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Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies SSCS

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SCCS-Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies (U. of Sussex) and ASCA-Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (U. of Amsterdam)

by Malcolm James

On 24th October, Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies (SCCS) partnered with Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) for a one-day workshop titled Cultural Analysis in the World. The workshop, held in Amsterdam, explored the two different traditions of studying culture at SCCS and ASCA. SCCS works more in the tradition of British cultural studies, whereas ASCA is more informed by the Dutch tradition of cultural analysis. The idea of the event was to come together and compare notes on the fields in relation to present circumstances and challenges.

The workshop was informed by the SCCS seminars on the "state of cultural analysis," exploring the most contemporary approaches to culture, cultural studies, and cultural analysis, and the recent volume The Future of Cultural Analysis: A Critical Inquiry (edited by Murat Aydemir, Aylin Kuryel, and Noa Roei) on the pasts, presents, and futures of cultural analysis.

The day started with a keynote lecture from Ben Highmore on "Cultural Analysis in the World". Naaz Rashid ran an interactive workshop on the cultural politics of nutmeg. Charlotte Fraser convened a PhD panel with Suzi Asa and Joseph Ironside, which reflected on the different institutional approaches to the study of culture as demonstrated by the panellists' research. The day ended with a plenary discussion with Jaap Kooijman and Niall Martin, which turned towards the role of cultural studies and cultural analysis in addressing the social and political challenges of the current conjuncture.

The workshop was generative and congenial, serving to build shared lines of enquiry and informing participants on the merit of different approaches to the study of culture. The day was universally a success and served to build initial relationships between the two institutions. SCCS looks forward to inviting ASCA back to Sussex in the near future.

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Working Papers

Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies

Cultural Analysis in the Wild*

by Ben Highmore

[*Thanks to Rob Sharp for this formulation]

[*This is the rough script of my talk in Amsterdam on 24 October 2025. It is not written with publication in mind and was designed to encourage discussion. Consequently, sources are not referenced, etc. Anyone reading this and wanting to know more details of citations, archival sources, etc. are encouraged to contact me: b.highmore@sussex.ac.uk*]

Thanks to everyone at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis for allowing me to come here today to talk to you.

This talk has a number of origins or contexts.

1. In July I stopped being employed by a university after 35 years of teaching and researching within its embrace.
2. Related to this is the dire state of higher education in the UK and elsewhere particularly in relation to the humanities and social sciences. And because of this (and my new lack of employment) I'm particularly interested in cultural analysis outside of and alongside the university.
3. Also, recently I reviewed ASCA's (Murat's, Noa's, Aylin's) book *The Future of Cultural Analysis* [you can download this book for free at: – a review which I undertook because I'm interested in the different histories and conventions of cultural analysis, specifically as it has related to the project of cultural studies as always, a *potential* project. And this was in the context of the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies investigation of 'the State of Cultural Studies'.

To put my cards on the table I think that at its heart Cultural Analysis poses the question of a relationship between two realms that have variously been posited as:

An economic base or infrastructure and a socio-cultural superstructure

A text and a context

A work and a society

An object and an environment

Etc.

At its least ambitious both the work and the society are already known and are stable. The society bit just provides background colour and information to, say, a Jane Austen novel, whose place in the canon is reinforced.

At its most ambitious neither the work nor the society are 'fully' known in advance – sometimes hardly known at all. The analysis is an entanglement that makes the work new, and just as important – perhaps more important – finds a new world, a new orchestration of the social.

The act of analysis makes the work anew, but it also makes the world anew.

Genetics and Cultural Analysis

I'm going to dive into the middle of things.

I first found out about Cultural Studies in the early 1980s. A friend of mine was at art school and had a copy of a magazine called *Block*. I was interested in art and the politics of art, and in the issue that I borrowed there was an interview with the artists Victor Burgin where he was talking about advertising, about the Ideological State Apparatus and about this thing called cultural studies. And it was around art, around art and film, and institutions like the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London that I found out more about this project or desire called cultural studies.

[Incidentally (or not) the ICA in the 1980s was an extraordinary mixture of art exhibitions, a place to see bands, and perhaps most importantly a place to hear intellectual arguments – particularly when the ICA talks and events programme was directed by Lisa Appignanesi.]

But I think I only fully started to understand the extend of the project of cultural studies through the formations/new formations project (a small series of edited books that then resulted in the journal *New Formations* from 1987). I'd been immersing myself in *Screen* theory (*Screen* is a magazine for film theory and in the 1970s and 80s it was the place for learning about continental theory – particularly semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralism and poststructuralism etc.) and saw theory as a way of attending to films and other cultural texts, but it was through formations/new formations that the capaciousness of cultural studies became apparent to me.

