

**I MAKE STUFF**

PROPERLY, AMERICAN: THE GENIUS EFFECT  
AND  
"THE POSTURE OF OPENNESS"

BLACK, FEMALE, AND ACADEMIC -- AN EARTHQUAKE IN  
WHITENESS

by

SUNI MULLEN

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**Properly American is the development of self-determination through discovering intersections that affirm ideas and theories of the black woman agency.** Two women and one man profoundly impacted my ways of thinking. These women and man inspired my agency to formalize a vocabulary that authenticates how Black women can occupy academic spaces that tend NOT to be populated by those who in fact, constitute the global majority. The philosophies of these three thinkers provide an alternative canon for me to seek fundamental truths about myself in the spaces I occupy. The first is bell hooks. bell hooks is an advocate for critical thinking; she consistently granted her ideas to be accessible through language and discussion. Equally, Toni Morrison placed me in a position to see writing as an art form to exercise the brain's capacity to imagine. Her cadence confronts the reader to deliberately reexamine the scene, the language, and the truth. Ruminating on black portals and articulations of blackness, Arthur Jafa affords time and space to analyze the ontology of black being. These intellectuals have provided me with an out-of-bounds framework that insists on an urgency to become myself, maintain myself, and birth new selves. Essentially, I have been given permission to do it my way- adding to the canon.

**Empowered, Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, an Investor in Diversity to increase the numbers of Black and Asian educators in London Schools, advocates:**  
"Global Majority" is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages...those who have been racialized as 'ethnic minorities'. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty per cent (80%) of the world's population(Global Majority; Decolonizing the Language and Reframing the Conversation about Race, p.1)."

## **INTRODUCTION.**

These chapters assert that the agency of blackness can falter when the insistence of whiteness foams at its institutional seams, leaving no room for the manifestation of the identity position and being of the Black-Academic-Female. Each section of this reflection lays a foundation to highlight the claims of how academic governance positions itself to perpetuate intellectual-black-female death by stifling.

This essay stands not just as a theoretical or researched assignment but as an act of commitment to my intellectual vocation: through consistent experimentation and curiosity, I position myself in a space to think well, think critically, and contribute to a paradigm of distinguished black-women thinkers.

Period.

I am interested in maximizing my agency in all the spaces I choose to occupy. Curiously, my interests lead to questions I ask myself relating to who I am when I am here or there. To commit to the challenge: possibility and capacity are leading themes I have applied. I advance my knowledge of self through conducting experiments.

As I theorize, I perform experiments to collect data that offer insight ,while I seek to bridge the gap between myself and space. Through culture, language, reading, writing, discussion, laughing, alchemy, thinking, smoking, sleeping, eating, fucking, running, observing, spying, sneaking, meditating, and praying, I aim to follow myself through consistent self-evaluation in relation to the thinkers that I honor . Not limited to these methods, the idea is to solve for becoming.

black woman x (fill in the blank) = unique charge(s).

With the amount of socio-political, psychological, patriarchal, and whitearchal systems in place to macro-manage my personhood, I am in a constant state of self-questioning. I apply this equation to investigate how free I can become as an intellectual black woman in constraining academic spaces.

This analysis focuses on the practice of self-possession, where white shadows cloak universities through institutional practices and passive-aggressive pleasantries.



**I. THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT  
POWER, IT CAN ALWAYS BE RECLAIMED.**

HOW POWER IS TRANSFERRED AND TAKEN. LEARNING TO BE SILENT, TO  
QUESTION, AND TO ASSERT.

Beginning to understand and comprehend the culture of academia, I position myself to alchemize my isolation or silence into power. Shifting my perspective, I listen more, and respond intentionally. I begin to cultivate relationships that I desire all while asserting myself in positions that amplify my existence. The idea is to bridge the gap between who I can become, and who I am. I problem-solve to actively get the result I need to thrive in spaces created without me in mind.

The classroom is my playground and I seize every opportunity to spar intellectually with those willing to participate. bell hooks set the stage for me to become self-aware in academic spaces through critically thinking about the content within classrooms as well as the practice of abandoning fear. hooks discusses how imperative it is to practice "radical openness" in academic spaces. Encouraged for academic leaders, professors, and teachers alike, as a student, I recognize my ability to put hooks' ideology to work. She shares this insight:

...it became all too clear to me, after years in academic settings, that it was far too easy to become attached to and protective of one's viewpoint, and to rule out other perspectives...I propose that teachers must be open at all times and we must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know. A radical commitment to openness maintains the integrity of the critical thinking process and its central role to education. (p. 10)

I am energized when I get the opportunity to take part and host generative conversations that invite me to turn my thinking inwards. These discussions are then reflected through my creative outputs. In an effort to reinvigorate my enthusiasm for learning, I do not internalize projections from students, professors, and faculty on campus. Whether perceived to be positive or negative, the desire for intellectual nourishment is intrinsic. Even when my likeability is at risk, I give myself the audacity to wear my ideas on my sleeve.



