Allianzen
Kritische Praxis an weißen Institutionen
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[transcript]
Postcolonial Studies
Band 34
A WHITE INSTITUTION'S GUIDE FOR WELCOMING PEOPLE OF COLOR AND THEIR AUDIENCES

* In so pro Black, pre-ten, femme-centric, anti-academic, non-European, anti-colonial meaning
A hands on model to stop demanding slave labor under the guise of diversity

revised in dec. 2017

"Where is home for the black contemporary?"

Jared Sexton

Black folk and people of color are out making culture, like we always have been since times immemorial. But white supremacist patriarchal capitalism has upgraded itself and once again our cultural production is capitalized on, while our bodies, well-being and communities are still expendable. Consumerism from the other side of the barbed-wire fence is extractivism. Extractivism – getting the knowledge, without caring for the people, leaving holes in existence – is what white institutions are almost irredeemably built to perpetrate, unless they have a strong will, purposeful practice and vigilant understanding of redistribution, reparation and rest. From the moment you first contact the artist of color – in its pro-Black, pro-hoe, femme-centric, anti-academic, non-European, anti-colonial meaning – until our arrival back to our “home”. There are numerous ways we are subjected to gendered, racialized, corporate, cor-rective, institutional, financial, state and police violence. Too often, white institution’s approach to understanding these complicated realities takes a universal framework based on vague notions of diversity, rather than a targeted approach relying on inquiry, analysis, criticality, and reparation. Arts organizations implied in the holistic well-being of the artist of color and their community play a crucial role in fostering and amplifying our work – those who do not engage in extractivist behaviors that leave us precarious and exhausted.

This guide is a non-exhaustive compilation of ways cultural institutions – public or privately funded, where people in places of curatorial responsibility are overwhelmingly white and/or light skinned, as well as spaces that utilize the white cube/
2 — Securing the artist of color’s participation

In many cases, white institutions invite artists of color before having secured any or total funding. Although this is understandable, it needs to not fragilize the artist of color should the white institution not receive the funding. In order to avoid this, white institutions should pay 50% of the aforementioned agreed fee upfront, upon signing a contract, including verbal agreements.

3 — Preparation of the event (URL/IRL)

Chances are your public is really white, middle-aged, middle-class, able-bodied, cis-gendered, and predominantly male.

Ask yourself and your co-workers why this is.

Actively reach out to migrant, queer, trans and gender-defiant audiences of color.

Listen to their needs.

Set up a quota for white/male/cis people in the audience. Example: 60% of the audience needs to self-identify as queer/Black/of color. Come up with a reservation system where people need to declare if they are white.

1 Even a virtual publishing platform like www.newhive.com, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Word, many operating systems, or the very Google Doc page I am writing on right now are white institutions, because it utilizes literal whiteness as the starting point of creation. Why do you think the background is always white?

There are countless interfaces we daily interact with, where white is presented as a blank canvas. This visual association between whiteness and “infinite potential” is ideological, because it makes us think of white as default, as the quantum field, the “everything-nothing”, as the place of creation. The artist of color knows the quantum field is Black and femme.

It’s also proven that a black background saves untold amounts of energy (http://www.blackle.com/about). The use of a white background is then not only ideological, but also economical. It creates the waste and the debt that support capitalism. (Petition for a black background as the beginning point for creativity.)

http://newhive.com/fanniesosa/black-background
http://newhive.com/fanniesosa/matrix/black
http://newhive.com/fanniesosa/why-is-my-canvas-white

2 http://www.mcknight.org/system/asset/document/1175/
original/Yes+Artists+Color_Portrait/layout-Reduced.pdf
Involve local artists of color in the devising of the event.

Pay the local artists of color.

A really effective strategy to dismantle and question the whiteness of the institution is organizing a POC event only, explicitly mentioning the need for self-segregated spaces.

Forget about contracts of exclusivity with the artist of color. Matter of fact, actually reach out to other institutions to see if the artist of color can get as much coin as possible when in town. Set up meetings with other white institutions on behalf of the artist of color. Redistribute.

Another strategy is to organize the event outside of the white institution, still backed by the white institution. Invest in a local gathering spot where people of color don’t have to take public transport to the Central neighborhoods.

4 — Arrival of the artist of color to the venue (IRL)

The artist of color will have gone through the custom lines at the airport/station and will be stressed out.

