CHAMELEON:
A SYLLABUS FOR SURVIVAL

JAAMIL OLAWALE KOSOKO
You are held in the sombre swaying tempo of raspy cellos rocking you back and forth. Brown, black, gold; a shimmering milky skin encases the body in front of you as it tries to hatch itself into new life, new conditions, new pains, new pleasures. The unfolding of Jaamil Olawale Kosoko’s *Chameleon* remarks, reflects on and rehearses the many holds that may confine or define the fugitive Black body; always on the move—on the run—changing its face, its posture, so as to live deliciously another day, another moment, another flicker of miraculous joy, Kosoko’s performance embodies this metamorphic process in melanated satin. Rocking, trembling, stretching, writhing, the whiplashing ends of fabric coming undone signal this figure’s transformation and arrival into a new form of Black life. Now untethered, warmed by the faint whisper of Luther Vandross’ *So Amazing*, Kosoko’s body moves in joy, feeling himself, getting familiar with this new posture. Vandross’ voice echoing, “I hope you know I gladly go / anywhere you take me,” we are reminded that this journey of transformations, reconfigurations and turnings is ongoing; a continuous drift guided by the will to return to a flickering moment of love and joy.

Kosoko’s *Chameleon* came to me while the likes of Hurricane Dorian came to the Caribbean. I didn’t have many words for what was happening; I could only find words wanting to make it stop. Kosoko’s work in one eye with the other eye staring into the eye of the hurricane, *Chameleon* is a reminder that we don’t have to stay where we are, as queered vulnerable bodies living precarious lives. Taking Turns with Hurricanes reflects on the fixating and stagnating social contracts imposed on the Caribbean region by global powers which render its lives and deaths meaningless in the ongoing queering of the climate and our hurricanes. Refusing to die meaninglessly in this hold, it instanially asks what other connections, interdependencies and kinships can we want and strengthen with each other in this present we’ve been dealt. Like with *Chameleon*, it recognises the ongoing nature of this journey of transformations and turns, resonating with the movement and passage of hurricanes—never settling, destined to arrive somewhere—knowing full well the process may be painful and difficult while always seeking to return to love, even if it must be found in a hopeless place. The eye of the hurricane may provide “the occasion for self-reflection as well as for an exploration of terror, desire, fear, loathing, and longing” in the same way as Blackness has (Hartman, 1997). It gives us room to question our current inhabited orders, perhaps making way to slip, shift and keep on moving together onto more meaningful and disruptive lives.

FOREWORD: DESTINED TO ARRIVE

-ADAM PATTERSON
CHAMELEON:
A SYLLABUS FOR SURVIVAL
-JAAMIL OLAWALE KOSOKO

“If you can’t change reality, change your perceptions of it.”
– Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”
– Arundhati Roy, “The Pandemic is a Portal”

This is a moment for Radical Reimagining, for sharing and displaying performances of kinship, kindness, and care like we have never expressed before. Because of our collective grief, the dynamic number of intersectional realities converging on our ability to practice freedom, our basic need for human contact and connection hangs in a void of deep unknowing. We find ourselves in a particularly fragile space emotionally and physically. On one hand this pandemic is asking us to isolate, slow down, read, self-care, and breathe. On the other hand, we’re being asked to practice a multi-tiered approach to community organizing and activism. We are being asked to transform and adapt.

What are the agreements, and complex systems of care needed to realize alternative methodologies for negotiating this moment of global crisis?

Is it even possible to create an invitation that portals us through such nascent space?

What are the emergent values of the new world inside which we are heading? What does it mean to educate or even create in a time of global crisis?

But of course, these are not new questions. For many poor, ill, Black, neurodiverse, Queer, Trans, Disabled, Indigenous, People of Color, + folx, we have been making work and realizing ourselves while negotiating crisis, pandemics and economic disinvestment our entire lives.

The inequities that have historically plagued our existence have, in fact, become more illuminated. Have there always been trillions of dollars hidden in vaults that could have been offering relief and support to the people all this time? Were reparations really so unfathomable a thought to realize inside the American Project? Now that we all must practice self-isolation and feel the pressure of confinement in and on our bodies, we also must consider prison justice reform. And as we approach what might be the greatest depression in modern history, we have to reconsider how we support the most vulnerable individuals so often left off the census, those on the fringe, born in the undercommons of the undercommons.

I feel incredibly grateful and honored to have had the opportunity for the past several years to share my thinking and strategies for performance-making all over the world. But more so than having had the ability, agency, and freedom to think publicly in the world, was having been given the trust of various educational institutions to create syllabi that are directly linked to my lived experience. These courses include “The Transgressive Body” and “The Radical Imagination.”

This brings me to Chameleon: A Syllabus for Survival. Here, I share some of the readings, practices, and creative vectors that have, literally, taught me how to survive in a world where I was never meant to survive.

