



OUTspoken

JUNE 2022

OUT!spoken

*a digital journal of LGBTQ+ writers, artists, and activists
in conversation with ending mass incarceration*

June 2022

OUT!spoken exists in solidarity with the trans and gender nonconforming community, especially children, as they face unyielding attacks on their safety, autonomy, and basic human rights.

I am honored to introduce you to *OUT!spoken*.

A digital journal of poetry, art, and nonfiction, *OUT!spoken* is just one small effort aimed at sharing the lived experience of writers, artists, and activists at the intersection of LGBTQ+ and anti-carceral spaces. The work collected here speaks to the impact of mass incarceration on the LGBTQ+ community – as individuals and as a whole – and seeks to further catalyze discussion around a radically just future beyond the confines presented by systemic racism, transphobia, and homophobia, and other inequities.

As scholar Jemma Decristo states in “On Black Trans Refusal,” which skewers the mass reduction of Black trans women to a source of performative social clout: “As sentimental art object, as gaping hole, as sucking wound, what might it look like to refuse the world that makes us such?”

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to a network of individuals without whom this journal would have never advanced past the proposal stage. Thank you, Stephanie Young and Susan Stryker, for the invaluable gift of your counsel and guidance; thank you, Joshua Zuniga, for your thoughtful advice; thank you, Tiffany Cruz, Tovah Strong, and Zehra Shah, my fellow Community Collaborators, for your enthusiasm, encouragement, and smart suggestions; thank you, Em Marie Kohl, for your generosity and insights on design; and thank you to my partner, Kaitlyn Johnson, for your seemingly limitless patience and understanding, artistic eye, and physical, mental, emotional, and culinary support.

Thank you to We Are The Voices, for its generous support of this work over the past 10 months, and to A.B.O. Comix and TGI Justice Project, for partnerships that have brought such depth to this collection.

Finally, my greatest thank you to my contributors, without whom *OUT!spoken* would simply not exist.

Now, dear reader, I welcome you to *OUT!spoken*. It is my hope that the writing and art gathered in this journal acts as a source of reflection and inspiration, and that you carry the work forward with you in pursuit of a world that is open, equitable, and truly just.

- Caroline Gasparini

Curation, typesetting, and design by C. Gasparini
Set in Redaction (Jeremy Mickel, 2019)

Editor's Note on Redaction:

OUT!spoken is set in the Redaction typeface, a bespoke font commissioned by Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts' 2019 *The Redaction* exhibition at MoMA PS1. It was important to me that the journal integrate design elements related to the fight against mass incarceration, and it feels particularly symbolic to present this work in a font built expressly to be a part of this movement.

As noted on the [Redaction website](#), "The Redaction project seeks to highlight the abuses in the criminal justice system, in particular the way poor and marginalized people are imprisoned for failure to pay court fines and fees." I strongly recommend visiting the site to learn more about the project and the origin, design and role of the typeface.

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KATHERINE CULLINAN

When four police officers come to my home in a white suburb armed with assault rifles, I say how much life my brother must have that you need that many guns to take it.

A human response to danger is often fight or flight but my brother could do neither. Pigs making a playpen out of our front yard, I can only tell you of the mess they've made.

Four years ago, my brother changed his profile picture to him holding a rifle in each hand. Rifles crossing like crucifix, though nothing holy here.

An assault rifle can fire
700 rounds per minute.

His mind produces 700 thoughts per minute,
convinced someone is after him.

In a moment of tragedy, each minute s l o w s.
Each minute a new prayer.

My father relays tragedy more often than he relays his name.
I have come to know the tone of his first word as a siren.

Our surname was planted two hundred years ago, and has
bloomed into a **decaying** tree.

I once climbed a tree because
my brother told me there was peace at the top.

Show me peace at the tip of your rifle
and I will show you liberation.

My parents talk about the death of my brothers often,
though they are **still alive**.

My parents place bulletproof vests over their hearts so they can survive the news when it comes. Recoil, fire. I am convinced our world is on fire.

My vest is broken. I have tried to tighten it, but
it still lets the pain through.

A bulletproof vest can take only twenty bullets.
An assault rifle can fire 700 rounds per minute.

JENNIFER TOON

Invisible Scars

For women inside prison, the fight for survival is less physical than psychological

I was watching TV one night about four years ago when my friend Latrice bounced into the prison common area. She'd just gotten mail and found out her mom had finally saved enough money to bring her five kids to visit from Houston. She could barely contain her excitement. "I haven't seen them all together in so long!" she exclaimed. Even though I didn't have children, I understood the joy of visitation. My parents were also coming the same day, I told her. I hadn't seen them in several months, as the almost four-hour drive from Kilgore to Gatesville was hard on them.

The next week, I walked into the strip room, where officers strip-searched us before visitation, elated to see my parents. Latrice was already there, in the process of removing her uniform for the officer on duty.

"It's really sickening how you have all those kids and you choose to stay in here. Living wild with five children at home. How does that make you feel?" said the officer, an older woman, as she shook out Latrice's shoes and threw them on the floor. (Latrice's name has been changed to protect her privacy.)

My appearance turned the officer's disgust toward me. "Offender, you stand over there! Stop crowding me while I'm doing this search. Do you want me to refuse your visit?" I felt my chest tighten with rage. I hadn't done anything wrong. "No, ma'am," I said and put my hands behind my back and retreated to the farthest wall as Latrice stood naked, holding out her uniform and undergarments to be searched. The officer snatched them from her hand and shook out each item. The berating quickly resumed. "I checked in all those kids and thought, 'Jesus, what a selfish girl you must be to keep having babies and dumping them on your momma,'" she said. Latrice remained impassive, her eyes glazing over with an emptiness I knew well. I could feel our collective joy about visiting our families seeping out of us.

I watched Latrice's unemotional face as she got dressed. I knew what she was thinking: "God, please don't let this officer talk to me like this in front of my family."

After I was searched, the door opened and I saw my elderly parents sitting near the window. A beam of sunlight bathed the table in a warm glow. I smiled, and they rose to greet me for our one allowed hug. We were still settling into our seats when I heard the door open again. Latrice walked out and nervously scanned the room for her family. "Mommy!" a little girl cried, darting from the corner where an older woman sat huddled with four other children. "Baby!" Latrice dropped to her knees to embrace her youngest daughter, who had started sobbing. The tenderness of the

moment transported me beyond prison, to times of unguarded happiness. Latrice suddenly looked vibrant and alive.

But then a familiar, booming voice cut in. “Offenders will sit at their designated table. Visitors will keep children under control!” the officer shouted. She flew around the tables, bumping into other visitors, as she made her way to the frightened child. “I’m sorry, she was excited. It won’t happen again,” Latrice said. The officer pointed her finger in the 5-year-old girl’s face. “Little girl, you need to put your bottom in that seat. If you don’t, your mommy is going back to her dorm and you won’t see her today.”

The room was silent. Many family members were in shock. But I knew the other women were experiencing, as I was, a seething rage. We knew the officer had the ability to terminate our visits on a whim, so we didn’t dare provoke her. The insidious abuse of power and authority was as it was on any other day, but with our families subjected to it and us unable to intervene, a boiling anger consumed us. But fear overrode anger. Our eyes remained downcast, our mouths shut.

I remember little from the rest of the visit. My parents did their best to distract me from the tension in the room. I couldn’t shake it, though. I went back to the dorm and sat on the floor, trying to make sense of what I was feeling, reflecting on my past seven years in this place. The constant barrage of insults, the belittling, the daily microaggressions from prison staff were suffocating. I thought about how incarcerated men often explain their suffering by revealing the physical scars that incarceration leaves on their bodies. Scar tissue zigzagged across rugged faces and tattooed chests tell stories of survival from gang fights, use of force, and officer retaliation.

But who can see our scars? Life in prison is different for women. The fight for survival tends to be less physical. It’s the psychological abuse we endure, that we don’t know how to articulate, that wounds us. It’s the shaming of Latrice while she stood naked waiting to see her children. It’s the threat of not being able to see family for little or no reason at all. It’s the laughter from officers when a menstruating woman bleeds through her clothes and is still forced to wear them. Every day, all day, invisible wounds to the spirit.

In order to survive, we must endure it. Silently and unemotionally, apologetic and self-depreciating. We must participate in our own degradation by smiling along at jokes made at our expense or apologizing for things we were not responsible for. We betray our true selves to make officers and other prison staff feel comfortable about their cruelty.

I made up my mind that day to attempt to rectify the wrong done to Latrice, myself, and all the women around me. I just didn’t know how.

Almost a year after I was released from prison in 2018, a friend wrote to me from the inside. She told me about a woman who had reached down and plucked a small flower while they were on their way to work one morning. “We marveled at the simple beauty of that flower, when out of nowhere the warden, who just so happened to be walking down the other side of the sidewalk, began screaming at us. He said, ‘You right there, stop! Put your hands behind your back. Do you think this is a park? Do you think you’re at home? I ought to write you up,’” she wrote. “Over a flower. A flower!” She closed her letter, “There is something inside of me that is tired, something that is about to break apart, unhinged and unafraid.”

I held her letter in my hands for a long time, staring at the last sentence. I thought about that day in visitation, about Latrice and her daughter and the years of psychological abuse.

At the time, I was on parole and still subject to the whims of authority. Years of incarceration had taught me that breaking the unwritten rule of silence meant punishment. On parole, retaliation wouldn’t be a canceled visit; it could possibly mean my freedom.

But that day, something inside of me finally broke apart. As I clutched that letter, the old rage in my chest turned into a furnace of resolve. It was then I knew how I would try to right those wrongs. I would refuse to remain silent and complacent any longer. I would write the stories of incarcerated women. I would stand in front of legislators and packed hearing rooms. I would bare this scarred soul for all the women who have suffered from the invisible violence of incarceration. The world will know the mark it left on us. We’re not laughing, smiling, or apologizing anymore.

DY'MIR

I am who I am

Sometimes I wish I were invisible to the world.