Make sure to have a person with good vibes present to collect them from the station and take them to the venue, preferably a local person of color. The best option for the artist of color is to take a cab. We don’t want to be hauling our luggage through the town like manics only to be stopped and questioned by the police. Remember, we come from far. So did our ancestors.

Give the per diem monies in cash upon the artist of color’s arrival. Preferably the person who collects them should have the envelope.

Organize the arrival so as to give the artist of color a few hours (preferably between 6h and 24h) before the start of their performance/workshop/dj set/concert/workshop/training/talk/lecture/read (not exhaustive list).

In the long run, staff is required to take gender and race-sensitivity professional development courses. Meanwhile, brief the entire staff includig security, catering and janitorial personnel so they know who artist of color is and what they look like, as well as being aware of their audience coming to the white institution so they don’t follow us around asking if we work there and/or barr our entry to the venue.

Have a quiet space ready for the artist of color to gather their thoughts and plug in their phone/computer.

Offer to give them time alone and/or with friends.

Always have water available. We need to stay hydrated.

5 — Documentation

Always ask the artist of color if they need assistance with documentation. Having a coherent, consensual trace of the artist of color’s passage is the white institution’s responsibility. For many of us, access to HD cameras, sound equipment and/or people available to document/edit is prohibitive. Make sure to support the artist of color’s access to appropriate documentation of their own work by setting up a time to discuss if/how to do this.

6 — During the event (IRL)

One of the important things to think about when welcoming artists of color and their audience is what kind of infrastructure needs to accompany the event. People that can come to cultural events on, say, 4 pm on a Friday are people that are not at work/caring for children → white people. Be ready to tackle these issues by proactively researching what are the structural barriers that exclude local people of color.

Make sure to make the events on dates and times that people of color can attend, like for example 7 to 10 pm, or Sundays during the day.
Child care and food should be provided for free.

The events need to be free.

If the events are open 4 all, be in the room. Be present, and be checking white people and their entitlement to the artist of color’s time and energy. Don’t expect the artist of color to be the one to both hold the space and accommodate white fragility.

If the events are non-mixed, make sure to stay around the site in case of emergency. Gatherings like these can be endangering for the artist of color and their audience.

7 — After care (IRL)

Chances are, if the event was open 4 all, that it was quite a taxing experience for the artist of color.

Make sure to make available a quiet space again for the artist of color to gather their thoughts, charge their phone/computer, take a nap, recharge themselves.

Offer to give them time alone and/or with friends.

Always have water/snacks available. White fragility and entitlement dry us, drain us, exhaust us. Soul and body nurture are needed after holding a space.

8 — Money (URL/IRL)

Artists of color are often precarious, freelance and in different, intersectional levels of migration/transit processes. A lot of us have crappy accounts in banks that charge us a lot for transactions.

Ask what currency the artists of color prefer to be paid in.

Eventually you can use Paypal, Venmo, Transferwise, Bitcoins or good ole cash.

Pay for any transaction fee that might come up.
REPAIR/REPARATIONS
PART 1: CULTURAL
INSTITUTIONS ARE
COLONIAL PROJECTS,
WHERE'S THE LIE
I AM A YOUNG BLACK-FEMME TRANSSEXUAL 1ST GENERATION DOMINICAN NEW YORKER FROM AN IMPOVERISHED MIGRANT FAMILY. I AM NOW A RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL ARTIST AND ACTIVIST. I WORK WITH COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS TO PLANT SEEDS FOR OVERDUE PLATFORMS AND RELATIONSHIPS TO CENTER THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST ENDANGERED. I AM CONTINUOUSLY EXPLOITED BY WHITE-LED CULTURAL INSTIUTIONS FOR MY, PALATABLE TO THE WHITE GAZE, BLACK-CENTERED QUEER/MOVEMENT-BASED WORKS. I DESERVE FOR MY WORK TO NOT BE, FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING, CULTURALLY RAPE AND HAVE MY ANCESTRAL WEALTH/INHERITANCES PILLAGED. WHAT ARE CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, ESPECIALLY THE ONES WHO, UNLIKE MANY, FUCK WITH ME AND MY PERSISTENT CLAPBACK, GOING TO DO ABOUT THIS?

