

Gender **F**ail,
A Decade
of **Q**ueer
and **T**rans
Liberatory
Writings

by **Be Oakley**
& **Yvonne LeBien**

PREFACE

GenderFail was started in 2015 while I was living in Philadelphia but had its roots as early as 2014. I thought of it as a way to expand queer subjectivity through small, independent publishing. In the decade since the start of the project, GenderFail has published over 100 titles, and 99% of our publishing has been self-funded by sales of previous editions in the hopes of having enough profit to continue to make new and ambitious work. This project, in many ways, was doomed to fail--but it has found ways to survive with little to no resources and with a team of just one.

My focus with GenderFail has always been on publishing new work without waiting for funding to produce the work. With this I don't seek to produce expensive material; I want to look at the resources immediately at our fingertips, taking account of GenderFail's real status as one of many underfunded publishing projects finding ways to exist. In 2018 I moved to New York and connected with an incredible community of artists and publishers that have helped GenderFail become what it is today. Although this project is run and

maintained just by one person, I have had help from so many amazing folks in my community.

These people include but are not limited to the many small presses that have given us space to print many of our publications, including: TXTbooks (Nichole Shinn and Kurt Woerpel), Wendy's Subway (Rachel Valinsky), Irrelevant Press (Holly Meadows-Smith), Secret Riso Club (Gonzalo Guerrero and Tara Ridgedell), Small Editions (Hannah Pierce) and Bushwick Print Lab (Ray Cross and Keren Hasson). I also wanted to thank the many bookstores who carried and supported our work, including Printed Matter Inc (NYC), Likely General (Toronto), Quimby's Bookstore (Chicago), Topos Bookstore(NYC), Good Press (Glasgow), HausWitch Home + Healing (Salem), The ICA Shop (Richmond), Burn All Books (San Diego), Ulises Books (Philadelphia), Human Relations (Brooklyn), Tomorrow Today (LA) and so so many others. GenderFail would have not existed this long without the kindness and support of those listed here and the countless others not named here.

At the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic we released our first GenderFail Reader. This

first edition compiled essays from previously published zines and other written essays by myself (Be Oakley) and my partner Yvonne LeBien. In the last three years we have published four volumes of our GenderFail Reader series. This book you are currently holding is a capstone of all four volumes, including essays, artworks and ideas that have helped to formulate GenderFail during the last 10 years of the project. These essays speak to the interests, research and passions that drive GenderFail and highlight the powerful agency behind self and small publishing. My hope is that these essays inspire you to future actions, dreams, hopes and new worldsthat center people and communities fighting for a world without colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, ableism and heteronormative oppression.

-Be Oakley 11/22/2023

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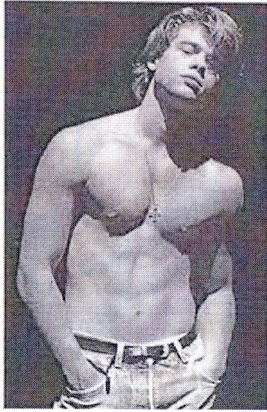
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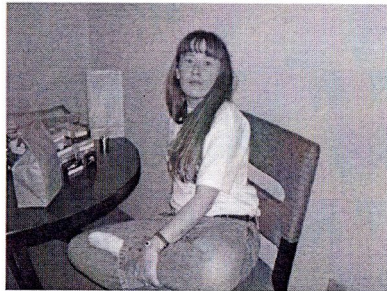
TWINK, DESTABILIZING THE IDEAL

Twink was first published in 2014. This zine predated my founding of GenderFail in Fall 2015. In many ways it informed all of the future projects I would do with GenderFail. The project started with the goal of showcasing queer content that was not focused on the hyper sexualized cisgender gay male body. Twink destabilizes an overly sexualized fantasy world and also shows the slipperiness of language and meaning.

This new edition was created from the one surviving copy of the first and only edition printed in 2014. During late 2021 the surviving copy was scanned and edited into the work you are currently holding. The images evoke the time in which they were created, in the early to mid 2010s. In many ways these images perfectly play into the stereotype of the “Twink” archetype, showing a thin white young gay man over and over. These white and often idealized bodies are perpetuated as the standard that many gay men feel pressured to both become and lust after. In this it’s important to understand how heteronormativity has influenced homonormativity in its (conscious and unconscious)



images.jpeg



twink-after-x101.jpg

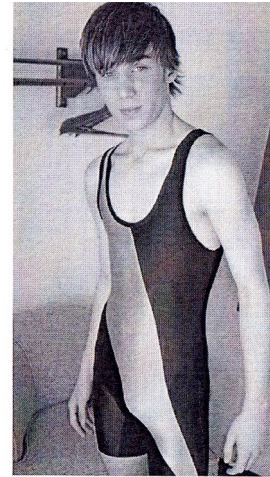
perpetuation of white supracist and colonial perception of beauty.

Twink, through chance, algorithm and safety settings, shows a strange, humorous and destabilizing depiction of symbol and signifier. The images show much of what one might expect, i.e. a “normal” Twink body, but other images appear, such as actress and comedian Twink Caplan, Brad Pitt (why I don’t know), an image of a balding white man biting a 7 inch record, an older rich white woman, images of children in costumes and even a Twinkie. Only one or two images depict a black person, showing the overwhelming whiteness of the Google search algorithm. The algorithm can be seen as what Sara Ahmed dubs: an orientation of whiteness, or how “whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach.” When googling “twink,” at least in 2014, we are shown an overwhelming idealized whiteness that helps to solidify a false perception of the queer experience. My hope is that Twink helps us to question how we orient ourselves towards stabilized definitions, many of which are perpetuated by white supremacy and

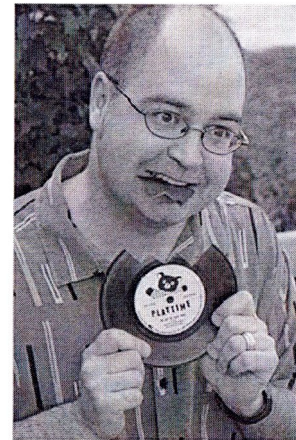
colonialism, and to realize how we can make these definitions messy, slippery and malleable.

Twink also employs humor and absurdity as a powerful tool in the unraveling of the fixity of an image's power and influence. Many of the 100 images look so cartoonish (or if not actually cartoonish) that the images eventually seem devoid of any real sexual energy. In this, the images become hollow and absurd, providing a different experience than just the erotic, arousing and fantastical. What do these images convey when they have been stripped of their raw power? What do these images leave us with past their intended objectification? Can this flatness actually help to encourage more ambiguous depictions of gay sexual agency? Or at the very least make us look at our own fantasies and think critically at the objects we lust and desire for? I don't wish to shame those who lust for the idealized twink body, but I do hope these awkward images help to inspire more adventurous conceptions of desire that may land somewhere unexpected.

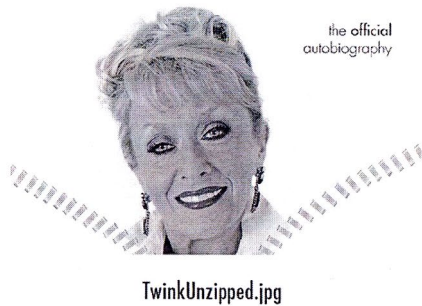
In many ways the idealized notions of



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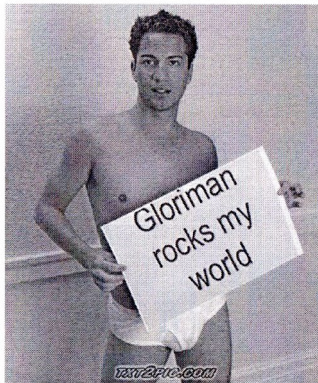


twink2.jpg



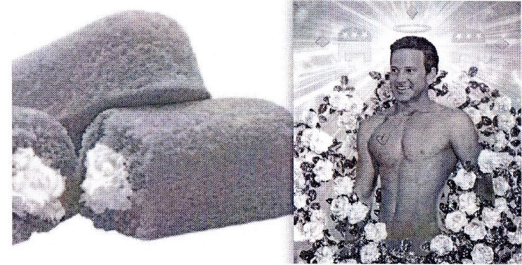
“twink” symbolize the worst notions of the LGBTQIA movement. Many white, wealthy, cisgender gay white men do not seek revolution for poor working class LGBTQIA people; rather they seek the safe inclusion that they enjoy through economic and white privilege. In this, I hope Sylvia Rivera’s words are a long awaited and continued cry for anti-capitalist revolution that specifically centers trans people of color.

As queer, trans and non-binary people we must continue to create, as Sara Ahmed states, “styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits,” that orient us away from the narrow white gay cisgender worldview and towards trans revolution. Poor and working class queer, trans and non-binary people, two spirited peoples, black trans peoples, disabled queer, trans and non-binary peoples should be the symbol of queer power. We must celebrate black femme twink, trans twink, disabled twink, elderly twink and all others who wish to expand the possibilities of any “twink” identity. Sex and sexual identity are powerful tools for both pleasure and revolution; and especially white folks like myself must



GlorimanTwink.jpg

understand the colonial effects that have invaded our sexual desires, limiting us to a narrow perception of beauty, happiness and liberation. This, of course, is a lifelong and ongoing process, but it is one that will lead to more revolutionary acts of love, community and worldbuilding, attributes we will need in the growing instability of 2022 and beyond.