Always hear people whisper "is that a boy or a girl?"

I am what God created me to be, but is it a mistake?

Trying to figure out who I am puts so much stress on my plate.

People look at me differently, but who are they to judge?

I am who I am, a human, who bleeds the same blood.

You look at me in disgust while I smile with my head held high.

I am who I am, never asked God why.

I will never be controlled by the idiots of this life,

I am who I am, one of God's beautiful creations.

But yet I get labeled and get misinterpreted.

Once again I will not be what you want me to be.

I am who I am and that's what matters to me

A creation with a heart of gold and a soul so pure

A doctor of my own with my own cure

I was broken, but yet and until I built myself back up.

Been through it all didn't think i had any good luck

My mind was never free always felt like it was chained

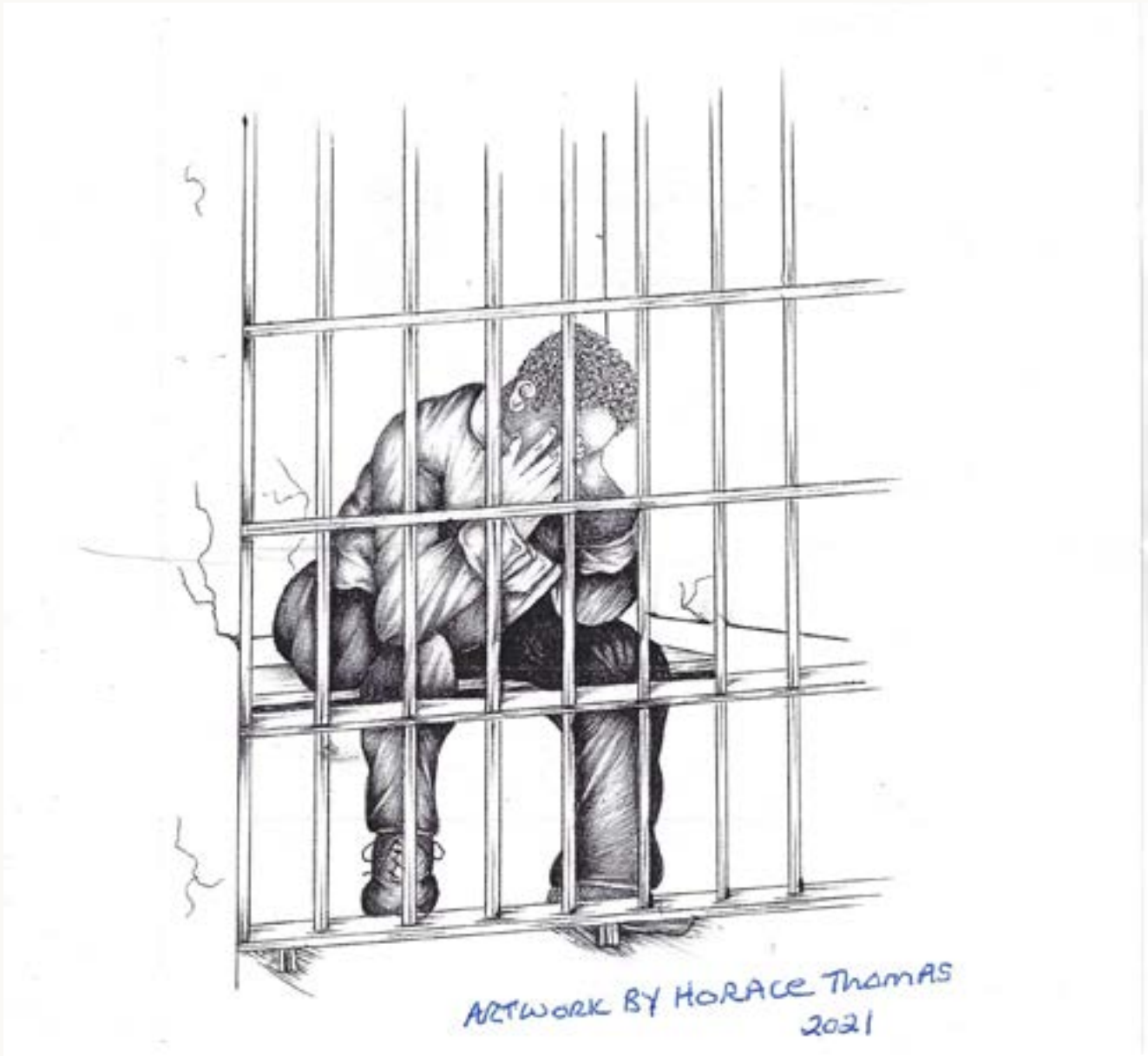
Fighting my own demons and it always left me drained.

One day out of the blue it hit me and I finally realized.

I am who I am and so now I no longer wear a disguise.

Now i'm finally free spiritually, physically, and emotionally

I am who i am so now i hope you can believe



Horace Thomas

JEMMA DECRISTO

On Black Trans Refusal

The twin hashtags of #ProtectBlackTransWomen and #PayBlackTransWomen, automatically compile, as if actions or assertions, across my naively selective social media timeline. And the other girls I know, mostly only through online meme circulations and cunt Internet trans humor posts, implore the critical void into which we often speak to pay and protect, “come on, show your support, show up for black trans women.” The command to “show up for” feels displaced, not because it doesn’t refer to an ongoing reality, but precisely because the sterility transmitted in the sloganized response seals off the ever-present social built upon the murder of black trans women into a niche marketplace of others’ performative proximity, invoking a form of antiseptic latex-gloved “crisis management.” Your support is shown, staged, proven, but your life is never to be deeply, and in a daily sense, politically fated with that of this now trending signifier.

Payment and protection, these yokes of sanitized categorical belonging provide a managerial proximity of public intimacy that constructs as it preserves the affected world built around the object “black trans women”—well-outside and far-beyond the lived experience (and death) of black transness. A kind of inversion of Lauren Berlant’s characterization of the intimate public of femininity takes place, where the “relay from...abandonment to recognition” is not a condition of lateral black trans affinity (even superficially) but a structure of reprieve orchestrated for the unaffected social to seek out monetary and affective amends through “black trans women.”

The hashtags, since they speak only to that outside social, may be better translated then with an attention to the affective resonance of their circulation as PayOffBlackTransWomen and ProtectYourselffromBlackTransWomen. Patronage and protection here vaccinating the normative social and specifically its bedrock of marketized interaction from the contagion of its perilously rendered phobic-philic other. Are these circulated accounts of our fallen symbolic kin a kind of care? Is this care merely part of the defensive black transfeminine social constituted negatively by the fear of “clockability,” withdrawn “hiiiiii’s,” protective shade, the social we withhold from one another out of “safety” as we too pass each other by?

Privately withheld behind probably every computer screen that circulates this plea is both the appeal for something more than, but the ultimate capitulation to, the almost pathologically insufficient social and political intimacy available to black trans women as alienated social spectacles of cutting edge slang, walking canvases for non-consensual makeup questions and clothing compliments, secret-cathexis black dick experiments and the ultimate evolution of the “I have a black friend, I have a gay best friend” chronotropical party-favor. The extent to which we are idealized ob-

jects to be perpetually publically passed by and circulated are part and parcel to our miasmatic life and afterlife within a supposedly normative social order.

The quarantine and isolation of black trans women as objects of crisis not only reduce black trans women to symbols of social contamination from which patronage and symbolic protection are ready-made solutions, it undoubtedly accounts for the profound real and existential loneliness and isolation many of us experience, and about which both Tourmaline and Dora Silva Santana have written.¹ This loneliness is the essence and excess of an intimate public constructed entirely on our symbolic negation; the out-of-the-mouth-of in which we only exist as something never inside others; the basis for their safely constituted subjection and the normative social in which our existence is a crisis to be selectively managed and performed around. We live in this intense internalization of an outline, aesthetically, economically, relationally, around which so intensely others feel compelled to perform, and in which we are rarely resourced to perform out of.

This exogenous rendering of black trans women forms the sentimental bounds of our mediated and marketized relationality. Not only perpetually by the violent and often non-consensual circuits of empathy conducted by others “on our behalf,” but also our own precarious relation to our deaths as our introjective relations to each other; our incorporation, as a momentary monetary breath in. The figment that the “cash” in CashApp is wealth, that the cash is anything but the thinnest accrual of perpetual ephemerality—an exhale, a breath out; gasps from the strangled neck of an unimaginative world in which we exist as so much more than breath.

The performative social capital extracted from our diminished life-chances, and certainly the circulation of our deaths as events for the exhibition of patronage and protection, everyday accrue against the unrealized attachments that build another world in which we would want to live and in which far less so we might die. It is in the interest of another world I offer the word of refusal.

So often these papers begin with the description of one of our deaths. I’d first like to refuse that. In the place of an oft-hollowed out symbolic husk I’d like to leave disgust, anger, rage and a host of other less cohesively despondent affects that unlike death, we actually feel. And which, unlike death, privilege the ongoing language of our relation—dare I say with one another; relations our isolated non-living as abject signifiers, often if not always, erases. As these abject descriptions circulate so thoroughly across the now mostly digital “stage of sufferance,” so too do those of us who are left behind, similarly circulate as purely discursive images for other’s often shocking and always awkwardly flung sympathy, as if we’re already dead.

There is then in this refusal, also an act of selfishness too, to avoid the banality of

1 Dora Silva Santana. “Mais Viva: Reassembling Transness, Blackness and Feminism.” *Trans Gender Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2, May 2019, pp. 210-222.

abjection's attendant performatively guilt-ridden sympathy. And to stave off the reoccurring character that comes up to me after these panels and wordlessly tosses a sticker in my direction containing some toothless statement of black trans visibility "Black Trans Lives Matter"...yeah I know, duh. This persona will have walked away before I can say a word, before I can open my mouth in potential refusal.