What I have learned is this: no matter the tone-- if "my" white counterparts find me disagreeable, the institutional practice is to prioritize their white tears. And more often than not, the perpetrator is a white female. Typically, these outbursts are a display of guilt, lack of accountability, and a perfect example of how the system of whiteness maintains a "non-combative atmosphere" through shifting the class focus to coddling feelings on topics of and related to race, class, prejudices, and critical observations of exercised imbalances of powers. IN DEFENSE OF SELF DEFENSE by Huey P. Newton, he illuminates:

"The power structure inflicts pain and brutality upon the peoples and then provides controlled outlets for the pain in ways least likely to upset them or interfere with the process of exploitation (p.4)". Newton goes on, "If Black people go about their struggle for liberation in the way that the oppressor dictates and sponsors, then we will have degenerated to the level of groveling flunkies for the oppressor himself".

I liken the "oppressor himself" to a metaphoric reference to institutional decorum and academic leaders who perpetuate systems of domination.

I must add another. Newton urges: "Black people must now move, from the grassroots up through the perfumed circles of the Black bourgeoisie, to seize by any means necessary a proportionate share of the power vested and collected in the structure of America (p.5)".

In a Black ego boost:



hooks observes similar instances and contends that the “pressure” to maintain an air of pleasantry, “can actually work to silence discussion and/or completely eradicate the possibility of dialectical exchange” (p.86). In these moments, I assess reactions, and how the classroom shifts. My goal is to always engage in meaningful critical dialogue. I decide that it will not be obstructed, especially as I occupy an institution with fees that should be waived due to chattel slavery alone— I digress.

I have to find the brave woman within myself to redirect focus back to the apex of classroom discussion. This practice has allowed me to exercise control in academic spaces that are predominantly-imperialistically white.



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ORIGINAL PLOT OF THE MOVIE? vis SUNI MULLEN YouTube Channel, 2022

I navigate the conversation back to source, bringing the power back into my court.

As an advocate for myself, I offer a habitual rebuttal in the Western academic space which hooks describes in a first-hand account on experiencing “white tears” in the classroom:

“As the lone black female student in many classrooms, I knew that voicing my disagreement with an individual white peer could lead to her crying and thereby becoming the center of attention, receiving sympathy from everyone else and drawing attention away from the issue of our disagreement. I knew that tears could be used as a weapon of distraction (p.80).”

I appreciate how bell hooks provides her autobiographical accounts as she navigated predominantly white schools and universities. Through my practice of self-awareness, I learned that I have little to no interest in "seamless harmony" within the classroom. I understand that tension provides an atmosphere and opportunity for growth. And so, I profess:

I respect you because I respect radical differences. My respect does not mean that my social, cultural, political, creative outputs and views will align with your beliefs-

I expect to be amidst diversity in all of its forms and capacities- I have intentionally chosen spaces like these to ensure that I am always challenging my own perspectives and learning how to approach from different vantage points-

My unique perspectives are influenced by what I have observed and experienced up until this point, so naturally there will be a spectrum of dissonance in pursuit of my own curiosity.

The luxury I have afforded myself to explore ways of being in these spaces does not come devoid of critique. Rather, I place these systems under scrutiny--constantly. Raising fundamental questions anchors my position to work at dismantling what hooks describes as a "model of domination" (p.113). This model reinforces a top and a bottom, a power source, and a weak site. I deny this paradigm and find myself submitting to the practice of exercising a power that works to empower myself as well as those around me. I offer MUTUAL respect. This requires me to remove my ego so that I may continue to think with an open mind. The key is critical thinking.



Jake Thomas as Matt McGuire in *Lizzie McGuire: The Rise and Fall of the Kate Empire*,  
Season 2 Episode 4

An International Conference in Critical Thinking and Education Reform was held in 1987. Michael Scriven, an academic philosopher, most known for his academic contributions in the practice of evaluation and Dr. Richard Paul, an internationally-recognized authority on critical thinking, offered a statement as participants of the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking. They illustrate critical thinking as "being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes— is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking." Both add that "critical thinking is an intellectual commitment of using those skills to guide behavior." As a black woman, I apply these methods to assert my power to lay claim to my intellectual legacy and vocation. I acknowledge my drive to always improve my abilities through analyzing the complexities of thought as an eternal life-practice.