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helicopter_by_goat_twink-d6b3hhn.png

Failure as Future Making

I.

The very structure of success in a white cis male dominated society necessitates that we deny our true desires, incessantly defer them. It necessitates a constant, hyper-masculine drive for dominance—the very thing radical queerness is trying to destroy—in order to attain even a barely adequate standard of living.

Do we become failures in order to preserve a measure of autonomy? Or do we embrace success to live?

So many of us would lose our entire material security if we were to deny even the minimum of success that is offered us. The white cis male lifestyle has become so linked with the very definition of *life* in our culture, that to stray one iota from its assumed universality is to, sometimes quite literally, die. Sustaining existence itself has become nearly impossible without conforming to the white cis male state's standards of life.

Is it possible to live autonomously from capitalism, from this narrative of *work*, of security, of attaining material existence through mirroring white cis male desire? Can we even imagine the end of success, of the ravenous

drive to subjugate through art, money, politics, family, sex, that has reshaped the world in its own image? Perhaps only if we let ourselves FAIL, finally.

To desire anything other than the ideal image of man, to dream of anything other than authority, and to finally pursue that desire with one's whole heart, is to FAIL.

Yet in that FAILURE we see a future, a liminal space in which success comes to be unmade, in which its tools are appropriated, a space created for FAILURES as we withdraw gradually from a collapsing system.

FAILURE opens a landscape, a squalid space between the cracks. FAILURE is too dangerous, the opposite of security, it is mortal. Yet the very work of attaining even a small measure of security through conforming to white cis male desire is to participate in a system that has destroyed our homes, our communities, and our planet.

FAILURE opens up a space between life and death, an oasis in the desert. Queer is mirage, is distant flame; we pick our failures, eke out a living, retreating to our true selves, our true fears and hopes. We withdraw from success to watch it collapse, chroniclers of the future.

2.

In FAILURE, I discover:

the strength in what is perceived as weakness.
access to a freedom I have never allowed myself.
a way to weaponize the messy, the unideal, the underutilized.

the urgency of matter, printed matter.

the power of the disseminated object.

the death of perfection which leads to renewal.

perfection as the causality of FAILURE.

that FAILURE is not mine alone.

how to embrace the FAILURES of others, hold it in
and make it my own.

my own limitations in a hyper-capitalist, ableist,
heteronormative, white supremacist culture.

how to see limitation as a gift.

how growth is limitless.

an access to new goals, aspirations and
ambitions.

the need to build upon the crumbling foundations

I wish to dismantle.

the danger of being perceived as unshakeable.

my inability to tirelessly create.

the urgency of living.

3.

FAILURE is a project. It manifests in moments of terrifying realization. Mental health is the catalyst and inspiration for my own FAILURES. A non-neurotypical body, I am a beacon of uncontested FAILURE in an ableist, cisgender society. Looking into the depths of my inability to function in the ways society labels “normal”, I see FAILURE. I see it as a light to understanding and positively charging my abnormality. I could not see myself as I truly am, I could not see my true desires for what I want to become, if I did not love FAILURE.

4.

FAILURE is tangible, highly visible and operating in plain site. In revisiting this manifesto on failure I am stuck on two things I saw online the other day that I can't get out of my head:

A. Climate activist Greta Thunberg, 16, addressed the U.N.'s Climate Action Summit in New York City on Monday. Here's the full transcript of Thunberg's speech, beginning with her response to a question about the message she has for world leaders.

"My message is that we'll be watching you.

"This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

"For more than 30 years, the science has been

crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.

"You say you hear us and that you understand the urgency. But no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that. Because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil. And that I refuse to believe.

"The popular idea of cutting our emissions in half in 10 years only gives us a 50% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees [Celsius], and the risk of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control."

"Fifty percent may be acceptable to you. But those numbers do not include tipping points, most feedback loops, additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution or the aspects of equity and climate justice. They also rely on my generation sucking hundreds of billions of tons of your CO₂ out of the air with technologies that barely exist.

"So a 50% risk is simply not acceptable to us — we who have to live with the consequences.

"To have a 67% chance of staying below a 1.5

degrees global temperature rise – the best odds given by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] – the world had 420 gigatons of CO₂ left to emit back on Jan. 1st, 2018. Today that figure is already down to less than 350 gigatons.

"How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just 'business as usual' and some technical solutions? With today's emissions levels, that remaining CO₂ budget will be entirely gone within less than 8 1/2 years.

"There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable. And you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is.

"You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

"We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not." "Thank you."

This FAILURE is so palpable, familiar and commonplace: Climate Change is deadly and the

burden is placed on those who are effected the most, the young, the poor, indigious folks , folks in color. At age 16 Greta Thunberg, Helena Gualinga, Autumn Peltier, Mari Copeny and other young people are feeling the immeasurable burden of this failure that is shared among us, tapping into the raw feeling of that FAILURE as a catalyst for change.

Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at Harvard, found that it takes just 3.5% of the population actively participating in protests to ensure serious political change. Like many others I “avoid the underlying problem” due to a plethora of excuses, conveniences, and first world problems. My guilt plays into the hands of the few corporations responsible for climate disaster. Capitalists want us to feel helpless, to continue their own profits and heap the FAILURE on us. It is crucial to weaponize our inherited FAILURES to dismantle capitalism in pursuit of climate justice.

FAILURE is seen as an end but we need to harvest its raw power as a means to this end, the end of the world as we know it. A world that was never built for us must be dismantled, revived and built again.

queer occupations

***So, we came here to tear shit up,
you know?***

Including ourselves. We came to fail.

Fred Moten

My work is a practice in queer occupations. As queer occupier, I utilize various skill sets in my practice to play on a false notion of a presumed mastery in certain fields. I often utilize roles, skills, and Traits in my practice without formal training. Through these occupations I position myself as a queer imposter to take on the messiness that comes with inexperience, and use that messiness to create work differently. I do not intend to master any of the temporary occupations that I employ in my practice - as designer, as archivist, as master printer, or even a mastery of queerness itself.

As a maker, facilitator and publisher who employs queer subjectivities, I am constantly taking on knowledge roles to fit the needs of the work I wish to create. The content I produce is not always practical, useful, or perfect. I look to occupy knowledge roles in hopes of failing, reclaiming and re-imagining the projects I investigate. My work invokes a queer amateurism, one that invites failure. You

could call it a collection of queer doings, or doing things by whatever means necessary to accomplish my objectives. A queer occupation tries to look for other forms of ‘success’ in what’s otherwise called ‘failure.’ I am not trying to create a ‘perfect’ project, collaboration, or idea but rather trying to create meaning in any way that I know how.

This approach allows me to embrace my lack of knowledge as a way of framing my interactions with each project I embark on. Collaboration becomes an important part of any queer occupation, enabling me to work with people who have sets of knowledge that I do not have. I seek other artists to realize these projects in ways that I wouldn’t be able to alone. I regard collaboration as one of the most important aspects in a queer occupation. I’m not pursuing a certain level of mastery in the performance of a given skill, occupation, trade, or identifiable organizational mode of working; I am pursuing productive forms of failure that are coded in queer subjectivity.

Each of these temporary occupations that I take on in my projects, artworks, or conceptual frame of mind allow for a freedom in looking to alternative value systems for success. My investigations into ‘queer occupation’ are an attempt to

perform the messiness of inexperience that I invoke in my practice. I perform the role of outsider in each of my activities to allow myself the freedom of imperfection, which is important to the realization of a queer artistic gesture. I regard the idea of having complete control or mastery over anything one creates as a type of delusion that limits one’s own creative potential. My occupations allow for a messiness that wishes to highlight problems and become a catalyst for change. In the *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* exhibition catalog, Fred Moten speaks to the need to deal with the ‘mess’ in institutions, stating:

Revolution or anti-colonialism, as [Frantz] Fanon says, is a program of total disorder, and museum and academic institutions clean up messes. I mean, really, the history of the modern subject, as codified by Kant, is about cleaning up of mess. It’s about the eradication of swarm, and of fuzz and business. But what if this got to be a mess that the Museum chose to present, rather than clean up? There a poetics of the mess, you know?¹

A queer occupation embraces this “poetics of the mess” to reflect a queer lived experience that always needs “cleaning up.” There is a level of unpredictability that comes with

¹ Burton, Johanna. *Trigger: Gender As a Tool and a Weapon*. New Museum of Contemporary Art, The, 2018.

inexperience, which is ripe for the creative rediscovery of how to occupy new forms of communication through my work. I am looking to be transparent regarding my lack of experience in the skill sets typically needed for the projects I create. Therefore, collaboration is a fundamental aspect to the type of content I produce. Through collaboration, I wish to foster a type of community that feeds off of each unique perspective brought to the table. Together, we can begin to occupy knowledges that disrupt the purification that looks to clean up the messes we create.