What possibilities emerge on this stage of refusal are imagined out of the desire to repel a regressive "genre flail," in this case all too literally—what is flung at us—that black trans lives are increasingly encircled by; the sense that our lives precipitate a language of momentary crisis and categorical response, deemed exceptional by the boundaries of normative society. As Lauren Berlant writes, "Genre flailing is a mode of crisis management that arises after an object, or object world, becomes disturbed in a way that intrudes on one's confidence about how to move in it. We genre flail so that we don't fall through the cracks of heightened affective noise into despair, suicide, or psychosis. We improvise like crazy, where "like crazy" is a little too non-metaphorical." The genrefication of black trans sufferance makes discordant a set of seemingly emergent yet actually ever-present social problems that constitute the supposed concord of the normative social that are unredressable through our guilt-ridden administration.

Hegemonic apparatuses of "protection" have been the primary harbingers of violence towards black trans women: Prisons, solitary confinement/protective care, shelters, hospitals, police, the military, the criminalization of sex work, the exploitative nature of all work—especially the low-wage, highly casualized, precarious labor available to most black trans women. The isolation of the SHU and the isolation that resounds in the patronizing circulatory social façade of the "outside" market are not the same, but they are relatives; part of a bigger political family in which we are coerced to value and make ourselves out of social non-productivity. That these are not obstacles to our self-making, rather the basis of our self-making, is what makes the violence of the world.

The social service affects of concern that silo off our living into administrative abstraction, as "service population," might share a limitation then with the exhaustingly white object choice of "gender" or "trans gender" that something like trans gender studies has deigned to institutionally grant the world. One site for trans studies may be to attend to the contours of the black trans living formed in the forceful displacements of generosity's glare.

It may have been presumptuous, to begin this paper by thinking refusal from an abstract crossroads of black trans woman that is characterized by a scarcity from which nothing is supposed to be refused; a scarcity of life-chances, of material resources, a scarcity of nothing that isn't prison cells and street-sites creating and extracting our informal market value that precipitate a further scarcity of rest from the ongoing weariness of the work of our living. Because our vitality is so often poached

by and integrated exploitatively into systems of value that render it in violently pragmatist terms, it can be difficult to distinguish between the refusal of the valuation of our lives and deaths, from a refusal to live. I have no interest, for the purposes of this panel, or even for something as institutionally-bound as trans studies, in positively theorizing this living.

Instead this distinction I am drawing around black trans lives is meant to penetrate the critical void that emerges around (the symbolics of) our lives and deaths, and that in the form of solitude, alienation, isolation, loneliness, puncture the time stream of our living. In this way refusal is implicitly, and not in an intensely positivist sense, meant to open a space to think about the criticality necessary to, which is often actually happening in, our kinds of black trans living. The political imperative I am trying to open up with this black trans living has historically, and continues to in many ways, tarried with fundamentally impractical ways of being. There is nothing particularly practical about walking out the door towards death, among other things, yet we still do it. And still the genres of patronage and protection attempt to surround our every step while leaving untouched the world in which we walk. How might refusal orient us away from simply making our way in this world for which we are too much and instead guide us in destroying a world which has never been enough for us?

Like the slogan from a flung sticker, valences of theoretically reparative and often violent automation, are articulated through the precipice of an almost open black mouth, which has a hand in making the world.

After all, we are always what they are holding. The demand to the performative address of victimology as an automatic attempt to engage power can serve to relieve our own investments in dominant systems by channeling emotional relief and symbolic legal resolution through one individual or prescribed set of bodies to whom no hearing is actually given. It's the way the singular individuality in the peculiar and customary institution of slavery kept the slave society intact. How do you outline a crisis without conscripting people to the normative practices that often uphold that genre?

I recall not only a legacy of radical black political organizing sprinkled throughout, but also the rigorous theorizing of generations of transnational feminisms that have critiqued the production of the voicelessness of the subaltern. These histories are quite easily linked intra-institutionally or interdisciplinarily. Yet the extra or inter-institutional links remain extremely tenuous—whether, because of seemingly inexhaustible transphobia, TERFism, Sex Worker-phobia, anti-blackness and classism, or rather the simple institutional isolationism of these discourses. Many of these generations of feminisms link to the fairly exhaustive critique of the value of (feminine) beauty, artistic muse and representation. What is the link between the production of spaces that allow an even excessive representation of the genrefied

suffering or banal celebratory patronage of black transness? What would an ancestor of black transness look like that holds the negative critique of our increasingly positivist rendering online and on certain TV shows? What would a representation of visual refusal look like and how could its lineage offer us black trans women and people a reminder of not the prescriptive engendering of our bodies, but the limited genrefied imagination of the world that hardly and often doesn't deserve the dynamic improvisations of our living and movements.

I would also hope refusal disturbs the celebrated or mourned exhaustion of gender as the supreme object of something known as trans studies. And instead nudges that spilt glass of quickly pooling abstractions into regarding the intensely real political practices that quite messily cohere and interfere with the production of something like that object.

While the modest impossibility of meager survival has historically been an occasion for constituting black political projects of collective social intervention, if not revolution that threaten this normative social, the weaponization of our abjection has often lead us to fashioning our practiced threats against the society that produced it; or at minimum these projects harbored practices of communal and self-protection. However, our social precarity has become an increasing site of what the Black Liberation Army famously deemed an unacceptable, and we might add actually materially unsuccessful, opportunism.² Our

indexing an increasingly diffuse social contiguity is an opportunity for our hustled ascension into and not against the social and a perfect investment for detached affective speculation.

The prophylaxis of embodied categories—that has never quite matched the ongoing acting out of power that distributes uneven life chances—is both subtly and overtly upheld within the banality of these repeated searchable phrases of categorical belonging and attachment of payment and protection. The commodification, speculation and scarcity of housing are all background noise against the automated harmony of patronage and the coercive aspirational projects of self-making in the worse and worse life available to most under neoliberal capitalism. The sterilized genrefied production of black trans women as sites of patronage and protection sediments our own isolation and merely palliates our ongoing reduced life chances. It also funnels the vitality of potential lateral black trans affinities toward market-exclusive attachments. Our side-by-side is at best our incidental working proximity, and at worst, a competitive precedent for catty obliteration.

Perhaps for no one in particular—at this point possibly only something as abstract as the market or only as empty as transaction—performative exchanges occur between the glossy ruggedly individuated hustle of payment and its instrumentalized

2 The Black Liberation Army. "Message to the Black Movement," pp. 1-16.

uses, and the sterile monetarily secured benevolence of protection they purportedly ensure. I don't know about you but I feel protected and paid, can't wait to leave the house this morning. "If you've learned anything from anything I've said on here my cash-app is finger pointing emoji underneath."

It's a space to be held, we are held, space-holding is happening y'all. The space that is all that's held is the barest motivic force of our lives under capitalism, the algorithmic circulation of our deaths, both cohere in these spaces that house the engineered non-intimacies of exchange. This space is extraction's from, where the messy and unwieldy nature of material attachment is translated into the monolingualism of sponsorship and the attendant social spectacle of individual labor. The singular language that we are never talking to each other; caught in a volley of highly consensual non-sensual non-contact.

As sentimental art object, as gaping hole, as sucking wound, what might it look like to refuse the world that makes us such?

EMJI SAINT SPERO

autocorrect is just another word for

a tendency toward futurity
leaning, we reiterate ourselves
split, reiterate, overwrite
a past, ours and not ours
captioning into the present
lounging language into being,
layered into
that is to say—

i used to describe dysphoria
to my psychiatrist,
social workers, therapists
basically anyone
who could write the letter
who could write the script—

as a doubling,
cross your eyes
object/subject
an image overdoubled
on itself, overlap,
slender and
more solid
irreconcilable

—to anyone
who could block the hormones
who could block the surgery
we are not enough
for ourselves (that's
what she said)

She tells me when I go into the clinic to say that I was having a panic attack. That my friend gave me an ativan (oh—but don't say xanax) and it felt like my anxiety was a jacket I could take off and drape over the chair next to me. It's still there but it's not mine. I don't write love letters anymore. I'm high as fuck functioning, or whatever.

and this is how you get yr script.

to get a higher dose higher dose all you have to do is—failing to hang yourself in the closet of the psych clinic, derailed by details just long enough for—

She worked at the needle exchange, the trans crisis hotline, she ODs, it's not uncommon. We find out on social media. Intent unclear: Obituaries are a timeline. Linear; and relational. That is, hetero-generational. Blank and voidoid. That is, autocorrect without context.

gimme gimme yr context.
begging for it. 2 days in
strung out on some pnp trade

bc i need a place to crash b/w
working the 36hr function and
working the 36hr function and
working the 36hr function
b/w the parii, the kiki, the afters
and working the 36hr function.

between is a brief interlude from slinging a queer contact high to yt pride tourists, i mean hyperallys, over the moon about their rainbow tights. u can always tell who to bump the price up for, can always tell who's a narc by their sneakers, their stance.

between is yr pnp trade on grindr trying to find a tgirl 3rd who doesn't have a rose in her profile, that is, who is free, so he can feel like she actually wants him, i mean, us. i decide not to mop his connie, least not most of it. i take nudes in his well-lit bathroom, send them to 3 ppl to see how they respond differently.

he lurked in the corner in slacks
he clocked me as a tgirl at the function
or at least he thought he clocked me.
language always precedes sex, desire,
a prophylactic against prescribed
anticipated violences.
exposition: a necessary prelude
a content warning
it's safer that way.

in the end again i am my genitals
a hole is not a hole however you square it
violence is casual, leave the car door unlocked
your back to the wall, an eye toward objects

eventually comes so naturally to you

the nearest exit
what object to latch onto
blunt or otherwise.

what words gathering
in anticipation
language is an exit
that is, language
is an opening
that was not an option
for you. not then,
blunt or otherwise.