Let's play.

**II. "BUT THIS MAY TAKE SOME  
INCORRECT ENGLISH TO GET DONE" -  
KANYE WEST**

SHADOW PARTICIPATION:  
INUNDATING THE "WESTERN" CANON WITH BLACK IMAGINATIONS



"...in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to hobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interesting, and definitive (Morrison, p.12)".

Toni Morrison effortlessly transcribes how words have power. In her book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison announces the peripheral nature of blackness in American literature. Her highlights offer moments of scrutiny that impact how I have begun to think about the canon of contributions to the fine arts. This examination requires Morrison to think about how free she can be as an "African-American woman writer in [her] genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world (Morrison, p.4)." This advanced study of language applies to how I learn the languages of creative mediums of interest related to thinking, painting, writing, and conceptual memetics. I actualize my imaginary landscapes.

At the core, I am supposed to say this, make this, generate this, produce this, and bring about what is conjured when I am in the zone.

Morrison brilliantly engenders my imagination to fully explore my blackness as a woman outside of the omnipresence of the white gaze, white systems, the practiced hierarchy of whiteness, and whitearchal spotlights.

I interpret:  
whiteness is not the plot over here.





Language is an ingress for ingenuity. The manipulation of American English brings me to where I am today- locating answers to the many questions I have learned to ask. I have developed a pattern of self: a mindful commitment to curiosity. Through my avid investigations, I observe and experience unique circumstances based on where I have placed myself socially and culturally. How I decide to identify, in many ways, has not only stifled me from internalized projections but has also led me through a steady breakOUT from aggressive projections by others

Considering the past, present, and future, my subject position is consistently challenged with social and cultural impositions: my physical body has become a mental playground for political implications without my permission. In 1950, Marcel Mauss an anthropologist, phrased, "techniques of the body," summarizing being in the body and the world as cultural somatics. I likened this to my fascination with other spaces I navigate and exist in: the ability to integrate sequenced somatic complexities which reflect what French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu proposes as habitus. Habitus is described as "the collective experiences a person has in their lives that create a sort of lens through which they understand their reality. Cultures consist of people sharing similar elements of habitus, embodied through unspoken but physical behaviors." I insist, my output provides value and impact by existing with and without any inherent understanding- it is what it is by way of channeling and transmuting memory. My process of existence is an arch example of ancestral, assimilated, and discerned eagerness of individualistic and internalized structures.

Each day I dare to exist as myself. My shoulders sit higher, my intent becomes apparent, my movements sweep spaces, and the strength in my voice increases---on myself in language, my interests have led me to be exposed to an array of possibilities through multiple gazes and perspectives. In turn, this muscle has been exercised since the first time I was introduced to Count Olaf. My invested curiosity in the Series of Unfortunate Events invited me to put my entire being into the position of three white kids. My Mother knew that exposure to literature would set me up for developmental success. Focusing on works I have found compelling, no matter the biases one may hold or depict, affirmed a further conviction in myself, the audacity to

be- especially as a Black woman in academic spaces.

We walked into the Baldwin Hills Library. This time was different from others. There was a large crowd, and I was looking for a new book. A librarian approached my Mother, sister, and me. He was tall, fair-skinned, with curly white hair. The tip of his nose held up his brimmed-glasses. They were black. My Mother encouraged me to tell him I was looking for a new book. He turned and guided me down an aisle. He scanned the bookshelves for a couple of minutes before turning towards me and placing in my hands; *The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket. That book led me to read everything I could get my hands on. But first, I read every book about the Baudelaires. That librarian's first suggestion, a chapter book I had never read before, told me he trusted that I was at a level to understand and explore the imaginary world within the text. At that time, nothing was more interesting than opening a new book, smelling it, reading it, and scribbling notes inside. I still do this.

In a fervent documentary, *The Pieces I Am*, on the literary impact of Toni Morrison, Sonia Sanchez cries to us how Toni Morrison gives us the ability to "review ourselves so we can walk upright, finally, as human beings— finally, as human beings".

Morrison asks herself, "what can I do? Where I am?" Simultaneously, she asks me, "what can you do where you are?". I meditate on this question often as colleagues, professors, and studio mates nose their curiosity in my creative activations. Aggressively manipulating mediums that have placed the black imagination in the peripheral, I aggravate euro-western rules and invite them to dismiss themselves from my mind. I am adamant about actualizing the worlds I have consistently found myself building upon in my psyche. "In my work, I seek ways to investigate further into my world. My black world," shares Morrison. The exploration leads to discovering how to "destroy universal ideas or projections of blackness through dismantling binaries."



