contentious art: disruption and decolonial aesthetics

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in a political and cultural landscape where artistic expressions that follow predetermined patterns without disruption is celebrated, art that compels us to connect creativity to political processes of agitation becomes urgent. art is a tool for dialogue that can be a formed to give voice or strengthened as a silencer. what separates aesthetic production devoid of contentious creativity from a decolonial aesthetic grounded in self-determination?

| inquire |

art infused with curiosity allows us to cut the umbilicus of white supremacy from the space through which our stories of resistance are told. exposing us, naked and blinking, to the sensations of an imagination that is our own. curious politically contentious creative processes bring into being movement art that breaks space and interjects imagination in the nodes. this breakage widens the in-between spaces enough to step in, to look where it ain’t. it is in these spaces that we find stories of ancestral spirits unfiltered through the white gaze. curious art “allows the dead to talk.”

| map |

decolonial aesthetics disrupt borders.

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art informed by decolonial aesthetics abandons the local imaginary for narratives that reach across those disrupted borders and connects to other locations from which testaments are being made; art is recognized by the ways it affects the story being told, because,

place is an axis of power in its own right. As a basis for the construction of difference, hierarchy, and identity, and as the basis of ideologies that rationalize economic inequalities and structure people’s material well-being and life chances, place is a vehicle of power.²

- Jacqueline Nassy Brown

contentious art maps the currents of power in order to highlight the dots connecting the effects of difference in relationship to inequality. this is not for the narcissism of writing neglect, containment or disaster but to better understand how politics of place shift spatial relations.

| ignite |

there is a subtle, vital difference between the politics of relationships and relationships as politics. one comprises discrete units, connected to modes of production, while the other emphasizes the collectivity of purpose. both of these frameworks will evoke aesthetic emotion. but what is the attraction that evokes the aesthetic reaction between the viewer and the object that the artist has created? in the discrete units of capitalist frameworks, where art is a possession as opposed to an immersive experience decolonial aesthetics disrupts the notion of art for the sake of consumption. here occurs a paradigm shift. movement art works to facilitate the dialogues necessary for relationships as politics. the artist, the audience, and the art play equally critical roles in the manifestations of aesthetic emotion.

decolonial aesthetic is responsive.

| incite |

representation affects the formations of identities. from under the weight of colonial misrepresentation, people united by decolonial aesthetics set fire to the collective imagination, creating community that rises, a phoenix from the ashes.

dilated
by politics
you dared to love³

- Sonia Sanchez

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threading together resistance, imagination, and vision, art bridges ancestral memory, community and collective action. catalyzed by urgency warriors walk with intention.

decolonial aesthetic as the searching for collective consciousness.

| disrupt |

Letetensae was not the stuff of movies, not the word protesters chants out in unison. my grandmother will not be found in the Black sections of bookstores. she did not speak english or have streets named after her, to be commemorated in death.

Letetensae was the stuff of jazz songs. improvised to perfect pitch. John Coltrane would repeat basic themes in all keys because “he [was] consciously exhausting every path…” in a “…musical recitation of prayer by horn.”

Letetensae was a love supreme and an artist at work, creating dangerously so her daughters could walk softly. she, an alchemist by birth, saw sites of survival as more than sites of fracture.

Letetensae embodied a decolonial aesthetic of freedom – disruption.

| transform |

Black art has always existed. It just hasn’t been looked for in the right places.

- Romare Bearden

Emeka Okereke, a Nigerien artist, takes photographs. he took photographs of people who worked and socialized by a harbour in Muputo, Mozambique. he exhibited those photos in the same harbour where he took them.

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6 Edwidge Danticat’s interview “All Immigrants Are Artists” provides an important framing of survival as art: http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/08/all-immigrants-are-artists/279087/

7 the exhibit being referred to is called “Bagamoyo – photography and the useful space.” Additional information about Emeka Okereke’s methodology can be found at http://emekaokereke.com/images#/id/i2032982
Ayana V Jackson in her exhibit ‘Archival Impulse’ restages existing images taken during European colonial expansion by situating herself, in the nude, in order to interrogate the “architecture of racialized thinking.”

Jackson and Okereke are engaged in transformation of space and subjectivity. Their work is questioning the processes of creation, engagement and reflection while rejecting the delineations of artist and subject and art and communal exhibition.

accessibility as a practice of decolonial aesthetic.

| build |

whatever is built must be flexible, responsive, compulsively changeable. whatever is built must riff on the theme already playing, enhancing without copying. whatever is built must be willingly dismantled; to imagine unchanging monuments is to imagine ego.

decolonial [ art for the people and art with the people ] aesthetic.

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8 Ayana V Jackson: Archival Impulse, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa
http://www.contemporaryand.com/blog/exhibition/ayana-v-jackson-archival-impulse/