Years later he tells me, I wanna look like what I am but don't know what someone like me looks like.¹ His voice stretched across years.

a decade lag

the archive is pretentious
precious
a posthumous fetish
performance evolves
in relation to
what gathers around it

you train your voice to notice
you stretch or manipulate
echo / repeat / overlay
switching back and forth
between—
eventually
it will be so natural to you
to make sound strange
it's very obvious
a very obvious feeling
a marked incongruence
vocal folds collapsing
choked more open
the sound is unremarkable.

you're experiencing
circumstances

1 Lou Sullivan, *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Select Diaries of Lou Sullivan, 1961–1991*, eds. Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma. (Brooklyn and Oakland: Nightboat Books and Timeless, Infinite Light, 2019), 40.

and you'll probably
remember some of them.
deviations, diversion, paraphilia
who's to say

the space inside
your throat wasn't not
necessarily pathological
depending on how well

you can genuinely pretend
to do something.

some are better at this
than others.

She goes missing. We drive around for days in a white convertible looking for her. The police find her instead. Naked, tying her clothes to a telephone pole and setting them on fire. 72 hours. Catch and release. We wait for her outside the psych hospital. They held her in the men's ward. They said she posed a threat to herself. We brought her a burrito. She didn't get the fun meds.

the very pink
magenta bottom line
is potentially unpleasant
a discrepancy between
constriction and
edges of their words.
you swallow, shifting into
subtext.

safer is just another word for
happy happy together
comfortable is just another word for—
it is, quite literally, life and death (and happiness!)
and death. so over it.

it's rude as hell.

Emji Saint Spero
April 13, 2022
Red Roof Inn
Buffalo, NY

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ANDREA ABI-KARAM

Excerpt from THE AFTERMATH

there's a way in which american literature
pretends to do certain things
& pretends not to do certain things
there are ways in which literature is not clean
is not sterile
is not outside of itself
is not existing in a way that matters so fully
there are ways in which writers pretend to do certain things &
 also don't do these things
like
writing about the riot from the 25th story
flicking the lights of a hilton hotel room on & off
or writing about the riot from a youtube video
the audio cutting in & out
or writing about the riot from the livestream
the screen glitching out into pixels
or having band practice during the riot
the guitar turned way up

or doing something really annoying & conceptual during the riot
i should be careful b/c this is starting to sound like some macho
 manarchist
riot or die manifesto
but rly
i'm trying more to complain about how the riot gets more imaginative
 attention than physical attention & how these people doing the
 imagining but not the attending
get the most IRL attention
the most visibility
but that only about 20 people showed up to J's sentencing last
 Thursday

while someone with 1,003 facebook friends wrote poetry or papers or
reviewsthat probably more than the 20 people who showed up to J's
sentencing last Thursday

will read

it's really coming back to this black panther vs BLA line of can we even
think of arts as a form of militancy—& i'm very much conflicted on
this too

like i want to & i do but also with the understanding that it's not enough
& really has to arrive out of a moment of upheavel or conflict or
feeling & can't actually be predictive

that's why the fighting phase

that's why i'm not sure i trust the fighting phase

maybe it made more sense then than it does now

I STARTED OUT THIS PIECE

I STARTED OUT

I STARTED OUT BY TRYING TO INHABIT FANON

I STARTED OUT BY

TRYING TO FIGURE SOMETHING OUT

it's easy to think the poet is the problem

but the poet is really just sad or maybe

even just nothing & the poet can't

burn down J's cell or the entire prison

or all the prisons & the poet can't even write

a fanonian poem because what would that actually look like

the poet can show up sometimes or not

the poet can watch

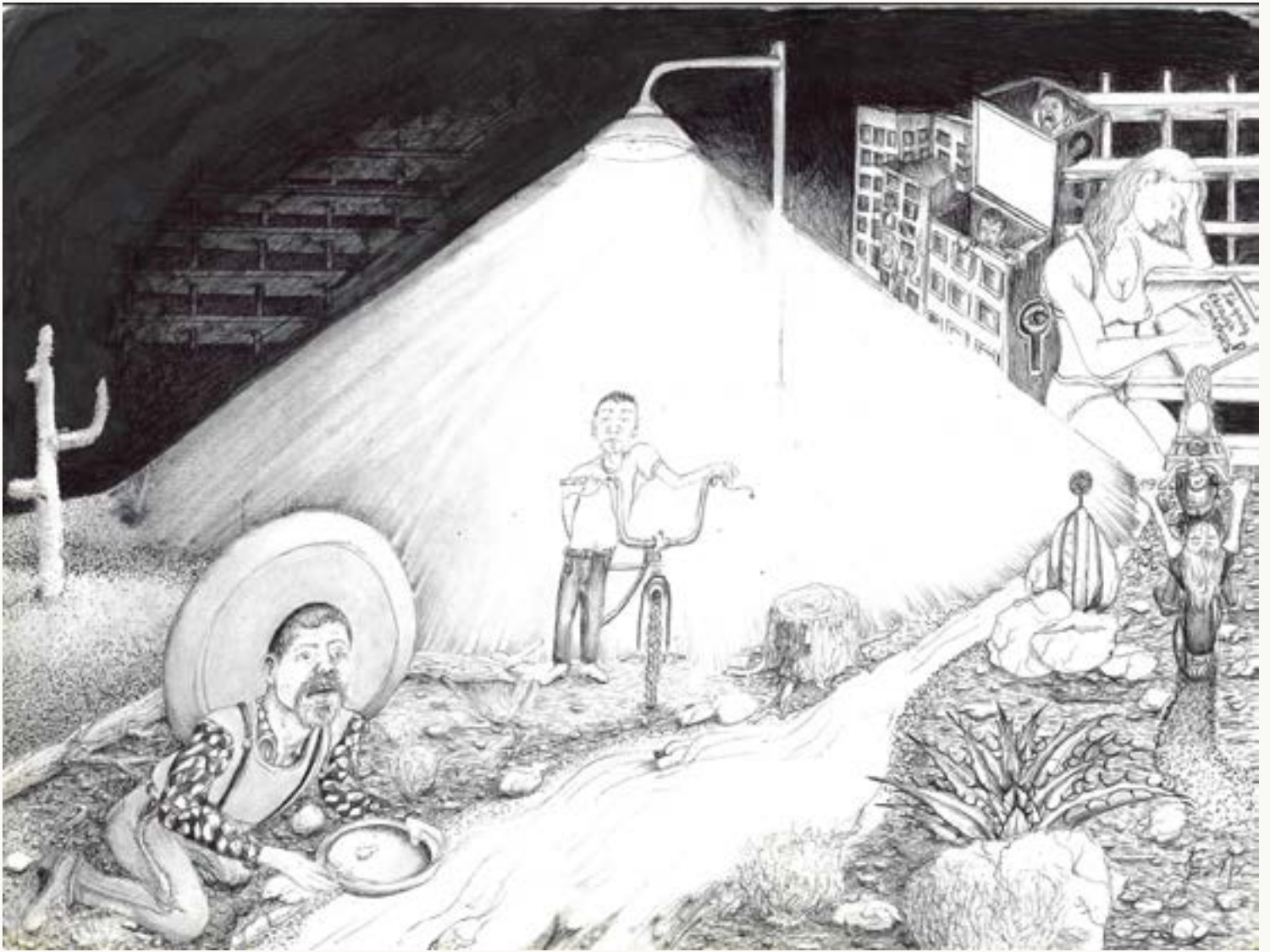
the poet can write, or not

because what would the fanonian poem even be—

it wouldn't even be poem or a phrase or a piece of art

in the middle of the street

it would just be fire itself



Joanna Nixon

SUSAN STRYKER

Resisting Carceral Power

On the Intersections of Trans Resistance, Black Lives Mattering, and Police and Prison Abolitionism at the Crossroads of Turk and Taylor Streets in San Francisco's Tenderloin District

Turk Street and Taylor Street physically cross each other exactly once in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood, but that single point in space is occupied by many different social intersections. It is a place where we can stand together in the crossroads of this historic moment in time.

In August 1966, at the corner of Turk and Taylor, trans women, street queens, gay hustlers, queer kids abandoned by their families, and other marginalized people fought back against police oppression at an all-night restaurant once located there, Compton's Cafeteria. Some of the people who fought that night lived in the Hyland Hotel, an SRO that occupied the floors above Compton's, or in many of the other cheap hotels, like the El Rosa, that lined Turk Street. These were some of the few places that visibly trans women were allowed to live back then, and working in the neighborhood's sex industry was one of the few jobs available to them. The revolt at Compton's was a bold assertion of their fundamental right to exist in public space, one that contested the criminalization of their lives. San Francisco honored that legacy in 2017 when it officially designated the neighborhood around the old Compton's Cafeteria as the Transgender District, and appointed a Black trans woman to lead it.

A private prison now occupies this historic site of resistance to the criminalization of trans people, at the heart of the world's first urban district established specifically to empower trans lives.

For nearly 30 years, the former Hyland Hotel has been a for-profit incarceration facility disguised as an inner-city apartment building, misleadingly labeled "111 Taylor Street Apartments" on the awning over the door. The facility is operated by GEO Group, the world's largest private prison company. California recently passed Assembly Bill 32, which aimed to ban private prisons, but the law created a huge loophole for any facility "providing educational, vocational, medical, or other ancillary services to an inmate." GEO Group's Taylor Street Facility is a Residential Reentry Program or "halfway house" providing these services under contract for inmates of both California state prisons and federal prisons in California.

Don't be fooled: this is just a way to rebrand a prison as a social welfare agency. GEO Group prides itself on pioneering new forms of incarceration, including electronic ankle-bracelet monitoring as a prison without walls, and camouflaged carceral facilities like the one at Turk and Taylor. It runs immigration detention facilities for ICE.

It manages 95,000 beds at 129 facilities worldwide, and provides “community supervision services” for more than 210,000 people, with profits last year of \$166 million and assets worth \$4.3 billion.