In the pursuit of queer occupation, I wish to continue to fail miserably at the expectations put on me by the colonizer, the oppressor, the capitalist, the fascist, the neo-nazi, the abuser, the racist, and the sexist; to thrive and continue a practice of refusal as a necessary form of resistance.

SOME DEFINITIONS,
SOME THOUGHTS,
SOME ASSERTIONS,
RADICAL SOFTNESS
AS A BOUNDLESS
FORM OF
RESISTANCE

A TYPE OF RESISTANCE
THAT A TEXT, BOOK
OR DIGITAL FILE INSPIRES
THROUGH OUR
REFUSALS TO ACCEPT
OR COMPLY WITH ANY
FORM OF OPPRESSION
EXAGGERATED UPON PEOPLE(S).

A TYPE OF
RESISTANCE THAT
CENTERS THE CARE
OF OTHERS AS
A CENTRAL ASPECT
OF OUR DISSENT.

THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF VULNERABILITY
AS A LEGITIMATE
AND POWERFUL
ACT OF RESISTANCE.

SOME DEFINITIONS, SOME THOUGHTS, SOME ASSERTIONS
RADICAL SOFTNESS AS A BOUNDLESS FORM OF RESISTANCE

Be Oakley

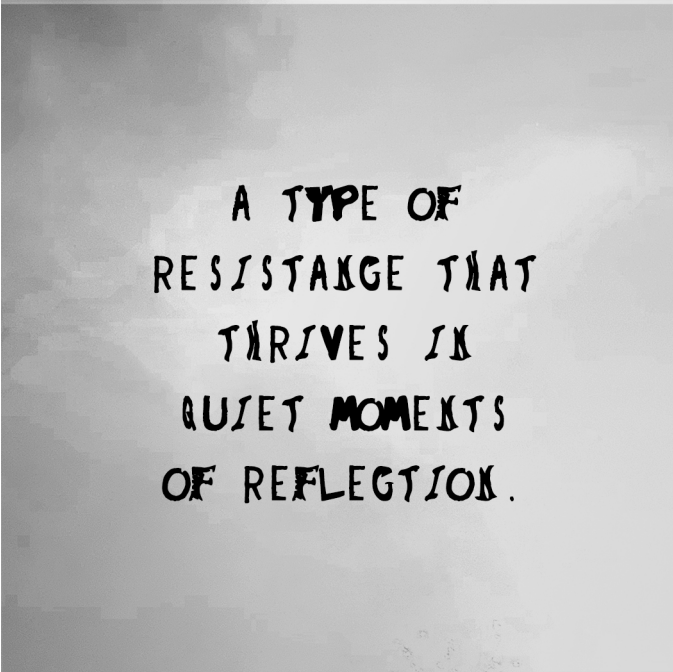
FROM MY ATTEMPT
THE STATEMENT "RADICAL SOFTNESS AS A BOUNDLESS FORM OF RESISTANCE" RESULTED
TO LOCATE A LEVEL OF POLITICAL SPECIFICITY IN MY OWN LANGUAGE

AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF THE QUIET AND
UNKNOWABLE FORMS
OF RESISTANCE THAT PEOPLE
PERFORM EVERYDAY,
THAT THEIR HIDDEN
UNKNOWABILITY BECOMES
POWERFULLY UNKNOWABLE.

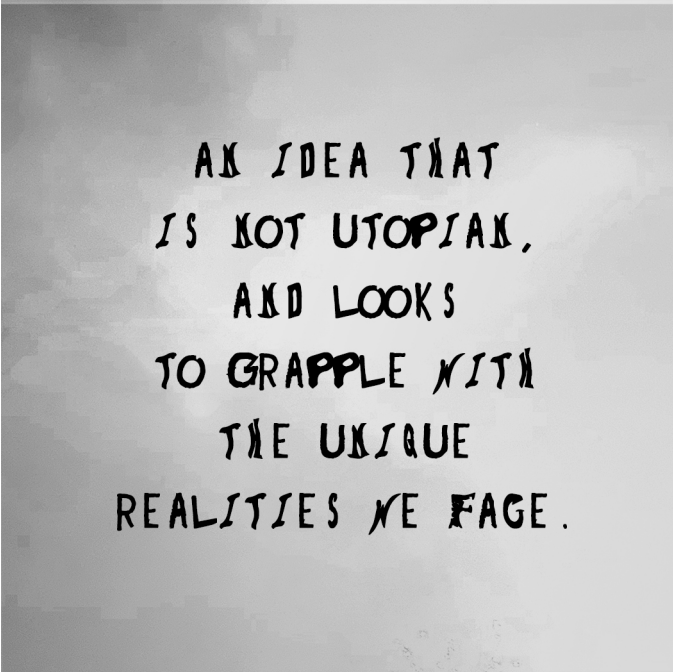
AN IDEA
THAT EMBRACES
TENDERNESS IN OUR
INTERACTIONS WITH
EACH OTHER.

TO CHALLENGE
WHAT TERMS
LIKE RADICAL,
SOFTNESS AND RESISTANCE
MEANS TO YOUR OWN
CIRCUMSTANCE,
PRIVILEGES AND
LIFESTYLE.

A FORM OF RESISTANCE
THAT ENCOURAGES A WIDE
RANGE OF ACTIONS
INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED
TO REST, CARE, FINANCIAL
AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT,
AND MUTUAL AID.

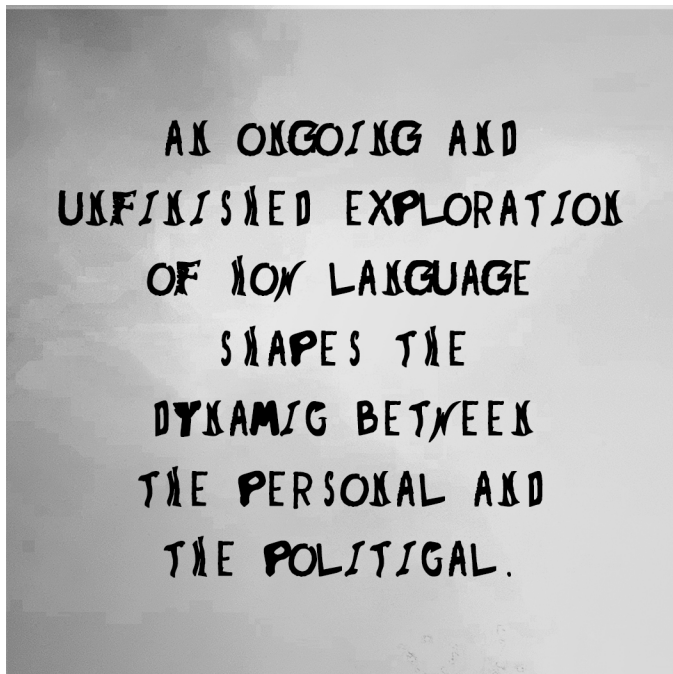


A TYPE OF
RESISTANCE THAT
THRIVES IN
QUIET MOMENTS
OF REFLECTION.



AN IDEA THAT
IS NOT UTOPIAN,
AND LOOKS
TO GRAPPLE WITH
THE UNIQUE
REALITIES WE FACE.

SOME DEFINITIONS, SOME THOUGHTS, SOME ASSERTIONS
 RADICAL SOFTNESS AS A BOUNDLESS FORM OF RESISTANCE



Be Oakley

THE	OUTSIDE	PUBLIC
PHRASE	OF	PROTEST
SPEAKS	THE	THAT
TO	PUBLIC	HAD
A	SPHERE.	BEEN
TYPE	I	PERFORMED
OF	WAS	BY
RESISTANCE	INSPIRED	QUEER
THAT	BY	FOLKS
IS	THE	FIGHTING
PERFORMED	SEEMINGLY	TO
QUETLY,	UNLIMITED	EXIST
-DAILY,	NUMBER	ALTERNATIVELY
AND	OF	TO
OFTEN	IMAGES,	THE
BY	VIDEOS	HETEROPATERNAL
MANY	AND	LIFE
QUEER	DOCUMENTATION	PRESCRIBED
PEOPLE	OF	TO

ALWAYS VOICED OR ENACTED“ IT CAN BE AN INTERNAL FEELING THAT DRIVES HOW WE EMBODY OURSELVES
A RADICAL SOFTNESS IS SOMETHING THAT IS NOT
IN THE WORLD.

AN ONGOING AND
UNFINISHED EXPLORATION
INTO AN AGGESSIBLE,
INTERSECTORAL AND
EXPANDED PERCEPTION
OF RESISTANCE.

A STATEMENT
THAT EMBRACES
JOHANNA MEDVAS
IMPORTANT AND
POWERFUL ESSAY
SIGMUND FREUD'S THEORY

DIRECTLY CHALLENGES
JOHANNA MEDVAS'S
DEFINITION
OF POLITICAL AS
"ANY ACTION THAT
IS PERFORMED
IN PUBLIC".

