

Inspirer Talk – Harold Offeh

[projectunitx](#) February 17, 2017

Words: Clare Champion

Our latest Inspirer talk was provided by artist, performer and lecturer, [Harold Offeh](#).

Harold's talk focused on who and what has influenced his work, projects he has worked on and the importance of identity and mythology. This was a full on, hour long performance in itself.

A big influencer for Harold is [Sun Ra](#). Born Herman Poole Blount, Sun Ra was a jazz musician and performer from America who created a myth narrative in the late 1950s and adopted this new identity. These themes of myth and identity were of great interest to Harold and inspire his work as an artist and performer.

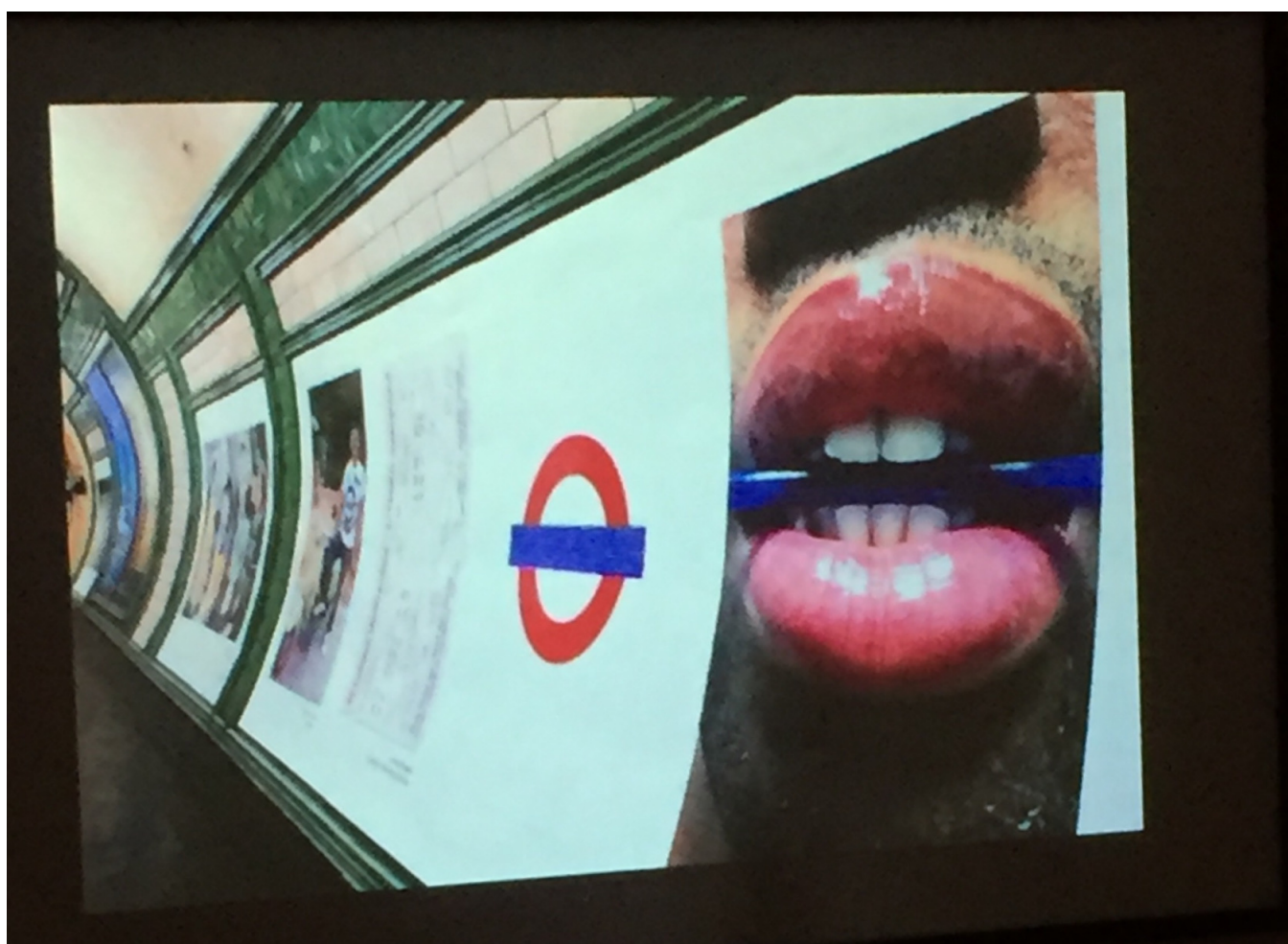


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj8KONVISC8>

Previous Projects

Harold talked through a number of his previous projects, again demonstrating the importance of identity and mythology and their impact on everyday life.

Two of his previous projects have involved working with London Underground. The first project was an interpretation of the Underground symbol called [Tube Lips](#) to celebrate 100 years of the symbol along with 99 other artists.



The other project saw Harold working with young people from different parts of the city to see their interpretations of different areas. This project was called [Transporter](#) and marked the 150th anniversary of the Underground. As this was a celebratory event, the brief for the project was to imagine the next 150 years of the Underground, how it might

change/develop, and how the surroundings might evolve around it. Such a theme allowed the young people to be involved in creating something that would be seen by thousands of people. They worked on a sci-fi theme with the idea of commuters moving through space. This theme links back to the Sun Ra influence and ties in with the idea of mythology.