GEO Group’s occupation of the building at the intersection of Turk and Taylor needs to be contested. Abolition now. The COVID-19 pandemic has given the lie to tired old stories about how some things are too big or too complicated or too entrenched to change quickly. At the same time, the pandemic has focused our attention on the government’s fundamental failure to provide adequate access to health care, employment, income, housing, and food. It has exposed the lie that policing actually provides public safety. The inspiring uprisings for racial justice that have swept across the United States and around the world in the wake of the latest police killings of Black men like George Floyd have shown how little willingness remains for tolerating deep-rooted systemic racism. The massive Black Trans Lives Matter gathering in Brooklyn on June 14, 2020, to protest the ongoing targeting of Black trans women like Riah Milton and Dominique “Rem’Mie” Fells shows just how much support there is for challenging transphobia – and a whopping 79% of people in the U.S. supported the U.S. Supreme Court decision on June 15 that trans people should be protected from employment discrimination. Led by the bold decision of the Minneapolis City Council to defund and abolish its police force, other cities from coast to coast have followed with similar initiatives of their own for dismantling our irredeemably broken system of policing and incarceration. All of these issues can be addressed simultaneously when, together, we inhabit the crossroads at the intersection of Turk and Taylor.

Crossroads, in many cultural traditions from around the world but particularly in those of the African Diaspora, are symbolically charged places where one realm of existence touches another, and dangerous, transformative encounters take place across some significant difference between those who meet there. It’s where Faust met Mephistopheles, and Robert Johnson was given the gift of playing the blues. A crossroads is literally a place of crisis, where in order to move forward we must choose one path or another. More than a mere intersection, the crossroads are a place to dream, and to conjure new realities through the path we choose. What crossroads might we discover at the intersection of Turk and Taylor?

San Francisco is a city whose legendarily left-leaning social fabric has been tattered by tech-driven gentrification that has displaced long-time residents and created one of the worst housing and homelessness crises in the country. There is a desperate need for affordable housing, particularly among communities of color, and even more pressingly among Black and Indigenous People of Color, especially if they are also queer or trans or nonbinary or two-spirit, or feminine-appearing, or excluded from meaningful work, or currently or formerly incarcerated. Why not liberate the historic site of trans resistance from its occupation by a private-for-profit prison, and turn it into something that truly serves these many unmet needs?

What would it be like for our actions in the streets to make the operation of GEO Group's Taylor Street Facility unprofitable? To collectively insist that the needs of the incarcerated be met by other means that served them better and profited no one but themselves? Why not demand that the City of San Francisco divert money from its police and jails to support a community-led effort to support Black Trans Lives, and the lives of the formerly incarcerated, by turning a private jail into low-income housing, as part of a broader demand for the abolition of all prisons, public or private? Why not reopen a cafeteria on the long-shuttered ground floor commercial space to provide training and employment opportunities for people reentering the workforce, similar to what Delancey Street Foundation already does? Why not partner with the Tenderloin Museum to create historical and cultural programs and exhibits about the neighborhood? Why not provide office space for nonprofit organizations serving our communities?

Let us come together in the crossroads of this historical moment, while the world we have inherited is in crisis and we are laboring to envision and enliven a better one. Let us come together at the intersection of Turk and Taylor to address the many pressing needs we see there, to better ensure access to the means of life for us all. Let's join in an effort to center the lives of the most vulnerable among us, those who are targeted and those who are denied the means of meeting their most basic needs. Let's begin by driving out those who profit from oppression.



Jorge Gonzalez

DIANA MARIE DELGADO

Prayer for What's in Me to Finally Come Out

I want to smoke weed on Easter,
walk with cousins up P. Hill
and, passing 7-Eleven, look into
the sweet and smoky houses of the middle class
and think you never know. I want to fade
in the doorway of the house I grew up in,
understand why the light in my dad's body
after the needle's tucked in is orange
on a river so silver I can barely see him.
I want to wear a yellow sundress
in the hallway of a rented house,
holding what I meant to send you
that summer I bought my first car
and Y.A. shaved my brother's head,
replacing his name with a number.
I want to walk P. Hill before
my brother was shot and the neighbors
carried him in on a dining room chair
to lay him on my mother's bed,
where later, waking, he yelled,
"Mom! Bring me my pills!"

MORGAN GODVIN

Are You a Piper or an Alex?

I never thought I would work in the trades. Nor did I think I would ever end up in a women's federal prison.

My prison counselor assigned me to the electric crew. At 6am we filed into the construction services building and passed through a metal detector. It was my first day. I had a notebook and a pen with me, for downtime or breaks, to give me something to do that would occupy my mind.

The gruff middle-aged officer manning the metal detector barked at me, "No personal items allowed in this building! What are you, new?"

I looked up, confused.

"I can't bring paper and a pen with me to work?"

He scoffed and adopted the most condescending tone he could muster.

"No! You work at work."

He scowled at me and blinked hard a few times to emphasize my stupidity.

This rule was, of course, not written in any manual, visible on any sign. It was one of the many things you were expected to know without being told. I hung my head low, embarrassed as other incarcerated women, wearing khaki uniforms, heavy boots and Carhartt-knock-off coats chuckled at my ignorance. I tried to hide my newness, tucking my contraband notebook under my coat, trying to blend in, failing.

The correctional officer that doubled as the head of the inmate electricians sat slouched over his desk.

"You the new one?" he asked, disinterested.

"Yes, sir."

He waved me towards the cramped closet off of his office, where I joined the other nine women of electric. I took a seat on an empty giant spool of wire, others sitting on upturned trash cans and buckets.

We waited—unable to read, write, or listen to our radios—for three hours. Most of the

time at work you do not, in fact, work. At no point did the officer brief me on safety or mention one word about the trade. I was handed a pair of gloves and told to follow others' lead.

The very next day, I got electrocuted by a hand dryer while standing in an inch of water. The correctional officer supervising the electrical department was not named Luschek.

My name is not Piper.



Five percent of Americans will serve time in prison. Less than ten percent of prison sentences are served in federal prison. Less than ten percent of people in prison are women. Of all the prison sentences served in the United States, less than one percent are served in women's federal prison. And yet.

And yet.

It is the most common pop culture reference for "prison" anyone has, thanks to *Orange Is the New Black*.

It is also where I did time.

The most watched show in Netflix's history validates the incredibly rare thing that happened to me, the world in which I lived that very few people will ever see with their own eyes.

When I disclose my past, the follow-up question is always the same.

"Was it like *Orange Is the New Black*?"

I don't begrudge people for this line of questioning. Prison is ineffable and words sufficient to describe it are elusive.

For the first 24 years of my life, there were a set of rules by which society and all its inhabitants operated. Prison turned my understanding of the nature of the world—and more specifically the nature of the US government—upside down. The correctional officers (when not consumed by apathy and disregard) created chaos and disorder, far from the ostensible law and order their job it was to provide.

Thanks to *Orange Is the New Black*, I can use jargon such as "a shot" and "the SHU" and laypeople, people far removed from the injustices of our system, understand me without further explanation. They saw it on TV. Perhaps their understanding is

flawed and superficial, while giving them the impression it is profound and complete, but at least it saves me the expense of trying to explain it.

Of course, if you've seen the show, you already know some of the things I am describing. You have caught a glimpse into a world that is intentionally hidden away from society. The general public had no idea what a women's federal prison looked or felt like. They do now

Tomatoes, green peppers, and onions became scarce precious resources, available only on the black market. Official processes, like submitting "maintenance request" forms for broken things in your cell were useless. Sex was illegal. Advocating for your rights could get you a shot or land you in the SHU.

"Are you a Piper or an Alex?," usually comes next. The profundity of my relationship to *Orange Is the New Black* is lost on its fans.

I have a canned series of responses, distilled into a language the show's admirers can understand. Being gay and previously in love with heroin does not make me an Alex, much to my dismay. I was "educated" by prison standards, with one whole year of community college. White and fairly privileged, I tutored; taught my peers about women's reproductive health, civics, pronouns, gender and sexuality. I started writing, became politically active, and was declared an agitator by a prison administration that promptly censored me.

I'm unequivocally *a* Piper. But I am not Piper.

I was not living a normal or well-established life. I was a high school dropout with some community college credits, lured by the promise of student loans. I was a pizza delivery driver, hopelessly addicted to heroin. A lowly blue-collar criminal. That I am able to relate to Piper's character and the setting of federal prison does not obfuscate the uniqueness of my own experiences.

And yet.

I am the privileged White woman who stepped foot in federal prison and became outraged at the conditions I found there, the mistreatment, and the horrific stories of traumas my peers recounted to me, clearly making them victims as the US government declared them criminals.

Replicated in the show are both my experiences and my observations. The social dynamics, though sometimes farfetched, also ring true. The nonchalant manner in which horrible traumas are discussed, mentioned in passing. "My mom's boyfriend, the one that killed her..." or "My son, the one that is serving life for murder..." were par for the course in a women's prison, where layers upon layers of trauma influence

every interaction.

Like in the show, I once settled an argument about “how many holes women have down there.” Another about how many states were in the United States of America. A Black transgender woman cut and dyed my hair for \$8 in commissary items. I worked with live wires as an untrained electrician. Even in the strangest of places, there is universality in the human experience.

I had no camera with which to document these formative years. For a steep price, I could place outgoing phone calls to my loved ones, but it was like calling another dimension. Eventually I abandoned trying to explain “what it feels like.” I adapted to a new world, a new society, one that bore little resemblance to anything I knew before. Free society began to feel like something foreign; distant.

Then I was released.

“Put it behind you,” they said.

But this thing that had happened to me had changed me. I will never be the same.

The nebulous memories of federal prison float through my mind, untethered to the world I see before my eyes. I am recalling a vivid dream. One where those charged with maintaining order sowed discord and arguments were settled with fists, not words. This dream cannot co-exist with my reality. One or the other is not real.



Then I sit in my living room and turn on *Orange Is the New Black*. And suddenly, a rush of emotions floods through me. The inane details relegated to the background—the uniforms, the ID cards, the jangle of the keys, the buzzers, the trays, the blankets, the cots—it is those details that remind me it really happened.

“It was real,” I repeat like a mantra as I watch.

