[00:00:02] **CANDICE STRONGWATER**
Hi, everyone, it's great to see you all. Thanks for joining us today for, I think, the second speaker series of the semester. I'm Candice Strongwater. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a second year graduate student at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, for those who might not know me. I'd like to quickly thank Lauren, Paulina, Casey and Amanda for working behind the scenes today to make this talk possible. So it's such an honor to introduce you all to Dr. Carmen Mörsch, who is presenting a lecture today called "Critical Diversity Literacy. Guidelines for Education and Curating in Exhibition Spaces." Her lecture will introduce the idea of critical diversity literacy, which I'll just sort of use the acronym CDL. It's a concept that was developed by Melissa Steyn, a white South African communications studies scholar. And, Dr. Mörsch will discuss the relevance of the different indicators of CDL applying this specifically to educational initiatives and curatorial practice.

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The talk will also cover anti discriminatory strategies and tactics and what those differences look like based on one's positionality. I'm going to talk for just a few more minutes and introduce Dr. Carmen Mörsch to everyone. So I'd like to highlight some of her positions within the field to emphasize her deep commitment as a researcher, writer, artist and educator. Mörsch is currently a Professor of Art Education at Mainz Academy at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Germany. Much of her research and writing focuses on the histories of art education and its entanglements with white femininity and the European colonial project. And that's why art education needs to be a critical practice. From 2008 to 2018 she was head of the Research Institute for Art Education at the Zurich University of the Arts, and from 2011 onwards, she's been conducting the PhD program Art Education at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.

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She is also a member of the network "Another Roadmap for Arts Education", which unites colleagues from all over the world who seek to analyze and develop the field collaboratively in an emancipatory and decolonizing perspective. When Dr. Mörsch

and I spoke earlier in the week, her presentation made me think about the rise in how corporations, businesses and arts institutions in the US are making public overtures to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and other historically marginalized communities. Some of these efforts and responses are centered around pushing for greater diversity, equity and inclusion measures in their spaces and practices. How language and action does or does not sync up is something that many critics and activists are paying close attention to. And so I really appreciate Dr. Mörsch's efforts to characterize what it means to be both literate and accountable through the lens of critical diversity. As she shared with me earlier, the concept of CDL tries to appropriate the language of diversity, equity, inclusion in a more radical way, through critical race theory and intersectional perspectives.

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And in her words, Mörsch's talk should prompt us to think about how gallery education can be a critical, anti discriminatory practice. Last year, when myself and other second years had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Mörsch in person as part of Nana Adusei-Poku's Proseminar, Dr. Mörsch led a vital discussion around ways to deconstruct and problematize how museums and galleries utilize education across exhibitions, programming and artist projects. One comment that struck me was her perspective about it being impossible to not be part of hegemony when working within arts institutions, but that working from a position of ambivalence or contradiction could be a way in.

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So I have been thinking about how this manifests in the work that is put forth here at CCS and beyond, and I'm eager to hear more about how this manifests within the concept of CDL. So before I pass it on to you, Dr. Mörsch, I just want to let everyone know that the talk will last around forty five to fifty minutes. And I know that you are thinking about making it a little bit more interactive to have people engaged, sort of as we go. I also encourage everyone to participate in ways that feel supportive. So if you'd like to just include questions or comments in the chat, I'm happy to read them out

loud and to help facilitate conversation. So thank you for being with us and I pass it over to you.

[00:04:56] **CARMEN MÖRSCH**
Thank you very much for this kind introduction, I will immediately move on and share my screen. I will do a PowerPoint presentation and will start reading a little bit, like maybe three minutes, and then leave the manuscript and talk to you. Thank you again to you folks for this invitation. I'm very happy to be with you here tonight, even if digital. And thank you all for coming. I'm looking very much forward to our exchange. Does everybody see the presentation? Good. So I start.

