"Do Let Us, *Destroy The Pyramid*"

PAUSE

It's in the meeting when someone talks over you.

It's in when you're asked to speak after them.

It's in not your expertise but theirs.

It's in the bibliography.

It's in the budget and what's unaccountable.

It's in the lunch with patrons and the table.

It's in their money and your labour.

It's in being a kiss ass.

It's in calling yourself diplomatic.

It's going to or not going to HR.

It's in HR as a concept.

It's in the email.

It's in the legal formalities.

It's in being a formality.

It's in being a complainer or compliant.

It's in no exceptions to the rules and making exceptions.

It's in the job description and the application.

It's in gratitude for the opportunity and in the rejection.

It's in just being grateful for recognition.

It's in the fees or lack thereof.

It's in time and having no time and turnover in no time.

It's in the pipeline.

It's in becoming a deliverable without deliverance.

It's in turning away or turning to the person of colour in the room.

It's in not having the words.

It's in the words that make you sound like you know.

It's in how you say care.

It's in the way I can't talk to you about what happened.

It's in the way you say to be fair.

It's in how I can't look at art anymore.

It's in you supporting him after knowing.

It's in the pleasantries.

It's in being asked to justify being you.
It's in justification.
It's in the lack of time to just be.
It's in me.

PAUSE

It's hard to know where to start with the question: *what does an anti-racist institution look like?* I get tongue and mind tied because there is just so much to say encased in the exhaustion with what to say. Do you start with the entwined foundations of capitalism and racism or the power dynamics of a department meeting? In the summer of 2022, this question hung like a forest canopy over the first of two knowledge exchange workshops organised by CVAN London and Iniva, the first of which I attended, that were held by artist Jack Ky Tan. Spiriting artistic thinking at an intersection between law and governance, these workshops were shaped by Jack's poetic ability to ground, prod and mould cogent and compassionate spaces for institutional and self-reflexivity.

These workshops and their culmination into the report AREVA report *A Knowledge Exchange Report on Anti-Racism and Equity in the Visual Arts* are informed by new materialist perspectives on how "systems are not created through resolving ... differences, but by manifesting and holding differences together as multiple entangled truths." As well as Sylvia Wynter's parsing of how epistemology, or knowledge making, is constructed in the image of the European Man. In particular how "rational and linear thinking has been used as a way to justify [and fortify] colonial oppression." One of the underlying dimensions of this report is understanding racism and inequality through experience; and anti-racism through embodied actions, over proclamations, also known as institutional doublespeak. At one point during the first Zoom session there was a long, saturated pause. It was in response to Jack's request to contemplate the kinds of structures we need within our respective organisations and the sector to resource change that would in turn be reported back to the Arts Council of England. It felt important to allow the virtual room to sit in a tensely tactile silence.

It seemed like a collective loss for words that Jack invoked as encountering the sublime of racism. Not unlike encountering the sublime of nature, how I've typically heard the term used, racism can hold a quality of infinity because of how complex, overwhelming and unending it is. It causes a form of aporia, a sense of dense internal contradiction and impenetrability (literally lack of passage or porousness) that can't be superseded, sidestepped

or sublimated through cleverness, smarts or tact. Transcendence requires a real shift in consciousness and internal transformation. Jack noted:

"I feel as an artist that the way to navigate is to create...Within aesthetic theory, you only get through the aporia through creation not invention... How you come through a storm at sea, metaphorically, is not to insist on sailing the ship in the normal way. Maybe it is not even with the same ship and maybe you become a submarine instead."

In other more vocal moments, participants described the viny, entangled professional and emotional environments, and hostile bureaucratic systems that impede even being able to imagine, let alone have time to imagine, a model for an anti-racist organisation. The reality of this limited capacity to imagine also sits behind lofty, institutionalised acknowledgments of histories of racism and injustice by arts institutions in the last few years. If done at all, acknowledgements can be more about underlying fragility and defensive postures within existing systems than structural change; co-optive and opportunistic tendencies to appear anti-racist and willing before racist and inequitable. It's like having an action plan before recognising and reckoning with the conditions of the status quo. It's saying something to fill in the discomfort of a pause. The pervasive racism and inequity in the arts sector is entrenched in seemingly innocuous workplace everydayness.

This everydayness contains normalised cultures of uninterrupted productivity to meet funding criteria; knowledge through the framework of categories, calculation and deliverables; and the trappings of bureaucratic processes and thresholds we consistently need to engage with in order to enter into, or exist within the sector as an artist and/or arts worker. Jack writes in a section on Context that art institutions evaluate most activities through a "sensibility of audit" that feels "incompatible with the inherent humanity of [our] daily work."In this way, the "over-reliance on a numeric, statistical mode of justification for arts organisations is indicative of a culture that feels like a return to utilitarianism: being 'value for money', 'doing more for less' and funding fixed outcomes rather than outcomes that emerge from processes." Underlying this outcome based value system is the precarity of being undervalued, grossly underpaid and just exhausted with contingent living. (See *Structurally F*cked* report on the state of artists' pay published by Industria and a-n The Artists Information Company).