I can gaze into a world in which I once lived but will never see again. One which most people in my life will never understand, despite their best efforts. Maybe I, too, will never understand.

The show’s commitment to authenticity is evident in every episode. I often wonder how it accomplished such precision in its details. Visually replicating an environment which very few have seen, and where photography is prohibited, must have been a feat.

With flashbacks, triggered traumas, laughter and occasional longing, I watch.

I have few mementos of my time in prison, save for emails I sent from the kiosk and an inconsistent journal, always aware that anything I wrote could be read by COs and cellmates alike.

The staged “prison photos” show a garish backdrop or a wall, with no glimpse into where or how we actually lived. If I want to remember, my only option is to turn on a show.

Most people watching *Orange Is the New Black* are exhilarated at a peek into a world they will never see. I am exhilarated at a peek into my past, my memories brought to life.

Some elements highlighted on screen are the same that I emphasize in my retellings. There are correctional officers who tolerate sex and relationships and others who make it their life’s mission to “bust” people having sex. For me—a queer woman—it felt like my sexuality was being criminalized. It wasn’t illegal to be gay, but it was illegal to act on our gayness. Same difference. And yet the primary source of violence among my peers that I saw was sex and relationships. I enjoy the delicate way the show depicts these complex dynamics. I feel legitimized.

Other elements that are critical to understanding the US prison system are absent. In women’s prisons, sexual abuse from the correctional officers is an occasional threat, but the threat rarely extends when we are amongst ourselves. In men’s prisons, outright rape by other incarcerated men is common. So common, in fact, that when the prevalence of rape in men’s prisons is combined with the country’s overall incarceration rate, it indicates the United States may have the largest population of male rape survivors in the history of the world. You would not know that if *Orange Is the New Black* is your only reference for prison.



I didn’t always watch *Orange Is the New Black* to reminisce on a past life. The first season came out before I went to prison and just after my first time in jail. I watched it laying on my mom’s living room couch, fixating on the series as a way to distract me from my awful life, injecting heroin every few hours, letting each episode’s end become my only reference for the passage of time. I, too, once gawked at the absurdity of the setting. I never imagined a scenario that would land me in federal prison. County jail, to be sure. But I was no international drug trafficker or money launderer. We always think it won’t happen to us. Until it does. The indictment read Morgan Godvin versus The United States of America.

I read Piper Kerman’s memoir on which the series is based from my cell, loathing the Bureau of Prisons, wanting to run from it and never look back. I never wanted to look upon that horrible place again. I never would have predicted a time would

come, just months after my release, where I would watch the show as a way of grounding me to both my past and present.

The most criminal thing I ever did was drive a half of a kilo of cocaine down the West Coast, binge-watching another Jenji Kohan show, *Weeds*, on a portable DVD player that sat on my lap, before the term binge-watching ever existed. Mostly, I bought heroin with the tip money I earned at work and injected heroin into all of the veins of my body until there were none left. I went to federal prison for selling one gram of heroin—\$80—to my best friend Justin, who overdosed later that night, alone in his bedroom.

I watched the first season for its distracting entertainment. I watched the others as a visceral reverie.



I've been out of federal prison longer than I was in, but it shaped my worldview and influenced my trajectory more than any other factor in my life. My memories are slipping away, twisting, merging with a fictional series. Its authenticity is so supreme I cannot always differentiate something I heard in prison versus something I heard on the series. The most watched show in Netflix's history depicts this incredibly rare thing that happened to me.

I love *Orange Is the New Black* for its commitment to authenticity, its attention to detail, and its brutal accuracy. It helps people understand me and the experiences that shaped me. It reminds me that those years in prison did, in fact, happen. How privileged am I that despite having one of the more rare prison experiences available, there is an entire seven-season critically acclaimed series that depicts it and depicts it well.

So am I a Piper or an Alex? Neither. I am Morgan Godvin, one of thousands of women who are incarcerated by the United States every year. Women are the fastest growing demographic represented in the criminal justice system, though still far outweighed by men in absolute numbers. Women that are being torn from their children, losing their parental rights, grieving the deaths of their loved ones from a faraway prison, and being expected to spend hundreds of dollars monthly on prison communications just to stay in basic human contact with their support circle.

If you're asking me if I'm a Piper or an Alex, you've missed the point: we must reckon with our mass incarceration problem. For the thousands of women in American prisons today, they are not on a television show. Each monotonous day flows into the next, never to conclude at the end of an episode. The tearing apart of families, the infliction of trauma on traumatized women—these things will continue happening until America can look beyond the entertainment of the show and into the deep injustices

it portrays, hidden just beyond the laughs. Satisfying your lighthearted curiosity diminishes the tragedy.

It may be easier to jest than to solve but I envision an American in which our country does not torture its own citizens in the name of "justice."

NI'LEK AMIR

Untitled

Broken coils....smh..we thru..transmission fluid on E
what can we do?

I'm stuck at rearview...smh..how the fuck I'm gone
tell you? pictured this day...way past a decade..
chuckels...blows breath make it to tell it too..I kept
so many memories too..kept those pictures..letters..
poems..I've been conflicted with this face off..I'm
straight with the cool off. don't want old feelings to
pop and the real reason gets lost. I'm at liberty to
pull the plug and just walk the fuck off.

Lost in this tunnel. Rusted pipe dreams. Broken
glass heart...love pouring thru a funnel...

Walked thru the door I haven't pulled in years. Felt
kinda funny.

Faced a demon that possessed my fears. Feelings in
my tummy.

What's next? what's left?

I really ain't got much left..I spent my last dime on
energy..

and I'm a 10% check..FUCK!

Turn around and face the fuck.

Failure. I left you there in hope you would be here
when I returned.

A face off worth the knock off.

Glad you view what I've become. what I possess. the
destined success..

the familiar heart burn..

I made this part fun. I gave 100% on my run. Gravitated my mind to a ton.

What's the procedure when this redefined man expanded his mental and body to a redefined land?

Failure standby .. I need challenge understand..its key to knowledge.

You didnt defeat me..nor did your ever dangle my key. I'm back .always right. no left..Wtf you got next?

KERI BLAKINGER

Why We Wore Makeup In Prison

Each hard-won stroke was a painted symbol of self-expression and rebellion

In prison, the little things matter.

In part, that might be because the big things don't exist. There are no concerns about getting fired or being evicted or making it to your aunt's funeral. None of that's happening. All the tough moments in life, all the decisions you have to make – you suddenly can't.

You have no agency. At least not when it comes to the big things. Instead, you focus on the little things.

For women, one of those little things is makeup.

There's no one to impress, and everyone's wearing the same thing, but in New York state prisons, there were relatively few regulations surrounding the use of makeup, so some of us went all out.

There were the classics – thick eyeliner, jagged lipliner, dark lipstick.

But then there were also trends like wearing different color eyeshadow on each eye or drawing elaborate henna-like designs with eyeliner. (There were some limits there, though – guards put the kibosh on designs so intricate they could be disguising gang signs.)

Makeup wasn't just a beauty ritual; it was one of the few remaining outlets of self-expression we had. Prison norms blurred the line between sticking it to the Man and buying into a symbol of patriarchy.

Of course, some facilities didn't allow makeup. But that didn't mean there was no makeup to be worn; it just meant we had to get more creative.

But, more importantly, it meant that each hard-won stroke of makeup was a painted symbol of rebellion. An eff you to the system.

In county jail, such feminine accoutrements were entirely verboten, but when visiting days rolled around – or when a random wave of boredom hit – women figured out ways to make do.

Every cell block was equipped with a set of colored pencils, most purchased from

the commissary and left behind by inmates past. But a lot of the time those sets were missing certain colors: brown, black, blue, sometimes purple. The prime make-up-making shades were undoubtedly hiding in someone's cell, pilfered in the name of vanity.

With a little hot water and a lot of determination, certain pencil brands made passable eyeliner and eyeshadow. Bad brands resulted in an undesirable clown-like effect, but some people were willing to settle for the sake of staking a claim in the field of contraband makeup.

Jailhouse mascara looked equally comical, but the effect was a little more consistent and not so dependent on brand quality.

Step one: Break apart a black pen and pour the ink into a bowl.

Step two: Mix in toothpaste.

Step three: Spread this minty fresh mess onto your eyelashes by whatever means possible.

Step four: Remember this is not waterproof and, whatever you do, do not cry all day. (Yes, the no-crying dictum can be a major stumbling block in jail, especially on visitation days.)

Another useful commissary item: Fireball candies. If you put a little water in your palm and rub a Fireball around in it, the result is something vaguely resembling rouge.

Again: It sometimes looks like circus makeup. But we didn't really care. Because makeup wasn't just about appearances – especially in the places where it was banned. It might have looked like a mishap to everyone else, but to us it looked an awful lot like a middle finger.



Adam Ingles

DIANA MARIE DELGADO

La Puente

Letter from Corcoran Prison: Please deposit \$1,500 into the P.O. Box of Debra C.—the Mafia's going to kill me.

After 9/11 they asked the Chicanos in prison and one of them raised his hand: How do you think we took it? We're Americans.

Mule Creek, Delano, Chowchilla, Avenal, Pelican Bay, Calipatria, Centinela, Ironwood, Solano, Wasco, Corcoran, Tehachapi.

California has a lot of prisons, all with beautiful names.

A cop I'm dating charges a gang member with possession: I understand you—the people I arrest remind me of your family.

Dad's arm out the car window: You're going to have a hard time finding a man.

On my brother's 40th birthday: I played gin rummy with Birdman. Manson's worth money, the court signs his name with a stamp.

After robbing H&H Liquor, drowsy with blood, they hide in the cellar, and dream the same thing: gang fame.

Driving to the methadone clinic: You know too much about us. Addicts are lucky: they get to focus on one thing their entire life.

Dad's drunk: Cornell, Princeton, Pepperdine? The names sound like exotic spices! Where you going to?

On a bench at La Puente Park: Call my manager—he stashed ten thousand

for me. From his backpack he pulls a dead watch.

