,*

*consisting of a collage I made by gathering different words jotted down during various institutional, online meetings throughout the first year of the pandemic. Often, during these meetings, I found myself writing or doodling – something I do to focus my attention. I noticed that these scribbles became a way for me to express feelings and frustrations that I wasn't able to say out loud. To me, they illustrate minute outbursts: swear words, sarcastic comments, painful realizations in moments when I felt clenched, unable to speak up. Material inscriptions that are paradoxical in both their silence and articulation. Then there's also the video titled STIMOROL, a clip of me arranging small, white, rectangular pieces of gum into a symmetrical grid, as I talk about illness, mental health and a profound sense of loss. In the audio, I grapple with what it might mean to account for a faltering body charged with the institutional "imperative of productive redemption" (Lee 2022, 259) that continues to attach to the narrative of the model minority. The clip is interspersed with photos of hospital visits, a tray of beige food, an x-ray, disposable pyjamas – material remnants of what it means to be an improper body, a feeling/failing body, within institutional systems. The gum alludes both to the orderings of whiteness in academia – its disciplining of bodies illegitimized through raced, classed and gendered markings – as well as to an experience during a doctor's appointment, to acquire documentation for sick leave, in which I impulsively grabbed several packets of liquorice-flavored Stimorol. Aesthetically, the repetitive motion of systematized assembly is juxtaposed to the affective landscape extended through rumination.*

*The reason I've chosen to draw out these examples is not only because they emphasize materiality as linked to our-selves, but because they encapsulate the unruly, almost convulsive, nature that is emblematic of these (seemingly nonsensical) ruptures. In some ways sensible ruptures can be understood as reactive, and although they of course emerge from the specificity of racialized and gendered antagonisms in Danish academia, I understand them less as opposition or response, but rather spontaneous fissures demonstrating a jolt (towards reclamation, of taking or talking back*

*in these examples); a return to the body, a move towards a sense of self, or a potentiality of self beyond the colonial claim to disembodied, individualized, ableist subjecthood.*

*I think this temporal distortion is crucial to our definition of sensible ruptures, echoing what Sharpe says about the undoing of time and space. I also think of tempo in the rupture INTUITION, created as a homage to embodied knowledges, or what might otherwise be understood as ‘gut feelings’ that reside in those bodies subjugated by history. Taking seriously these visceral ways our bodies remember and convey, the video plays with tempo by making use of extreme slow motion at the same time as the frame zooms out. At first you see just a close up of a belly button before the video reveals a hand cradling a stomach, which gradually becomes a body filling the screen, pairing slowness with expansion. Artist Arooj Aftab’s voice reverberates beyond the moving image, creating an atmosphere that is out-of-sync with the temporal impetus of academic productivity. Slowness becomes the condition for knowing.*

*There is of course ample and generous literature on alternate temporalities, where queer/disabled/raced space-time is collapsed and reassembled against normative futures (Halberstam 2005; Hartman 2006; Muñoz 2009). Following these theorists, I think this temporal reconfiguration we’ve been considering extends to the archive as a whole. Maybe that’s what you’re getting at when you say it is a rupture in of itself? Rejecting notions of linearity/coherence in that queerly inconsistent way, the ruptures loop and connect continuously, speaking from differently bodied subject positions but blurring, in the sway of voices and images, towards a collective desire for a way of knowing and being against the exclusions and alienations of academia.*

*Reflecting on this affective pursuit of alterity as I rewatch STIMOROL now, I notice how the themes of mourning and loss are interwoven with longing. I hone in on the lines: “Losing my bearings/ my temper/ my nerve/ my mind” as well as “I want to be touched and feel home. I want to hold someone and feel close to myself”. I read this yearning for closeness both as a desire for an embodied self – that healing of the split that bell hooks speaks*

