

Fragments
of a
Queer
Radical
Mapping
Praxis

QUEERCIRCLE



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Introduction

This project grew out of QUEERCIRCLE's commitment to queering creative health¹ and our recognition that health is shaped less by individual behaviour than by the social and political conditions in which we live.² Queer communities, especially those facing multiple oppressions, experience disproportionate harm because inequality is built into our environments, our institutions, and their infrastructures. Rather than inserting ourselves into existing cartographies³ that have historically regulated, erased or criminalised us, we began by asking: what might mapping become if it were reclaimed as a collective practice for queer wellbeing, pleasure, and liberation?

We set out to develop mapping as a collective, experimental practice. Through desk-based research, participatory workshops, an exhibition, and this text, this project approaches mapping not as a fixed representation of reality, but as an ongoing practice through which we can collectively reorient ourselves, identify forces of oppression, and experiment with new cartographic languages to destroy these forces. In doing so, we explore how mapping can help us unsettle the structures that shape queer unwellness and imagine the social, spatial, and symbolic conditions that make collective wellbeing possible.

¹ Yasmin Jiang, *Queering Creative Health* (London: QUEERCIRCLE, 2023); Meg-John Barker, *Queer Creative Health Zine* (London: QUEERCIRCLE, 2023). Both available at: <https://queercircle.org/health>

² Ignacio Martin-Baro, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

University Press, 1996); Michael Marmot et al., *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On* (London: Institute of Health Equity, 2020).

³ Cartography describes the practice of drawing maps.

Why 'fragments'?

We talk about fragments⁴ because we don't strive to impose a totalising vision or single unified doctrine. Instead, we are developing a radical mapping praxis that lives in practice, is shaped through reflection, and remains open rather than finalised.

Fragments, because we question what Lola Olufemi calls the hegemonically sealed order of time.⁵ Colonial modernity imagines history as linear and progressive.⁶ We reject this single timeline. Time is layered, looping, unfinished. Fragments of past and present catch and refract one another like light through a prism, scattering into the many-coloured possibilities of liberatory futures.

Fragments, because written words can only hold so much. Our mapping process was nourished by songs and sounds, movements and shapes, colours and textures, and the affective resonances entangling our bodies.

Fragments, because our ideas carry an edge: not reforming a system to make it more bearable, but building something new within the shell of the old.

Fragments, because research here is not understood as an individual invention or discovery. It is the gathering of wisdom, skills, and experience already circulating in queer networks.

⁴
The idea of fragments here drew from David Graeber's *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004) and Lola Olufemi's website THIS IS A TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE <https://lolaolufemi.co.uk/this-is-a-temporal-landscape>

⁵
Lola Olufemi, "But... the luminous tree!": The Uses of the Imagination in Resistant

Cultural Production' (PhD diss., University of Westminster, 2024).

⁶
Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

Fragments, because none of us stands outside the worlds we map. We are shaped by them as we move through them. Our vision is partial. Our theories carry blind spots. Traditional maps often conceal this by disguising authorship and naturalising dominant worldviews as if they were simply how things are.⁷

We begin instead from the premise that no vision is total, neutral, or objective. We all see in fragments. Rather than conceal this, we make it explicit. We embrace multiplicity through co-production, foregrounding authorship, and practicing transparency by mapping our own collective process. We used a Mirō map to visually and explicitly trace the journey of this project, the conversations, collaborators, and lineages that shaped it (reconstructed on the walls at QUEERCIRCLE for the final display.)

Central to the journey are the participants in our workshops who co-authored this approach: Mijke van der Drift, Sega Halsall, Jacob V. Joyce, Dunya Kalantery, Lola Olufemi, E.S., Dolly Sen, and Frances Williams. Our dialogue extends back and beyond this project. We carry ideas and provocations from thinkers such as David Graeber, adrienne maree brown, and Paulo Freire, alongside the everyday teachers in our lives.⁸ What emerges here is not a singular vision, but a constellation.

Fragments, to acknowledge that our project is not comprehensive, but is still unfolding. As we begin weaving new languages for a radical queer mapping praxis; moving us towards our humanity, wellbeing and liberation.

Finally, these are fragments, because this is an orientation, not a prescription. This text does not offer a blueprint. It offers pieces: attempts, examples, reflections, and tensions for anyone interested in mapping for resistance, insurrection, and radical transformation. What follows is a guide to that orientation.

7

Tom Wakeford and Javier Sanchez Rodriguez, *Participatory Action Research: Towards a More Fruitful Knowledge* (University of Bristol and the AHRC Connected Communities Programme, 2018).

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Thank you to PJ Annand and Asha Lyons Sumpoy for their feedback on this piece of writing.

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Key ideas

WHAT ARE MAPS?

‘- What comes to mind when you think of maps?’

- When I think of a map, I think of ...

...I think of a journey,

a piece of paper with a physical map on it,
a world map,
an atlas,
a globe’

...geography, elevation lines, and symbols,
what is where, or like a map of a theme park’

...I think of an OS map with an orange cover,
I think of the colours, the blue
and the green of water and forest
and the different dots of paths and bridleways’

...a map that’s hanging off the wall,
a 3D image of Hungary, my country, in high school.
I’m starting to feel how strange it is that we are
trying to catch this colourful world in a piece of plastic.’

...the different heights of things,
the shapes of the mountains
the different terrains’

...Somebody had to create this map,
so how good is that map?’

...a traditional big map that you can put on the wall,
where you can see the capitals’

...a 2D visual image,
a bog-standard

Google Map version of a map.’

...an image of my own hands that is holding an
Ordnance Survey map in Scotland.
The colour of these maps, the pinky reddy
lines that give the map that hue of redness’

...Fear
Vertigo
Routine
Constriction
Encaging
Boxing in
Formula,

...how maps are interpretation of space.’

