Everyone Has To Learn Everything Or Emotional Labor

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"Minorities mark the beginning of their own enunciations by speaking from anxious places of disavowal—from the hollows of denial, or the traces of repressed contradictions." (BHABHA 2015)

Cultural Diversity and Superdiversity are terms that have a close link to both educational and employment policies, as well as business strategies in Higher education.

A great amount of research has been produced in the global north over the past two decades, which emphasizes that social equity is yet to be achieved.

Art education is equally affected by the dilemma of trying to have inclusive policies and a diverse student body. Alongside this, it fails to address the long-established power structures that can be traced as far back as into the Imperialist Era. Research projects and agendas including **Art for a Few** (UK) 2009 or **Art School Differences** (CH) 2016 are only two examples of recent research in the field that show that a lot of work still needs to be done when it comes to minority students and teaching staff (with great emphasis on students with disabilities).

Whilst the end of Multiculturalism has now been officially declared, the gap between scholars who aim for Diversity politics (I.E. STEYN 2011) and voices that claim it as a failure could not be greater, and that it serves only White peoples' conscious (I.E. BERREY 2015). The opposition hence argues that any such "inclusive" strategies and instrumentalisation of *Difference* within Higher education does not create equity,

but stress that the exploitation of adjunct teachers of color does not contribute to changing of the body of knowledge that is reproduced within Higher education (DIZON 2017). At the same time, is higher art education changing through a managerial turn and changing into corporate machines aiming to fuel the neoliberal Job market with young individualized and a politicised middle-class creatives (McROBBIE 2016).

Therefore, the question is how **not** to recreate models that are bound to fail again.

One of the key research findings that **Art School Differences** showed, was that there is a way to have a sustainable impact within the institution. The research design included several co-researching subgroups, which were consisting of teachers and students, who proposed individual research subjects (all tied to questions of Diversity), which were supervised and "trained" by the main researchers. This meant that the knowledge produced had an immediate impact on the students as well as the teachers and their various practices, it also created a Network of "like-minded" who created a snowball effect within the institution (VOEGELE, SANER AND VESSELY 2016). The research project **WdKA makes a Difference** had a similar but more small scale model which has had a comparable effect. This effect was achieved through the distribution of content concerning Critical Race, Gender, Queer, Post- and De-colonial Theory, subjects that were more often than none rejected from the lessons and courses. Conversations with students showed that these lessons had the greatest impact on them as individual creative beings in order to find a space for themselves within the school and in the world. Here, particularly minority students felt deeply empowered and acknowledged in their difference without feeling excluded. This effect would not have been possible if we would not have had critical conversations in reading groups and workshops with volunteering teachers on "inclusive pedagogy" and self-identity awareness. But some students also felt encouraged to further pursue artistic research in the field of Difference due to collaborating with and visting the Witte de With and the exhibition and framing program NO HUMANS INVOLVED which I curated. To expose the students to critical content produced by queer voices of color not only had a great impact on the number of diverse visitors at Witte de With, but it also introduced subjects that remain marginalized in a context such as Rotterdam.

The term decolonization is a buzzword in contemporary art and education discourses, but often it is not clear what decolonization means exactly. The way in which I use the term in this publication, is not just a metaphor, but is based on the way in which theorist Gabriele Dietze maps the field:

"Arturo Escobar, a contributor to the Modernity/Colonialism Research Group describes the program of Decolonial Theory as "another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives (Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism); it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric modes of thinking" (2007, 180). From his point of view, a new understanding of modernity is needed,

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based on the premise that modernity is unconceivable without colonialism. Escobar maintains that Eurocentrism as a regime of knowledge is "a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as center" (2007, 184). *She further elaborates: The underside of modernity is that it is convinced of a supposed European civilizational superiority, which must be established in other parts of the world, in their best interests, and by force if necessary. Ernesto Dussel calls this point of view a "developmentalist fallacy"* (2000, 473). *Theoreticians of decolonial thought such as Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Ernesto Dussel declare that this orientation provides "another space for the production of knowledge [...], the very possibility of talking about the 'worlds of knowledges otherwise'" (Escobar 2007, 180)."*
(<u>DIETZE 2014, 253</u>)