THE REASONS WHY CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS ARE UNABLE TO HOLISTICALLY HOST MINE AND PEOPLE LIKE ME’S WORK ARE NOT Mythical NOR MYSTIC. I WAKE UP TO EMAILS EVERYDAY TO FIND ENDANGERING CYCLES CONTINUE AND WOULD NOT BE CURVED WITHOUT MY EXPRESSED PAINED WORDS AND NUANCED KNOWLEDGE. ALSO KNOWN AS FREE INCIDENTED LABOR. I RECENTLY SAT WITH A CURATOR FOR THE 1ST-TIME MEETING TO FIND THAT THEY HAD AN ITCHING QUESTION... “DON'T YOU THINK PEOPLE OF COLOR SHOULD BE OFFERING FREE EDUCATION TO WHITE PEOPLE, I MEAN, HOW ELSE ARE WE GOING TO GET IT?”. TO WHICH I SAID “IT IS YOUR EXPRESSED JOB AS THE LEADER OF A CULTURAL INSTITUTION TO RELENTLESSLY ATTEMPT TO GRASP THE 360 DEGREE PICTURE AND IF YOU WANT TO CONSULT PEOPLE OF COLOR YOU PAY THEM AS A CONSULTANT JUST LIKE YOU WOULD AN ARCHITECTURAL OR DESIGN CONSULTANT”.

WHY DID I HAVE TO SAY THIS? DID THEIR QUESTION NOT MODEL A SETTLER COLONIAL ENTITLEMENT TO MY BLACK TRANS FEMME LABOR? I MEAN THE ENTITLEMENT OF WHAT THEY SAID SHOULD READ VOLUMES. TO BE CLEAR, THIS IS THE BEGINNING AND CERTAINLY NOT THE END OF HOW A COLONIAL PROJECT SUCH AS ART ORGS, MUSEUMS, THEATERS, ETC., ENDANGER MY MENTAL HEALTH AND THEREFORE THE HEALTH OF MY BLACK SELF AND MY BLACK COLLABORATORS. THIS EXAMPLE IS ONE OF THE LEAST HARMFUL I HAVE NAVIGATED WHILE IN CLOSED-DOOR MEETINGS WITH MOSTLY WHITE CIS DIRECTORS.
THINGS I HAVE SAID AT THESE EXCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONAL TABLES: “I EAT WHITE FAGGOTS LIKE YOU FOR BREAKFAST”, “I’M LUCKY TO BE HERE??”, “YOU NEED TO DO BETTER WHEN HOSTING BLACK TRANSFEMME FOLK LIKE ME”, “PLEASE REIMBURSE ME FOR THE TICKET I HAD TO PURCHASE MYSELF BECAUSE I MISSED MY TRAIN BECAUSE OF A LIFE-THREATENING TRANSPHOBIC ATTACK ON MY WAY HOME FROM WORKING AT YOUR INSTITUTION”, “I’M NOT A DIVA, I NEED SAFE TRANSPORTATION”, “ALL MY MUSIC IS ORIGINALLY COMPOSED, THE FUCK YOU THINK THIS IS??”, AND “YOUR INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES ARE RACIST, IF YOU WANT MY ART, YOU WILL HAVE TO TAKE A STRUCTURAL RACISM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE WHERE WE INVITE THE PEOPLE MISSING FROM THIS DIALOG, AKA THE BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITY LEADERS THAT HAVE/HAVE NOT BEEN THRIVING THANKS TO YOU”, AMONG A FEW THINGS.

THE POINT IS EVERYONE IS EXPLOITING THE CULTURAL LEADERS WHO RESIST AND PROTEST WHILE BLACK AND FEMME, STRUCTURAL RACISM IS ONE OF THE MOST INSIDIOUSLY FATAL AND YET ARGUABLY “THE MOST ELUSIVE” TO THE WHITE GAZE, WHITE RUN/LEAD CULTURAL

INSTITUTIONS ARE A COLONIAL PROJECT/STRUCTURALLY RACIST AND DO IMPACT THE LIVES OF MANY. THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING AS THEY SAY... WHO’S SAUCE IS THIS ANYWAY? THE RACIAL DISPARITIES FROM STAFF TO ARTIST PRESENTED ARE ALWAYS PALPABLE AND NOT AS MYSTICAL OR MYTHICAL AS THE WHITE INSTITUTION WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE. IF YOU’RE A DATA MONGER, THE REPORTS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN, DEVOS AND MELLON TO BE EXACT.