*about – as well as a longing for a relational future yet-to-come :’)))*

*There is a conceptual potency in our choice of the word rupture that I want to excavate. The choice of the word ‘sensible’ has layered meanings: a way to subvert notions of neutrality that saturate how certain types of disembodied knowledges are presented as distanced, detached, dichotomous and thereby rational, as well as alluding to the ways in which these seemingly ‘irrational’ ways that resistance surfaces make sense as bodily expressions of existing and navigating in academic institutions steeped in oppression. Sensible also in terms of engaging the sensory: how institutions make themselves felt in bodily ways and how this feeling in turn produces other forms of knowing – knowing always and inevitably entangled with the body – that calls into question which bodies are assumed as knowing bodies and which bodies, through their opposition, cause friction, ruptures. How these ruptures are also testament to the way in which embodied knowledge resists the imperative to fragment the self, how affective experiences shift and disturb the very fabric of academia.*

*The rupture then alludes to a fracturing of a structure (i.e. the mechanisms of coloniality that govern DK academia), and in that, the potential of its destruction. But why rupture, and not crack, break, rift, crevice? For me, the reasoning lies in the motion, going back to the notion of spontaneity, multidirectional jolts in time-space, unruly and differently ruled ways of knowing. Something echoing Jafari S. Allen’s description of “generative flashes in which pasts are present” (2021, 3). I am stuck on the term generative. A rupture is sudden, unpredictable, disruptive, disobedient; it is also, importantly, not static. Etymologically adjacent to eruption, a rupture does not simply break apart, it emanates – something comes of a rupture, it carries a force, an energy, a willfulness for something to emerge. I don’t offer the term generative in terms of production or output, but in the sense that despite (or perhaps precisely because of) their commitment to abounding disorderliness, their incapacity to be forecast or foreclosed, sensible ruptures cut open a space of possibility. Which, in encompassing the affective dimensions of institutional violence, allow*

*the refraction of racialized and queer embodiment as inexorable responses and interventions to those same structures. Structures that are devastating, as well as demand devastating.*

*I wonder if these thoughts on sensible ruptures resonate with you, or connect to your understanding of the archive itself as a rupture?*

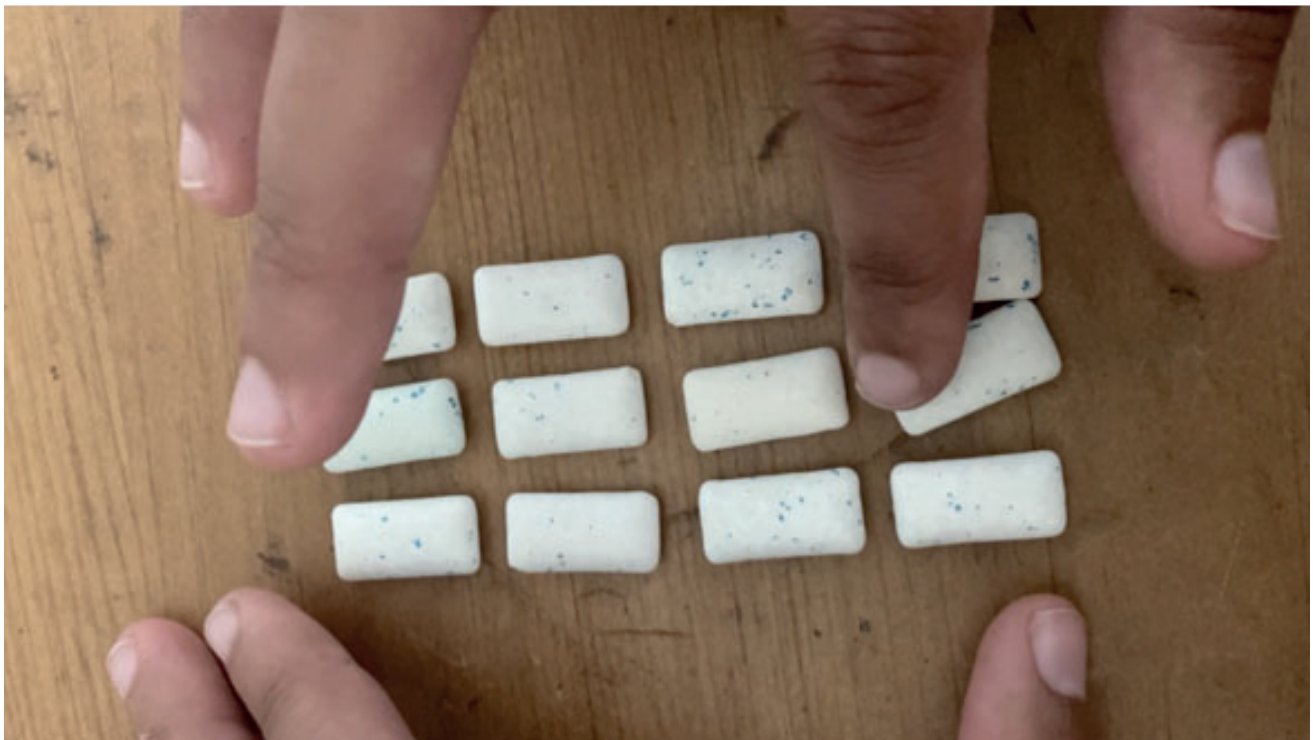
*One more thing before I head: in outlining these examples, I arrive, once again, at the paradox between the desire to theorize from our lived experiences, and the vulnerability that comes with that. This links to conversations we've had around how to do the archive. Realizing that the project was not a display of pain or explanation, so often the default mode of narration afforded/imposed upon marginalized people, we asked how we could create an archive where theorizing and articulation is not simply a mode of education, documentation or extraction for a white gaze, but instead a striving for knowledge as liberation?*