Hence, what Dietze presents here is how I understand decoloniality, it is an aim for a transformation of Eurocentric epistemologies, stressing the importance of the production of knowledge in different (local) geopolitical contexts and the necessity to create space for neglected epistemologies. To decolonize the curriculum and pedagogical practices, therefore, means to embrace the impossible. The impossible for me here is not related to bringing non-western epistemologies and content into established curricula and their related constructed canons. That would be an enterprise that could be established in a fairly short amount of time- but to convince University directors and teaching staff that these changes are quintessential to make a different future possible seems to be the impossible.
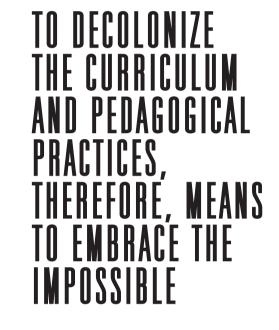
Like Esma Moukhtar in her essay **Safe is the Place** (<u>2017</u>), the impossible is related to the internal intellectual and emotional transformation processes that are needed within art schools to make decolonization and change possible. By this I mean the intricate self-motivated work that is necessary to understand one's historically produced position in the world, particularly as a person with white privilege, which becomes even more complicated when that privilege is enhanced through being heterosexual, CIS Gender and many other categories and identity positions that fuel a suppressive normative order.

Decolonizing work is uncomfortable work and it is work that constantly challenges one's comfort zone and can be at times so destabilizing, that it increases neglect, rejection and resistance.

This resistance can articulate itself in various forms, insufficient funding, rejection of research projects, social policing or refusal to hire staff that brings expertise in the fields that are invested in social change such as queer studies, postcolonial or decolonial theory all of which lead to systematic exclusion. I am emphasizing systemic, because as **Art School Differences** has repeatedly concluded, the desire for Diversity and Change is present within art schools but the work seems too uncomfortable to be consequentially pursued.

But that desire seems to be fuelled by the idea not having to do the work- and by this, I don't mean programs in intercultural exchange, that have the tendency to exoticize the other and reproduce a status quo as Teana Boston-Mammah eloquently argues in her article **The entrance gap** (<u>2017</u>). "The work" means to start the reflection where it hurts the

TO DECOLONIZE THE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, THEREFORE, MEANS TO EMBRACE THE IMPOSSIBLE

most- to look at our entangled Histories without losing track of the consistent intersectional power dynamics that reproduce themselves on a global scale, an argument that echoed in Jan van Heemst's article **Secularism Matters** (<u>2017</u>).

The idea that everyone has to learn everything is of course a utopic and equally impossible wish, speaking against the hierarchies and often erasure of knowledges and practices that don't confine with the dominant narrative of modernity. A modernity that claims to be universal but as Sarah Ahmed points out; "the universal is a structure not an event. It is how those who are assembled are assembled. It is how an assembly becomes a universe." (<u>AHMED 2015</u>) The foundations of this modernity- that we live in and that has from the beginning deprived Black and Brown people of our ontology created the legitimation for the unworthiness of our bodies and spirits or our labor. This modernity is what we teach in various iterations from Kindergarten to University. The philosopher Silvia Wynter —one of the most important post-colonial thinkers of our time and author of an essay called **No Humans Involved**— has called us and here I mean teachers and educators out on reproducing the foundation of that modernity through an idea

of human and humanity, that places the category human outside of culture and subjectivity but allowed to claim numbers and statistics as a classificatory and ordering believe system. This means by reproducing an idea of objective knowledge production, we reproduce the foundations of our disciplines and 'their hegemonic modes of economic rationality'.(<u>WYNTER 1992, 52</u>)

Yes, there are now additional courses at Willem de Kooning Akademie, that are called Cultural Diversity or electives, which address postcolonial theory or in other parts of the world there are entire departments dedicated to Black Studies, Postcolonial Studies or Queer Theory but further Wynter shares that the exceptionalism with which any subject is treated that involves the other" fuels into a whitewashing of our institutions and curricula. (<u>WYNTER 1992, 57</u>)

Approaches that don't confine with this modernity- which I argue have to be considered a practice rather than a static concept- are based on an understanding of learning as a holistic project, which is a threat to the establishment and questions your colleague's mastery and knowledge base as well as the institutions credibility, importance and tradition.