When you open *Formations of Pleasure* from 1983 there is an epigraph on the fly sheet:

'It is not enough to know the *ensemble* of relations as they exist at any given time as a given system. They must be known *genetically*, in the movement of their formation' Gramsci

I don't think I paid any attention to this term 'genetically' in 1983 but 40 years later it seems to speak of something that was at the heart of the cultural studies project – that was perhaps hiding in plain sight, so as to say. In the 1960s you could hear Stuart Hall using the term, and for Raymond Williams, cultural studies was often something similar to the genetic structuralism that was proclaimed by Lucien Goldmann.

Genetic structuralism wasn't simply putting a work into a social context, it was looking at the historical conditions that allowed the work to exist in the form that it did, it was a way of drawing out the history in the work, the genetic threads that allow art or literature or music or other forms of communication to tell history.

This isn't particularly news to any cultural Marxist who might be familiar with Marx's 1852 study *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. This is Marx:

People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

This is me:

In a more optimistic vein, or at least dialectical vein we could swap the word 'nightmare' for 'dream' – after all one of the important aspects of cultural analysis is to grasp the possibilities of another 'better' world wherever we can find it.

This would be Walter Benjamin's project of looking at how the past provides uncashed promissory notes for a future that never came about.

Cultural Analysis in the UK mid-century

OK, I want to look at how cultural studies emerged in Britain as a postwar project.

Raymond Williams' (RW) connects to both Gramsci and Lucien Goldmann when he talks not about **work and society or text and context**, but about ***project and formation***. Project and formation are Williams's preferred realms. One of the oft-repeated stories that are told about how British Cultural Studies (BCS) began is to name three books: namely Richard Hoggart's *the Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958), and slightly later, E. P. Thompsons' *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) as both foundational and constitutive of BCS.

One of the strongest reactions to this comes from Raymond Williams in an important talk that he gave in **1987 at North-East London Polytechnic** (NELP). I mention the place – this is not a university – but part of a much more heterogenous set of Higher Education Institutions. It was a place that allowed Catherine Hall, Sally Alexander, and Bill Schwartz to develop a particularly historical form of cultural studies in the 1970s.

RW's response to this narrative of these three books 'founding' cultural studies is to say that this is not a particularly cultural studies way of looking at cultural studies!

This is RW telling us what cultural analysis is for him – sorry it is a fairly long quote:

'You cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; that the relationship between a project and a formation is always decisive; and that the emphasis of Cultural Studies is precisely that it engages with *both*, rather than specialising itself to one or the other. Indeed it is not concerned with a formation of which some project is an illustrative example, nor with a project which could be related to a formation understood as its context or its background. Project and formation in this sense are different ways of materializing – different ways, then, of describing – what is in fact a *common* disposition of energy and direction.' 151.

To look at the emergence of Cultural Studies in terms of these three books is simply to mistake the project for the formation.

RW looks not to other intellectual precedents but to alterations in cultural infrastructures. Particularly important for me is that he looks for it in all sorts of non-university forms of adult education – i.e. education taken up by people usually in a part time capacity, people who had jobs but want to 'further themselves'.

This is RW again:

'**In the late forties people were doing courses in the visual arts, in music, in town planning and the nature of community, the nature of settlement, in film, in press, in advertising, in radio; courses which if they had not taken place in that notably unprivileged sector of education would have been acknowledged much earlier**.'

This is in many ways the history of cultural studies from below: a project whose formation is not three authors, but a phalanx of determined students demanding an education. People who had been emboldened by the war, but the successes of the unions, into wanting to understand the new conditions of life.

And we should remember that the conditions of possibility for many of those things that we hold most dear are not the universities, but this determined energy that was always allowed into the university sector kicking and screaming: look at the history of film studies, or feminism, or psychoanalysis, or cultural Marxism, or Black studies. To tell those stories means looking elsewhere to institutions, to formations, that are missing from our cultural memory.

Who, for instance, in Britain has much of a sense of what post-school education looked like before the formation of polytechnics in the late 1960s. How was, for instance, a 'social worker' educated, or an urban planner?

But the main thing I want to take from Williams here is that all of this analysis is an act of creativity: there is no pre-given project or pre-given formation prior to our attempt at grasping them.

After all it is easy enough to tell this dialectical story quite differently in relation to the growth of consumer society and the general burgeoning of a workforce with disposable funds consuming TV, new housing, and so on.