Maps are often understood as practical tools: scaled drawings of the world that show us where things are and how to get from one place to another. In geography, they're described as simplified representations of space.⁹ They reduce the complexity of the world into lines, symbols, and coordinates so that they might help us navigate, measure distance, and organise information.¹⁰ From atlases to Google Maps, they are usually treated as factual and objective. As many thinkers have pointed out, maps are fundamentally political.¹¹ They reflect the priorities, power structures, and worldviews of those who produce them. Every map embodies choices over what to include, what to leave out, what to name, and what to centre. In doing so, maps don't just describe the world: they shape how we understand it, who belongs where, and what counts as important. They can (and do) transform our very reality by making certain things visible and others invisible, legitimising particular boundaries, routes, and forms of knowledge.

To think about maps differently, we turn our attention to what maps do, what actions they might bring about. For us, a map isn't only a finished diagram of streets or borders. It's something that happens between people. A map can be a collage, a story, a song, a constellation, a pile of stones, or a

9

John Pickles, *A History of Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2004).

10

J. B. Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001 [1989]).

11

Ibid; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992).

shared memory.¹² It comes alive when someone uses it, feels it, or recognises themselves in it. Rather than focusing on accuracy, control, or efficiency, we are interested in how maps can orient us towards liberation and transform our reality in the process. Our maps don't have to explain everything or be readable to everyone. They can be partial, poetic, and relational: ways of finding each other, finding ourselves, and imagining liberatory futures.

To begin weaving together our collective exploration, I composed a poem from conversations with the co-creators, introducing fragments of our thinking about what maps might be and what they might do.

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Margaret Wickens Pearce and Michael Hermann, 'Mapping Champlain's Travels: Restorative Techniques for Historical Cartography', *Cartographica* 45, no. 1 (2010): 32–46; Margaret Wickens Pearce, 'Framing the Days: Place and Narrative in Cartography', *Cartographica* 43, no. 1 (2008): 17–32.

MAPS AS ...

maps as play before plan,
instinct before instruction,
a body following curiosity
defying the blue dot marshalling our steps.

maps as birds,
recognisable only to those who need them,
perching briefly, then lifting,
never asking to be owned.

maps as invitations: to collaborate,
to improvise sound, or return home,
insatiable longing,
Rajeen, We're coming back.

maps as armour,
feeding the softness within,
a masquerade keeping us safe,
as brutal systems thicken our skin.

maps as poetry, as process,
as prayer woven through making,
calling forth presence,
without fixing it in space and time.

maps as a way through grief,
through change, through the unknown
a gentle guide
leading without prescribing

maps as critique stitched from scraps:
eviction notices, anti-strike laws,
toxic clouds made visible in colour
fiction as refuge: if they can't find you, they can't remove you.

maps as sensual
rocks held warm in the palm,
the fragrant sound of winter rain sealing the earth's cracks,
a collage that refuses to settle without your touch.

maps as carnival, memory in motion,
space for African and Caribbean people
to become bats, to shriek and huddle together.
arms wrapped, ears open.

maps as refusal to be useful on demand,
to be extracted, optimised, or mined,
choosing instead
to resist, to nourish, to move through.

maps as survival for some,
play for others,
who gets space
to wander without needing escape.

maps as affect before data,
feeling before proof,
not rejecting numbers
but refusing to be reduced to them.

maps as refusing fixed goals,
asking better questions instead,
letting imagination lead
without efficiency closing in on us.

maps as tension held open:
meaningful to us,
opaque to others,
legible only where it's safe.

maps as collective emergence,
more than voices added together,
something forming between us
that no one can own.

maps as thinking past reason,
our bodies already in motion before language arrives,
improvisation opening
new ways to mean.

maps as turning the map against itself,
collapsing centres, burning the frames,
black soil for stories silenced,
we commune on the ashes of our enemies.

maps as grounding
stones laid down in unstable times,
not to fix the ground,
but to feel it underfoot.

maps as finding our way back to ourselves,
again and again,
not by marking territory,
but by staying in relation.

FRAGMENTS OF A MAPPING GENEALOGY

If maps can be so many things, why does our imagination get restricted by lines and symbols flattening our lifeworlds?

The dominant maps of our time (e.g. Google Maps) are based on a system of scale called the Mercator projection. It was originally developed by European maritime powers in 1569 and was instrumental in their colonial expansion. Maps using the Mercator projection allowed sailors to draw straight-line routes, a characteristic important for long-distance navigation. This feature allowed European ships to move more efficiently across oceans to extract and steal resources and traffic enslaved people.¹³

Colonial maps were not passive records but technologies of conquest. One reason for the Mercator projection's dominance is how well it aligned with colonial interests. It visually and practically supported the infrastructure of European expansion, extraction, and domination.¹⁴ These maps were used to legitimise colonial violence and dispossession of Indigenous peoples across the globe.¹⁵ For example, maps depicted the lands of Turtle Island and Abya Yala (today often referred to as the

Americas) as 'empty' territory awaiting discovery and settlement, despite them already being home to many Indigenous communities. Maps were used to divide Indigenous lands among colonial powers, erasing existing systems of stewardship and belonging. They turned land into property and people into subjects. The colonial map's grid – precise, efficient, and linear – transformed living worlds into abstract parcels of ownership.¹⁶ It flattened complex relations between bodies, ecologies, and spirits into coordinates and boundaries.¹⁷

The projection also reinforced colonial power symbolically: it dramatically enlarged Europe and North America while shrinking regions like Africa, South Asia, and South America. This distortion visually elevates imperial powers and minimises those they exploited, naturalising racialised status hierarchies through colonialism and its economic order. In this way, the Mercator projection is not just a technical tool but a worldview that supported systems of extraction (of land, labour, culture, and life) by centring Europe and whiteness both on the map and in the global imagination.¹⁸