In my classes I am often confronted with the question, "Why haven't I learned about what Judith Butler called the Heterosexual-matrix, why did I never hear about Frantz Fanon, Silvia Wynter or Edouard Glissant earlier?" My course is often an elective, of course. I have previously argued that critical educators have to deal with a different form of racial time, meaning that there is a chrono-political dimension to our teaching (<u>ADUSEI-POKU 2016</u>). There is never enough time to catch up in one week with theories and practices, which will neither the teacher nor the students allow to go beyond the content presented and further and deepen the subject. There is no thriving; only a scratching on the surface of possibilities.

Since the content that I am presenting to the students is based on a foundational knowledge that has been produced by Feminists, Critical Race and Queer and Postcolonial Thinkers and Artists, which has a longstanding history.

Contemporary Education has therefore to be seen within the confines of

"the uneven global power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, immigration, and imperialism, which interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination, and dispossession, criminalization, expropriation, exploitation and violence that are predicated upon hierarchies of racialised, gendered, sexualized, economized, and nationalized social existence."(<u>WEHELIYE, 2014,1</u>)
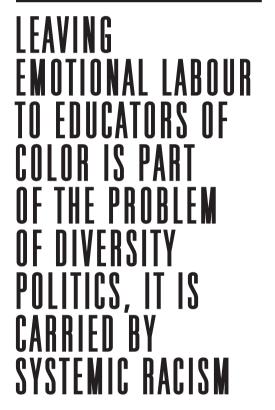
Reading this quote by Alexander Weheliye, that so sharply points us readers to the heart of our contemporary dilemma, clarifies that contemporary education has to tackle with all of the mentioned aspects at ones- holistically, in order to create an understanding of our "planetary system"(<u>SPIVAK 2012</u>).

Nevertheless, this is the unthinkable and often desired outcome of critical educational approaches. But what does this mean as a practitioner and student? What kind of structures are necessary in order to be able to sufficiently teach "everything" and what kind of work comprises a decolonial process?

ON BEING A CARE WORKER TO BECOMING A SELF-CARING WORKER

When I started my position at the Willem de Kooning Academy I entered with high ambitions, I was promised free reign over the subject of Cultural Diversity. I was happy —I knew I was a token for the institution out of 57 Lectoren there are 3 people of Color and only one Black Woman, which is not an unusual number. I also knew that I was as a Black Queer Femme not as threatening to the institution because I was not a Black Dutch person. I knew that the work wouldn't be an easy one and that I would go through a lot of traumatising experiences. I am emphasising my "foreigner" status because "homegrown" resistance is harder to cope with.

Being in the classroom and caring for my students consistently reminds me how much you have to give as a Black person in a space that reproduces one's own racialised position in the world. Talking about Whiteness with White people is not pleasant- it is neither enriching nor enlightening and it is at times very draining. It is a very self-destructive work if you don't manage to create an external support system through friends and family that support you to "deal" with the harsh realities that you are confronted with. The student's positive feedback, however, is what keeps one going and creates hope and pleasure. Teaching critical race theory is, because of the great amount of emotional and intellectual labor, extremely skilled work, highly sensitive and demands expertise, which no diversity program can prepare you for. This is the work and education, which is an emotional one and this is an area, which

LEAVING EMOTIONAL LABOUR TO EDUCATORS OF COLOR IS PART OF THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSITY POLITICS, IT IS CARRIED BY SYSTEMIC RACISM

I see highly underestimated. The social change we need in times of global growth of populism in which racism, sexism and queer-phobia are rising involves emotional growth. So decolonial education is more than just introducing alternative epistemologies. The system how it functions right now, leaves the emotional waste work with those who are dedicated non-negotiators dealing with the thick layers of ignorance and privilege in and outside the classroom, in board meetings or in the private realm, a layer that is produced over centuries through white cultural hegemony. So one of my conclusions here is that to leaving Emotional labour to educators of color is part of the problem of Diversity politics, it is carried by systemic racism. For educators of color, this means to be caught in a violent cycle of resignation, frustration and precarity.

