

***‘THOSE
INSTITUTIONS
SHOULD
BELONG TO
US’***

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1.

my job is not to spend my time convincing explaining or justifying myself to white ppl or make more woke white allies, because i refuse to let clueless white kids set the terms of what blackness can or should look like with one hand, while sustaining their positions of power and privilege with the other. what i am striving for in my life and work is to destabilise and rupture white supremacy by consolidating the power that we already have outside of its mechanisms of domination and its gaze. The effort is not to be the most unproblematic but to do the difficult and serious work of allowing difference to become the terms of our liberation, the framework is abolition, not inclusion.

2. tw for mentions of depression

1 of my tutors told me he wanted to meet cause he was worried abt my mental health n i spent a whole hour bitching @ him about art / being/working as an artist and at one point he just goes "well, what exactly do u want?" n at the time i just answered something that even as i was saying it i already knew i didn't fully believe, i can't even remember what it was now, but when someone asks me a question i just feel compelled to answer coherently even at the expense of being truthful, especially if its an authority figure, but thinking about it a bit more now and looking @ my room which has not seen a gesture towards cleaning it in several weeks i can say w confidence that i don't know what i want !! which doesn't mean that i don't want anything or that it doesn't matter but maybe jus that for now the wanting is enough, and what i do know is that in where i am right now there are not the right conditions for me to know what i want, but i am hopeful that wanting it will lead me there.

today is the first day in several weeks that i can say w a tiny amount of confidence that i feel relatively okay about being alive...

one things for sure, i don't want 2b a part of any conversation which, when trying to express dissatisfaction with/be critical of/tries to hold accountable institutions that possess the means to financially and economically support ppl who want to work as artists but withholds those means by demanding productivity, visibility, being articulate and legible on the institutions terms rather than the artists own, then ends with someone going "yeah but everyone goes through this". as if that makes it okay??? as if the onus is on us as artists to just figure out how best to **game the system**.

the one thing my tutor said that i fully agree with is that actually, those institutions should belong to us, to artists.

3.

My mental health has been all over the place the past few months which is affecting my ability to properly sort through my thoughts about my dissertation. I started a line of research before the summer, having been at one point very excited about writing it, and on reviewing it now feel as though I have found many examples of the same thing; maybe I guess what the thing is is some problem with representation as a means of liberation for marginalised people, specifically black and queer people. On one side there is a need to see ourselves reflected in positions of agency power and self-determination in a world which does not really wish to see us thrive at all and on the other, and understanding that representation is itself a system of power which is built not to liberate, but to exclude, trap and to uphold a capitalist patriarchal heteronormative and white supremacist status quo.

However, the feeling that I have now is that having many examples of the same thing has not put me in a position to write a dissertation which asks that we be as specific as possible in problematising a single

instance of a given situation and account for, or explain as coherently as possible a body of research around a given topic.

I don't want to do this and I don't feel able to, because I feel incapable of meeting the conflicting demands of delivering what I feel is expected from a dissertation while at the same time trying to write something that directly affects my ability to survive in institutions built to reduce my experience and the experience of others like me to 'spectacle', to the 'subjective', the unprofessional and the non-academic. The terms of my being able to successfully write this dissertation are premised on my ability to academicise my own experience and to be complicit in these systems by producing more inert critical language at my own expense.

Even though I know at some point I am going to have to yield to these demands I feel I have to say now that I want to take in this dissertation a position of defending the inarticulate, defending the subjective and defending the incoherent, without having to arrive at a point of defence through theoretically determined foundations, but to feel

them.

Audre lorde writes in her cancer journals "there are many things I have not said ... that can only be lived now" Hannah black similarly writes about history as being fissured- 'life is on one side and forms of life are on the other' and that any attempt to cross the fissure from history into this other thing which is maybe life spirals out fast like a fractal, things become complicated very quickly. There is a problem that I can only defend incoherence by being incoherent, but this quickly turns to spectacle. There is a problem that because the form of the dissertation inflicts violence on my own experience as something which represents the institutions power over discourse, I can only retain a sense of self worth by either withdrawing or producing a critique of the dissertation itself. There is a problem where I can't believe in the performance of my own criticality which leaves me wordless and unarmed and as vulnerable as I was before. There is a problem where because of this I cannot get out of bed or open a book or sort through my thoughts at all. There is a problem because I want things to be different but they aren't.