This is the takeaway – the forging of a formation as much as the grasping of a project is an act of creative agency – it is our work – it isn't out there sitting patiently waiting for us to pull back the cloth and – dah, dah, - reveal it. It is as an act of creative agency that is our work in creating a processual relationship of project and formation. And it is part of the politics of someone like Raymond Williams that he chooses to locate it not amongst dons, but amongst an active student body:

RW again, 'these were people in a practical position to say "well, if you tell me that question goes outside your discipline, then bring me someone whose discipline *will* cover it, or bloody well get outside the discipline and answer it yourself"' - 157

Cultural Analysis at the end of the Twentieth Century

I'm jumping forward to the 1990s to look at the establishment of the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis. Obviously, I'm an outsider to this strict project, though I feel very close to it in other ways. For instance, one of my MA tutors, Griselda Pollock was one of the authors of the Practice of Cultural Analysis and in 1989 when I undertook an MA in the Social History of Art, we spent a whole term analysing one single work – Jasper Johns' 1954 Flag. So, when I came across the practice of cultural analysis when it came

out it felt like a field that I was already familiar with.

I want to describe the project of cultural analysis as it emerged in universities in the early 1990s in two ways.

1. First of all, as an act of generosity.
2. As a response to the massification of higher education and what was emerging as the neoliberal conditions of post-school education.

So, I'm looking at this form of cultural analysis from a UK perspective and want to start by noting that the founding of ASCA in 1994 corresponds to a moment in the UK where nearly all higher education was absorbed in 1992 into the university sector – which – amongst other things – erased the complex heterogeneity of the histories that fed into the polytechnics and brought with it all sorts of new standardisations and new forms of state control – including around research.

In Britain the period from 1952 to 2022 is characterised as this enormous growth in the University sector.

So, we are looking at a 2,500% increase in full time students (from 85K to 2.2 million)

An increase from 18 universities in 1952 to 166 universities today.

Cultural and media studies was an agent in this growth – in this massification. And the early 1990s marks something like its moment of institutional consolidation. That Cultural Studies wasn't simply a progressive project but would also be entangled in larger social and cultural forces should of course be part of a dialectical understanding of cultural studies itself.

So the enormous enlargement of cultural studies brought new problems with it:

This is from a conversation between Colin MacCabe and Stuart Hall looking at the period of massive enlargement in both UK and USA:

Colin MacCabe: In the early eighties in the American universities, cultural studies sweeps all before it. How do you look at that now?

Stuart Hall: At some point in the expansion of cultural studies, culture escaped. It became a kind of balloon, a pumped up critical theory balloon. I really cannot read another cultural studies analysis of Madonna or The Sopranos.

So of course we studied those things [as part of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies], but always because of how it interconnected with wider formations. But now it doesn't interconnect with any wider formations.

But perhaps this critique is put most stringently by the Australian Meagan Morris in 1988:

'I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master-disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations'.[1]

So here the project of cultural studies is seen as a repetition machine feeding a massive expansion of higher education. The formation here isn't so much a student body demanding a form of inquiry, as a set of social expansion that we have come to call neoliberalism and within education featured huge increases in publishing with models that are about throughput from people like Taylor Francis, Wiley, Elsevier….

International conferences and the sort of industrialisation of the academy, the establishment of international rankings, research and publishing auditing and so on.

The movement to establish Cultural analysis has to be seen as partly pushing back against this, insisting on the messy sensual specificity of culture itself as text, thinking, sensuality, substance and so on.

And a generous call out to all those fellow travellers around cultural studies who also can't bear to read another analysis of the sopranos, etc. or of anything cut off from the dirty reality of life…

Cultural Analysis Without Universities

OK, cut to the present.

I was going to call this section "Cultural Analysis as the Universities Shrink", but now I think it is better to call it "Cultural Analysis outside the University" or "without universities".

This is part of a larger work looking at various cultural infrastructures and began by looking at adventure playgrounds, and now I'm interested in the history of community arts organisations, independent and alternative bookshops, radical newspapers and magazines, Free Schools (anti-schools), and so on. It is part of an interest in the Vernacular Human Sciences and includes thinking about publishers like Pelican (and the way that the social sciences became part of popular knowledge) and institutions like the Workers Education Authority.

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1 Meaghan Morris, 'Banality in Cultural Studies', Discourse, vol. 10, no. 2, 1988, pp. 3–29. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43385514. Accessed 29 May 2025. P. 15

I think that the genetic situation facing us at the moment in relation to Cultural Analysis is partly connected to what feels like a severe shrinking of the place of cultural analysis within the University. At the same time, and connected to this, has been (in the UK at least) a massive alteration brought about by the commodification of higher education so that it is discussed as something with exchange value rather than use value.