"IF WE TAKE HANNAH ARENDT'S
DEFINITION OF THE POLITICAL
- WHICH IS STILL ONE OF THE
MOST DOMINANT IN MAINSTREAM
DISCOURSE - AS BEING ANY
ACTION THAT IS PERFORMED
IN PUBLIC, WE MUST CONTEXT
WITH THE IMPLICATIONS OF
WHAT THAT EXCLUDES."

JOHANNA HODVA SICK WOMAN THEORY

"IF BEING PRESENT IN
PUBLIC IS WHAT IS REQUIRED
TO BE POLITICAL, THEN
WHOLE SECTORS OF THE
POPULATION CAN BE DEEMED
A-POLITICAL - SIMPLY
BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT
PHYSICALLY ABLE TO GET THEIR
BODIES INTO THE STREET."

JOHANNA HODVA SICK WOMAN THEORY

THIS SOFTNESS IS THE RESULT OF THE
TENDERNESS OF OUR FRIENDSHIPS, SUPPORT
SYSTEMS AND CHOSEN FAMILIES, AS WELL AS
THE TENDERNESS OF OUR BODIES AND OUR
MODES OF SPEAKING. AND THIS SOFTNESS IS
OFTEN WHAT ACTUALLY CARRIES PROTEST
THROUGH TO FOLLOWING GENERATIONS OF
MARGINALIZED PEOPLES. IT IS A SOURCE OF
STRENGTH THAT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN AWAY,
EVEN IN DEATH, BECAUSE SOFTNESS DOES
CARRY ON. I BELIEVE IN RADICAL SOFTNESS
AND I PRACTICE IT AS OFTEN AS I FEEL ABLE,
ALLOWING MYSELF THE OPPORTUNITY TO
EMBRACE THE VULNERABILITY IN QUEER
EXISTENCE AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH.

AN IDEA ABOUT NOT
PUTTING SO MUCH
PRESSURE ON YOURSELF
TO CONFORM TO OTHERS
ACTIONS OR IDEAS, AS
BEING THE STANDARD
FOR WHAT'S GOOD
IN THE WORLD.

**Queer
Accomplices:
This Is
Not Another
Photo Of
The Gay
Male Body**



BUT AN ESSAY OF
DISCONTENT THAT
DEMANDS MORE
OF PRIVILEGED
WHITE GAY
MEN WHO DON'T
RECOGNIZE THE
POWER OF IMAGES
TO RETAIN
SYSTEMS OF WHITE
MALE EXCLUSIVE
BEHAVIOR.

This manifesto calls for an expanded queer aesthetics that puts as much emphasis on intersectional queer liberation as it does on the sexualized gay male form. This is a series of questions about the proliferation of images that perpetuate a body type that does not reflect the complexity of a queer body. This text in particular is made for cisgender white male artists to use as a way of reflection. Also note that these thoughts are those of a non-binary white queer person. In the 2nd draft of this text formally called, “This is not another photo of a cisgender gay white body,” I expand past the ideas I introduced in 2017. In revisiting this text, I find it important to revise these ideas to provide more specificity and context to further my goal of calling in (rather than calling out) other artists.

During the gay liberation movement, showing the body of a sexualized, white, cis, gay male was a powerful symbol in a white supremacist homophobic society. Symbols of healthy, fit, gay men, especially in contrast to media images of gay men wasting away because of the AIDS epidemic, were a symbol of survival. Today the predominance of social media in the lives of many artists, writers and other creatives means that

much of our work is consumed on digital platforms. So our inheritance is that on platforms like Instagram there are many queer photographers sharing work of mostly cisgender gay white men. It’s important to address the discourses these images are having as both art and as symbol in the queer community at large.

What do these images produce now, in a cultural landscape where white male privilege is receiving so much attention and criticism? How do these images reflect or refract white male privilege that excludes trans people, non-binary people and queer people of color, as well as an ableist lens of desire that leaves behind disabled, fat and differently abled?¹

1. In writing a 2nd draft of this text I didn’t speak to an important ableist critique of the fit cisgender white gay male art.

Sex sells. Contemporary queer photography is flooded with ableist images of white gay bodies. I am in no way trying to be anti sex-positive. My argument here is for a more critical and thoughtful depiction of queer bodies. Queer art is flooded with one-dimensional representations of queerness that flatten the complexity of what a queer body is and can be. Artists

and photographers have celebrated the gay male form and given it a visibility akin to its straight counterparts' photographs of idealized white women. These images have overpopulated queer art production—but what do these images communicate to society at large? And what do they tell the queer community? When bodies do not fit into this conception of what a queer body looks like are they unworthy of representation? While the non-gay world (dominant culture) continues to digest this normalized white gay male body, how do trans, fat femme, non-binary, differently abled bodies fit into these fixed narratives of the queer body?

Queer bodies are often in transition between what they are and what they wish they could be. A queer body is fluid, changing, and imperfect.²

2. “Imperfect” in relation to dominant culture does not in any way mean bad, undesirable, or damaged. To be imperfect in a system of beauty standards that are transphobic, ableist, fat-phobic, racist, and heterosexist is a powerful gesture.

I don't believe there is any one model, type, or description of a “normal” or “ideal”

queer body. A body can be much more than its physical form; it can be a thought, an aspiration, a futurity, a not-quite-there-yet.³ A queer body isn't always fully

3. This thought was influenced by the writing of Jose Esteban Munoz and their influential text *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

realized; shouldn't a photograph of a queer body reflect this? A queer body doesn't have a final form, at least not in the same way that a “fit cisgendered white gay male” or “gym rat” might consider their bodies to be nearing a socially-constructed conception of beauty.⁴

4. This is not to say or assume that those who are perceived to have “perfect bodies” do not suffer from body positivity issues or body dysmorphia. This is meant to express the ideal that is sold by homonormative and heteronormative society is the ultimate symbol of perfection is damaging to those who suffer from society's pursuit of “the perfect body.” This commentary speaks to society at large, rather than taking a focus on the personal pursuit of one's own conception of what their ideal body and healthy body looks for each individual.

Through writing, the queer body can incite the fluidity of one's imagination. In an interview with Che Gossett, Juliana Huxtable states "to me, writing and performance are really immediate ways to dictate the terms on which I'm establishing my own history." 5

5. Gossett, Che A. and Juliana Huxtable. "Existing In The World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility." *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*. The MIT Press, 2017.

Therefore, often a photograph traps a queer subjectivity in a suspended moment of fixity, creating a need for a written and spoken articulation to fill in the information that is left unknown from an image alone. In this, one can't undermine the power dynamics that a photograph can have over someone, especially for many trans and non-binary people whose appearances change rapidly.

Personally, I look to language to fill in the gaps that are created within a queer body's fluidity between what it is and what it can be. Words can help express what our bodies do not have the ability, privilege, or mental capacity to appear as, yet. In an interview

about *Badlands Unlimited's New Lovers Series* of erotic novels, Paul Chan stated, "I'm tapped out. I'm done. The drugs don't work, but the words still do. That's the strange thing."6

6. Krasinski, Jennifer. "New Lovers: An Interview with Paul Chan." *The Paris Review*, 10 Mar. 2015, www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/03/10/new-lovers-aninterview-with-paul-chan/. I also want to note in quoting Paul Chan how many artists have been underpaid while being published under the *New Lovers series*. I do not condone the unfair pay practices that Chan has provided artists in *Badlands Unlimited*.

He made these comments regarding the ways that our culture is visually tapped out of photographic depictions of the erotic. In referring to Chan's statement, I don't mean for this text to limit my exploration of what a gay or queer body communicates by focusing solely on its connotations of "porn" or "sex." Rather, I seek to illustrate the power that language has to put into words an intensity that a photograph or artwork perhaps can't do on its own (yet). Language's ability to speak to what a body can't say is not only powerful, but it

destabilizes a public rhetoric which uses stereotypical representations to limit what a body can appear as.

Returning to the cis gay male body, the context for these these images is critical in the critique of these images. I want to hear from the queer artists, photographers, and curators who decide to perpetuate these idealizations. What do they feel these images communicate? On social media platforms like Instagram, queer photography is dominated by images of fit, cis, white gay men. These photographs populate Instagram feeds like my own ⁷ yet

7. This essay started by looking at my feed and seeing all the accounts I followed of gay fit cisgender (mostly) male photographers. I felt frustrated at myself and the images. The experience of viewing these images often felt empty for me as a viewer and as someone digesting this “art.”

they contrast starkly with the radically queer content, often on the same feed, focused on the actual lived reality of most of the queer population. E.g., what does the perpetuation of images of gay white men

communicate in a political climate where trans women of color are being murdered on the street?⁸ When I see images

8. In 2016, when I first published this essay, 23 trans people were killed in the United States. Since then 29 trans people have been murdered in 2017, 26 in 2018 and 26 in 2019 and 44 in 2020. This number has not gone down throughout the last five and continues to go up. This information was provided by the Human Rights Campaign and more information about each person killed can be found on their website. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2019>.

and stories on social media of trans murder intermixed with images of fit white straight passing gay men it just highlights the infuriating divide in the queer community. In this context, it might seem unfair or out of line to relate queer art about the cisgender gay male body to the realities of the continued death of black trans and non-binary people, but I feel it's paramount for artists to grapple with the privileged contexts of their work and what it means in this larger context.