I lived next to a train crossing on Valley Blvd, the sky above pink-
and-gold stars.

Summers were horses traced on denim; my youth unfolding,
paper fan.

ERIC A. STANLEY

Excerpt from *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable*

Seditious Life

In defiance of both the liberal statist hypothesis that the social order would, given the direct power, equally distribute life chances, and a libertarian antistatistism that believes all structures that do not directly benefit them are impediments to their free market of domination, is the protracted struggle of trans/queer sedition. While this might appear adjacent to a left melancholia or perhaps nihilistic edgeplay, the difference between reconsolidation and resistance, accommodation and refusal, is precisely how we inhabit impossibility. It is not that we have no tradition to look toward that offers beyond the cold desolation that insists, yet again, on democracy's modification as our only chance. Grown through this boundless violence is also an ecstatic vitality, even in death, that builds a collective revolt beyond the reign of pragmatism and its armored logics.

If the attempt to fashion a more perfect democracy is also the order under which its deadly force expands, then ungovernability becomes an abolitionist way of life. The charge of ungovernability, a behavior recast as being, disturbs not just the social but the social's coherence that designates some existence as beautiful disruption. Sylvia Rivera's 1973 climb to the top of a TERF-swarmed stage and her exasperated "Revolution now!" was not just another politic. It opened, by way of desecrating the political, toward a post-politic. In effect, she cleared a path through the resolve of brutality she knew as democracy's nonchoice. Outvoted by the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activist Alliance, silenced by the Gay Freedom Day's vocal majority, she, along with her STAR sisters, knew there was no home to be found there. It was her unruliness, the inability of either normative culture or the lesbian and gay political order to contain her that she was deeply punished for. However, it was also her riotous theory in action.

Ungovernability finds its legal application in the juvenile court system as a charge for youth who live in refusal. Not surprisingly, Black and Brown trans/queer youth are often judged as such for repudiating the authority of a parent or guardian. These "status offenses," which include truancy, running away, and consuming alcohol, are actions that break the law only because the accused is under legal age. As wards, the legal category of youth produces numerically young people under the jurisdiction of others and who are to some degree also their legal responsibility. This unique relationship became nefariously clear when Kamala Harris chose to aggressively prosecute the parents of Black and Brown truant youth when she was the district attorney

of San Francisco.¹

The assumed protocol via federal guidelines is to keep young people with their legal guardians if they appear in youth courts under status offenses. Yet, for others it is a homophobic

and/or transphobic parent who is petitioning to have them removed from their custody and placed in juvenile jail. The non-personhood of trans/queer youth is confirmed through the mark of ungovernability in an attempt to relinquish legal accountability. As is undeniable, trans/queer youth are habitually physically and emotionally terrorized in schools; then, in an attempt to survive, they often refuse to return. Truancy, for most young people, would not find them in juvenile jails, but if their parent or guardian is also invested in their desolation then the lockup is almost certain.

Along with truancy, the sexual practices (even as accusation) of trans/queer youth can find them beyond the governance of their parents' projected cis heterosexuality. In deep Foucauldian realness the court performs its disgust by demanding every titillating detail. The state revels in its forced disclosure. These youth are rendered "incorrigible" because of consensual queer sex, while their straight peers escape the severity of such consequences. Moralism reappears in the neutral space of the court to reconfirm the court's affinity to non-neutrality. Trans/queer youth are also sometimes held in contempt for presenting in a way that confirms their gender if that presentation contests the judge's desire. Compounding the cycles of incarceration, if youth that are awaiting trial have been removed from their parents' or guardians' custody, they are often forced to remain incarcerated in pretrial detention. De facto sumptuary laws and sexual morality become relegislated as the conditions of captivity for youth who refuse to remain an "object in the midst of other objects."²

"The child's habitual disregard of the lawful and reasonable demands of his caretakers and that the child is beyond their control": thus the Louisiana Children's Code designates ungovernability as twinned evasion.³ Given the state's foundational violence, being beyond the control of that same system is also an attempt to find safe passage out of it. Indeed, the practices of trans/queer youth, their ability to figure a social world out of the antisociality that envelops them, are not simply a survival strategy, although they are that. A life lived below the incessant charge of bad choices, for those without any good ones, scavenges a post-political plan of attack—youth liberation as guerrilla warfare to destitute the state.

1 Molly Redden, "The Human Costs of Kamala Harris' War on Truancy," *Huffington Post*, March 27, 2019.

2 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 109.

3 Angela Irvine, Shannan Wilber, and Aisha Canfield, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, and Gender Nonconforming Girls and Boys in the California Juvenile Justice System: A Practice Guide" (Oakland, CA: Impact Justice and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2017)

Such contemptuous living, even in the small space of habitual disregard, is countered by harm's escalation, here in the form of youth imprisonment. Yet these practices of refusal also open possibility after anything that might resemble options has disappeared. While the state pathologizes and criminalizes young people's ungovernability as yet another symptom of their unwillingness to adhere to white civil society, their methods persist as a rebellion against that which produces them as persons in waiting, at best, while in practice relegating them to democracy's negativity. Or, put another way, these acts stack together to reveal shared tactics of survival—a sociality of *bad kids* who know the goodness of group disruption.

Still Fucking Here

I too was an errant youth. By the age of fourteen I was precariously housed and had already

been expelled from school for the second and final time. I was charged with truancy, which was the name they gave my attempt to escape the extended torment of public education. It was then, as it is now, much easier to banish the survivors and to produce us as the problem of our own making than it is to confront violence's grind. My chronic absence was narrated as disruptive, not because I was actively distracting others but because I exposed the fragility of that which kept us in class by escaping it. Indeed, their fear was not for me, a fact they emphatically confirmed but that I might serve as referent for others to join us beyond the school's administration.

My refusal to adhere to the lockdown of normativity's drive, expressed as unavoidable injury, was both the punishment for my escape and the catalyst for its persistence. Alone together, the materiality of my survival was never singular. The intimacy of aid—a sofa, free food, a place to be when there was no other—offered a wayward community, however transitive. Without transcendence, we can't disregard violence's endurance, nor assume flight is always an option. Yet here, I want to hold the beloved networks of care that have always helped us learn, as Tourmaline affirms, that "It's easy to be free." In the quake of her evocative precision, we know our undoing has not been undone; on the contrary, it continues to intensify. Nonetheless, radical dreaming affords us the space of ease, which is how we might learn to feel freedom.

Among the figures whose freedom dreams have allowed for our shared endurance in a world that wishes otherwise is Miss Major. In the 1990s, Major was working at the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center (TARC) as a street-level service provider for low-income people in the neighborhood. She drove the outreach van and helped run the needle exchange program that provided clean syringes and other supplies to anyone who asked. Needle exchanges were then, and continue to be, semilegal operations where direct action and mutual aid meet in the communal knowledge that distributing resources without expectation keeps us alive. Before the massive

tech-fueled gentrification of the Tenderloin, it was a space of fugitivity where those cast aside came together to build a life out of the wreckage of latest capitalism. The site of the Compton's Cafeteria riots decades before, even under attack, its glorious blight has partially protected it from those who find value in sterility. An unhoused teenager who had, like so many before, sought refuge in the fantasy of San Francisco, I was sitting in the lobby of TARC when a booming laugh broke the ordered chaos of the room. With a swing of a glass door and the slam of a box of condoms on the floor, Major was there.

Major is multiple. She is a Black trans woman by way of the South Side, by way of Deep East, now Little Rock. In the aftermath of at least two bloody uprisings, she was radicalized by Attica survivor Frank "Big Black" Smith in Dannemora prison and on the streets outside the Stonewall. She is the maternal sign for many whose first mothers lost them. Her stories of survival, hooking, and boosting collect a wild history where getting by without getting got grows an ecology beyond the formalism of the state. Sinuous scams, fraudulent documents, and ever-changing identifications, her life on the run brought the world with her—anarchism in action. In 1990s San Francisco, she and most of her girls survived with only scant health care, let alone the coverage necessary to pay for gender-affirming services. Through a dedication to supporting her sisters and daughters, fictitious community college students gleaned financial aid checks for classes never taken to pay for care never otherwise

available. Here, ungovernability is not a scene of drifting chaos where power's account of survival always cuts along difference; that is democracy. It is an organized yet improvisational practice in common that revels in pleasure and expropriation, whose aim is to collectivize exposure toward that exposure's abolition.

The Biometrics of Domination

Without consent, the mechanism of being accounted for by being counted against intensifies under the surveillant gaze—democracy's resolve. The walled polis demands your papers, a technology where self-representation is ferociously required to adhere to the genres of state legibility. From public bathrooms and residential hotels to ICE prisons and airports, identification or its lack often dictates movement, or its lack. Many trans organizations remain dedicated to the life-saving task of providing gender markers and name changes that are necessary for people navigating bureaucracy's escalation. Having the option to align one's identification under a regime of state surveillance, especially for those held in highly institutionalized spaces, like shelters and hospitals, is a reform we cannot not fight for.

Along with battling through what Dean Spade might call the violence of administration—democracy's data set reconsolidates the gender binary. Here, by way of boundless accommodation, mainstream LGBT politics has, on occasion, suggested transitioning from medically imposed gender markers to ever-expanding biometrics

as criteria in state-issued identification—a deferral of gender as biomedical truth and toward retinal scans as that truth’s concretization. This idea also accumulates under the growing consensus that facial recognition’s artificial intelligence (AI) technology is unable to “accurately” identify many trans, gender-nonconforming, and/or nonwhite people. In response, projects have emerged that demand a democratization of AI that can recognize us all—equality in and as the gaze of the state. Yet what remains under these attempts to degender identification is that gender normativity and anti-Blackness are designed into the very idea of biometrics. Worse, these demands, in turn, legitimate biometrics, and the state that reads them, as the racial and gendered scientific truth, and their proliferation as the path to safety. As we continue to expand gender options on ID s, we must also struggle to end the state that issues them as a practice of territorialization.