The Mercator projection did not become globally dominant by accident. It spread along the routes of colonial violence. As European colonial powers expanded from the sixteenth century onward,

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James R. Akerman, 'Mapping the World: Cartography and the Age of Empire', in *The Imperial Map* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

14

Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

15

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

16

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

17

J. R. Carpenter, *The Gathering Cloud* (Stroud: Uniformbooks, 2017).

18

Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

Mercator-based maps became embedded into the machinery of colonial administration, trade, and military expansion. As colonial powers grew, so did the authority of their knowledge systems. With the rise of printing technologies cartography was standardised, professionalised, and folded into emerging sciences and state institutions. When state-subsidised schooling expanded across Europe and the territories its colonisers occupied, these maps entered classrooms as unquestioned truths. Printed in atlases, hung on classroom walls, reproduced in textbooks, the Mercator projection became the image of the world.¹⁹ Generations of children learned to see the world through its distortions long before they had the tools and resources to question them. In this way, the Mercator projection became naturalised; not just as a technical convention, but as common sense. Through education systems, mapping agencies, and, later, digital platforms like Google Maps (which still relies on a web-optimised Mercator variant), this worldview was reproduced globally, shaping spatial imagination at scale.²⁰ Seeing the world this way again and again – in classrooms, atlases, textbooks, and on our screens – fundamentally affected the way in which we understand the world and our place within it. Without necessarily realising it, we absorbed an image of the globe that mirrored the worldview and served

the interest of those in power, and in doing so, many of us also came to accept that their systems and institutions govern our lives.²¹

The dominance of the Mercator projection is a testament to the enduring link between power and knowledge. Maps are powerful. They can transform fiction into reality. Maps make us see through a particular lens, shaping how we experience, interpret, and intervene in our reality. Maps are never neutral, even if they are often presented that way. Maps are technologies of power that make some things visible while hiding others. They have been and are tools of control, used by those in power to keep us placated and persuading us to see violent systems of oppression and exploitation as ‘just the way things are’.

19

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

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Ibid.

21

Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Rethinking Maps* (London: Routledge, 2007); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

ORIENTATION

‘why can’t maps just be birds? [...] if it’s like a tree that has different birds on it. People could even engage with it not knowing it’s a map. It’s only a map to people who need the map.’ (E.S.)

Instead of setting this project against the history of colonial atrocities and state-sanctioned violence, let’s begin with the idea of (dis)orientation. The maps we use every day help us navigate streets, but they rarely help us navigate belonging, grief, or desire. Some spaces invite us in; others subtly (or overtly) push us out. Digital maps can tell us where a café is, but not whether we will feel welcome there. They show infrastructure, but not processes of dispossession that shape it. They offer routes, but not affinity.

As co-creators, we recognised a felt condition of disorientation, of feeling slightly off-centre, out of sync: moving through a city that feeds a violent capitalist machinery, squeezing the life out of queer communities. For many queer people, orientation is a daily negotiation: scanning a room, reading a street, sensing atmospheres, calculating risk. We are constantly mapping, even when no paper or screen is involved. Although we see how crucial these practices are, this project reaches beyond these practices of survival in search of pleasure, affinity, and freedom.

Orientation is not only about knowing where the geographical North Pole can be found, or how to get from A to B. It is about how we find our way in a world that was not built for us. How do we find the people who could become our northern star in these harsh landscapes? How can we orient ourselves towards a future of liberation when it is not yet visible on our horizon?

‘It is possible for one to orient themselves against racial capitalism without providing a roadmap for liberation’.²² Orientation is about how bodies turn toward some spaces and away from others; how safety, desire, fear, and affinity shape the routes we take. Here, orientation becomes relational, how we position ourselves in relation to each other, to histories, and to possible futures.²³

Rather than beginning with critique alone, we began with practice.²⁴ We gathered. We wrote. We played. We placed rocks and string in relation. We asked what might happen if we could rewrite the language of mapping altogether? Perhaps our map could become a bird, a song, a set of instructions only legible to those who need to break free. We explored whether mapping could become a collective process of reorientation, a way to trace care without

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Inspiration from: Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (London: Hajar Press, 2021); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Simone Browne, *Dark Matters* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015).

24

See Rhiannon Firth, *Disaster Anarchy: Building a Framework for Anarchist Analysis and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2022); Rhiannon Firth, ‘Utopian Politics in Prefigurative Practice’, *Political Studies* 60, no. 2 (2012): 303–19.

23

Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift, *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (London: Pluto Books, 2024).

making it extractable, to put our wisdom to use in the pursuit of revolutionary action, and to imagine forms of belonging and relation that our oppressors cannot tame.

Could, then, the process of mapping become a tool for liberation wielded by the oppressed? Could reorientation disrupt the illusion that this violent system we live under is inevitable?²⁵

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Ursula Le Guin writes: 'We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.'



Our process towards mapping as praxis

So how could our process depart from mapping practices that are used to extract, control, and drive the dispossession of oppressed peoples? In response we co-developed a radical orientation to knowing that strives for transparency, actively invites voices from different positions within the matrix of oppression, reclaims power, and remains accountable through iterative cycles of collective reflection and action. To do this, we have borrowed tools from radical organisers like Aimé Césaire,²⁶ adrienne maree brown,²⁷ and Paulo Freire.²⁸ One of these tools was the idea of praxis.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PRAXIS?

Praxis is a word we borrow from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. For Freire, learning is not something delivered from above, nor something that happens only in the mind. It is an embodied, collective process rooted in experience of and interaction with the world. Freire also believed that people who experience oppression are best placed to understand it and to transform it.

²⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

²⁷ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017); adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019).

²⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996).

In his approach, learning, thinking, and doing are inseparable; each deepens the other. He describes praxis as a cycle of reflection and action: we look at our reality together, name what we see. When we share experiences, patterns begin to appear. What once felt personal or accidental can be recognised as driven by structural forces. Once this is identified, we can, together, act to change it and then reflect again on what this action revealed about our reality. Praxis is an open-ended process. The world changes, we change, and so our understanding and action must keep moving too.²⁹

Throughout this cyclical process of what Freire calls 'consciousness raising', we not only transform the world, but we also transform ourselves. By collectively recognising how power operates, and by acting to transform oppressive conditions, we can reclaim ourselves as historical agents, as makers of the world rather than objects shaped solely by it.³⁰

We paired this with a desire-centred approach inspired by Eve Tuck and her essay 'Suspending Damage'.³¹ Tuck cautions against research that focuses only on harm. While it is essential to name violence, communities are more than their wounds. We did not want to map queer life only through surveillance, displacement, or exclusion. We also wanted to map pleasure, creativity, intimacy, resistance, and longing. By combining praxis with a desire-centred lens,

²⁹
Ibid.

³⁰
Ibid.

³¹
Eve Tuck, 'Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities', *Harvard educational review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409-428.

we created space not only to critique what dehumanises us, but to affirm our humanity.

Praxis was our guiding principle in our journey of co-creating our approach to radical mapping. We involved as many people and perspectives in our decision-making as our resources allowed. To make our collective process more transparent, we created a map of the mapping itself. This meta-map traces the people directly involved so far – participants, facilitators, collaborators – alongside the writers, artists, and counter- and anti-mapping traditions (detailed below) that informed our thinking. It acknowledges that this work is not authored by one voice, but grown through relation. We honour this interdependence and situate this project as one fragment within a wider, ongoing, radical praxis towards liberation.

The iterative cycles of this mapping praxis live beyond this text. The next phase of the project is an interactive showcase at QUEERCIRCLE between April 11th and June 14th, 2026. Rather than presenting finished conclusions, the exhibition will invite further participation. Workshop contributors will lead new sessions, opening the process to wider communities and continuing the cycle of action and reflection.

THE PROCESS, STEP BY STEP

In summer 2025, QUEERCIRCLE commissioned me, River Újhadbor, an independent researcher, to co-develop a mapping project for queer creative health. In conversation with QUEERCIRCLE researchers and artists Frances Williams, Sega Halsall, and Ariel Collier, we identified three possible directions for this work.

The first proposed developing a mapping approach rooted in counter-mapping traditions, one that would address the structural roots of health inequities and challenge the queerphobic systems limiting access to resources, agency, and life chances. The second imagined a map of creative health resources available to those living in London, both online and in physical spaces. The third focused inward, exploring how to visualise the skills, knowledge and connections within the QUEERCIRCLE network to support mutual aid, collaboration, and ease pressure on individual artists and staff.

To explore these possibilities, I undertook a rapid web-based scoping review to situate our work within wider counter- and anti-mapping traditions. Selected examples were gathered into a working digital map and shared as part of our early conversations.

The initial search focused on queer counter-mapping initiatives connected to London. The

field was surprisingly sparse. There are important archival and heritage efforts, such as Lola Olufemi's archival project,³² the LGBTQIA+ collections at the Bishopsgate Institute³³ and activist-led walking tours by Dan Glass.³⁴ These initiatives make visible marginalised histories of resistance, care, and radical organising. There are also commercial and community-led guides marking LGBTQ-friendly venues and businesses,³⁵ typically focused on nightlife and safe navigation rather than structural transformation. A number of gallery- or university-led projects experiment with counter-mapping, though these are often short-term and rarely sustained as long-term community infrastructure.

Expanding the scope beyond London revealed a broader tradition of queer counter-mapping. Lukas LaRochelle's *Queering the Map*,³⁶ for example, invites users globally to pin anonymous queer memories to specific coordinates, creating a living archive of intimacy, risk, and belonging layered onto dominant cartographies. In Brighton, Matt Smith's community-based mapping project has explored local queer histories through participatory research and public engagement. In Manchester, Markus Hetheier's sound mapping experiments³⁷ foreground listening as

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Lola Olufemi's website: <https://lolaolufemi.co.uk/this-is-a-temporal-landscape>

33

Bishopsgate Institute LGBTQIA archives
<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/lgbtqia-archives>

34

<https://museumofthehome.org.uk/whats-on/queer-footprints-walking-tour/>

35

For example: <https://www.gaymapper.com/>

36

<https://www.queeringthemap.com/>

37

<https://www.industriesmcr.com/news/voicing-manchesters-streets-through-soundmaps-and-psychogeography/>

a spatial method, challenging the visual dominance of conventional maps. Other projects expand mapping into sensory and embodied registers: Masumi Sato's movement diaries track migration and daily life through gesture and repetition,³⁸ while Kate McLean's smell maps chart cities through collective olfactory walks, translating subjective sensory experience into shared cartographic form.³⁹

Alongside explicitly queer initiatives, this initial review engaged wider counter-mapping traditions. Indigenous land rights maps, such as Black Goose's Kiowa-Comanche-Apache mapping work, have been used in territorial claims at the Oklahoma Court. Forensic Architecture's collaboration with RISE St. James in Louisiana, mapping environmental racism along the Mississippi River corridor known as Cancer Alley, shows how spatial analysis can support grassroots resistance to extractive industries. Other projects seek to transform mapping language itself. *The Dis-Orientation Guide* and accompanying board game at Queen Mary University of London re-maps the university through border regimes, labour conditions and resistance movements, reorienting participants within and against institutional power. J. Carpenter's work on islands unsettles fixed ideas of territory, layering text, code, and poetics to evoke relational, archipelagic thinking.