[00:05:48]
The plea for awareness of social discrimination and that's for social justice have been a phenomenon of modern Western societies since the formation and especially since the 19th century, with the rise of the so-called social question and the rise of civil rights activism. The social field of exhibitions and curating are no exceptions here, on the contrary, they have been and still are at the center of debates around epistemic violence, structural discrimination and social exclusion. As an art educator, I have been working around those issues since the 1990s in pedagogical practice and research. I worked on the post-colonial and feminist historiography of my work field at education.

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I have worked for several years on empirical and participatory action research-based investigations on exclusion in art schools, in museum and gallery education, art education and schools and many fields more. All this resulted in written work, mainly. In the last three years, though, I have been following my need to put all the findings and concepts one step further into practice by conceiving a teaching and learning material for people who are studying or already working in the fields on the intersection of art and education. By means of a lot of reading and of several excellent research projects, workshops, interviews, and thus with the help of many, many practitioners and scholars from the arts, from art education, curating, programming and the like, I have

been trying to develop a systematic approach towards the question of how the work we do could become less violent and how to make space for and support the professional engagement of members of social groups that are notoriously underrepresented in those fields.

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So today, I would like to give you an insight into the conceptual framework I am drawing on in the course of this quest and discuss with you the potential relevance of this framework for your realm of work and study. In my presentation, I will sometimes pause. I will ask you to think about a certain question and write down your thoughts and ideas. Those notes can foster our discussion after the presentation, but they do not have to do that necessarily. They can also stay with you individually or they can be used by you in other occasions and group constellations. By these pause exercises, I'm trying to give you a very small glimpse not only of the conceptual but also of the pedagogical approach I have been trying to develop further in my inquiry on what critical diversity literacy might mean for the work on the intersection of the arts and education, because pausing and thinking are at least as important for this approach as action-taking and problem-solving.

[00:09:11]
So as already has been mentioned, I'm working with the concept of critical diversity literacy developed by a white South African scholar named Melissa Steyn. And she herself draws on a concept called racial literacy, developed by France Winddance Twine when she looked at actual biracial couples and their children and especially white mothers with children of color being bystanders of racist violence. And that's not being affected directly, but most closely by, yeah, by racist violence. And so what they develop as as kind of tools to cope and also to educate themselves and their children was named by France Winddance Twine as racial literacy. So Melissa still defines critical diversity literacy, drawing on Winddance Twine as a reading practice which perceives and responds to social climates and prevalent structures of oppression. The indicators to evaluate the presence of critical diversity literacy in any given social context, she

develops as eight, so eight different indicators.

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But before I come, I move on to these eight indicators. Let me explain a little bit why I like critical diversity literacy as a concept. I like it because the notion of literacy contains the idea of alphabetization, of needing to learn to read and write. And I think this is exactly what we need when it comes to the awareness and the action against social discrimination. It also implies that this is something everybody can learn. And the other aspect of critical diversity literacy, which I really appreciate, has already been mentioned in the introduction, and that is that through the word critical in front of diversity and literacy, there is a trial to critically reappropriate these two concepts, which have been themselves appropriated by neoliberal discourses and emptied out quite a lot. And I think that is a vital discussion as far as I understand, in the US about the emptying out of the concept of diversity. And the same happens with literacy, even if in a more like, specific pedagogical field.

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So now I'm moving on to the different indicators, which makes you critical diversity literate. So a person who is capable, who has the competence of critical diversity literacy has an understanding that social identities are learned and are an outcome of social practices. So I'm always trying to or in most of the cases when I now introduce these different indicators, I'm trying to connect them to our work field. And so for this first one, I chose an image from 1866 from a vernissage of a French au salon. So the original vernissage was this social occasion, which was only attended by invited patrons and the elite. And the name came from the smell of the varnish because the artists were still doing the last finish in their paintings, while these invited guests, these very special persons, very important persons, were already allowed in. And so the vernissage is actually coming from that smell and from that the experience of being allowed in the space when the artists were still at work. And of course, these vernissages were also the most important moment for the artists because these were the actual buyers of their work and not the crowds, which would come in later during public opening hours.