As we all move deeper into this new world and the possibility of the portals it generates, I hope this syllabus offers you as much healing as it has me and my students. Furthermore, I invite you to begin creating your own syllabus or bibliography for your life, for your family. Perhaps this will become a new kind of family album? What texts have saved your life? And by texts, I mean songs, rituals, potions, spells, memories, recipes, materials, objects, practices, communities, etc.

My goal is for this to be a living document. This project is not an end but a beginning, an invitation into an alternative way of working and thinking alongside each other, in community, to protect the future we all deserve.
Live click-able links are embedded throughout this SYLLABUS. Explore!
Michelle Alexander
The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (2012)

James Baldwin
The Fire Next Time (1992)

Pauline Boss
Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief (1999)

Jericho Brown
The Tradition (2019)

Adrienne Marie Brown
Emergent Strategy (2017)


Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto
First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model
Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (2015)
James H. Cone, The Cross and Lynching Tree (2013)
Configurations in Motion, Performance Curation and Communities of Color (2015)
Ashon T. Crawley, The Lonely Letters (2020)
Whitewalling: Aruna D’Souza and Nisa Mackie on Art, Race, and Protest
Stuart Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1990)
“we are the consequence of the history of the colonizers future.”

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom (1994)

bell hooks, We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity (2004)

Philip Huang, A Pornography of Grief (2011)

Saeed Jones, Prelude to Bruise (2014)


Audre Lorde, ZAMI: A New Spelling of My Name (1982)

Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power


Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (2013)


"The function of the erotic is to encourage excellence and to give us the strength to pursue it. But giving into the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury that only the unintentional can afford..."

- Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power
“THERE IS A WAY THAT PLEASURE HELPS US TO SURVIVE THE UNIMAGINABLE AND SURVIVE THE IMPOSSIBLE”

-ADRIENNE MARIE BROWN, PLEASURE ACTIVISM
“Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. Imagination turns Brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.”

-Adrienne Marie Brown, Emergent Strategy

José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1994)


Alexis Pauline Gumbs, M Archive: After the End of the World (2018)

“Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. Imagination turns Brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.”

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Claudia Rankine, Citizen (2014)

Arundhati Roy, Field Notes on Democracy

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-Adrienne Marie Brown, Emergent Strategy
FUTURE
"The heat blessed your whole new self with horizon, square-jawed boy. With such potentintent, you blared illicit and just enough saint. Now, with so many northern days between us, you are much easier to God."

-Patricia Smith, *Incendiary Art*

Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell* 
THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITIES THAT ARISE IN DISASTER


Bessel van der Kolk MD, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014)


Black farmers once made up 14 percent of America’s farmers. Today, black farmers account for less than 2 percent. One of them, fourth-generation sugar cane farmer Wenceslaus ‘June’ Provost Jr., is fighting to maintain his family’s farming legacy.
leveler.info
peer to peer wealth distribution

leveler is a tool for people with job security to help people whose work status has been impacted by COVID-19. The list includes freelancers, service industry, and gig economy workers.

Click distribute below to be shown 10 individuals to contribute to. Click the payment link for each one, and hit send. We recommend sending each person $5.00 to $10.00.

This is a mobile-first tool. Please participate from your phone instead of your computer.

"If you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem."
-Toni Morrison

We are in a health crisis, and entering an economic crisis. Let’s give Emergency Money to the People.

ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT

the Color Code

Green: Show unity and solidarity with others
Yellow: Isolated in home
Blue: Vulnerable folks in home, like elders
White: Extra supplies for others
Red: Supplies are needed
Purple: Folks with disabilities are in home

thecolorcode.org

#PassTheCheck
National Public Radio

Soul Fire Farm: BIPOC*-centered community farm committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system.

Performances:

Okwui Okpokwasili, *Bronx Gothic*

Howardena Pindell, *Free White and 21*

Nora Chipaumire’s *NORA#PUNK 100% POP *N!GGA AT THE KITCHEN*

Jennifer Harge’s, *FLY / DROWN* at Detroit Artists Market

Nina Simone, *I Can’t See Nobody*

Lecture: Tina Campt, “Black Feminist Futures and The Practice of Fugitivity”

Lecture/Performance: Thomas DeFrantz, *i am black (you have to be willing to not know)*

Conversation: “Ruby Sales in conversation with Michelle Alexander about Martin Luther King Jr.’s Riverside Sermon”

CODE SWITCH PODCAST

Terrible, *Thanks for Asking, What Does All This Loss Mean?*

Abby Martin, *The Empire Files: Black Radical Tradition, with Mumia Abu-Jamal and Cornel West*

Karen Thorsen, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*

Bong Joon Ho, *Parasite*
EMPAC

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Cover Photo courtesy of the Artist, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Personal Archive, 1983