Drawing on this review prepared across all three proposed mapping strands, I presented the options to

QUEERCIRCLE's research group, including Meg-John Barker, Hil Aked, PJ Annand, Hel Spandler, Stephanie Davis, Ashley Joiner, Juliet Jacques, Yasmin Jiang, Aly Fixter, Ariel Collier, Alex Hincapie, and Chris Rizkalla. After careful consideration, we decided to focus first on counter-mapping as radical praxis.

This work is being delivered in three phases:

1. Co-producing a theoretical approach to and practice of counter-mapping
2. An exhibition and workshops that grew from the research
3. Compiling the maps and learning into a zine

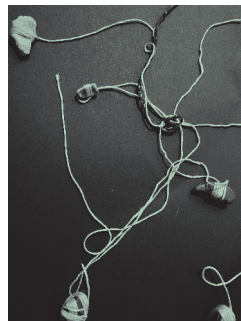
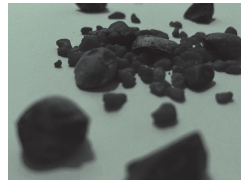
Following the meeting with the research group, I have continued to widen our understanding of existing and emerging counter- and anti-mapping projects to allow us more options for what our project could be. This was complemented by attending exhibitions and holding conversations with mapping practitioners and academics working across geography, digital design, and community organising, including Mike Duggan, Lukas LaRochelle, Matt Smith, and Everin Scott. Through them, we have found more counter- and anti-mapping projects that inspired our approach and fed directly into our workshops as prompts, provocations, and points of departure. Importantly, they helped us clarify our theoretical approach and identify the ethical considerations and the tensions around authorship, safety, legibility, extraction, and

co-option that a queer radical mapping praxis ought to grapple with. Rather than replicating any single model, we drew from this landscape to plan the two participatory workshops with the co-creators.

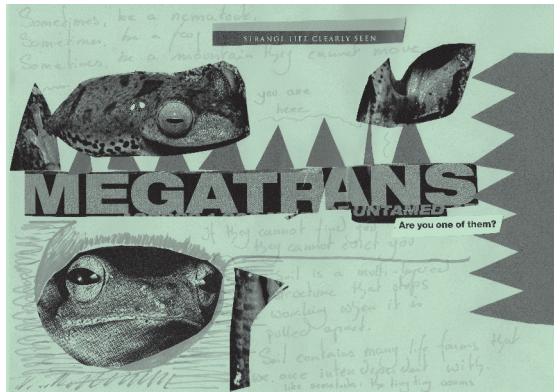
The workshops were grounded in Participatory Action Research theory and praxis, informed by the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Ella Baker, Augusto Boal, and Paulo Freire, and supported by my two decades of practice alongside mentors and collaborators including Terry O’Leary, Javier Sanchez-Rodriguez, Flavia Peréa, and Lita Wallis, the lattermost of whom supported the planning of the first workshop.

FIRST PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

I facilitated the first one-day workshop at QUEERCIRCLE. It was attended by the co-creators of this document. Together, we co-produced an approach to mapping for queer wellbeing and liberation. We worked through praxis, using iterative cycles of action and reflection. Collective dialogue moved alongside making and experimentation. These are some of the examples of this making:



'Rocks and strings, attempting to bond things together that don't easily bond. Maps of practice rather than maps of territory, how you keep things together in impermanence, how you might map survival.' (Dunya Kalantery)



'Sometimes be a nematode, if they cannot find you they cannot evict you; sometimes be a mountain they cannot move. You never need to be one thing.' (Mijke van der Drift)



'It's like a map of how to be a man. Lots of words around control and weird kind of things. Trying to play with it being logical, but then it really doesn't make sense at all, like sometimes navigating society.' (Sega Halsall)



'Together, reorientating, rereading as a process of countermaking. You're tearing out a part of a map and putting it back. How those bits call to us, and, kind of, we rearrange words and images and colours in a way that they're not supposed to be rearranged.' (Lola Olufemi)



'Masquerade. Bat costumes. Art is the prayer. A way of calling to different energies around us.' (Jacob V. Joyce)

SECOND PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP: PILOTING THROUGH PRAXIS

In our second workshop, participants each facilitated a 30-minute pilot session experimenting with radical mapping as a praxis. Rather than discussing mapping only in theory, we allowed it to move through bodies, gestures, and stories, instead of paper alone. What follows are fragments of those workshops.

Jacob V. Joyce brought *The Spaceship*, a silk parachute co-created with Ella Golt and communities of action. Printed with stories of resistance and affinity, it held us together. Through the story of the sea slug, we undid the power of systems that try to fix us, classify us, capture us. Mapping here became a way of resisting alienation and creating coded gestures of safety: testing the waters before revealing anger, desire, dissent. We built a glossary of signals – glances, sighs, half-sentences – allowing us to build networks of affinity whilst evading those wanting to harm us.

Dolly Sen invited us to address CCTV cameras directly after watching her film *Dear CCTV Camera*. If surveillance is already mapping us, how might we queer it? Could we confuse it, seduce it, overload it, or refuse it? Through humour and absurdity – strange hats, dazzling makeup, becoming a llama, fireworks – we explored how subversion might interrupt systems that relentlessly chart our movements.


Dunya Kalantery worked with signs, camouflage, and wearable codes. Participants imagined objects

that transform how they move or are read, then wrote continuously in response to questions about hiding and showing. The writings that emerged mapped trickery, swagger, fear, pride, survival as performance. Mapping became divergence rather than disclosure.

E.S. guided us into sonic mapping: becoming mountains and rivers through voice and movement. Stories of ancestral lands, rituals, and frozen rivers turned into collective soundscapes. This map could not be pinned down visually; it moved between bodies. We questioned whether translation into a fixed form would flatten what sound can hold.