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So I think this is a very illustrative example of a social practice, which is connected with the subject formation of a white European middle class and the role the arts, the art field, played in the subject formation. And now already the first pause to practice, the pause exercises. So I'm sure that what I just presented to you is no surprise to anybody of you. And I'm sure, you know more social practices that are contributing to the constitution of the figure of the curator. So please take five minutes, take a paper and a pen and list like five to ten social practices that come to your mind, which are contributing to the constitution of the figure of the curator. Starting from now.

[00:21:01]
OK, time is over. I'm sure your list is very full and now we can move to the next indicator. Oh. OK, so the next indicator for critical diversity literacy is a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic social identities such as whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, abledbodiedness, middleclassness, etc. You see at the image I chose for this indicator, the German art patron Hasso Plattner, he's one of the richest people in Germany, at the press conference at the opening of his newly built giant 19th century-style palais, which he calls Museum Barberini, located in the public space of the city of Potsdam near Berlin. In there, and since 2017, he has been presenting his private collection, which mainly comprises impressionist European painting and sculpture to a paying audience. And I chose this image because I find it a very clear representation of one version of what hegemonic social identity means in my context and how I encounter it within the field of museums and exhibition making.

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The next indicator is an analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of privilege intersect, interlock and co-construct, and constitute each other. So basically this refers to what we call intersectionality. And I'm sure that at least most of you, if not all of you, are familiar with the concept of intersectionality. Nevertheless, I am taking the opportunity to remind you that this concept has been developed by a Black scholar,

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar in race and the law, feminist legal theory and critical race theory. So intersectionality, just to remind everybody, describes instances where people experience simultaneous prejudice and discrimination based on race, gender and other ascribed identity markers. So one key asset of critical diversity literacy is an analytical skill to read the world in an intersectional way. And most of all, this refers to oneself in the social space, because this is the next indicator of critical diversity literacy, the ability to intersectionality, localize oneself in social space and to understand how privilege works.

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Yeah, I have a little quote here, which also might be well known, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." I'm using a lot in workshops, in educational settings and with my students, a tool which is already quite dated. It's called the Power Flower, and it has been developed in the beginning of the 1990s at the Institute of Education at the University of Toronto. I don't know if you are all familiar with this tool. Is the tool for, yeah, a critical, intersectional self localization in the social space. The inner leaf of each section of the flower means that you are on the privileged side of things. The outer leaves mean you are on the less privileged side of things. And then you have the different categories, like a sex, race, ethnic group, religion and so on.

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One can do this tool individually or one can also use it as a tool for discussion to do it in a group. And I like to do it with my students because everybody is really hating it, including myself, because it has a lot of methodological problems. It is too binary-oppositional, you know, reality is much more complex as the categories and their social value is depending on context. So, for example, age, you know, when you are a young person in one context, that can be a disadvantage and in another context it can be a huge advantage. And o applies to not every single category. There are more robust categories, but basically it applies to every single category. So too binary-oppositional, too static, too universal, you know, ignoring contextual specificities

and also ignoring the fact that hegemony is always in flux. So categories change. So some of the categories which you have here might be less important than they used to be in the 90s. And others are not visible, which are now kind of key.

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So, having said that, I still find it an extremely useful tool by using it in a critical way, like trying out what it can do and what it can't, and then try to move on to a more specific version of it. So I'm asking my students, for example, to try and come to a representation, to sketch a representation, which is more context-specific and complex. So a more context-specific and complex version of that tool, of that Power Flower. And so this is one example which one student in the first year of German Turkish descent did last summer in my course. It's all in German, but I still want to show it to you because I find it really interesting. And of course, Kübra also allowed me to show it to you. And she also asked me to put her name as the author of the drawings. So, you know, it's obviously something she can relate to. And she is OK with showing it in public. So, I ask the students to draw a Power Flower, which is more complex and is context-specific towards their positioning, their social positioning in the art school. And there is a lot of interesting details in this Power Flower, like, for example, coming from a family where we're just working class and coming from a family which doesn't speak German as a first language.