In creative academic settings, I frequently find myself pressured to depict an imagination rooted in historical accuracy. Morrison beckons my imagination and unapologetically gives me the grace to use history as a point of departure for my imagination to canon itself. Moments in time are used as a foundation to depart from and not as a site of fettering.

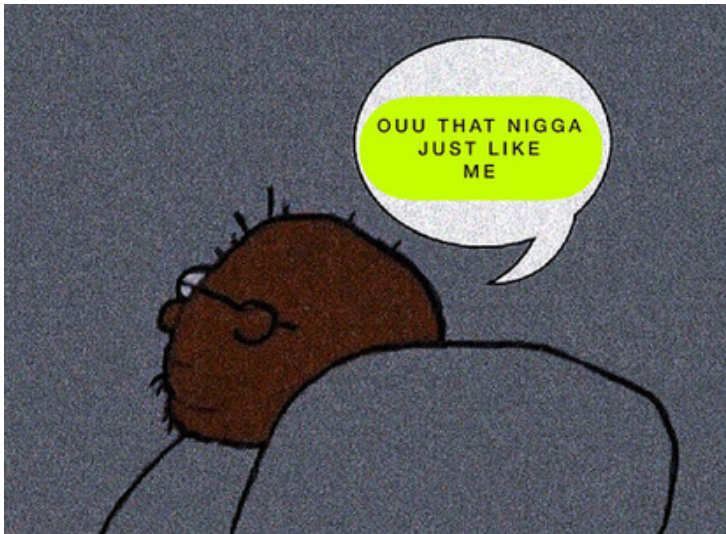
I ask myself, "how can I share my own story through another so similarly akin?". I am invited to INVENT.

I contend my contribution will not be sought after or regarded through political correctness but on the premise of critical contributions to the arts. Morrison writes, "Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectual anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power (p.15)".

In accepting myself, I mature all of the elements about myself that others have taught me to dismiss or "correct" for the sake of assimilation. My belief in genius and true growth rests in tandem with my ability to be open to perspectives while being especially alert of my position in space. This belief in self gives me permission to expound upon what Morrison describes as the "expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom (p.7)" I am interested in my critical ability to lean forward INTO the foray.

III. "BLACK GENIUS IS EXPONENTIALLY  
INCREASED WHEN SURROUNDED BY BLACK  
GENIUS"

-ARTHUR Jafa



## HOW DO I LIVE MY OWN SENSE OF BLACK SELFHOOD?

1. I ask questions others are dancing around using direct language to gain clarity on what is presented.
2. When topics related to race and power come up within the classroom, I do not deny the tension or coddle the yts as it distracts from the topic at hand.
3. I aim for my input to be generative and actively pursue to engage in critical dialogue despite responses projected that my input may be coming from a place of passion. If it is, I protect my valid passion.
4. I embrace the liberation of my mind and physical agency through indulging in a continual self-evaluation that may or may not upset others around me. I do not make this my problem.
5. I maintain a posture of openness in order to form my own ideas and opinions. I consistently consider new information.
6. I break oppressive powers. ACTIVELY. ReLentlessly.

I always say if you want to do school right, you have to do it twice. I decided to enroll into an art program because it occurred to me that my purpose in life is to surround myself with people and resources that magnify my genius. Genius is not limited to the sterile walls of academe, but rather another space of resources. Like Miles Davis deciding to classically train himself at the Institute of Musical Art, now known as the Juilliard School, he alchemized his ancestral hum and remixed it with yet another, unique world of sound. Davis did this until his death.

In moments when I remained idle to gain clarity, a pathway presented itself to me. It had not occurred to me that on some level, I had accepted the dynamic of the academic classroom; very yt and very man. This subconscious acceptance I imagine comes from the consistency of the euro-patriarchal-western reinforcement of learning within "traditional" academic spaces. I always look around the classroom to see how many skinfolk are nearby.



Kandi Burruss Season 7 Reunion: The Real Housewives of Atlanta

This perhaps is also a method to seek some form of validation or affirmation of the self in these collegiate spaces. In pursuit of an intellectual vocation, I have found that I consistently must grant myself permission to exercise my being undeterred by my surroundings. There is only one me and yet, fundamentally, I understand the power of black agency and how it activates the black agency in others. I have made this my responsibility: to advocate and encourage through practice and discussion, to retain what Arthur Jafa calls attention to: the “ontological integrity” of blackness.