Mijke van der Drift focused on mapping care. Together we mapped how care is asked for, given, withheld, and unevenly distributed in queer communities. Boundaries were reimagined not as border regimes but as shifting shapes. We explored the care involved in saying ‘no’, the power of affirmation reorienting spaces, and how care circulates alongside violence, exhaustion, and grief. The map remained unfinished, marked with caveats, refusing to resolve the tensions it revealed.

River Újhadbor facilitated an embodied mapping exercise drawing on Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal. Participants were invited to sculpt their bodies into images of places that nourish them and places that drain them. The map emerged through shifting shapes and theatre-based storytelling, a landscape of affect sculpted from our bodies.

A black and white photograph of a park path. The path is paved and leads into a wooded area. On the left side of the path, there is a wooden post with a sign attached. The sign has text on it. The background is filled with trees and foliage. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Police and Park
Liaison Officers
regularly patrol
this area

From the praxis undertaken through our two workshops, I have distilled seven fragments to help us orient towards our collective journey of queer radical mapping praxis.

Seven fragments to help orient us

1 – MAPPING AS RELATION, NOT OBJECT

A foundational premise that emerged throughout our co-production process is that our mapping approach is relational, a testament to interdependence, a refusal of separability.⁴⁰ The world teaches us to see ourselves as separate, self-contained units. Maps rooted in this worldview can alienate us from each other, ourselves and the world. Instead, we develop a mapping praxis that nurtures connections across peoples, times, and locations. One, that can trace, as much as it can generate, emotional resonance, affective transmission, and potentialities for shared struggle. In this sense, mapping becomes a relational practice that, as a tool, cannot be owned or controlled by state institutions and the machinery of capitalism.

Geographers such as Kitchin and Dodge⁴¹ argue that a map is only lines on a page until it is brought to life through navigation. It does not exist as truth in advance, but it becomes meaningful through use. This shifts mapping from object to event; meaning emerges in the encounter.⁴² We were inspired by the songlines – also known as ‘dreaming tracks’ – practices in many Aboriginal Australian cultures across mainland Australia. These songs, held in living memory, carried the description of routes across

⁴⁰ Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift, *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (London: Pluto Books, 2024).

⁴¹ Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Rethinking Maps* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴² Rhiannon Firth, ‘Making Maps Otherwise: Radical Cartography and Social Movements’, *Geoforum* 43, no. 6 (2012): 1203–1212.

Country.⁴³ They recount the journeys of ancestral beings and encode navigation, ecological knowledge, and systems of accountability. Sung in sequence, they enabled people to travel vast distances and find their way back to places they had left in search of food, water, trade, or seasonal resources. These maps are living, embodied practices, held and transmitted according to customs of stewardship.

Dominant mapping, by contrast, often severs relation. Like the blue dot on Google Maps, it keeps your eyes on the screen rather than on the world around you. Colonial cartographies have gone further, erasing inhabitants altogether, as in Indigenous people in Turtle Island, or British maps of Palestine that depicted land without life, preparing the ground for dispossession. These examples show us how maps can disconnect as much as they can orient. What would an anti-map look like if its purpose was not to control or categorise, but to hold us: through grief, through return (*rajeen*), through care? What if maps were invitations to sing together, to improvise, to come home to ourselves and to each other?

Dreading the Map is a powerful artistic response to the violence of colonial mapping. Installed in the Map Room of the Royal Geographical Society, it was created by Sonia E. Barrett and a group of Black women who shredded official maps

of the Caribbean and the UK and re-plaited them using African-Caribbean hair-braiding techniques.⁴⁴ In a space historically dominated by imperial cartography and white exploration, the act of braiding transformed maps from tools of abstraction into an embodied, communal practice of singing, presence, and collective care. Rather than simply correcting the map's content, the work reimagined the space of mapping itself. It reminds us that maps can be reworked through relation, intimacy, and collective making, not only to critique history, but to change its fabric through political praxis.

This understanding destabilises the assumption that maps possess an inherent authority or truth independent of their users. Instead, mapping becomes an event: situated, contingent, and embodied. Meaning does not reside solely in the map itself, but in the relationship between the map, the mapper, the reader, and the conditions under which navigation takes place. This reframing opens up a crucial political possibility: if maps are produced through relations, they can be reclaimed from hegemonic uses that present them as totalising, objective, and universally legible.

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Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987); Nancy D. Munn, *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

44

Sonia E. Barrett, *Dreading the Map*, 2021, performance/installation, Map Room, Royal Geographical Society, London (artist documentation and exhibition materials).

2 – ASKING THE QUESTION: WHY MAP AT ALL?

We return repeatedly to this question. If mapping has been bound up with conquest, control, and extraction, should we refuse mapping (and being mapped) altogether?

We embrace refusal and rebellion. There are real dangers in mapping our queer networks and lives: maps can be used for surveillance, policing, profit, and co-option. They can flatten our complex relationships into data and turn our radical care networks into infrastructure for institutions that do not serve us.

Counter-mapping emerged in response to this history. It challenges dominant cartographies by making visible the lives, meanings, and struggles erased by official maps.⁴⁵ Yet a tension remains: if counter-mapping relies on the same visual grammar of borders, pins, and projections, does it risk reproducing the logic it seeks to resist? Can the master's tools dismantle the master's house?⁴⁶

As described above, some initiatives work within recognisable cartographic forms to achieve strategic clarity, for example, Indigenous land rights maps used in court to support territorial claims. Others take a more radical turn, breaking from Mercator projections, Cartesian grids,⁴⁷ and state-style boundaries altogether. Often described

as anti-mapping, this strand questions the very language that dominant maps use. Mapping might become story, performance, walking, sound, memory, or collective improvisation. We align with this latter approach, prioritising security over legibility, relation over ownership, freedom over fixed territory. Rather than fitting alternative knowledge into colonial containers, we build new mapping languages written by us, for us.