I am not claiming that these images are trying to be anything but what they are; pictures of “sexy” gay men being taken by other “sexy” gay men. I am, rather, pushing a call for more visibility for queer artistic expression that does not focus on these socially-accepted bodies. This type of work does exist **9** and there are many

9. This is a non-comprehensive list of visual artists and photographers I feel are depicting queer bodies in all their complexity: Wu Tsang, Tourmaline, Sasha Wortzel A.L. Steiner, Troy Michie, Zackary Drucker, Catherine Opie, A.K. Burns, Jacolby Satterwhite, Juliana Huxtable, K8 Hardy, Chris E. Vargas, Jess T. Dugan, Community Action Center, Sharen Hayes, Stanya Kahn, Simone Leigh, Nayland Blake, Robert Yang, Arnold J. Kemp, Buzz Slutsky, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Nicole Killian, Michael Royce, Edie Fake, Cassils, Tschabalala Self, House of Ladosha, Curtis Talwst Santiago, Sable Elyse Smith, Diamond Stingily, Mickalene Thomas, Hannah Hiaasen, Sondra Perry, American Artist, Caitlin Cherry, Lisa Yuskavage, Guadalupe Maravilla, Demian DinéYazhi, Vaginal Davis, Christina Quarles, Patrick Staff...

queer, trans and non-binary artists doing work that makes space for the expanded queer expression I am so desperate for. I recently came across the disabled queer photographer Robert Andy Coombs, whose work explores a disabled queer sexual agency not regularly represented in the context of cisgender white gay male photographers. The artist’s work is in part influenced by an accident at a gymnasium in Michigan that left him disabled as a C4-C5 quadriplegic. In an article from Mel Magazine Coombs describes the change in his work from before and after his accident: “[b]efore my accident, I was always photographing my body and my friends, and the LGBTQ community,” he says. “But once my disability happened, I had so much more to say. There’s little to no representation of disabilities and sexuality, so my work got so much better and more political.”

I am thankful for queer content that really forces these conversations. What is the responsibility for artists who have white, economic and class privilege to use their platform to advocate for issues that extend outside of their own subject position? I want privileged artists to break up their algorithms and create an assemblage of

different bodies, ideas and content by sharing work by other queer artists whose work is radically different than theirs.¹⁰ In

10. In this I'm not trying to tell people to *not* make the type of the work they want to. Work is best when it's made through and about your own subject position. People can't change what types of privileges they are born into, but they can reflect on their position and inform themselves as to the experience of others.

this, what I am calling for is queer accomplices: artists who will put implicate themselves for another person, support another when having oppression enacted in them. A queer accomplice looks at the privilege that they have access to and uses it to leverage for others who do not. A queer accomplice is a co-conspirator in the crime against normalization. A queer accomplice makes work that promotes an expanded queer subjectivity, a type of work that makes both the artist and viewer truly desire more than simply rehashed images of a socially dominant body. I am calling for an allyship that extends through the LGBTQIA community, that extends to black lives, indigenous lives, and the lives of the poor and disenfranchised.

Put bluntly, we need more from cisgender white gay men. We need an intersectionality closer to a more radical definition of queerness ¹¹, one that

11. Here I think it's important to identify how I define what a queer identity is for myself. The way I formulate my queer identity is always as an action of refusal. A refusal of the LGBT movement's focus on politics that only benefit white cisgender men. A refusal of the limitation that results from the corporatization of queerness. A refusal of the perpetuation of queer aesthetics that value ableism, whiteness, and maleness as defining characteristics. A refusal against dodging accountability for even the smallest act of oppression. Refusal as a continuing practice of discontent that forces one to confront the complacency of one's privilege. To me, queerness is founded on this.

exists in contrast to the aims of the mainstream gay community's focus on assimilation into straight culture. We need accomplices that have little tolerance for gay artists, photographers, and creatives who don't look outside of their own privilege. We need accomplices

that can distinguish when work is merely an act of oppression wearing the thinly-veiled mask of being “other.” One that does not perpetuate a type of lifestyle which ultimately becomes a form of white supremacy. It’s not only important, but necessary, for those that possess cisgender, white, ableist and economic privilege to advocate for those who do not. Simply being gay doesn’t shield you from being an oppressor if your actions mimic primacy, or “the fact of being primary, preeminent, or more important.” Being gay doesn’t shield you from enforcing acts of oppression if you are complicit in racist, transphobic, fat phobic, and hyper-capitalist sentiments. Only photographing other privileged fit white cisgendered gay male bodies perpetuates an ideal that limits the reality of the queer body and reinforces a gay assimilationist position of power. Reinforcing this one body type reinforces the “pornified body”

Paul B. Preciado addresses this in *Testo Junkie*. The full quote reads “Until now, we’ve been aware of the direct relationship between the pornification of the body and the level of oppression. Throughout history, the most pornified bodies have

been those of non-human animals, women and children, the racialized bodies of the slave, the bodies of young workers and the homosexual body.” This has limited queer subjects by perpetuating the sexualized “other” put upon queer bodies by the heteronormative world. Those people who choose to be passive, indifferent, or silent in response to acts of violence towards queer and trans people and people of color are oppressors regardless of their identity.

STONE
WALL
WAS A
RIOT

AGAINST
POLICE
BRUTALITY

IS THIS EVENT FOR ME? WHAT AM I
ACTUALLY CELEBRATING? WHAT HAS
BEEN COMPROMISED BY THE CORPORATE
SPONSORSHIP AT PRIDE EVENTS? IF
I'M NOT A PROFITABLE 'QUEER' WHAT
IS MY WORTH IN THESE SYSTEMS? HOW
DO THESE EVENTS HELP ADVOCATE FOR
NON-BINARY PEOPLE, TRANS PEOPLE,
AND PEOPLE OF COLOR? DO THESE
EVENTS HAVE MY INTERESTS IN MIND?
HOW DO THESE CORPORATIONS HELP
ADVOCATE FOR HOMELESS QUEER
YOUTH? COULDN'T ALL THE MONEY
SPENT AT THESE EVENTS BE DONATED
TO ORGANIZATIONS THAT ACTUALLY
HELP QUEER PEOPLE? BY CALLING
OUT THESE EVENTS AM I A SELF-HAT-
ING QUEER PERSON? OR DO I RESIST
CELEBRATING AN EVENT THAT CLEAR-
LY ISN'T MADE FOR ME, OR MADE
FOR OTHERS WHO FIND IT HARD TO
CELEBRATE WHEN PRIDE HAS SHIFT-

Stonewall was a Riot Against Police Brutality

june 2020 Forward

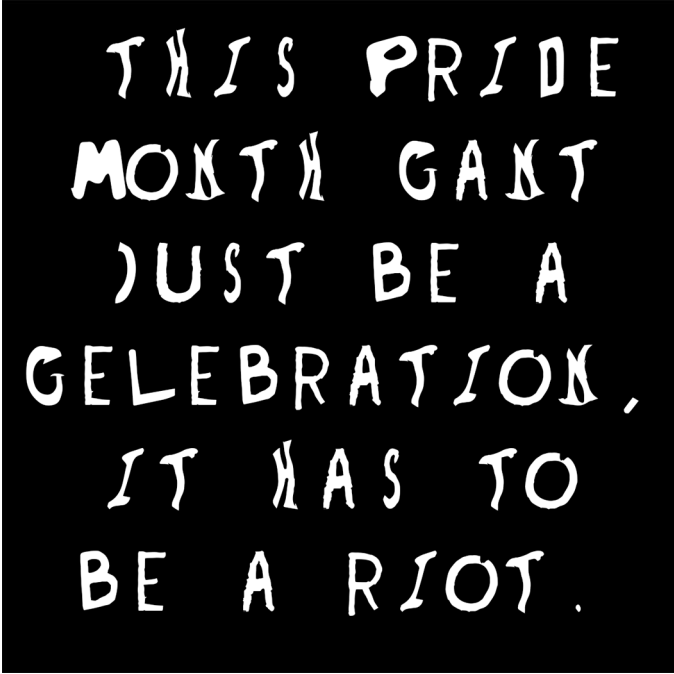
In the days leading up to June 2020 the world is such a different place. Covid-19 has killed over 100,000 people in the United States (and counting), certainly getting the media attention than the AIDS Pandemic ever received at the same horrible landmark. On Instagram @staleypr captioned the photo of the January 25, 1991 article posted by the New York Times, stating:

" This is how the @nytimes reported that 100,00 americans had died from AIDS. They didn't bother writing their own story. They ran an Associated Press story instead. On Page 18. Below the fold. No pictures. No Names."