WHEN WE ASK FOR REPARATIONS IT SHOULD INCLUDE EVERYTHING FROM ECONOMIC TO ENERGETIC REPAIR.
I AM IMAGINING A WORLD WHERE MARGINAL PEOPLE'S REST/SLEEP/R.E.M CYCLES ARE PRIORITIZED. THERE ARE GREAT RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE SLEEP OF RACIALIZED PEOPLES AND THOSE OF WHITE PEOPLES. I PROPOSE THAT WHITE-LED CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS ARE JUST AS CULPABLE IN EFFECTIVELY ENDANGERING AND DISPARAGING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AS THE CLUB BOUNCERS OF THE WORLD'S IMAGINATION OR WHAT IS LEFT OF OUR PILLAGED IMAGINATIONS. CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE INSTIGATING BETTER REST/SLEEP FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST. HERE'S AN EXTENSIVE (NOT EXHAUSTIVE) LIST OF WHO'S REST NEEDS REPAIRING: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, BLACK DISABLED, BLACK FEMME, BLACK TRANS WOMAN, BLACK IMMIGRANT, ARAB IMMIGRANT, MUSLIM IMMIGRANT, SINGLE BLACK PARENTS, YOUNG BLACK PRECARIOUS AND ALONE ARTISTS AND ACTIVISTS.

ON THE TOPIC OF PILLAGED IMAGINATIONS, DENZEL WASHINGTON PLAYED A COP 7 TIMES ON FILM. THE BLACK MALE COP IS THE WHITE SUPREMACIST DREAM. THIS DREAM IS TO WEAPONIZE OUR CHARACTER AND POLICE OUR PEOPLES BY PUTTING BLACK MEN IN UNIFORM AND PROMINENTLY INVESTING

POC NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDING INTO POLICING INSTEAD OF EMPOWERING. EARLIER IN MY CAREER I WAS OBSESSED WITH THE ARCHETYPE OF BLACK MASCULINITY. I WAS COMING INTO MY TRANS IDENTITY AS MORE MASC-CENTERED AND STRUGGLED TO WRAP MY BRAIN AROUND THE VIOLENT DEPICTIONS OF BLACK MASCULINE PEOPLE WHICH DENIED ME, AS I'M SURE MANY OTHERS, OF A POSITIVE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK MEN.

WHAT I MEAN BY POSITIVE IS DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE OF QUEERNESS, FEMININITY AND GENDER NON-COMFORMITY. IN THE FINAL INSTALLATION OF MY SERIES ENTITLED "I SHOT DENZEL" I WORKED WITH MY MOTHER AND VOUGING AS THE FINAL PUSH FOR GRASPING WHAT WAS EXCLUDING ME FROM THE JUMP... THE SUBSEQUENT OPPRESSION OF MY IMAGINATION. ONCE I SHOT HIM I COULD WALK AWAY WITHOUT REGRET. I HAD MADE AWAY WITH THE DISTORTED NATURE WITHIN THE POPULAR DEPICTIONS OF BLACK MALE-DOM. THE DEPICTIONS WHICH HAVE US ALL PANICKED AROUND BLACK MASCULINITY AND UNABLE TO SEE BEYOND THE MONOLITH.

niv Acosta — Repair/Reparations Part I; Cultural Institutions Are Colonial Projects, Where's the Lie
OUR COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION OF BLACKNESS KILLS BLACK PEOPLE.

UNLIKE WHITE CIS-HETERO MEN I WAS BORN INTO A DEFICIT I WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO REPAY. THE DEFICIT WHICH DENIES ME FREE MOVEMENT AND ACCESS TO STANDARDS OF LIVING THAT I HAVE A RIGHT TO, SUCH AS STRUCTURES LIKE SAFE TRANSPORTATION, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, ETC., YET MORE IMPORTANTLY THE RIGHT TO BE SEEN AS THE EXPERT OF MY OWN EXPERIENCE. AS IN THE RIGHT TO BE BELIEVED IN THE STRUGGLES I, AND MANY OTHERS, FACE AS TRUE AND NOT AN OBSTRUCTION TO THE WHITE CIS-HETERO FICTION BY MERELY EXISTING IN A WORLD THAT REMOVES MY HUMANITY.