Our framework fundamentally sees mapping as resistance: not reforming violent infrastructures, but uprooting them. Colonial mapping centres efficiency, property, and control; we centre curiosity, relationality, multiplicity, and liberation. Where dominant maps freeze land into parcels and people into subjects, we ask how mapping might hold emergence, hauntings, and revolutionary potentials. Where maps have guided colonial extraction and displacement, we ask how they might serve practices of reparations and commoning, how maps may guide us home into collective autonomy and possibilities for insurrection. Mapping, in this sense, becomes a tool not for domination but for liberation: reclaiming our gaze, asserting our humanity, and fracturing the status quo so that new forms of commoning, care, and resistance can take root.

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Mike Duggan and Daniel Gutiérrez-Ujaque, 'Counter-mapping as Praxis: Participation, Pedagogy, and Creativity', *Progress in Human Geography* 49, no. 6 (2025): 562–580.

46

Audre Lorde, 'Can the Master's Tools Dismantle the Master's House?', in Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981).

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A Cartesian grid is a two-dimensional, rectangular coordinate system used to pinpoint locations using a horizontal axis and a vertical axis that intersect perpendicularly at an origin.

3 – LEANING INTO TRANSPARENCY AND PARTIALITY

Colonial mapping claims authority by presenting its vision as complete, objective, neutral, as if maps simply mirror the world. Their partiality is rarely foregrounded. They do not show the choices behind the borders, the silences behind the labels, the worldview embedded in the projection.⁴⁸ This pretence of completeness is part of their power. It allows the map to speak as if from nowhere, and therefore for everyone.

Our approach moves in the opposite direction. We begin from the understanding that every map is partial, situated, and shaped by the social position we occupy. We remain attentive to our own theoretical blind spots, life experiences, and limits of vision. Rather than hide this, we frame our work explicitly: this is a fragment, not a total world. By naming our standpoint and our constraints, we loosen the grip of symbolic authority that maps often carry.

In practice, this means using clusters instead of clean borders, fragments instead of seamless wholes, invitations instead of instructions. It means including process notes, collective authorship, and visible seams. It means allowing opacity where necessary, and refusing the pressure to make everything legible to everyone. These small gestures matter. When a map admits it is partial, it stops

pretending to dominate reality. It becomes something else: a contribution, a proposal, an opening. In doing so, it actively unsettles the symbolic power that colonial cartography has long relied on.

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J. B. Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 149–168.

4 – REACHING BEYOND THE VISIBLE THROUGH AFFECT, INTUITION, AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

Another major thread throughout our collective exploration concerns the role of affect, intuition, and non-rational knowledge in mapping practices.⁴⁹ In our workshops, experiences of place were often described through bodily sensations like goosebumps, atmospheres, sudden shifts in mood, rather than through coordinates or data. In contrast, colonial mapping privileges what can be seen, measured, bordered, and owned. It treats space as fixed and legible, and in doing so often drains it of aliveness. We found that dominant maps can kill curiosity: they tell you exactly where you are and where to go, closing down possibilities for transgression, play, and wonder. Our approach instead asks: how might we reorient ourselves by following our curiosity? How might our mapping invite uncertainty, desire, and affective engagement? Rather than centring mastery and control, how can we centre joy, connection, and the felt sense of being moved by others.

Across the workshops, emotions, sensations, and intensities weren't something we analysed from a distance; we allowed ourselves to be moved by them, let them move through us and reverberate in between us. We explored our bodies as open, relational, and

constantly affecting and being affected. Through these engagements, our attention shifted to what mapping does, not just what it represents.⁵⁰ We experimented with collage, sang and chanted, folded our bodies into shapes and entangled with each other in playful movement.

Art-based mapping allowed us to move beyond rigid planning into instinct and improvisation. We reflected on how creative practice can open space for the imagination to reconstitute our affective and political will; not by pretending a map can solve structural power, but by loosening its hold. Jacob drew on carnival traditions to imagine maps as communal movement and remembrance, especially within African and Caribbean diasporic experience. Dolly used collage and text to critique institutional violence. Mijke created a fictional map of nematodes, squatting, and an evicted house, using metaphor as refusal. Dunya described mapping with rocks and string as emotional grounding amid instability: a small act of finding a foothold in an unstable world. These practices treat maps not as tools of certainty but as spaces for story, metaphor, play, and touch.

Unintelligibility, silliness, and nonsense are identified as powerful tools. For example, playground rhymes, viral phrases like 'six seven', and embodied performance. Unintelligibility resists capture. It frustrates authority, disrupts meaning-making systems, and creates shared affective

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Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2013); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

50

Lisa Blackman and Couze Venn, 'Affect,' *Body & Society* 16, no. 1 (2010): 7–28.

bonds. That which 'doesn't make sense' can become a site of liberation. We balance the material with the cosmological, the analytical with the instinctual. In doing so, mapping becomes less about marking territory and more about cultivating aliveness, cultivating humanity. Radical mapping praxis, in this sense, does not only expose systems of violence and dispossession. It also nurtures affective conditions like curiosity, pleasure and silliness that make refusal and resistance irresistible.

5 – WELCOMING INSURRECTION AND EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

This fragment refuses the idea that a map must stabilise the world. Colonial mapping pretends to make the unknown known and fixes it in place. It upholds a status quo that systematically dispossesses oppressed people, benefitting the few hoarding resources. We are interested in maps that move beyond reform. Instead of a practice that organises us into a movement sharing a unified vision, a radical mapping praxis perhaps unfolds as an unpredictable revolt, an untamable rupture, a tiny gem that wedges against the cogs of the capitalist machinery.