Of course the University is a site still worth fighting for, but I also think it is worth looking outside.

After all the university is only one of the places to find forms of cultural analysis and if we look historically at what might be called 'critical and creative consciousness' we might need to be hesitant of over privileging the university.

So, I want to suggest that cultural analysis might need to go wild. And that this might mean returning to some older forms as well as to new forms.

I think that one pathway to do this – and a fairly obvious one – is to think about something like podcasts – and I have a friend who makes a podcast called Love Saves the Day which in many ways is an extended form of global cultural analysis.

But perhaps counter-intuitively I want to go to pre-digital histories to look at projects that might connect to us and might suggest new ways of thinking about formation – about us working on formations – and by that I mean working on different social and cultural infrastructures.

Let me give you one example – *A Seventh Man* (1975) – it is a heterogenous form, compromising of poems, statistics, descriptions, ethnography, photography, and so on.

What was Berger and Mohr's project? Another way of telling – a new way of rendering, of accounting, a new aesthetic practice.

It took its design principles as much from magazine design as tradition book design.

But what I also want to point to as part of its formation is the publishing. And for this one of the people to look at is Glenn Thompson – as well as the history of community activism. Glenn Thompson was an African American – he grew up in Harlem only learning to read at a late age, and like many later readers became a voracious one.

He moved to London in the late 1960s and help set up Centerprise in Dalston, part of Hackney and an area of chronic poverty in the 60s and 70s.

He started publishing working class poetry

And then got together with John Berger and Lisa Appignanesi and others to form Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. They started the …For Beginners series (graphic introductions to philosophers, theorists, etc.). They published liberation theology.

The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire – *pedagogy of the oppressed*

The Austrian Ivan Illich – *Deschooling Society*

Etc.

My second example is photography workshops. I'm just going to gesture towards this as it is something that comes out of youth work and in particular the sort of local council supported initiatives around unemployment.

I just want to give you some sense of the project.

Take Half Moon in Bethnal Green in London – one of around 70 photography workshops. It produced exhibitions and a magazine called *Camerawork* which was often telling people how to set up their own exhibitions.

Here are some of the exhibitions:

Underdeveloping Bangladesh

Who Killed Blair Peach (Blair Peach was a New Zealand teacher killed by the police in an anti-racism demonstration in Southall London in 1979)

The Police, the Community and Colin Roach

A Document on Chile

El Salvador

Factory Photographs

Etc.

This and another 45 exhibitions were produced just by one workshop in the 70s and 80s. And they were exhibited at around 120 sites across the UK including other workshops, but also libraries and so on.

Conclusion

This is for me an ongoing project that is about charting and theorising what I'm calling the Vernacular Human Sciences – and by that, I mean the Human Sciences as they are practiced outside of (but often in relationship to) the Universities. I'm trying to focus it a bit but I'm particularly interested in community forms specifically local community forms, but also publishing more generally, workshops, cooperatives.

It is a continuation of work on playgrounds – not just looking at experimental playgrounds, but also exploring the cultural infrastructures that supported them.

1. The creativity of searching for formations, for infrastructure – a sort of useable histories
2. A movement from analysis to analytic creativity and production. Brecht a new popular, a new aesthetic for democratic culture

What does this mean for how I think about cultural analysis? One of the things that has become increasingly important for me is the way that cultural analysis is rendered into a communicative form. The point of looking at Berger and Mohr or in looking at the photography workshop movement is to look at the sensual specificity of this stuff as stuff. As work in the world – that works aesthetically to attract readers and viewers and to turn authors into producers – as Walter Benjamin put it in the 1930s.

We always need new models, conventions, we need new forms of attraction, and it is this that finally is my hope for cultural analysis as a generative project of new forms and new formations.

Ben Highmore, October 2025

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Working Papers

Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies

Resisting a Carceral World: Abolitionism and Gender-Based Violence

by Baljit Kaur and Radhika Pradhan

Workshop Overview

Abolitionist approaches to gender-based violence have emerged in response to the limitations of the criminal justice system in providing sustainable solutions to gendered violence. Gendered violence is rooted in, and at times exacerbated by systems of oppression; whereas prisons offer individualistic solutions to violence focused on the body of the person who has caused harm (Verges, 2022; Olufemi, 2020). Abolition feminism, then, is a collective effort to build strength in the grassroots, particularly vesting power in communities to offer solutions to gendered violence. The focus within this approach shifts from individual carceral responses to building alternative, transformative, and radical community-driven approaches which have been marginalised by racial capitalism (Davis et al, 2022; Gilmore 2022).