OUR REPARATION WILL NOT BE CHEAP, FURTHERMORE NOR WILL IT LINE PRODUCTION-BASED POCKETS. TO CENTER BLACK/INDIGENOUS REST, A DIRECT RESISTANCE TO CAPITALISM MUST BE MADE. MONEY AND THE INSTITUTIONS WHICH CENTER IT WILL ALWAYS EXCLUDE AND PUNISH PEOPLE WHO CANNOT ACCESS IT, REMAINING KNOWN TO SUSTAIN STRUCTURAL RACISM.

LIKELY EVEN AFTER READING THIS TEXT YOU ARE STILL AT A LOSS FOR HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO REPAIRING BLACK & INDIGENOUS TIME, REST AND REJUVENATION. YOU CAN HIRE ME. YOU CAN ALSO EMAIL ME WITH QUESTIONS ONCE YOU’VE SENT MONEY TO ME THROUGH PAYPAL.ME/NIVACOSTA. IN FACT, IF YOU THINK READING THIS TEXT, ATTENDING A FEW WORKSHOPS AND OVERBURDENING THE FEW PEOPLE OF COLOR IN YOUR LIFE FOR FREE IS GOING TO BE ENOUGH YOU SEVERELY NEED TO CONTACT ME.
The story is [...] we are still talking/thinking about diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism (conversations that started three or four decades ago) when we need conversations about cultural equity, cultural democracy, cultural justice. We are still talking about a paradigm shift when, in reality, we are often engaged in (unspoken) power struggles. We are fighting a revolutionary struggle on two battlefronts with a two-edged sword: the need to build, support, sustain community-based/culturally-grounded/culturally-specific institutions on one hand; and opening up opportunities for board participation/employment opportunities in ‘major/mainstream’ organizations on the other.

Baraka Sele

Colonial Distortion

What does a radically inclusive curatorial practice look like? How does this practice become a lived experience that moves beyond the predominantly white cultural institutional frame? Throughout my travels in Europe, Canada, and the United States, I have consistently encountered a lack of supportive inclusionary cultural spaces for individuals who identify as trans*, queer, disabled, Black, indigenous, and/or people of color. Performance curators and audiences alike ask me the same question in regards to creating more inclusive spaces for people who exist outside the sphere of white cisgender hetero-normality and ability: how do we begin to break the border between art and culture to allow diverse audiences to feel more welcomed inside predominantly white spaces? In her blog post, Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice, the independent curator and educator Chandra Frank makes a case to broaden and decolonize modern curatorial practices by altering the current conventional predominantly white structural frames of curation:

“A decolonial curatorial process is committed to undoing coloniality that is embedded in the existence of the Western museum space, and disrupts the power dynamics that lie beneath the development of exhibition making. This commitment creates an environment where the incorporation of alternative epistemologies becomes a core part of the politics of curation. That said, the application of this informed process requires the curator and the institution to contribute to the unearthing of hidden histories.” (Frank 2015)

Before I discovered the language to identify my curatorial practice, I found the act of organizing performance, exhibition, and the humanities fascinating because of my consistent impulse to focus my thinking within Black study and artistic communities. My first job, as a teen usher, was at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan. For me, that museum was a place of refuge, mentorship,
A commitment to undoing colonial structures within curatorial practice must be a central goal for those in positions of power. If we are ever to realize radically inclusive cultural spaces for all people, we must first acknowledge the burdens and experiences of those who are already involved in these practices. Curation, when practiced with radical care, is not only an act of inclusion but also one of reparative justice. As a call to action, I propose that we adopt a framework that allows for both the reflection and transformation of curatorial practice.

This framework, informed by feminist and decolonial theories, seeks to disrupt hegemonic narratives and promote a more equitable approach to cultural production. It involves acknowledging the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism and its legacies, while also recognizing the power dynamics that continue to shape our understanding of cultural value.

One approach to this is through the use of "radical care," a concept developed by Nicole马林 and others. This practice ethos emphasizes the importance of empathy, respect, and a commitment to the well-being of all involved. It involves a radical rethinking of how cultural institutions are structured and operated, with a focus on community and accountability.

Another key element is the integration of diverse perspectives and voices. This includes supporting and uplifting the work of underrepresented artists and scholars, as well as fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual learning.

In addition, there is a need to challenge and disrupt the normative structures that govern curatorial practice. This can be done by reimagining exhibition formats, challenging traditional narratives of art history, and creating spaces for actively engaged and participatory experiences.