*constantly out of time,  
Maya*

*Hey Maya,*

*Yes! and conceptualizing ruptures as an embodied experience that rejects temporal linearity in a queerly inconsistent way makes me think of the different formats and platforms we considered to explore ruptures in a non-linear way. Do you remember we especially discussed the relationship between the concept and format? We experimented with the extent to which the audio-visual archive should fit into a traditional storytelling arc, i.e. with an introduction, a middle (with a conflict or climax) and end with a resolution. We tried this, and it didn't work, because the linear storytelling format flattened the complexity of a rupture and also risked erasing our individual experiences by homogenizing and essentializing them. Instead, we leaned into the interactive multi-story format with no clear beginning or end, where we could mediate the different affective atmospheres of a rupture by playing with sounds, images, time and rhythm to create a different way of making sense of our embodied experiences.*

*This format also lends itself to telling many stories within one story – it offers different perspectives on the same topic by giving us the choice of*



Still from video STIMOROL, 2022

linking and looping the videos. Especially the use of the loop function became a visual entry point for us to think through the ways in which these ruptures are exactly that: relational, connected and reoccurring, blurring notions of beginnings and endings, with some of my experiences tying into yours and vice versa. The technical process itself, the making of the archive, became a way to think through the relationship between affect, materiality and bodily knowledge. The filming, editing, naming of the videos, dragging and dropping of clips, deleting and experimenting with sounds and images became catalysts for us to co-create knowledge. I appreciate how our practice-based approach is very much an interconnected yet open-ended way of co-creating knowledge about racialized and queer experiences, which celebrates incompleteness in knowledge production (Nyamnjoh 2020) blurring the boundaries of knowledge making inside and outside of Danish academia.

This is why I see our archive as a form of rupture in of itself, because it is not separate from the notion itself – we needed the format to think through and conceptualize sensible ruptures. It then becomes more than a term to identify racialized and queer experiences; it becomes a practice-based approach striving towards a distinct epistemological space.

But, we are now approaching a new phase: after the making of the archive and writing of this article, what do we want to do with this audio-visual project? Who could this archive be for, how can it evolve beyond our experiences? We have discussed how the archive is not for consumption and explanation of racialized and queer peoples' pains/struggles or necessarily seek to advance institutional systems but rather create a space for other racialized and queer peoples to make sense, care for and explore their embodied knowledges – nurturing the ruptures we carry.