In the workshops, we explored our orientation to the unknown through our discussion on mapping grief. Dunya spoke about maps that guide you through an experience without attempting to solve it. An orientation toward uncertainty that resists the impulse to render it transparent or resolved. We described mapping as a way to sit with loss, displacement, or change: tracing where something hurts or shifts, without turning it into a tidy story. A line, a cluster, a thread of string can offer orientation without certainty. The map accompanies, it does not master.

To welcome insurrection, we allow gaps, silences, unfinished edges. We resist the pressure to impose our vision of a revolution or to translate every rupture into strategy. Mapping becomes a way of staying with process, respecting dissent, going with our gut: daring to step into rebellion together, without guarantees, and without the illusion that we already know the outcome.

6 – REFUSING LEGIBILITY AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL

What happens once the map leaves the room, and our hands? This fragment questions the demand of colonial mapping that insists on legibility and clarity for the state, for institutions, for control. Participatory maps have been used to extract resources or intensify surveillance. Being mapped often served to expose us, manage us, or capture us. For queer people, visibility can carry risk.

Making queer life visible can build solidarity, but it can also expose communities to harm or co-option. So participants explored the importance of opacity. E.S. and Jacob discussed masquerade, disguise, and partial concealment as strategies. What if a map holds knowledge that only certain people can read? What if some details remain deliberately obscured? Radical mapping praxis should consider what is shared, what is coded, and what is withheld. It is about ‘holding the key’ while also refusing to hand it over completely.

This raises tensions. We want our work to support queer wellbeing and liberation. Sometimes that requires clarity and practical usefulness. At other times, strategy can slip into military metaphors and goal-driven thinking that narrows imagination, as Mijke pointed out. Jacob considered if a map’s value lies in what it does practically, or in what it makes us feel and experience together.

At the same time, participants were clear that the politics of who gets to be unintelligible matters. Some people can play with opacity, but others must map in order to survive, to find escape routes from eviction, policing, or displacement. Who gets the time and safety to experiment with opacity? Who must map clearly in order to survive to find housing, to access care, to avoid violence? Our mapping approach stays alert to these unequal conditions, to the uneven risks people carry, and to the different reasons we might map in the first place.

7 – HOLDING TENSIONS

The final fragment of our framework is both simple and demanding: we do not try to resolve the tensions this work raises. Radical mapping praxis works with contradictions rather than smoothing them out. The friction is not a failure of the method. It is part of the method.

Counter-mapping scholars and practitioners have long argued that mapping is never just technical. It raises ethical considerations from the start. Decisions about scale, visibility, authorship, access, and platform are decisions about power. Participatory and community mapping projects have shown that even well-intentioned maps can be co-opted, extracted, or repurposed by states, corporations, or NGOs.⁵¹

Throughout this project, we have been navigating a set of ongoing tensions. Earlier we explored:

- process vs. goal orientation
- meaningful expression vs. public legibility
- visibility vs. safety
- using colonial tools vs. resisting colonial logics

There are further tensions we must also sit with:

Individual voices vs. Collective imagination

How do we honour individual journeys, experiences, and revolts, while creating space for something collective to emerge, something that is more than just its individual parts? How do we move beyond aggregation toward shared imagination and struggle?

Participation vs. Extraction

Counter-mapping is often framed as empowering but, without long-term commitment, it can slip into extraction. Gathering stories without shifting material conditions risks reproducing harm. Ethical counter-mapping requires clarity about who participates, who benefits, and who may be harmed. Without long-term commitment, participation can become extractive. How do we practice transparency and accountability, especially in low-resource contexts like charity-based or grassroots research?

Institutional power and resources vs. Grassroots practice

Access to funding, space, and visibility shapes how knowledge circulates and whose voices are amplified. It also carries a different kind of authority. This means our maps do not move through the world neutrally. They enter policy conversations, funding frameworks, and cultural economies. What responsibilities come with that position? Does it

⁵¹

See for example the case of the Maya Atlas
<https://nawimaps.com/maps/maya-atlas/>

make it more likely that a radical approach is toned down or even co-opted? How do we ensure that this radical mapping practice is also helpful for grassroots networks of queer organising? Who benefits? Who is exposed? Who is erased?

To practice radical mapping praxis is to remain inside these questions and to revisit them as contexts shift, risks change, and relationships deepen. Ethics are not a tick-box exercise, they are an iterative practice. There may be no perfect balance, only situated decisions, made collectively, with care, and revised over time.

Invitation

This is not a finished map.

It is an orientation.

A practice in motion.



A set of fragments gathered in relation.

Rearrange it.

Break it apart.

Take what resonates.



Let it shift in relation to your context.

This work turns mapping

toward

practices that sustain queer wellbeing

towards practices that help us move toward liberatory futures.

This work continues beyond the page.

Fragments of a queer radical mapping praxis

Written by River Újhadbor,
co-created with Mijke van der Drift,
Sega Halsall, Jacob V. Joyce,
Dunya Kalantery, Lola Olufemi,
E.S., Dolly Sen, and Frances Williams.

Desire Lines: counter mapping creative health,
runs at QUEERCIRCLE from 11 April – 14 June.
Across the exhibition you will encounter many of the
artists, thinkers, and mapping projects mentioned in
this report. There will be opportunities to meet the
mappers, take part in creative workshops, listen to
River speak about this project, and add your own
desires to the evolving display.



Artworks on pages 10, 11, 30, 31, 46, 47
by Jacob V Joyce

Collage artworks on page 42 by
Mijke van der Drift (left) and Dunya
Kalantery (right)

Collage artworks on page 43 by
Sega Halsall (top), Lola Olufemi
(centre), Jacob V. Joyce (bottom)

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