Ultimately, the goal is to foster a more inclusive and equitable cultural landscape, where the voices of all are heard and valued. This requires a sustained commitment to the principles of radical care and a willingness to confront and transform the institutions that have traditionally excluded and marginalized certain groups.

By adopting a framework of radical care, we can begin to undo the effects of colonialism in curatorial practice and create a more just and equitable cultural space for all.
realize their own freedom strategies both within and outside of spaces that have been historically foreclosed to them.

Decentralization of a single stakeholder or leader and collaboration with members of the local community is fundamental to the curatorial ethics and inclusive application of SCM. It is critical because it allows the behaviors of Socio-Choreological Mapping to have the nuance, reverberation, and emergent complexity needed to empower any person seeking to participate within a shared goal or project. The versatility of decentralized systems allows multiple points of entry within the digital world, the physical world, and the psychic/ theoretical world. A self-proclaimed activist can tweet, write, march in protest, create a mural or theatrical work, all as legitimate notated and/or archived personal forms of performed collective protest.

Clear examples of SCM ideological application can be found in trans-digital reality and social justice movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #TransIsBeautiful and #GirlsLikeUs. These examples, when considered through the lens of performative movement actions created by Black and queer women of color, decentralize the voice of one single curator. In identifying Socio-Choreological Mapping as a conceptual framework for inclusivity, it has become clear that the role of the curator is deeply situated within the practice and sustainability of care (both for self and others). Some examples of projects that centralize care and serve as examples of how the model of SCM works successfully in partnership with various institutions include The Gathering (a project created by Camille A. Brown that has been held at New York Live Arts and Gibney Dance among other locations), Dancing While Black (a project created by Paloma McGregor that has collaborated with institution such as Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance and Brooklyn Arts Exchange), and Dancing for Justice (a project created by Brittany L. Williams with team members based in Trinidad & Tobago, Miami, Detroit, and DC). These curatorial projects encourage deep collaboration between institutions and artists/activists allowing new voices to enter the institutional frame and cause much needed disruption.

My goal in writing this paper – as artist, academic, and curator – is to implicate SCM as a curatorial framework considering care as a technology derived from centuries of documented and undocumented fugitive knowledge while providing case studies that highlight value systems that are integral to the SCM conceptual frame. I argue for SCM as a healthy alternative for the creation of radically inclusive care-giving within the dominant culture of the art world. I ask my readership to consider if we – as members of the cultural sector and global citizens invested in the resistance against white supremacy and coloniality – are actively committed to providing the socially engaged artist-activist with the sustained resources needed to continue creating the intersectionally collaborative socio-choreological maps "that when followed will liberate us" (hooks 2011).

Fugitive Survival

Before I knew who I was, my being was already rendered into a social construct that understands me to be non-human, invisible, illegible, criminal, disposable, traumatized, policed, a thug, a niggar, a negro, colored, an incomprehensibly Black fugitive. But even as these labels mark my past and present, I choose how they obtain the power to mark my future. Black theory allows a space for infinite imaginative performance and psychic experience to occur. It allows escape, refusal, transgression, and practices of freedom to be felt and materialized in the body, transmitted into action through creative forms of expression and activism. As a Black artist-curator I am a remarkable expression of freedom and futurity risen from a stolen past. The practice of creating and curating live performance is deeply intertwined with the ability to dream limitlessly and, as a result, create the maps that can articulate the possibilities for a liberated society.

I like to imagine: what if my ancestors had not been colonized, reinvented, labeled, and rendered marginal? What if the diseased illusion of race had never become a preordained performance assigned to my body, and all bodies alike, for generations? What performance of self might I be able to engender had those before me been curated into a condition of freedom instead of enslavement?
Knowing loss is an epistemology located in my blood memory. My Black being came into existence within an American context where loss is an epigenetic system embedded in the DNA of how I have come to understand the performance of my identity. The strains trace back to my father’s too frequent disappearing acts and sudden death. They take the shape of my 22-year-old brother who was murdered outside a 7-Eleven in Denver, Colorado. In the alcoholic tears and schizophrenic episodes that led to my mother’s premature death at the age of 36. I know loss because my entire immediate family is dead, and so every day I live in the wake of that ultimate truth.