At The University of Minnesota, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner conducted research which examines how “people of color perceive the campus climate and its impact on them”. The findings include groups that have been traditionally marked as “minorities”. In the study, I sought students who described themselves as either Black or African-American. In two instances, a student encourages other African-Americans to not attend the University... following that there is a constant feeling of needing to prove yourself academically. In the other, a student observes the busyness and practices of lack of care during office hours for simple inquiries (p.360). It often goes unseen how Black students begin to silence and isolate themselves as a result of being dismissed by their academic “leaders”.

The presence of the black woman increases the probability of macro-aggressions, dismissiveness, and the lack of relational commitment. I came to realize, that although granted access to campus facilities, “...we are still likely to be seen as intruders in the academic world who do not really belong” (hooks, p.101).

I collected answers through a handwritten questionnaire from an intimate group of women. These women were asked to racially identify themselves. Names and personal information that inform who each woman is have been excluded to cue in focus. They have either graduated or are currently enrolled in Fine Arts programs at academic Universities. Two questions were asked:

1. As a black person in a predominantly white, creative and academic space, could you describe your campus experience?
2. How could the university make the climate more welcoming for you and others that may align with your identity in this space?

AGE	RACIAL IDENTITY	PROGRAM OF STUDY
27	Black	MFA Fine Art
25	African-American	BFA Fine Arts
Timeless	Black sometimes African American depends on situation/environment	Fine Art emphasis Photography minor Entrepreneurship
29	Black	BFA Photography
29	Black	Fine Arts, Painting

**QUESTION 1** Responses in order of the table above:

- *My experience feels a bit solitary in the way that my identities intersect between being a Black, Queer, Trans-masc/gender-fluid person. My experience also feels a bit invisible or rather hidden as I'm often observing the space and adjusting to being a part of it.*

*My experience on campus was shitty, I didn't connect with a lot of people, maybe that was because I was a transfer student, everyone already had their cliques and established friend groups. The hardest part was that there were little to no black people, especially women, and even with them I did not have a welcoming experience. Funnily, we learned so much about the theory and history of racism in art, but I felt the program was very inclusive/exclusive when it came to diversity and freedom of speech.*



I'll leave it at that. After graduation, I don't keep a connection with anyone from that time, it was definitely a unique experience.

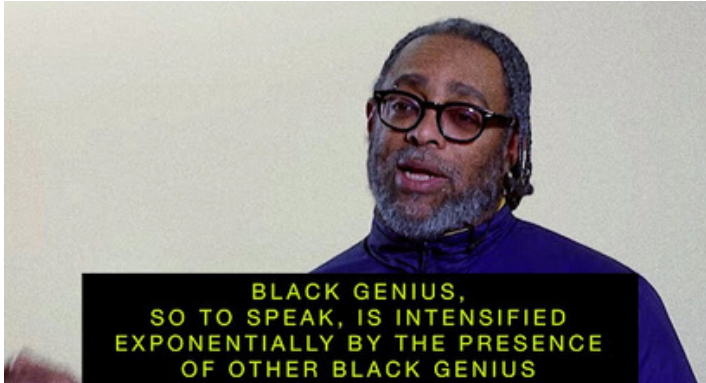
- . At times it felt liberating & other times like a traumatic sacrifice. The reason I say that is that pursuing a higher education degree from a prestigious school as an African American can be a great accomplishment. Still, due to societal normalities, it is rarely done. On the other hand, being black in a predominantly white environment felt like self-sacrifice because mentally, I endured abuse from the faculty and students that could have been unintentional but unforgettable. Two significant recurring experiences were others' distasteful approaches to their curiosity about black people and others being so hard on me because of the fact I'm black, they could very much so be responsible for my successes, would make harsh comments when, in actuality, at times, didn't make me feel great but only added fuel to the fire.
- . Because I attended grad school at a separate building I didn't have a typical "on campus" experience however my experience was diverse in terms of class structure, reading material, geographical location of my peers, and unique relationships that were built with the professors.
- . My experience on campus(es) was different from community college to attending a 4 year institution. However I always felt as though I had to claim space, and make my present felt. I had to work 3 times as hard. I had a lot of instances where teachers and other students tried to instill doubt in me, or just blatantly tried to discourage me from my dreams and goals. I heard it all! Early on I really had to look inward to find the strength to keep going. It was very traumatic at times actually, I often felt isolated and alone. Eventually I would cling on to anyone who I felt was an advocate for me. It was hard to find those advocates but when I did I held them close. I had to tell myself that this is only temporary and that not everyone would understand my work, or even my purpose there.