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Kübra finds it difficult to follow certain discussions in the classroom, in the art school, you know, in the studio, for example, in studio critiques. Or the fact that she's coming from a working class background and she has no savings, so she can't invest in the expensive art materials which other people can. But at the same time, she states that she never, ever made any kind of discriminatory experience because of her being a woman or being a Muslim woman in the context of the art school. So it is important for her to state that as well. She also says that she never had the feeling that her Turkish descent would have brought her any kind of disadvantages during her studies. But then again, she says that... No, like discussions of lookism... Like discussions on beauty and how you should be

looking at as an art student are very, very prevalent and not at all nice in the context of her art school reality. So all these kind of considerations lead to, I think, a very precise self-awareness of, you know, and the kind of momentary location of what you feel are your personal experiences, the structural privileges and the privileges and the way you are dealing with the situation you find yourself in.

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Yeah, you can maybe after I finish my talk, we can also come back to single issues, to single slides or single moments of this talk. If you have a question, just maybe write it down now. But I'm already here at the next pause, and I think this is the most difficult one. So I can already comfort you. Once you've gone through this, it becomes easier. So I would like you not to draw your own Power Flower, I don't think we have time for this now. But maybe take some notes again for five minutes around these questions here. So inside the social space of curatorial study studies, where do you think I use socially positioned, you know, concerning the different social markers of, or markers of social difference? And how do social markers intersect and which dynamic do they unfold in your case? As I said, within the professional field, within your field of curatorial studies. And which emotions evolve while you are thinking about these questions and what are your doubts and hesitations? So, as I said before, nothing of this has to be put on the table later in the Q&A. You are just doing this for yourself now. So we have the process, all the performative dimension of what I'm trying to develop in the talk and not only me giving an account of it. So five minutes for this.

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OK, you made it. You survived. I'm moving on, and now comes the serious action, because the next indicator for critical diversity literacy is to obtain a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of forms of oppression and resistance. So I give you two examples. One is more general and underlying the concept of intersectionality and thus also CDL. And the other is, again, more context-specific for our working fields. So one example is in terms of developing a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of forms of oppression and resistance is the colonial matrix of power, which has been developed

by the Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano in the year 2000. I think it's an extremely useful taxonomy to understand our place in the present, and it is also underlying the concept of intersectionality and critical diversity literacy as far as I'm concerned. So Quijano says that's due to five hundred years of capitalist and colonialist endeavor. We are living in a world which is structured by a matrix and this is the matrix of coloniality and it is basically comprised of four axises. One is the control of economy. The second is the control of authority. The third, is the control of gender and sexuality. And fourth, is the control of subjectivity and knowledge.

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And these four axises of the colonial matrix result in certain conditions, which he calls coloniality as an umbrella term. And here you see the different, um, the different effects; all the different markers of coloniality, a particular global class formation with the diversity of labor forms and international divisions, division of core and periphery and intrastate political military system controlled by Europe, I would say controlled by the West. The global racial ethnic hierarchy, privileging white European people, the global gender hierarchy, privileging European patriarchy, the sexual hierarchy, privileging heterosexuals. A spiritual hierarchy privileging Christianity and epistemic hierarchy privileging Western knowledge and cosmology. A linguistic and cultural hierarchy privileging European languages, especially English, in communication and knowledge and theory production. So I think this is describing basically the conditions we find ourselves in, and that's also, of course, the conditions which structure the work of curating, exhibition-making and education in exhibitions.

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So coloniality offers a framework to understand why some of the markers, which also appear in the Power Flower are producing social differences and others do not like, for example, the preferred color of the socks you wear. Because this is a question which comes up again and again, you know, who defines which markers are making a difference and which are not making a difference? And isn't that all just also a matter of personal choice? And I think to understand the colonial matrix of power and to be

able to name the different effects of coloniality is a good example of what [inaudible 00:42:09] means when she talks about the ability to obtain a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion on oppression and resistance. And then again, I think sometimes in terms of our work field, it can also be more simple.