4.

What is the art world without artists in it?! Let me put it to u this way, are curators gonna make the art? No! *Artists* r gonna make the art, *U* need *US*. u may sign us to the galleries, u may put on our shows, u may write our press releases, but **WE** make the actual **A R T**

n ppl have been making art since the beginning of time, across ppls across cultures across history ppl have made art, which points towards it having a vital role in being human, in creating healthy and thriving societies where ppl feel empowered and that they have agency over their own lives histories and narratives.

on the other hand, without artists, whether that means a person with a professionalised artistic practise or a person who makes art in their bedroom for no one, or only their friends to see (and u cannot have one without the other) what the hell is a curator going to do? and to imagine an art world in which it is artists who somehow owe everyone else (The Viewer, The Curator, The Collector, The Critic, The Funding Body — none of which are actually people who form a society, but are functions within

a system) for the validation of being seen degrades how important it actually is to have art to make art and to see art.

5.

i feel like i went to art school hoping to learn about all the different ways in which you could exist as an artist and all the ways that art could be important and instead i learned how to use theory to ventriloquise not only the things i made but my reasons for making them as well. I learnt how to read theory as if it were some kind of self help book from which i could take a sentence here, passage there, whatever was convenient to support my practise and the things i was 'interested' in. i learnt about the limitless potential of thinking imaginatively, about the whole world and everyone in it as a resource for making art, but nothing of the implicit whiteness of this worldview and the power dynamics involved in instrumentalising other people. i learned nothing of the feeling of disconnect, of loss, and being unable to think historically, or how to be connected to the way materials and gestures can participate in the ongoing construction of meaning of the world around me and my position in it. i didn't learnt how to explain to people how important art actually is in helping me think feel and move through problems

that are real to me, that affect me in real ways. instead i got the critical problem, or the critic's problem, that only exists on the level of being 'interested' and therefore completely interchangeable with another problem, another person.

6. the fantasy is so strong

thinking about how the demand for representational politics assumes that proximity to white institutions is good for all of us. thinking about how, despite this, the power of representation is real. where is the line between representation and diversity? thinking forever about how i wish i knew better in the past than to misconstrue the recognition that institutions offer as the thing that will make me a real artist. wherever the line might be between recognition and consumption, it feels more like chasm than a line. i feel that in this big hole there is a direction which sends me straight down. and on the way down the feeling is not of moving towards a centre, whether that be of gravity or of anything else. the feeling instead is of the friction of air moving fast upwards against the grain of my skin. by this i mean that there is nothing but the feeling of acting against a force much bigger than where the edges of my body take me.

i realise now that in the past, where i may have felt antagonised by the ground and its finality and lack of movement, it was this opposition that allowed me to

stand upright on my own feet, and move in directions that i could choose for myself - muscles can do their work in sympathy with physical forces like gravity, i hold the ground in place, like my skin holds my insides in place, not by trapping them, fixing them inside, but holding them together in a way that allows them to move, inside becoming outside with each breath, or sound heard or tear dropped, but the support is there, is real.

back in the fall, there is only the mechanics of strategising - how do i use and not be used? how do i protect myself? how do i attack? how will i break my fall? how do i hold all my insides inside? the language of warfare, and it grazes the skin on my tongue as it leaves my body and the air hurls itself upwards as i continue to fall.

the force of the fantasy rings loudly throughout and dispels the thoughts of the transference of power. the unrecognised must build things that are unrecognisable. safety, joy, pleasure, sustainability, complexity, silence, presence, the list is all commas but there's enough for everyone even though it's not enough to just say so. sometimes it feels like the

most important and difficult thing ever to remember that there is something so colossal in the relationship we create when we just turn our head at a slight angle to look away from the thing that is painful, and look towards something else.

7. New Years Resolutions

- adopt a mode of criticism that is serious in its consideration of history and context, stop focusing on things that make you feel bad or lamenting at the ways the system has not worked for you, or the places in which you have been left out of/written out of/excluded from hegemonic power

- focus more time, money, resources on UK based QTPOC artists ,writers and poets, on reading and sharing their work, especially ones outside of London and ones outside art institutions/the academy

- see more art that happens outside London

- read voraciously, study historically, piss on the canon (preferably by ignoring it)

- find more heroes, find more friends