Overall I felt like the school didn't always put my concerns in a realm of importance. I dealt with blatant racism on several occasions, and I was often the one that was told to just be the bigger person and just turn the other cheek. It's really hard seeing a professor everyday who said racist things to you and about you to others. It's discouraging. I cried a lot. I think my experience at redacted changed a lot of things though, and I do feel they are making the environment a bit more welcoming for more students like me ( from what I can see)

**QUESTION 2** Responses in order of the table above:

- . Honestly, I'm not sure if I have an answer for this or that I'm even open to holding space for an academic institution to answer this question authentically. I don't have resolutions for it to make a space for me because there is no true reciprocation in that I'd want to make space for it.
- . get more black people into the program, stop talking so much about race and racism and decolonization of the mind, I find that shit weird and still feels like overt racism. In addition to hiring teachers that are not so politically impressionable
- . Honestly, I don't fault anyone because you only know what you know; if you knew better, you would do better. I believe white people in those environments don't understand blacks and, therefore, can not communicate correctly for both sides of the equation to benefit in pleasant ways. The way universities can make the climate more welcoming and align with other identities are hiring and enrolling individuals who look like minorities because the majority will never understand what it is to be Black, no matter how many books they read or forced diversity/anti-racism pieces of training they attend.
- . I believe they could make the climate better by employing those in positions of authority whose background and lived experience is representative of those from minority communities with the intent to impact all areas of learning and contribute to community engagement.

- *If I could tell my slightly younger self something, I would say to not turn the other cheek to always speak up! I wanted my work to do the speaking and while it did, it left me exhausted and even more isolated at times.*



Arthur Jafa: A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions  
2017 with Serpentine Sackler Gallery

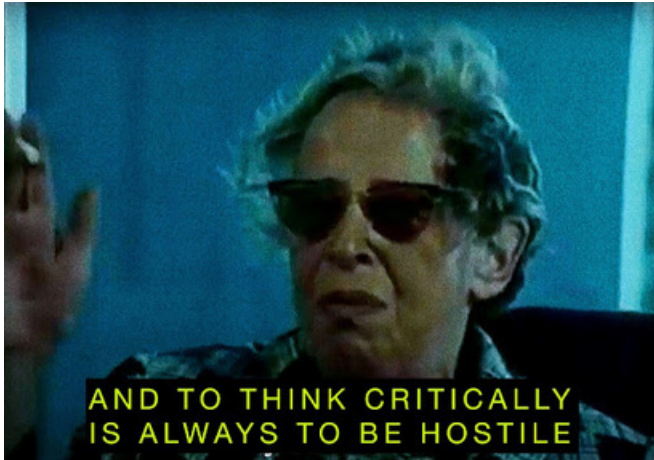
An observation from reading these responses is that there is a lack of implacable representation to AFFIRM the black genius. To complete and pass through a program culminating with apathy for institutional anatomy, intersects with the idea of internalized limitations of agency. The suggestions rest in a desire to see a version of self in others; racially, conceptually, and through the execution of ideas. Black women students of academe are looking for what is reflected in the syllabi and institutional ethos. They are looking for permission. I apply pressure to self-permit despite what is heavily scrutinized. It is my duty to radiate a resolute purpose.

I recall multiple instances in which I have brought up the discrepancies within the university syllabi, referring to it as a "jungle of irony".



"Jungle of Irony", Acrylic and Oil on canvas, 18" x 24", 2022

Students are encouraged to critically think and create at high levels but there are consequences for being disruptive through questioning, and as a result, tension ensues. Professors have released some of their power through apathetic rebuttals of "these are the institutional rules, not mine" and "complete the assignment and just... make what you want when you graduate." I find myself in predicaments often that put me in a position to consider and question my output within the classroom- always assessing if my unique contribution is worth the risk of disrupting the classroom air of pleasantry.