Blackness, “the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption [...], a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity” (Moten 2003: 1) forces us to imagine new experimental ways of practicing joy “in the wake of loss” (Sharpe 2016) because one is never quite at ease in the world. Always forced to live on the edge, Black life is constantly in the throes of the avant-garde, always considering new imaginative methods of being because it is constantly negotiating the obstacle of being. From popular music to visual art to literature, Black people habitually conjure care, magic, medicinal potions, stories, and other anecdotes of Black joy and survival for the world to eventually consume and/or shun. Back artists are vital to the contemporary cultural discourse now more than ever before. The cultural production that we offer the public domain is integral to the healing of all people as we attempt to navigate through this turbulent atypical political moment in world history known as the Trump administration.

In bringing attention to the crisis in the gallery that plagues the art sector within the US and Western world cultures, I return to one of my leading questions for researching this idea of self-care as a curatorial practice. What can Black thought teach all people about living, being, and creating meaning in a world where “we were never meant to survive” (Lorde 1995)? The SCM concept is a framework I needed to locate because I had to develop a strategy for my own survival in the wake of immense loss; a strategy that might translate into various communities and creative practices. Learning how to exist inside this wake, how to do the work of the wake (cf. Sharpe) allowed me to begin identifying SCM, and as a result, allowed me to find new meaning within my life’s work as an artist-curatorial.

But for my Socio-Choreological Mapping concept to be applied successfully within the cultural institution, more inclusionary practices within the arts field must occur. A reorganized methodology surrounding the consistent and highly problematic implementation of “predominant whiteness” (Wethers 2015: 15) must transpire within the field before a dynamic socio-choreological map can be realized.

The statistics are not surprising. According to a 2017 report by the Museum Board Leadership, “93 percent of museum directors are white, as are 92.6 percent of board chairs and 89.3 percent of board members.” But even with this crisis of non-inclusivity ever present, I believe most white people working in cultural institutions recognize the importance of diversity both within and outside of the art sector. The issue, in my opinion, goes far beyond the concept of “creating diversity” within predominantly white spaces.

While many enlightened white contemporary curators and artistic directors know the importance of incorporating Black and other minoritarian voices into their staffs, exhibitions, and performance planning, much of the art world is still managed under a structurally violent white supremacist’s doctrine that ordains European aesthetics and creativity as the highest level of intellectual/conceptual rigor.

What I am arguing for is a revision in the way we care and support individuals who are QTIPOC once they arrive within the walls of the predominantly white institution. No matter the capacity (staff member, artist, audience, board member), I question if the modern American white institution is actually capable of delivering the kind of care and hospitality needed to sustain members of minoritarian communities who have been forced to work within spaces where the white gaze (and its corresponding micro-aggressors) are endured on a daily basis.

In response to this cultural erasure, many artists of color have created their own strategies and managed to become far less dependent on cultural institutions. The internet has changed the way visual and performance art is experienced. The mainstream distribution of the internet has allowed multiple artists a platform to challenge the structural racism within
embedded in the criticality of current artistic concerns, then they must be in constant discourse with artists, producers, and curators who are on the horizon, self-taught, outsider, minority, and independent. Now more than ever before, individuals are in control of their experiences, carefully curating the cultural content which they ordain as most important to their lives (as displayed most concretely by media), and so the role of the art institution of the future is to create more spaces for this kind of experiential, innovative, horizontal interaction to take place without judgment, prejudice, and highbrow critique. Because "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde [1984] 2007: 110), in order to implement the real work of diversity, inclusion, and radical care, cultural hubs must meet Black and Brown people with new inclusive strategies that center their needs and concerns. Institutions must be willing to work with and alongside communities of color to create programming that speak specifically to the concerns of these communities. The tools and frameworks used to support the work of socially engaged artists need to be just as multilayered, dynamic, and radical as the work itself.

Hand over your old tools and allow those who exist on the outskirts to enter into the center! Watch and listen! Curators and presenters cannot use passé systems to support work and make hires if their institutions are to remain vital for decades into the future. The American cultural infrastructure has spent hundreds of years mastering barriers that facilitate non-inclusion and segregation to locate, intrigue, and attract white, wealthy prospects. Now it is time to devote the same amount of energy to centralize the "dark divine" (hooks 2011) and gain the trust and attention of disabled communities, QTIPOC communities and the like, allowing them the cultural equity, support, and care they deserve!

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko — CRISIS IN THE GALLERY: Curation and the Praxis of Justice