'Resisting a Carceral World' is a workshop series loosely designed and facilitated by us as part of the Abolitionist ~~Book~~ Club (ABC). Running from April to May 2025, the programme comprised five sessions that engaged with: (1) abolitionism and gender-based violence (an overview), (2) carceral feminism, (3) collective care and justice, (4) mapping community allyship, and (5) the development of creative, co-produced outputs. Consistent with ABC's ethos, the series sought to cultivate dialogue, critical reflection, and knowledge exchange concerning non-carceral responses to gender-based violence, emphasising everyday practices of transformation, community-building, and resistance.

Although held on campus, the sessions were deliberately structured to minimise hier-

archy: we welcomed participants to join a circle in the centre of the room to encourage openness and co-learning. Workshop activities included collective readings, small and large group discussions, and collaborative creative work. We also incorporated adapted role-play exercises to support the participation of group members with visual impairments. Attendance across the series ranged from seven to ten participants each week, including postgraduates, doctoral researchers, academic staff, professional services staff, and local community members, some of whom were affiliated with survivor-support organisations. We also observed that there were fewer participants of colour – a pattern that warrants further reflection on barriers to access and engagement.

Transformative Justice: Thoughts, Worries, Questions

For this section of the working paper, we want to set our focus on the thoughts, worries and questions which so often infiltrate discussions of abolitionism in the context of gender-based violence. In almost all debates about police and prison abolition, someone will undoubtedly ask: "What about the rapists?" (Davis et al, 2022). This inevitable question lies in very simplistic stories about gender-based violence, and particularly sexual violence: if you're bad, you go to jail, if you're good, the police will protect you. While this story appears to be conveniently tidy, it does not reflect the reality of Black, queer, trans, indigenous, poor, or non-binary communities who are more likely to be on the receiving end of state violence (Davis et al, 2022). Thus, it is no surprise that systemic policing failures in safeguarding women and gender minorities from violence are entrenched in high levels of distrust of the police (Gill and Anitha 2024).

Additionally, many of the people and places thought to protect the public from gender-based violence are often sources that inflict that very same violence. The deluge of scandals exposing rape and domestic violence perpetrated by police officers, as in the case of Sarah Everard, is but one example, as is the long-recorded issue of state-sanctioned sexual violence perpetrated by prison and detention centre guards (Day and McBean 2022). So, what of the police officer who is the rapist? Or, when cops bring violence, not relief, to your door? Contrary to your neighbour, partner or family member, this abuse carries the power and protection of the state, and consequently these simple stories fall apart (Davis et al, 2022). Through this lens, we cannot rely on better police training, or speedier court processes that discriminate against marginalised communities as viable long-term solutions to the issue of gender-based violence, particularly because these very processes and practices are engulfed in racist and sexist structures (Beddows 2022).

Against this backdrop, what we saw in our workshops is that the solutions to gender-based violence are less than straightforward; rather, they are murky and complicated. In our third session on collective care and justice, we explored different forms of justice. There was a collective recognition and understanding of legal systems/definitions of 'justice', but less so of alternative forms of justice that do not rely on the state. The purpose of this session was to invite a group reading of transformative justice – an abolitionist framework that understands systems such as police and prisons as inherently violent to maintain social control (Mingus, 2022). This is echoed in *Abolishing the Police*, in which Koshka Duff writes that the purpose of the police is not to fight oppression nor to reduce violence, but to uphold 'public order'; that is, the order of capital and private property, of white supremacy, of patriarchy (Duff 2021: 7). Given these roots, improving an institution within which classed, racialised and gendered power dynamics are embedded, is an extremely limited intervention (O'Neill 2025). Seeing the oppressive violence that goes into upholding what passes for order (despite the disorder and trauma it spells for many) is not only central to the arguments against policing, but pivotal in seeing how things might be otherwise (Duff 2021). Thus, transformative justice works to build an alternative, acknowledging that to end incidences of violence, we must end the conditions that create and perpetuate them: capitalism, poverty, white supremacy, misogyny, ableism, and war, to name a few.

Discussions of transformative justice are also discussions that recognise our communities as imperfect. Often, the way in which communities respond to violence can be just as harmful as the state, including the shaming, blaming, isolating, attacking and threatening of those who have been harmed (Mingus, 2022). However, the overarching belief is that there is a greater possibility for transformation in our communities than in the state. Transformative justice recognises that addressing and reducing violence is not solely about what we do not want but practicing what we do want: healthy relationships; good communication skills; skills to de-escalate active or "live" harm in the moment; expressing ourselves in ways that are not destructive but healing for our communities. For instance, taking accountability for any harm that we are complicit in, and supporting community members' skills to interrupt violence while it is happening.