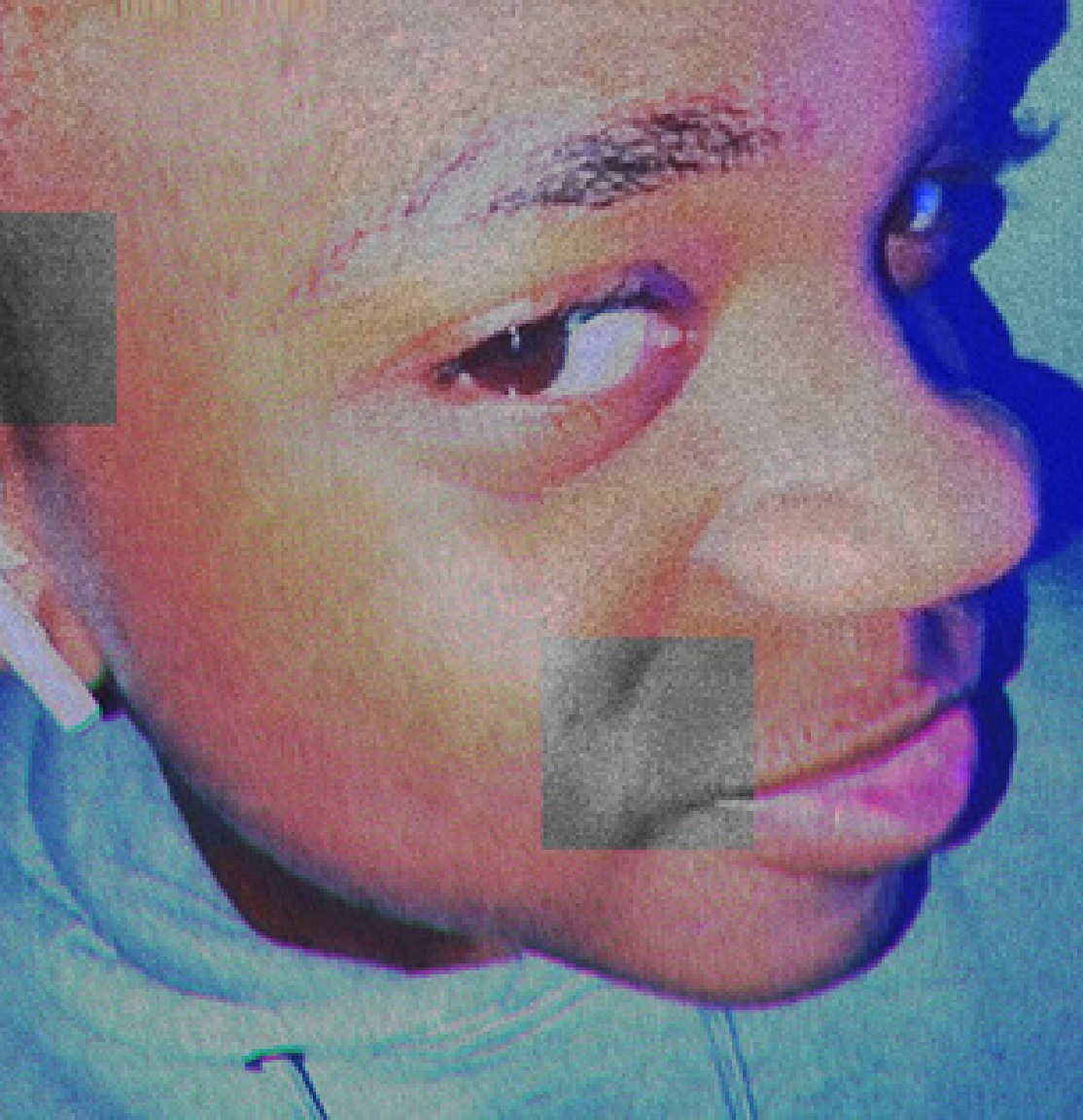
Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview with Hannah Arendt  
1973 with Roger Errera

I ask, "who are the representatives?"

When it comes to concluding with a singular answer, I may not be the best articulator of that, but when it comes to putting myself in a position to be a catalyst for magnifying black genius, that is my area of concentration and here are my thoughts:

I have to become what I aspire to see in the world. In many instances, black women, black women in academic spaces, and black women of the fine arts are leaping through an infinite Venn diagram pulling together pieces of themselves to entwine with fantastical possibilities. The fantastic and the absurd are bridged to form new bases. These bases become territory to use.

The acceptance sought must be turned inward. I have learned to not alienate myself, from myself, but to drive into the particularities of me. I have had to come up with my own methods to actualize the existentialism of myself. I make myself available to be another proof of concept for the Black Woman American Genius through a "posture of openness". This is the earthquake in whiteness.




queue 50-0 by BashfortheWorld then,  
Bussin' (Cold) by Pink Siifu



Bashfortheworld - Darkest ...




Watch on  YouTube



Pink Siifu - Bussin' (Cold) ft...



Watch on  YouTube

My practice is a direct result of being both inspired by and empathetic for Black women. I am quite frankly: saying, making, doing, and thinking in ways I wish were in my direct view growing up. I am building a foundation for my [younger self](#): an instructional guide that empowers expansion for girls like me.