Happy first day of spring,  
Gabriella

Dear Gabriella,

Okay, I think this is *The Question*. If the stuff of the sensible rupture, what comes of it, does not seek output or consumption, but possibility, if we are not seeking to rupture as proof, documentation or evidence, and if the rupture isn't static, then what is generated in these sudden and momentary instances, how might we work with their debris? In short, as you ask, what is to become of our archive?

When I think of the debris and 'nurturing the ruptures we carry' (love that btw!), I'm reminded of Kara Keeling's concept of 'futures past', where she gives life to those "struggles and things that people tried to make happen but were defeated in" (2020, n.p.), how those efforts for futures are not a mirror to the present but nonetheless not lost, they still have a power and charge. Carrying along this idea that shattered struggles and intents may still reverberate in the now, it's important to be clear that sensible ruptures don't seek a reductive destruction or to simply dismantle the systems that they emerge from (and thereby illuminate), but instead enact a desire for a more capacious way of creating knowledge. They are not invested in breaking as an end but as a means. By attending to the affective minutiae of existence as racialized and queer people, the ruptures embrace the irreconcilable, the unlanguageable, the felt, the flesh, as the grooves along which we might unearth, and perhaps nurture, a different kind of epistemology.

Thinking about who the archive is of and for, I'm intrigued by how your question of access relates to refusal. Tina Campt outlines the transformative potential of refusal as it relates to haptic images, specifically in work by Black artists, by shifting the optics of gaze to radical forms of seeing. This vantage point is one that demands affective labor "of discomfort, feeling, position and repositioning" (Campt 2021, 17). In her offering, as well as those of many others on the ethics of visibility (Alexander 1994; Odumosu 2019; Sealy 2019), we are reminded of the colonial stakes of witnessing as an affective process, one that demands and moves.

In talking about how our archive might conjure further rupture, I've been thinking about our decision to open it to others who find themselves at

*the juncture of racialization and queerness in Danish academia, inviting them to contribute their own ruptures. By exerting agency over access, how we make it visible, and to whom, the archive becomes a practice in breaking with structures of spectatorship and consumption. This also goes back to our conversation on intimacy and how academic comportment enforces ideals of individualization and ownership when it comes to knowledge. Our co-creation insists on relational knowledge as well as building an ethics of opacity, where those who seek to access the archive must also become engaged in maintaining it as a site of embodied possibility. The archive becomes a space not only for subverting gaze but for freeing new perceptions as we look towards each other. It's cool to think about how we might create a genealogy of ruptures and gazes; one that is invested in mutuality rather than universality.*

*The way sensible ruptures introduced itself as a concept was very much on brand, as in, it felt explosive. It came from an urgency between the two of us, an inexorable need to make meaning of our experiences, our tears seeking scale. The potential of the concept though, I think, lies in its collective expansion; how we intend the archive as a project that is perpetually unfolding and relational. In this sense, our desire for feeling, for one another, for connectivity, is both a premise and a promise.*

*see you in the water <3  
Maya*

## Towards a Relational Horizon

In asking how queer and racialized experiences can be explored through affective, embodied and sensory ways of knowing, these letters conceptualize the notion of sensible ruptures, troubling who and what is considered 'sensible' in the academy, and reflecting on what it means to take embodied knowledge seriously through the audio-visual.

We argue that sensible ruptures offer a lens to analyze not only how institutions make themselves felt, materially and affectively, but as a way of expanding what it means to be a knowing

subject in Danish academia. Connecting the concept of sensible ruptures with the archive, we show how the body and its relation to material surroundings are intertwined. We examine the relationship between the material – linoleum floors, soap, gum packages, and paper collages – and the affective/felt as mutually contingent to sensible ruptures; one does not make sense without the other. Characterizing these ruptures as spontaneous, disorderly, intuitive, everyday and breaking with linear notions of time and space, we contend that they offer generative potential, breaking open modes of interrogating and creating knowledge.