While some participants were more welcoming of this approach, it felt less convincing for others and invited a flux of thoughts, worries and questions:

How can we trust each other?

How do we begin without everyone on board?

Who ends up doing the work?

Who/How do we hold communities accountable?

Who decides and facilitates justice?

What about the **power** dynamics in communities?

What might **consequences** look like from an

abolitionist and community allyship lens?

How do we ensure survivor safety?

Who shoulders the burden?

Echoing our earlier thoughts, these questions comprise less than straightforward answers, but are nonetheless questions we must continue to grapple with. Being in the company of many questions, even when we don't have the answers, and sharing our worries is far more conducive than no questions at all. They help us to think better about collectively ending gender-based violence and other abolitionist goals.

The work that abolitionist approaches to violence requires us to do can feel 'abstract'[1], and leave many of us wondering, 'where and how do we start?'. In our final session, we planned a short debrief that evolved organically into a more expansive roundtable discussion. We shared and organised our reflections into four categories: things that stood out, challenges, questions, and actions. Here, we note some of the actions the group proposed to help translate complex ideas into small individual and collective ways of practicing this work:

1. Read more. What we covered was the tip of the iceberg.

2. Practice small ways of relying on each other.

3. Create spaces to educate, inform and learn.

4. More radical forgiveness (not dismissing harm but acknowledging wrongdoing while recognising the potential for transformation in the person that has caused harm).

5. Collect examples of what accountability and consequences can look like.

Collective care and Community-building

For those who are marginalised, care is a form of political warfare:

to engage in care is to uphold the right to survive

(Lorde, 1988).

In our session on community allyship, a participant brought bananas to share with everyone. During the co-production part of the session, as the participants were discussing collective care and community-building, they inadvertently channelled their relationship with care into art and doodles on the banana skin. These bananas were taken home and baked into a banana bread, which was brought in the next session to share among the attendees. Through these naturally occurring moments of creative co-production, collective care, and community-building, the bananas came to symbolise mutual aid by the participants. During the session, a pressing critique also emerged - participants who had lived experience of providing care for their loved ones expressed that collective care was a form of care work. They expressed anxieties around this, stating that the care work involved in community-building might replicate the disproportionate burden of care borne by women and people from marginalised gender identities.

Such a practice of care has been produced by and for racial capitalism and requires the responsibility of care to be individualistic, rather than community-based. Collective care, on the other hand, can be retooled to address persistent forms of exclusion and domination (Ticktin, 2024). The politics of structural care articulated by the Black Lives Matter movement disrupts the idea of care as built on hierarchy, volunteer-based, and individual responsibility. Rather, the revolutionary potential of care is foregrounded by highlighting the interconnectedness between care and political organising. In the case of abolitionism and community-building, Ticktin (2024) advocates for a long-term politics of care - one that transforms communities. Such an idea of care is underpinned by the notion of care being a collective endeavour, one that goes beyond caring only for one's own family. Collective care is performed by everyone within communities for each other, breaking the individualistic notion of care performed by certain individual members of the community, for those falling on a higher level of hierarchy in the community.

1 Term used by several attendees to describe abolitionist praxis more broadly.

Collective care is underpinned by the goal of creating a society wherein everyone can care and be cared for; where everyone matters.

While exploring ideas that go beyond individualistic notions of care, the participants sought radical hope in the possibility of collective care. Disillusioned by living in an individualistic world, it created space for an alternative imagining. Disproportionate and individualistic notions of care had created a barrier to engaging with anti-carceral frameworks of justice. In parallel, this raised questions within the group about the role of community support in shaping viable alternative futures, revealing how concerns about collective care can inhibit the imagining of non-carceral responses to harm. However, this does not necessitate a return to carceral systems; rather, it offers a stepping stone towards more nuanced conversations about ending gender-based violence.

As we step back to reflect on the learnings from the workshop series, it becomes imperative to foreground radical hope. Radical hope here means that we collectively create something, even if in this initial instance, it is creating the space to engage in dialogue. In the second iteration, we hope to develop this into something better that enables us to start moving away from the 'abstract' to more tangible and achievable actions. It is a collective commitment to knowing that there is no straightforward solution and that there may not be immediate rewards to the work we do. However, we can be assured that these very small actions have the potential to contribute to the longer-term goal of ending violence within our communities and creating meaningful social change.