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So when it comes to the choices we make in our work, you know, in arts and education, I'm taking here the example of a young European curator or even a young European art educator who doesn't want to work in the Eurocentric way and tries to find other examples from other geopolitical regions in the world and thus puts the term African arts in the search engine. And this is what you get, these matches in the image search. You basically get the Western gaze on the African continent. When you look, when you are looking for African arts. If you look for decolonial arts, you get a completely different picture. And I think this is also an example of what it means in context, specifically for our working fields, what it means to develop a vocabulary in terms of critical diversity literacy. And the question is how and where do people learn that, you know, words that appear in the curriculum?

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The next indicator is a definition of an oppressive system as historical legacy and continuity in the present. I have two examples here. One is a US American example coming from my own research and also the research of many other people. Jane Addams, the co-founder of Hull-House in Chicago, who also won the Nobel Prize for Peace and was definitely an activist, but at the same time used Hull-House also as a space for her as a new women woman from the beginning of the 20th century, ending of the 19th century, for her own self development and her own emancipation and thus her own subject formation as a white, liberal, feminine person. And at the same time as has been already researched and also produced exclusions along the axis of race. And these exclusions were very constitutive for the practices which were connected to the subject formation of these white middle class women of the times. And I think they still are, especially when it comes to museum and gallery education. So for me, this is one

example related to our field when we talk about oppressive systems as a historical legacy and continuity in the present.

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Another one is the fact that if you want to find information and material, for example, as an art educator on Paul Gauguin, you will find tens of thousands of examples. You know, if you look online, you want to find information or teaching and learning material about Gauguin there is really an abundance of it, where if you try and find similar stuff on Amrita Sher-Gil, who is considered as being one of the foundation stones of Indian modern painting and did this wonderful, ironic comment on the exotism and the sexism prevalent in public art paintings when she painted herself as a Tahitian woman you do just not find anything, like it is not possible to find proper teaching material on Amrita Sher-Gil. Not yet, I would say. I mean, she is now, you know, getting big retrospectives, and has been getting some retrospectives during the last few years. But it is just very emergent. And I think this is also a good example of historical continuity, historical power relations and their continuities in the present.

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OK, then. We are coming to the last or to one of the last indicators, the ability to translate and interpret coded hegemonic practices. And here I put an example from a recent museum conference in Germany when it was about "Museums of Tomorrow" and them needing to be more inclusive and more diverse. And you had this wonderful panel discussion here which had the title "What to Do?", like the old Lenin quote. But if you look closely at the people who are sitting there, you will only find representatives of what in the first indicator was, what was named as the hegemonic social identity construction. So you have a completely homogeneous panel discussing how to make museums more inclusive and more diverse. I think this is a wonderful example for what we call hegemonic practices. And I'm sure it's not only happening in Germany, otherwise I wouldn't have shown it to you.

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So now this is very important, it's actually the key indicator for critical diversity literacy. It's about the will to change. So Melissa Steyn refers to Paulo Freire's notion of conscientisation and engagement with issues of transformation towards deepening democracy and social justice in all levels of social organization. Because all of those indicators which we mentioned before, you can also use because they're about critical readings and critical understandings, whereas conscientisation also refers to the level of aptitude and the level of emotion. So otherwise without conscientisation, without the engagement with issues of transformation and the will to cause change, you can also take the critical reading and use it as a kind of instruction for oppressive practices.

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So I will, for time reasons, I will skip this slide, it is just a little explanation about what is meant by conscientisation, but you can also find that out yourself. So if I translate critical diversity literacy and these indicators to our working fields, you know, art, education, curating, I see three interdependent dimensions where these indicators can play a role. The dimensions are the canon. So what is the content of our work? Which sources are we referencing? And the second dimension is methods: how are we doing our work? And the third dimension concerns the structures. What are the conditions for the work? Who is doing it and which knowledge is valued and available in our context? These are the three dimensions which I was able to identify, I would be very interested in a critique on this. And if you see aspects of our work, which are not embraced by these three dimensions, I would be really, really keen on getting these kind of critiques and suggestions from you because I'm still working on it.

[00:52:22]
Questions and comments not transcribed.