"HISTORY, THE SMILER WITH THE KNIFE"

These elaborations may not be convenient or comfortable to read, but they are necessary to be pointed out. My accounts are also not singular. Michelle Sharp beautifully places on the basis of Sadia Hartman's work the use of the personal narratives in her book **In the Wake: On Blackness and Being**, when she writes

"The "autobiographical example," says Saidiya Hartman, "is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel-gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (Saunders 2008b, 7). Like Hartman, I include the personal here, "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction" (Hartman 2008, 7). (SHARP, 2016)

Tamura Lomax a Scholar of Black Religion and Black Diaspora Studies, who recently published an article **Black Women's Lives Don't Matter in Academia Either, or Why I Quit Academic Spaces that Don't Value Black Women's Life and Labor** echoes my observations:

"Just as we should not close our eyes to the bound hands and economically free labor that literally built institutions of learning across the nation or the living flesh used in academic and scientific experimentation to advance the production of knowledge, we should not look the other way and ignore the overwhelming and present dependency on black women's labor in the academic caste system, which excessively utilizes black and women of color as the mules of higher learning — and that black and women of color, in turn, participate in as one of many means to survive. We cannot turn a blind eye to this push and pull or how it creates an illiberal power structure of oppression based survival. I should note that I am emphatically not suggesting that academia is a slave economy or that black women faculty are slaves. I am, however, arguing that the current structure operates along oppressing racial and gender lines and that should give those of us who care about justice in real life pause." (LOXMAN 2015)

Whilst I was conducting my research on the subject of emotional labor by Black Women I found many personal accounts from the US to Europe beginning with enslaved women as Nannies for White Children and how this History continues due to systemic racism (I.E. WALLACE-SANDERS 2008) —but "I have to emphasise that the personal is institutional" as the theorist Sarah Ahmed points out on her recent resignation statement. In the reading sessions of **WdKA makes a Difference** in preparation for this publication a central question came up- who are we writing for? I am trained to write for White people and to explain and make my arguments resistant to hegemonic critique, but in this text I want to pose two question for educators of color: How do we measure the success of our own work, which tries to develop self-awareness in students, if we lose our self-worth in the process? How can we lose the fear of speaking out? I ask the latter with Audre Lorde. How do we shake off the trauma in the classroom and implement holistic approaches of self-care within the institutions instead of compartmentalizing it as a private matter —as if your depression is detached from the violence that one experiences on a daily basis as a person of color? The answer to myself is not to remain silent, even if this means to be labelled "angry" or as in the case of HR "Zwarte Piet" and maybe to leave the institution at some point behind.

What I also did not take into consideration in the beginning of my position, were the structural, systemic as well as emotional walls that I would encounter. Because social and systemic change won't happen via work on policies but "You can change policies without changing anything. You can change policies in order not to change anything"(AHMED 2016). Institutions also can deny research funding and provide no structural support in order not to change anything, one's own work can either become "too academic" or "not academic enough".

In conclusion, the walls that I encountered are thick and even more troubling is that I encountered them on various different levels. Neoliberal Universities —have adjunct professors, lecturers on short time contracts or one semester engagements in order to let people, who have been doing the work for centuries to do the care work again —which allows institutions not to deal with their own business- with the sheer unbearable impossible task to deal with their white privilege.

EPILOGUE— PRECARIOUS RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Sarah Ahmed asked quintessential questions at the end of her resignation letter **Resignation is a Feminist Issue** to Goldsmiths College London; I think these questions are important to ask for everyone who is working in this field and that call for a revisioning of our ethics and integrity. Otherwise one remains complicit with an abusive system.

"But what if we do this work and the walls stay up? What if we do this work and the same things keep coming up? What if our own work of exposing a problem is used as evidence there is no problem? Then you have to ask yourself: can I keep working here? What if staying employed by an institution means you have to agree to remain silent about what might damage its reputation?" (AHMED 2016) ●

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