While the state’s checkpoints remain, collective indeterminacy, or more precisely collectivizing the refusal to be known from without, emerges as a tactic of interdiction. Tourmaline’s *The Personal Things* is a stop-motion animated film that layers an interview with Major over the vibrancy of drawings. Opening with a zooming shot of her 1976 Cadillac DeVille crowned with vanity plates that read “TS CUGR,” Major announces her cunning irreverence. Major’s voiceover declares that “one of the most exciting things to me today is watching a girl go catch the bus in her shit. You know, it’s like, yes!” Her joyful laugh cuts through the juxtaposition of the history of how she and other girls could not dress during the day, for fear of absolute violence. Detailing the ways Black trans women were targeted by police for “just breathing,” she entangles her optimism with an insistence on harm’s ongoingness.⁴

Wanting to reduce the kinds of administrative harassment she lives, Major changed the gender marker on her identification from the assigned “M” to an “F.” The camera pans the

drawings, creating movement through depth and light, as Major’s narration reworks the relationship between the political and the personal. In a radical recasting of the temporality of transition, she then changed them “back to male” because “I want people to know I’m a transgender person and love me for that. Fuck this other stuff.” She did not want the state to understand her as a cis woman, and “that was my way to strike back. And you have to find your way to strike back.” In effect, her striking back was not a desire to further expand the biometric state, or for a more democratic census but to collapse the very conditions of intelligibility that offer nothing other than life’s cessation. She’s emphatic that such practices are not available to all, nor is she making a claim to realness or a generalizable prescription but that you have to “get together and abolish what is going on. But it’s the personal stuff that gives you the strength to go forward.”

Major’s perpetual interruptions and illicit practices—the ways she grows a Black

4 Tourmaline, dir. “*The Personal Things*,” YouTube, November 21, 2016.

trans social life in the ruins of the white world—unsettles the stone precision of the state’s biometric drive. This, with the unruliness of trans/queer youth who reject the corporal discipline of education and the emptiness of home, undoes the pledge of incremental personhood. While the scale at which revolutionary change most often becomes known might miss these minor acts, it is their building of another (end of the) world while also allowing for life to fill it that reminds us we never struggle alone. Together, our antiauthoritarianism is a force that wildcats the state in the covert practices of skipping school, jumping turnstiles, and counterfeiting documents. Underground, we creep, undetected, through the dark alleys of recognition and below the frames of democracy’s security cameras.

REGIS "GIFT" COOPER

Beauty Flaws

My way of thinking may be new to you
Although I have the same outlook as usual
You don't have enough Flaws to be Beautiful
I'll only repeat what I saw to a few of you.

Eyes gleam
At what I am Realizing
Knowing that you're on my team
Do you know what that kind of pride brings?

Happiness
I can't afford to be unhappy with
That's a risk
I'll take even if we clash a bit.

Nothing by passionate
All male prison but that's my bitch
Wouldn't view you as anything else
Can't love me until you love yourself.



Glenn (Kinoko) Tucker

Writers

ANDREA ABI-KARAM [they/them] is a trans, arab-american punk poet-performer cyborg. They are the author of *Villainy* (2021), a reimagining of militant collectivity in the wake of the Ghost Ship Fire and the Muslim Ban, and *EXTRATRANS-MISSION* (2019), a critique of the U.S. military's role in the War on Terror. With Kay Gabriel, they co-edited *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics* (2020). They are a leo obsessed with queer terror & convertibles.

NI'LEK AMIR [he/him] is a formerly incarcerated Black man of trans experience from New Jersey, currently residing in Georgia, who enjoys writing poetry. While incarcerated, he contributed to peer advocacy for fellow Black trans men, helping them to get adequate gender-affirming items and address injustices based off of trans discrimination.

KERI BLAKINGER [she/her] is a Texas-based journalist and the author of *Corrections in Ink*, a memoir tracing her path from figure skating to heroin addiction to prison and, finally, to life as an investigative reporter covering mass incarceration.

REGIS "GIFT" COOPER is a formerly incarcerated person who contributed to TGI Justice Project's 2021 *Stiletto: Black August Edition*.

KATHERINE CULLINAN [they/them] is a queer, trans non-binary writer of color. They are from the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, but currently live in Madison, Wisconsin. Katherine writes about familial trauma, social injustices, loving and unloving, queerness and transness, and the impact of addiction, among other things. They studied sociology and work in diversity, equity, and inclusion, moving in the direction of abolition and liberation. Their hope is that writing and sharing their story will create a window, an entry point for others with similar truths.

JEMMA DECRISTO [she/her] is an assistant professor in American Studies at University of California, Davis. Her current book project, *The Aesthetic Character of Blackness*, is an experimental genealogy of black music and aesthetics that argues, from the theoretical position of the blues and black experimental art of the Black Arts Movement, that technological modernity acquired its symbolic authority through its capture and conflation of black sound with conceptions of black humanity. Countering liberal narratives of progress, she contends that sonic and visual economies in the humanization of black people, that emerged from slavery's legal abolition, liberated the apparatuses of representation over black people, but did not liberate the formerly/enslaved and their descendants.

DIANA MARIE DELGADO [Diana or D] is the author of *Tracing the Horse* (BOA Editions, 2019) and the chapbook *Late Night Talks with Men I Think I Trust* (Cen-

ter for Book Arts, 2015). A National Endowment for the Arts fellow and recipient of numerous scholarships and grants, Diana currently resides in Tucson where D is the Literary Director of the Poetry Center at the University of Arizona. D holds MFA degrees in poetry from both Columbia University and the University of California, Riverside.

DY’MIR is a gender deviant person currently incarcerated in Georgia. A proud parent who loves basketball and writing poetry and music lyrics.

MORGAN GODVIN [she/her] is a drug policy reform and decarceration advocate from Portland, Oregon. She was released from Bureau of Prisons’ custody in 2019.

EMJI SAINT SPERO [they/them] is a writer, performer, and pervert living in Los Angeles. They are curious about the potential of creative intimacies. Through movement and collaborative performance they seek to find embodied modes of connection, to queer the familiar, mapping the boundaries of collective engagement. Saint Spero is the author of *disgust* and *almost any shit will do*. They co-founded the Oakland-based small press and queer poetry cult Timeless, Infinite Light with Joel Gregory. With Lauren Levin, they were co-developmental editor for *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan*, which was awarded the 2020 Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Nonfiction. Learn more at saintspero.com.

ERIC A. STANLEY [they/them] is an associate professor in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. They are the author of *Atmospheres of Violence Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Duke University Press, 2021). In collaboration with Chris Vargas, they directed the films *Homotopia* (2006) and *Criminal Queers* (2019). Eric is also an editor, along with Tourmaline and Johanna Burton, of *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (MIT Press, 2017) and with Nat Smith, *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (AK Press, 2015/11).

SUSAN STRYKER [she/her] is professor emerita of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona, and a Marta Sutton Weeks External Faculty Fellow, Stanford University Humanities Institute, 2022-23. She is the author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of numerous books and anthologies, including *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2006), *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (Routledge, 2013), and *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution* (Seal Press, 2008, 2017). She won an Emmy Award for her documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (ITVS, 2005). Dr. Stryker’s current work in process is *Changing Gender: A Trans History of North America*, under contract to Farrar Straus Giroux.

JENNIFER TOON [she/her] is a criminal justice and mental health advocate working at the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities. As a freelance writer, she has published in The Guardian, The Marshall Project, The Texas Observer, and The Tyler Loop.

Artists

OUT!spoken features artworks by incarcerated artists provided through an incredible partnership with [A.B.O. Comix](#), a collective of creators and activists who work to amplify the voices of incarcerated LGBTQ+ people through art. The names of the artists featured in this journal are shared below.

- Arnold Collins
- Jorge Gonzalez
- Adam Ingles
- Joanna Nixon
- Horace Thomas
- Glenn (Kinoko) Tucker

Credits

Andrea Abi-Karam, “THE AFTERMATH” originally appeared in [Villainy](#), published by Nightboat Books (2021). All rights reserved.

Ni’Lek Amir, “Untitled” originally appeared in “Writings from the Inside” in *Stiletto: Black August Edition*, published by TGI Justice Project (2021). All rights reserved.

Keri Blakinger, “Why We Wore Makeup In Prison” originally appeared in the [Houston Chronicle](#) (June 30, 2017). All rights reserved.

Regis “Gift” Cooper, “Beauty Flaws” originally appeared in “Writings from the Inside” in *Stiletto: Black August Edition*, published by TGI Justice Project (2021). All rights reserved.

Jemma Decristo, “On Black Trans Refusal” talk delivered at the American Studies Association Conference (November 9, 2019).

Diana Marie Delgado, “La Puente” originally appeared in [Tracing the Horse](#), published by BOA Editions, Ltd. (2019). All rights reserved.

Diana Marie Delgado, “Prayer for What’s in Me to Finally Come Out” originally appeared in [Tracing the Horse](#), published by BOA Editions, Ltd. (2019). All rights reserved.

Dy’Mir, “I am who I am” originally appeared in “Writings from the Inside” in *Stiletto: Black August Edition*, published by TGI Justice Project (2021). All rights reserved.

Morgan Godvin, “Are You a Piper or an Alex?” originally appeared in [The Women of Jenji Kohan](#), published by Fayetteville Mafia Press (2022). All rights reserved.

Eric A. Stanley, “Coda: Becoming Ungovernable,” originally appeared in [Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable](#), pp. 114–123, Duke University Press (2021). All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Susan Stryker, “Resisting Carceral Power” was written specifically to link to print materials circulated at the Courthouse2Compton’s March and Rally in San Francisco on June 18, 2020. A revised and expanded full-length article, “At the Crossroads of Turk and Taylor: Resisting Carceral Power in San Francisco’s Tenderloin,” appeared in [Places](#) (October 2021).

Jennifer Toon, “Invisible Scars” originally appeared in the [Texas Observer](#) (November 10, 2021). All rights reserved.