Harold told the audience that he loves the sci-fi theme and made an interesting statement:

‘When I ask people to think about the future they often reflect on the present’

Harold’s next project is very different to the work for London Underground, yet still embodies the narratives of identity and mythology. The project is called [Covers](#) where Harold re-enacts images from album covers in order to deconstruct the original image. From this work, Harold was invited to do a [live performance](#) of his interpretations of the images. He would take up the pose position and attempt to hold it for the length of a song from that album:

‘My performance is always a failure as it’s impossible to maintain’

Harold shared a curatorial collaboration he worked on for Tate Britain called [Radio City](#), which was a radio, sound and performance work. The Tate’s learning team invited artists to submit proposals for activities that would engage ‘families’. In this instance that is anyone under 16 and anyone over 16.

In collaboration with Marion Harrison, Harold offered the space to other artists as a residency for a set number of days to come up with and produce their ideas. This culminated in a fifteen-minute radio broadcast at the end of their residency.

Using radio and sound as a platform is more enabling as it isn’t visual, and

allows for another way to disseminate ideas.



Betty Davis, They Say I'm Different.
Original album cover, 1974.



Harold Offeh
Covers. After Betty Davis.
They Say I'm Different, 1974. 2013

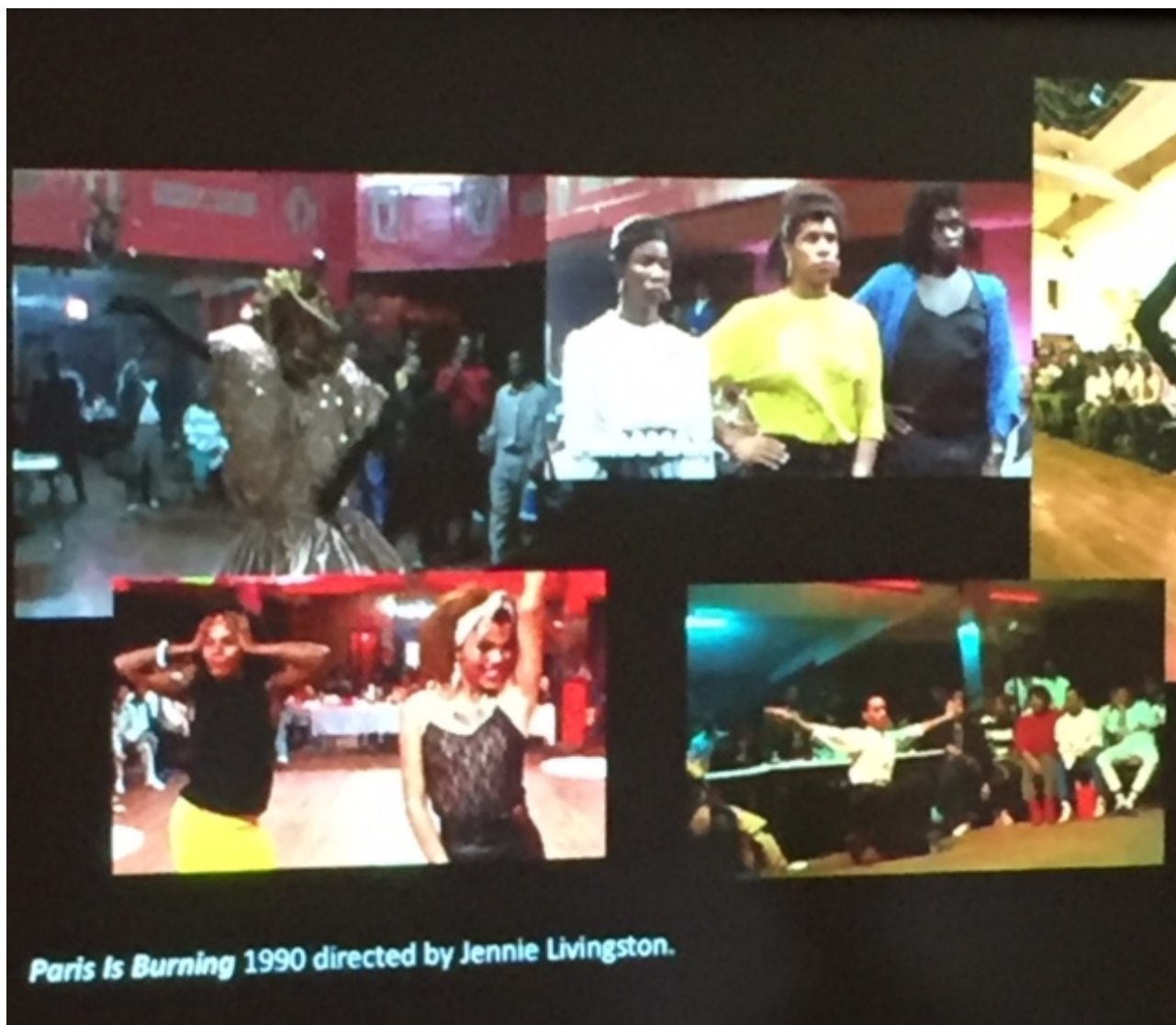


The final project Harold discussed was [Snap Like A Diva](#). (*There is a link to a video on the site, but please be aware it contains strobe lighting)

He was influenced by a documentary from the late 1980s called Tongues United set in New York. The documentary mapped language and the lexicon of movement. From this inspiration, Harold created a collaborative, interactive workshop called ‘Snap Diva’, explaining the finer points of ‘Snapology’.



Harold was also influenced by another documentary called 'Paris is Burning'.



This workshop ties in with the previous themes of mythology and identity.

'As artists you are making your own mythology. It's about branding. You have to market and sell your work, which is mythologizing.'

Harold told the audience that his practice has become very proliferated. Working in performance that can exist in many spaces, working with people from so many different areas, has allowed this proliferation to happen.

'You have the potential to be strategic and playful. Think about how you position yourself, about how you want to be framed.'