Compare this to the May 24, 2020 full cover page of the print edition of the New York Times, in which we see 1,000 (or 1%) of those who died named and given a small background. Although this gesture is important in representing the gross negligence of the leadership in the White House, it still points to the glaring inequality of how these pandemics have been covered by the media. In the

passing of the activist and Act Up founder Larry Kramer on May 27th, 2020, it's an important reminder that we must continue to make noise and demand change. Kramer's legacy in queer activism and his unwillingness to be quiet is what we need now not only during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also faced with the countless deaths of black men and women, black trans women and other black bodies by the police, "Karens" and other enforcers of white supremacy. This pride month cannot merely be a celebration. It has to be a riot.

We need to remember that Stonewall was a riot against police brutality. As queer, trans and non-binary people, 2020 pride month can't just be about a casual celebration of our identity. This month (like every month, for that matter) must focus on addressing the intersections of our collective oppression, that is rooted in white supremacy, heteronormativity and colonialism. This month we need to continue to honor and demand justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and everyone murdered by our white supremacist police state. As queer, trans and non-binary people we need to stand in solidarity and action in our refusal of joining the status quo. We need to stay fucking mad and



THIS PRIDE
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IT HAS TO
BE A RIOT.

protest, donate and coalition build with each other, to actively work towards the dismantling of our white supremacist police state.

Pride 2020 is not a time for celebration, it is a time to show solidarity with cis, trans and non-binary Black people. The Stonewall was a Riot essay written in 2018, at its heart, was a call to decenter white cisgender gay male interests and show how they have taken over a movement started by trans women of color. Pride events and mainstream queer representation are focused on affluent white gay men and women buying power in our capitalist society. But we need affluent cisgender white gay men to decenter their relative privilege and refocus on supporting bail out funds, memorial funds and covid-19 relief funds. We need accomplices to fight with us, riot for us and help in the redistribution of wealth. This can't just be a one time gesture to help ease the guilt of white people; it has to be a lifetime commitment to actively dismantling white supremacy.

In seeing the recent protests and riots in honor of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and all the other black folks we have lost, we cis, trans and non-binary queer people need to remember that

similar riots against the police started the gay liberation movement. Our struggles, although they are not the same, come from common oppressors and we need to come together in the dismantling of these racist and heteronormative systems. The Covid-19 Pandemic has shown us and reminded us how broken American capitalism is. With billionaires having increased their net worths by 485 billion during just 10 weeks of this Pandemic, after having been bailed out with trillions of dollars from the United States government, it's never been more clear why this system is broken. These riots started with the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis but are about so much more than this one death. This was the spark that exploded 400 years of white supremacist capitalism.

American capitalism cannot be fixed as it is rooted in a 400+ history of white supremacy. It needs to be dismantled and rebuilt around the mutual aid of black, indigenous, disabled and queer people. Our queer identity is just one part of all the myriad political intersections of our identity, and we need to deeply examine our privileges, be they white, cisgender, economic or ableist. This month, queer issues alone are not enough and really have never been.

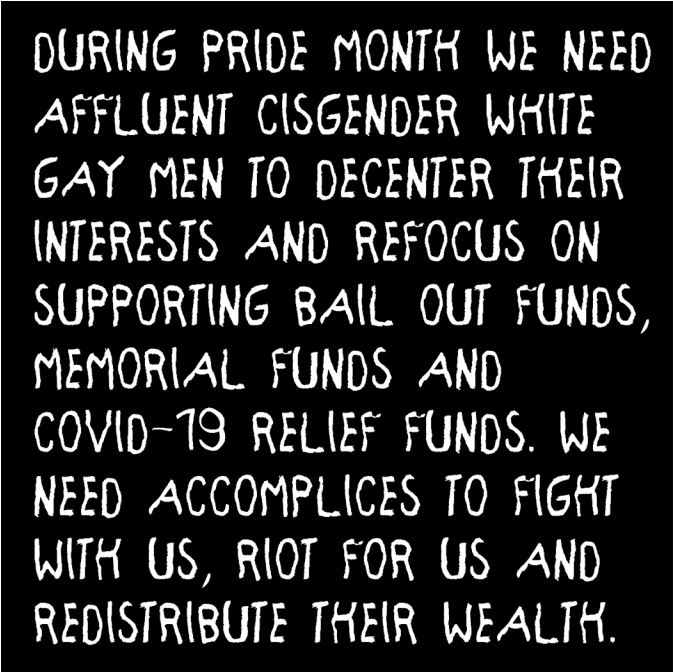
Pride month must be the start of a lifetime of dedication to fight systematic racism. We need to be militant in our queerness and we cannot continue this legacy of white cis male supremacy.

This month it is paramount to question and challenge our ethics, privileges, biases and assumptions. If you are not actively fighting and are sitting silently on the sidelines you are upholding and hiding behind the privileges of a white supremacist state. As a white non-binary queer person myself, I hold myself and my work to the standards of anti-fascism and anti-racism. This is a time to stay loud, stay mad and actively fight to dismantle white supremacy.

In the beginning of what will be an onslaught of ads by large corporation “celebrating” Pride Month (the same corporations who received government bail outs while queer, trans and non-binary people are struggling to even pay the bills) it’s essential to resist and actively boycott these larger corporations if you have the means. Buy and support small business run by Black queer, non-binary and trans people, indigenous people and immigrants, anyone who isn’t part of the normalization of queer culture. This month is about the intersections of our shared struggles

against capitalism, heteronormativity and white supremacy. This is a month of the celebration of resistance and the resistance of all peoples, not just queer people.

Be Oakley June 2020



DURING PRIDE MONTH WE NEED
AFFLUENT CISGENDER WHITE
GAY MEN TO DECENTER THEIR
INTERESTS AND REFOCUS ON
SUPPORTING BAIL OUT FUNDS,
MEMORIAL FUNDS AND
COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS. WE
NEED ACCOMPLICES TO FIGHT
WITH US, RIOT FOR US AND
REDISTRIBUTE THEIR WEALTH.

On Whitewashing & Queer Resistance

Be Oakley

One question that I continue to ask myself is how queer can be enacted rather than just proclaimed. The academization of queer keeps it in a place of inaction. Many people utilize queer subjectivities in their daily lives, by which “queerness” enacts itself in an inclusive intersectional way. For me, queer is a site of resistance. Queer has been used in so many different contexts, merging itself with the pursuit of capitalism (pinkwashing, gay pride, corporate endorsements), white gay male subjectivities (gay marriage, sexism, hyper-masculinity), and other pursuits that filter queerness through a white, cisgendered, privileged perspective. I am interested in a queer struggle that is not limited to a critique of gender and sexuality, but extends itself intersectionally to critique injustices towards other marginalized people.

Queer resistance can be defined in context with other struggles against dominant culture. Forms of oppression which include white supremacy, police brutality, capitalism, anti-environmentalism, rape culture, anti-immigrant rights perspectives, and other oppressors are situated within “normative” culture.

“Normative” in this sense is any action that presents itself within the values of contemporary culture at large. For example, Donald Trump’s endorsement of white nationalists who protested in Charlottesville (through his proclamation that there are “good people on both sides”¹ normalizes the actions of white supremacists within dominant culture. This proclamation, made by one of the most powerful white, cisgender, heterosexual men in the world, gives a window into a worldview that some white, cisgender men and women view as acceptable. White supremacy, neo-fascism, and white nationalism are queer issues; any actions that normalize oppression are queer issues.

I was recently looking through my social media feed and saw an article from out.com titled *The 50 Biggest Homophobes of the Last 50 Years*, by Lucas Grindley. The first homophobe listed was “The police.” Images depicting police brutality against queer people were paired with written commentary, where Grindley stated that “It might be hard to imagine now, with gay officers marching the pride parades and big-city squads having dedicated LGBT Liaisons”.² The Advocate wrote in 1973 that gay people had come to think of police “as

their natural enemies”.³ This statement summarizes the disjuncture between mainstream gay assimilation policies and anti-assimilated queer politics. The police have never been friendly to queer people of color, trans folks, or non-binary people, while police violence is something that privileged gay white men haven’t had to deal with since the beginning of the gay liberation movement. Although Grindley’s article mentions the history of homophobia among the police, it isolates their brutality as historical and does not give any insight on the current police brutality that queer folks face today. This post is just one example of how divided the LGBTQIA community is at large.



Stonewall, Exclusion, and the Corporatization of Gay Pride Events

The Stonewall riots, which have been recognized as the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement, were started as a result of police brutality against trans women of color, gay men, and other queer people. The riots were started by two trans women of color, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, who were largely ignored after these events due to the whitewashing in the early Gay Liberation movement. During the 1973 gay pride celebration in New York City, Sylvia Rivera had to fight her way on stage to give a speech after being pushed out of the movement. In her speech, Rivera denounced the liberal, white gay revolution and looked to an actual revolution where queer and trans people of color were at the center of the movement. Rivera stated:

I've been trying to get up here ALL day for gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail! That write me every motherfuckin' week and ask for your help. And you all don't do a god damn thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up? And raped? And jailed?" She continues, "I have been beaten, I have had my nose broken, I have been thrown in jail, I have lost my job, I have lost my apartment, for gay liberation. And you all treat me this way?