An essay written by Arthur Jafa, MY BLACK DEATH, Jafa remarks upon self-determination using an example through Jazz, performance, and agency.

An excerpt:

"Classically, Jazz improvisation is first and foremost signified self-determination, this actually preceded its function as musical gesture. For the black artist to stand before an audience, often white, and to publicly demonstrate her decision-making capacity, her agency, rather than the replication of another's agency...This signification of one's "self determination" is in turn premised on one's "self-possession". There is no "self-determination" without "self-possession." And, "self-possession" is "the" existential issue for Black Americans".(p.9)



**IV. "SOMETIMES A ROPE IS JUST A ROPE"  
-KERRY JAMES MARSHALL**



The institutional paradigm asks us to tether ourselves inside the box.

The mental workout asks us to think outside of the box.

I observe the questions positioned to conjure horror from the black personhood as though any possible horrors are not symptoms of a

centuries old perpetuation of what Arthur Jafa observes as, "migrant crisis, dissolution of family structures, being subjected to violence, certain kinds of sexual pathologies, economic dissipation...these are not just things that have happened to us, but are intrinsically bound up with being black." A thinker that I have grown to appreciate, Arthur Jafa-- held a conversation with Mathias Ussing Seeberg in July 2021 for the Louisiana Channel. Jafa begins to expound upon this idea that "where we've gone is where everybody is going".

Increasingly, this idea ruptures the containment of what is peripherally through adjacent gazes-black.

I am led to explore the ontology of what in essence, is BLACK. The initial projections of concepts and ideas have been manipulated and thieved: adopted to better articulate and reflect the position. Despite the historicity, "sometimes a rope is just a rope". Kerry James Marshall chuckles in a discussion for Tate Talks in reference to his 2017 painting, Untitled (London Bridge). There is a correlational inquiry in his use of ropes as it relates to BLACKness and the violence inflicted on those who are BLACK. There is an insistence for Marshall to conform into the perception of the confines of the white box- in wit, with grace, he responds, "sometimes a rope is just a rope".

Not to abandon history, but to use it as a point to depart from, I consider the resistance needed in practice to be inherently me.

I think about how other groups decide to frame the identities of BLACKness through one lens and in turn, find it imperative to be active and instant with clear rebuttals that navigate points of views back to source.

To know history, is to gain power of self. The power of self, acts as a catalyst for self-agency. Agency acts as a signifier for purpose, for meaning, for unwavering determination. Jafa resounds in MY BLACK DEATH, the root of what we label as the western canon. Calling attention to euro/white/pasty artists inability to access signification and structures of meaning. In a specific example, Jafa highlights Jackson Pollock:

“Pollock unable to access his work’s signification, its structures of meaning, found himself vulnerable to critiques that the work was essentially without meaning” (p.9)

The canon is **BLACK**, and its purveyors humble themselves to what has been alienated and shoved into the peripheral. I am interested in the *slave codes* engendered from the outside and within as much as I am interested in giving access to not considering them when making and molding. The word nascent has just been added to my vocabulary: making peace with birthing new selves; as a nascent **BLACK** woman, I position myself to permit myself to think critically, make, and do. I find myself less interested in indebteding myself to over explanations but in queuing to focus my interests of freedom through retaining the ontological integrity of what **BLACKness** in its infinance has come to be and a curiosity for what it can/will be.

# SMOKE BREAK



\*JOINT NOT INCLUDED\*

## CITING LITERATURE

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A survey is conducted which includes 32 students of color, staff, and faculty. The survey concluded that the environment remains unwelcoming despite programs implemented to encourage campus diversity and equity.

**SUNI MULLEN** is a contemporary multi-disciplinary artist working towards liberating her mind from the shackles of white mythic projections. MULLEN challenges the ways in which people receive and convey information, asserting her right to tell her story, how she wants to tell it. She sets her own rules, rebelling against proposed static masters, and makes room for innovative ideas, experimental thoughts, and radical practices. SUNI extends strategies to communities globally by connecting virtually, spiritually, emotionally, culturally, and in human form.

Memes of social-cultural references are used to bridge conversational gaps with the aim of creating a sense of connection through social, racial, class, and cultural understanding.

SUNI MULLEN graduated from Otis College of Art and Design, earning a Fine Arts degree in Painting. Currently, she is pursuing her post-graduate degree from the Royal College of Art in Contemporary Art Practices, researching methods and mediums that embrace the spectrum of blackness, including niggas.

SUNI honors black energies and their respective frequencies.