In imagining an anti-racist model we are asking ourselves to learn to rehearse what it looks and feels like to refuse the very foundations and systems of doing and knowing that are absorbed into the muscle memory of not only organisations but ourselves. In the report, some of the forces that limit institutional change and interpersonal relationships are identified

(teleology, exclusion, precarity, language, white fragility/allyship, power, lines of accountability, neo–utilitarianism, and neoliberalism). In a section on *Data*, verbatim dialogue drawn from workshop participants is transmuted into poetry (in italicised font) that Jack has woven into his own verses of informed intuitions and reflections. The brevity of the poetic form, the flexibility and resonance of this approach, give the words a kind of flight they may not have otherwise as "words transcending functionality as social research data":

"*It's very hard to have these conversations*
when you're trying to keep up
with your sort of day–to–day workload.
And it's hard to speak when you are out of breath, Trying to keep in step with the pace of the crowd; You end up communicating without conversing, Vocalising without articulating."

"But there is no such thing as Talk,
There is only TalkDo.
And there is no such thing as Thought,
There is only ThoughtDo."

Following this is a series of 'performance scores' for organisational meetings, HR, and governance, inspired by Yoko Ono's book *Grapefruit*, called Jackfruit, a nod to where the artist is from and (though unmentioned) his namesake. These performance scores are a series of enactments that can be practised as ways to unsettle power dynamics and workplace habits and feel deep, bodily and playful.

On the page, they appear as gentle and brief provocations that in practice, could incite profound shifts in office rituals. Like this one: "OFFICE MOVE Move your Head Office or Director's office to a different location for a month. Do this consecutively for 3 months..."I tried to imagine this in my own previous hierarchical work and study environments and the fact it felt both comedic and impossible just made the normalised complacency with the kinds of spatial and interpersonal relations even more disturbing.

It feels necessary and also limiting to call this lively and enlivened document a report because of how porous, emergent and poetic it is. It just goes to show, more artists should be entrusted with imagining the structures of arts labour that recede into the background of our daily work life.

It's also necessary as a report because we should transform our expectations and experiences around typical forms of organisational report making; *the audit-like, chart-like, yes-no answer like, corporate, market, impact driven, X and Y axis-like* sense of reporting we've come to expect and perhaps numbly distrust. But also, 'report' as a concept is limiting because of these same existing expectations around form and prescription. Whatever this document is, it invites the imagining of new languages for organising and "manifestations of new relationships, emergent states and collective will" that feels like braiding lines of solidarity as well as accountability in ways that begin with consciousness over form.

PAUSE

During an evening launch event and panel discussion for the AREVA report at UCL East's brand new campus, the lights in the room kept turning off. Each time they turned off, one of the organisers would get up and program them to turn on again.

It seemed like the lights were pre-programmed to turn off after a certain period or time of day; likely a high tech and intelligent feature of the new campus operating system. I felt a strange sense of relief with the unexpected darkness. There was something about the lights turning off and how it immediately shifted the mood in the room.

Panel discussions, in their usual form, contain very clear physical and psychic boundaries between speakers and audiences; boundaries that are neutralised but also tensely felt, at least for me. There are processional formalities, courtesies and tones of voice. Speakers take turns and there's a certain manner, sequence and method of talking that we all recognise and replicate time and again in the arts sector or otherwise.

But when the lights kept turning off unexpectedly, people giggled, sighed, moved or started chatting amongst themselves. This overarching technical programming that manifested as a glitch seemed to perforate the boundaries to highlight the pervasiveness of how form dictates the logic of sharing.

How much of knowledge is about fitting a form?
How much of anti-racism in arts organisations is about trying to find the gap between breaking and fitting into an existing form?

When it was Jack's turn to speak, he did not continue the continuum of the panel discussion, but rather ruptured it and raised himself from his seat, stepped forward and introduced what

he was going to do. He had decided to read out and physically gesture parts of the data poetry section from the report.

The emotional energy of the room shifted again, not unlike not knowing whether the room would be light or dark. The resonance of the poetry was palpable like feeling reciprocity in the body. Moments of emotional rupture can make visible the roles we are playing and remind us of the difference between listening and hearing, reading and internalising. It's feeling how form enshrines the limits of how we come to know and imagine:

"Criteria is a way of choosing.
Choosing is a way of seeing.
Seeing is a way of worlding.
Worlding is a way of structuring.
Structuring is a way of seeing
And not seeing,
Seeing–Not–Seeing is an aesthetics
Of criteria."

"*It is something a bit like capitalism,*
or *something we are all subjected to.*

The further up the food chain you get,
the more resistance there is.

...

But *when you're talking about the breakdowns ...*
there is actually a sense of horrible release.

Do let us,
destroy the pyramid."

PAUSE

ADDENDUM

It's in the expat, the migrant, the immigrant, the refugee and the death that makes the news.

It's in which body you are, no matter what.

It's in being too political and the model minority.

It's in your silence and my rage.

It's in silence as violence and rage as liberation.

It's in 'let's have a healthy discussion' and 'not the right context' for the end of the world.

It's in 'neutrality' as neoliberal dissociation and palatability.

It's in 'neutrality' as white privilege making and funding.

It's in 'neutrality' as a white shroud and rubble.

It's in 'neutrality' as an archive of destruction and self-care.

It's in 'neutrality' as empire making, nicely.

It's in 'tragedy' as Saying-Not-Saying.

It's in the choice of words without Palestine.

It's in exhausting words, and words that exhaust.

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