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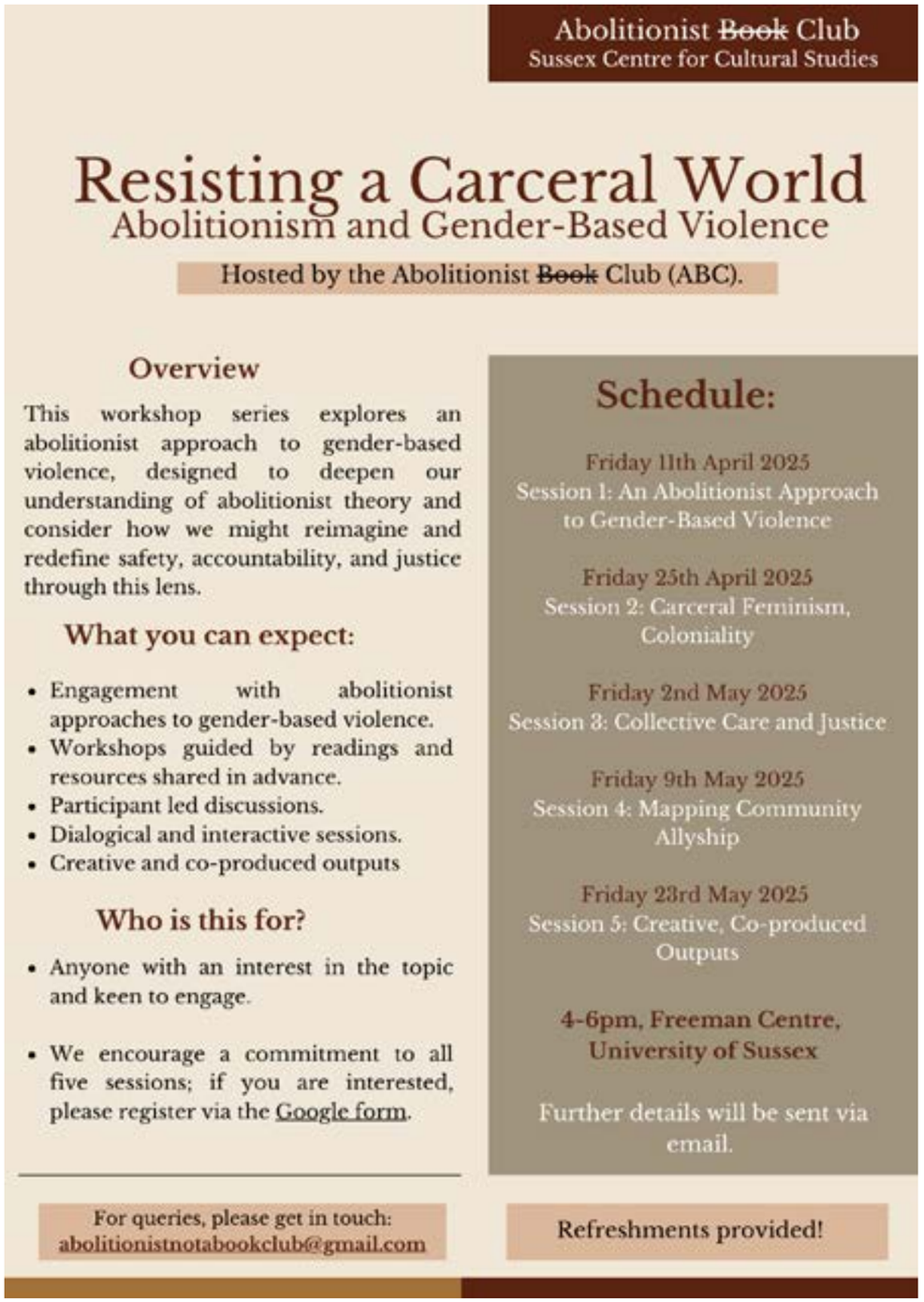

Image: Flyer for the *'Resisting a Carceral World: Abolitionism and Gender-Based Violence'* workshop series at the University of Sussex.