There is an insistence, spanning not just the concept of sensible ruptures, but the making of the archive itself, as well as the letters comprising this paper, on alternate ways of knowing. An insistence on knowing as inevitably imbrued with the body, reconfiguring the self as always permeable, constituted through and with our histories and surroundings. While revealing and resisting the logics of disembodiment that permeate academic systems, we emphasize the generative qualities of this intervention, not as an undertaking in documentation of racialized pain/harm/oppressions or institutional validation, but as an exercise in possibility. Tuning into the sensory, we ask, what might be discovered if we tend to these ruptures, transfused in the minutiae of everyday experience? What understandings might we uncover through digressive and disorderly paths that jolt from the body?

Our letters traverse these routes through intimate dialogue, intentionally embodying both our practice and our proposition. The correspondence itself performs our desire for, and argument towards, relational knowledge. Describing the making of the archive as both a return to and an undoing of the self, we have sought to reject the imperatives of singularity, instead elevating the ways friendship and feeling sustain us within and through conditions of alienation. Merging conversation with analysis, theory, citations that cover poetry, journal excerpts, friends and scholars, our use of queer epistolary also refuses the categorization and hierarchization of these forms of knowledge, enshrining them as mutually constituted. We offer

analyses of different sensible ruptures in the archive, as well as the sonic and visual choices we made in arranging these ruptures, to demonstrate how an audio-visual exploration of these instances can meaningfully contribute to capturing the embodied, sensory and affective aspects of racialized and queer experiences. Crucially, by allowing a different type of vernacular, the archive addresses the necessity and potential of substantiating these experiences. Pointing to the specificity, and oftentimes vulnerability, of researching and articulating experiences of marginalization in Denmark, we contextualize our project through the urgency of those absences – of language, reckoning with colonial histories and acknowledgment of structural racism – that saturate Danish academia.

Reflecting on tensions of gaze and access, we open the archive to other racialized and queer

people in Danish higher education in the hopes of collectively developing sensible ruptures. In this sense, the archive is an ongoing, open-ended project. It's important to highlight that we weave together our experiences to valorize interdependence, but not to collapse or conflate: we mean for the space to be a practice in collective knowledge creation, recognizing our distinct positions and experiences, not a move towards the universal and homogenizing. We have gathered these ruptures as an experiment towards a relational horizon, hoping that our work can contribute to enlivening ground for new terms, methods, concepts, connections and creations to continue to shift and arise. We establish ruptures as necessary, not simply for enduring those systems implicated in the colonial project, but for pushing at its limits, towards emanation and possibility.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Recognising that these categorisations are contextual, contested, shifting and imperfect, we use racialized to describe the process of being racialized as non-white.
- <sup>2</sup> For insight from Black feminist and Indigenous scholars, see Dillard (2010); Navarro et al. (2013), Simpson (2007), Wilson (2008).
- <sup>3</sup> Scholars have expanded conceptualisations of the archive beyond the textual, attending to its affective dimensions (Cvetkovich 2003) and addressing archives not only as “sites of power, knowledge and violence but also reimagination, redress and healing” (Agostinho et al. 2019, 5). This project is inspired by scholars such as Sharpe (2016), Singh (2018) and Hartman (2006), who open up the possibilities of the archive as a space of creative potential.
- <sup>4</sup> In the DK context, Skadegård and Thorsen (2019) use epistolary to foreground their intimacy in researching monstrosity, gender and race. Also see Midtvåge Diallo et al.’s (2023) recent work on Afro-Nordic feminism, using letter writing as counter-archiving.
- <sup>5</sup> The letters presented here reflect our conversations throughout our PhDs and have been edited for the purposes of this article.
- <sup>6</sup> Marronage is a collective of decolonial feminists who work with resistance narratives through editorial work, events and protest. DCN is an organisation working to strengthen community among Afro-Danish groups in Denmark.