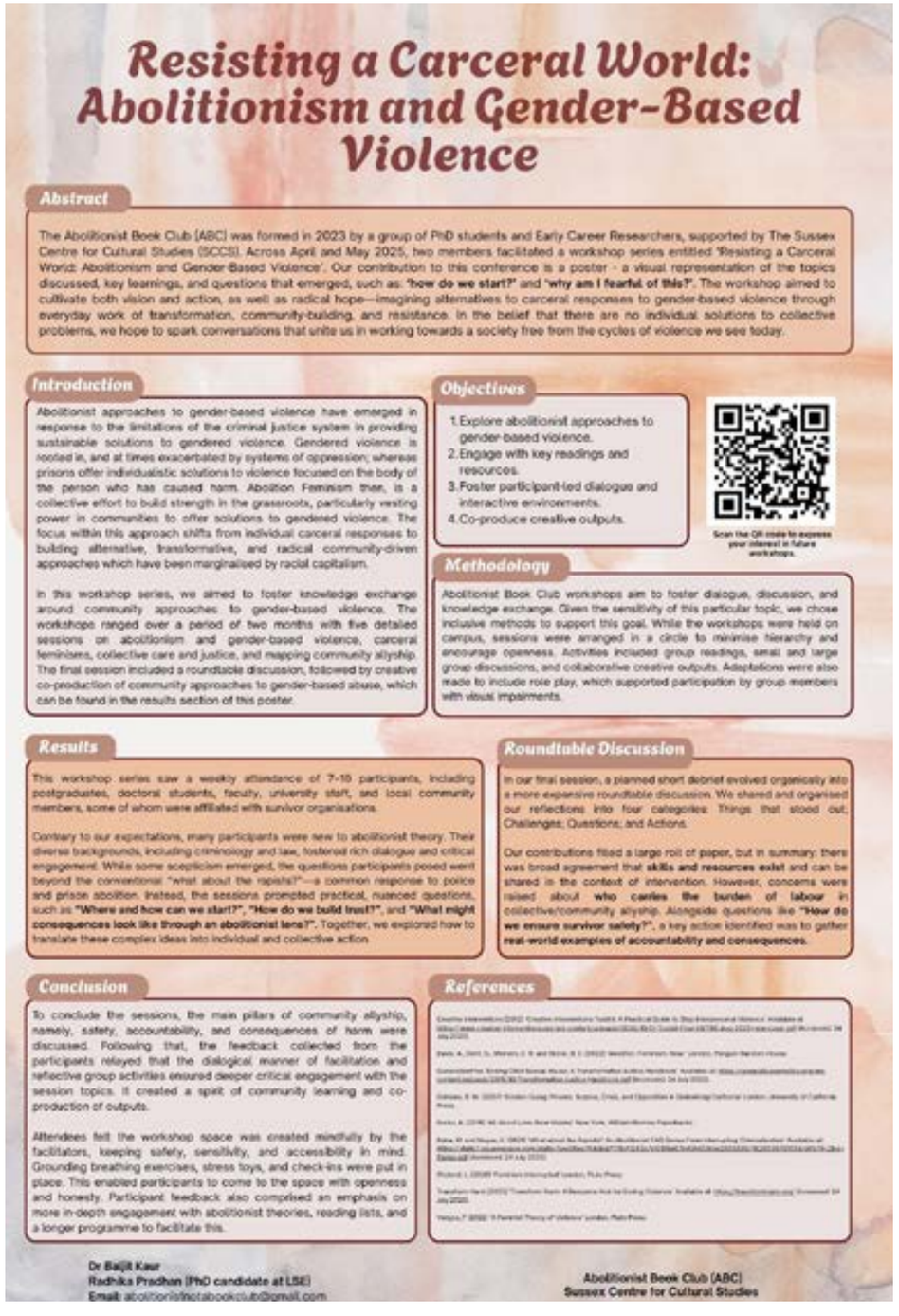

Image: Poster Presentation by Radhika Pradhan and Baljit Kaur for *'A Feminist Politics of Radical Hope in a Time of Oppression'* conference at the University of Liverpool (2025).

Launching a New Website

“States of Cultural Analysis”

We are happy to announce the launch of the new project of our Centre, STATES OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS. This pubic intervention from Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies is a website, generously hosted by REFRAME that showcases innovative approaches to culture and cultural analysis and asserts the ongoing urgency of such work.

REFRAME are also very pleased to announce of this new project.

Stemming from the need to redefine cultural studies tools and approaches for the challenges of the contemporary moment, the intervention has four strands.

- The State of Cultural Analysis evaluates and re-defines the role of cultural studies in the contemporary moment.
- Sites of Cultural Analysis highlights the depth and vibrancy of cultural studies in museums, curation art, youth clubs, schools, photography, and other vernacular settings.
- Textures of Cultural Analysis engages with rich and divergent empirical explorations using cultural studies approaches.
- Times of Cultural Analysis learns through history and historical approaches.

The ultimate aim of the website is to provide a home and archive for the most innovative approaches to cultural analysis and cultural studies, and therein contribute to the ongoing renewal and vitality of the discipline.

REFRAME is an open access academic digital platform for the practice, publication and curation of international research in media, arts and humanities, based in the Faculty of Media, Arts and Humanities at the University of Sussex.