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What the fuck's wrong with you all?"⁴

The participation of police at LGBTQIA pride fests undermines an event started in response to harassment by the NYPD at the Stonewall Inn. The uniformed police and "PRIDE"-detailed vehicles promote spaces made for cisgender gay men, who feel comfortable in their interactions with police at these events in ways that some queer, trans, and non-binary people of color might not. The first gay pride event started to honor the Stonewall riots started by Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. Since then, pride events have shifted their focus to corporate sponsorships, which have become one of their defining aspects. Corporations have clearly shown us that queer people are now, indeed, profitable. Companies focus on their corporate interests at pride events and disregard the events' history. Those who wish to forget about queer history further deny the intersectional struggles of queer liberation. Queer voices are silenced at large by selling out events to corporate interests, which value profits over the lived perspectives of queer people. Thus, the goals of these events are put into question.

Is this event for me? What am I actually celebrating? What has been compromised by the corporate sponsorship at pride events? If I'm not a profitable 'queer' what is my worth in

these systems? How do these events help advocate for non-binary people, trans people, and people of color? Do these events have my interests in mind? How do these corporations help advocate for homeless queer youth? Couldn't all the money spent at these events be donated to organizations that actually help queer people? By calling out these events am I a self-hating queer person? Or do I resist celebrating an event that clearly isn't made for me, or made for others who find it hard to celebrate when Pride has shifted its focus away from them?

Activist Mattilda (a.k.a Matt Bernstein Sycamore), one of the initiators of the San Francisco-based activist group Gay Shame, has been working for years to address the issues of police presence at Pride parades and the lack of intersectionality at these events. Gay Shame started as a “challenge to the assimilationist agendas of mainstream pride celebrations”⁵ and has been critical of corporate sponsorships at these events. Groups like Gay Shame hold mainstream gay organizations accountable for actions that perpetuate oppression by ignoring trans people and queer people of color, instead privileging their own goals of assimilation for white gay men into dominant culture. Gay men who have white privilege, economic privilege, and are able-bodied need to be held accountable for their narrow definition of equality that

promotes, as Lisa Duggan says, “access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism” (6) over issues affecting queer people of color, homeless queer youth, and other marginalized queer folks who don't have access to those institutions.

Issues such as gay marriage have become a defining symbol within gay assimilationist politics. Gay marriage has become a symbol of equality that only exists, however, for those who already have economic and social privileges. When talking about marriage, Gay Shame once stated that “Marriage is the central institution of that misogynist, racist system of domination and oppression known as heterosexuality”.⁷ Singling out gay marriage as the defining aspect of the LGBTQIA fight for equality looks to a model set by heteronormativity, the nuclear family, and capitalism, mimicking the same lifestyles that look to silence those who choose not to participate in those lifestyles. In *Same-Sex Marriage and the Queer Politics of Dissensus*, Ben Trott states that:

Where, for instance, in the framing or enacting of “marriage equality,” is the equality of those who fall outside or between, move within, or refuse the binary that makes it possible to even talk of “Same” and

Opposite” sexes? Where is the equality of those intimacies, relationships, and modes of kinship that are ineligible to the institution of marriage? Are they counted? Countable?⁸

The privilege of gay marriage exists in a capitalist system that benefits those who have access to the most privileges in society. An examination of the corporate sponsorship at LGBTQIA pride fests around the world reveals ways in which gay assimilation and capitalism have had a negative effect on the modern LGBTQIA fight for equality. LGBTQIA pride events generally happen in the month of June, the same month as the Stonewall riots which became the catalyst for the Gay Liberation movement. The nation’s first pride parade was on June 28, 1970, to commemorate the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Celebrations of a historic event in which trans women, queer people of color, lesbians, and gay men fought against continuous harassment by police have transformed into sponsored events that focus on capitalizing upon the queer people who fought against dominant culture from the beginning. This shift is protested by those such as the Washington D.C.- based group, No Justice No Pride, who protested against the inclusion of Wells Fargo in the 2017 Capital Pride

event. The group criticized Wells Fargo for “its lending to private prisons and investment in the Dakota Access Pipeline, and weapons manufacturer Northrop Grumman”.⁹ Corporate sponsorship like this at pride events such as Capital Pride show how mainstream pride events have almost seamlessly merged themselves with corporations that actively fight against an intersectional queer critique.

No Justice No Pride also fought the exclusion of issues that affect people of color at gay pride events by helping to shut down the 2017 Capital Pride Parade in Washington D.C., stating that the organizers “ignored the concerns of Native Americans and people of color generally, transgender people, and other marginalized populations”.¹⁰ Groups like No Justice No Pride aim to end the mainstream LGBT movement’s complicity with oppressive systems, including corporate interests and other sponsorships that continue to further the marginalization of queer and trans individuals. The group is also invested in other intersectional queer issues including protesting Trump’s military ban on transgender people and criticizing corporate interests in organizations like the Human Rights Campaign. Although No Justice

No Pride's main protest is directed at the Capital Pride event, the group has involved themselves in many other issues affecting queer people of color and trans people. The multifaceted aims of this group employ intersectionality as one of the defining aspects of how a queer identity is actively tied to an ongoing stance of resistance.

While attending the Richmond Pride event during the summer of 2016, I was struck by the overwhelming number of sponsorships at this small event. After my experiences at Richmond Pride, I created a zine with direct commentary about the corporate sponsorship of LGBT pride events. For the publication, titled *Sponsor*, I researched the 2016 NYC Pride sponsorships at one of the world's largest LGBT pride events. I was struck by the amount of information on the website that was dedicated to the sponsorship of the events, rather than acting as a platform for discussing queer issues. The zine displayed every single sponsor that was a part of the 2016 New York City Pride. I then employed spray paint on the pages as a censorship tool to block out every corporation that was advertising that year. *Sponsor* drew attention to the large amount of sponsorship at the event by employing

the aesthetics of spray paint to create a physical barrier between the sponsor and the viewer. The saturation of the corporate logo was enthralling to me, and motivated me to investigate the effects that capitalism has on queer culture.

At gay pride events people of color are still pushed out of the movement at large, which has resulted in routine protests such as Black Lives Matter activists' protests against police presence at Pride. Chong-suk Han has addressed the issue of black expulsion from gay pride events, stating that gay organizations have tried to reinforce whiteness to obtain more institutional support. In his essay *They Don't Want to Cruise Your Type: Gay Men of Color and the Racial Politics of Exclusion*, Han quoted Allan Bérubé in describing such exclusion as:

...mirroring the whiteness of men who run powerful institutions as a strategy for winning credibility, acceptance, and integration; excluding people of color from gay institutions; selling gay as white to raise money, make a profit, gain economic power; and daily wearing the pale protective coloring that camouflages the unquestioned assumptions and unearned privileges of gay whiteness.¹¹

Whitewashing Queerness

Outside of gay pride events, trans women of color are still being pushed out of the LGBTQ+ movement by white gay men. In 2017, Netflix released the documentary *The Life and Death of Marsha P. Johnson*, written and directed by David France. In the documentary, France incorporated footage of the lives of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera to show how both were pushed out of the gay liberation movement. The documentary places Rivera's homelessness in context with the neglect of the movement at large, which focused on issues affecting white gay men while leaving out the struggles of trans folks and people of color. Shortly after the release of the documentary, David France was accused of stealing work from transgender activist, filmmaker and writer Reina Gossett. While France's documentary details how, as a whole, white gay men took space away from trans women of color during the early Gay Liberation Movement, France himself reflects the same behavior; as a white gay man, he took advantage of the labor, work, and research of another trans woman of color. The acts of France are not surprising and perpetuate the history of gay assimilationist politics and the erasure of trans women of color. In

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an Instagram post, Tourmaline details how David France stole their work:

#deepshare #realtruth this week while I'm borrowing money to pay rent, david france is releasing his multimillion dollar netflix deal on marshapjohnson. i'm still lost in the music trying to #pay_it_no_mind and reeling on how this movie came to be and make so much \$ off of our lives and ideas. david got inspired to make this film from a grant application video that @sashawortzel & I made and sent to Kalamazoo/Arcus Foundation social justice center while he was visiting. He told the people who worked there -i shit you not- that he should be the one to do this film, got a grant from Sundance/Arcus using my language and research about STAR, got Vimeo to remove my video of Sylvia's critical "y'all better quiet down" speech, ripped off decades of my archival research that i experienced so much violence to get, had his staff call Sasha up at work to get our contacts then hired my and Sasha's *ADVISOR* to our Marsha film Kimberly Reed to be his producer. And that's just the shit I have the spoons to name. TRUST THERE'S SO MUCH MORE. This kind of extraction/excavation of black life, disabled life, poor life, trans life is so old and so deeply connected to the violence Marsha had to deal with throughout her life. So I feel so much rage and grief over all of this & STAR must have some serious level plan on moving through many---and clearly by any means necessary---to get the message out... So tonight I'm channeling high priestess energy to show me the honey throne cuz this

storm queen is

Activist and writer Janet Mock came to Tourmaline's defense in a Twitter post, stating "A black trans woman's work about a black trans woman was used to make a film by a credentialed white cis man aided by Netflix's millions".¹² Mock went on to advocate for others to support Tourmaline and to give her the credit she deserves for her work on the digital archives of Marsha P. Johnson & Sylvia Rivera. In *Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures*, Jeannine Tang states:

Tourmaline research has made increasingly clear how both Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were fundamental to the founding of the Gay Liberation Front, before being forced out by conservative liberalizing impulses in the movement. Johnson and Rivera's foundational anti-policing, anti-prison, welfare and shelter organizing were replaced with more conservative LGB organizing that focused on legal rights rather than structural

economic reforms.¹³

When the initiatives of artists such as Tourmaline are sabotaged by those who benefit from white cisgender privilege, they reinforce the history of the white gay liberation movement conservatism that has been built upon the labor of trans women of color fighting injustices that affect queer people and people of color. Tourmaline was

able to show her short film *Happy Birthday* in the 2017 New Museum exhibition *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*. For an exhibition on queer and trans artists in the United States, *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* still lacked critical perspectives, and was still heavily oriented towards a white perspective. While Reina Gossett was able to show her film in the exhibition, other critical voices were still excluded from the show. The exhibition intended to "investigate gender's place in contemporary art and culture at a moment of political upheaval and renewed culture wars",¹⁴ yet the show included no indigenous perspectives. Indigenous artist Demian DineYazhi made a comment on my Instagram post regarding the *Trigger* show, stating:

This exhibition by the New Museum left out a strong indigenous perspective on gender, which is pretty unethical in a country and a city that enacted so much assimilation and genocidal acts against indigenous peoples. Transphobia begins in the states through colonization. To leave out indigenous peoples time and time again is perpetuating settler colonial violence and erasure.

In the numerous articles and discussions as well as the panel that I engaged with about the exhibition, there was still a glaring lack of conversation on the exhibition's exclusion of indigenous perspectives.

Trigger curator Johanna Burton's neglect of indigenous voices is a continuation of the type of exclusionary action engaged in by David France. After reading the comment from DinéYazhi, I searched various exhibition reviews and found no mention of this glaring omission from the exhibition. This illustrates a further form of oppression in which artists like DinéYazhi and Tourmaline are forced to advocate for their own issues when facing the erasure of the perspectives of trans women of color and indigenous people.

Whitewashing, or the covering up and exclusion of the work, labor, and activism of non-white subjects, is a major problem in the LGBTQIA movement because it erases black, brown, and indigenous voices from conversations and historical engagement surrounding LGBTQIA issues. This whitewashing of queer history can be seen in *Stonewall*, a 2015 drama history film that depicts the events of the Stonewall riots in 1969. The film's sole protagonist, Danny Winters, is played by an able-bodied white actor Jeremy Irvine, which portrays the riot from a white, male, and cisgender perspective. David Leitsch, executive director of the Mattachine Society, commented on the film, stating: "It was terrible to center the mov-

ie on the white kid. It was a silly trope that plays with a lot of audiences, but at this point historically that theme is overplayed. Having him throw the first brick was bad. That was all crap – that was all drama. But then it's just a Broadway show – it's not real".¹⁵

This film became symbolic of how dominant culture has been trying to commodify queer subjectivity as a selling point for white heteronormative culture. The director justified his use of a white gay male protagonist, stating that "he'd made the movie for as wide an audience as possible, and that "straight-acting" Danny was an "easy in" for heterosexual viewers".¹⁶ His act to "cast a wide net" shows how his intentions were for the whitewashed *Stonewall* to be consumed and digested to sell to a conservative gay and straight consumer base. This type of whitewashing is dangerous for the large population of queer people of color, especially trans women of color, who are omitted from queer history and also live at the dangerous intersections of racism, transphobia, and homophobia. Thankfully, due to this criticism the movie received negative reviews, resulting in bad box office sales.

The whitewashing in movies like

Stonewall illustrates how the LGBT movement has catered to white gay men. Gay assimilationist politics have divided the LGBT movement; while some have assimilated into dominant culture by capitalizing on their privilege, trans women and queer people of color still seek to not be silenced, killed, or left out of the conversation. Certain gay men are able to take advantage of the institutions that are made for bodies that are white, cisgender, and able-bodied. The term that summarizes this critique of gay assimilationist politics, “homonormativity,” has been used in various queer theory texts, including Eric Stanley’s essay “That’s Revolting!.” In an interview, activist Mattilda (a.k.a Matt Bernstein Sycamore) provides a definition of “homonormative:”

In much the same way that heterosexist is really useful for thinking about homophobia, homonormative offers us the potential to see the violence that occurs when gays show unquestioning loyalty to many of the things that at this point are routinely challenged even within mainstream straight dominant cultures... it’s beyond heteronormative because it’s on a different level, it’s imitating straight people better than they would ever do it, perfecting the tools of oppression and rationalizing it to this extreme violence.¹⁷



Homonormativity and A Seat at the Table

One of the main aspects of homonormativity that becomes problematic is its intersection with capitalism. The inclusion of gays and lesbians at large multinational companies is not “progress” for most of the LGBTQIA community, who face job discrimination at even the most basic levels of employment.¹⁸ In the deployment of queerness as a form of resistance, queer identity should be framed within anti-capitalist and marxist discourses, which structure a critical perspective on the effects of neoliberalism, capitalism, and income inequality. For a homonormative perspective, the main goal is having a seat at a problematic “table” that was built on the suffering and exploitation of those who do not have economic, white, and educational privilege. This is not to undermine the levels of progress that have been accomplished in the last fifty years, but to think critically about who has benefited by this progress and what this group of people has done for those who are not seated at the table with them.

In my work I consider a queer subjectivity to introduce a level of criticality that looks to everyone who wasn’t invited to that table, and demands that the table not

make room for others to be included, but for the table to be destroyed and rebuilt. It is important to consider how one is oriented towards wanting a seat at this “table” within an assimilationist and homonormative perspective to begin with. This idea of orientation and “a seat at the table” has been written about in a unique way in Sara Ahmed’s book *Queer Phenomenology*. In her book she talks about the writing of Edmund Husserl, stating that “we get a sense of how being directed towards some objects and not others involves a more general orientation towards the world”.¹⁹ A homonormative queer person begins to orient themselves toward the table to fit into a heterosexual lifestyle that looks to deny their unique subjectivity, giving them a false notion of safety and survival.

Therefore, by sitting at this table, the subject conforms to the social norms of a racist, heterosexist, and transphobic culture. Their position at the table makes no room for others who don’t fit into the normative social expectations of who gets a seat. Yet, their seat at the table becomes a stand-in for a groundless symbol of mainstream LGBT progress. Rather than actually destroying this conceptual “table,” one must, as Sara Ahmed states “consider how

the table itself may have a background”,²⁰ therefore opening the possibility of asking why one would want to be included at the table at all. Investigating the background of the table introduces a critique of gay assimilation by looking past a one-dimensional goal of inclusion and reintroducing a criticality that is needed in the mainstream gay rights agenda.

What a “seat at the table” represents within queer resistance is the actualization of a place in the world where, regardless of social status, race, gender identity, sexual preference, and physical ability, people have an opportunity to be. This idea is practiced daily within queer communities that provide systems of support, which exist in contrast to social policy that looks to silence marginalized queer bodies. This idea of “queer futurity” has been summarized by José Esteban Muñoz in the book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

The future is queerness’s domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasure of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must

dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed some thing is missing”.²¹

Muñoz articulates the power of looking inwards towards a future where a queer subjectivity can be enacted in order to work up against the painful reality of the present. A cisgender financially-stable gay male subject who does not actively help to work towards a queer futurity where everyone is offered the opportunity to survive becomes equal to the oppressor. There is no difference between a heteronormative and homonormative subject position if they both do not wish to think past the limitations of capitalism, white supremacy, and the gender binary. Therefore, it’s important to hold accountable those privileged members of the LGBTQIA community who wish to assimilate into mainstream culture without actively resisting policy that affects marginalized queer folks. A queer resistance is one that continually looks towards the future while actively dealing with the problems of the present.

On The Undercommons and Queer Resistance

In contrast to the above description of those gay people who choose to assimilate into dominant culture, I wish to elaborate on an anti-assimilationist positioning that queer people, like myself, look to, in what Fred Moten describes as the “undercommons.” In the introduction to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Jack Halberstam talks about the idea of the undercommons that is introduced in the text, stating:

If you want to know what the undercommons wants, what Moten and Harney want, what black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people want, what we (the “We” who cohabit in the space of the undercommons) want, it is this – we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgment generated by the very systems that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls. We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and

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feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming. What we want after “the break” will be different from what we think we want before the break and both are necessarily different from the desire that issues from being in the break.²²

This passage above by Halberstam speaks to my desires to reimagine the structures that queer people can inhabit, take part, and build upon. This “undercommons” is a form of future world-making, one that creates spaces, programs, and futures for those black people, indigenous people, queers, and poor people who are the most affected by acts of oppression by dominant culture. As a queer non-binary person, I wish to foster the spaces of an “undercommons.” I want these spaces to be flooded with actions of queer resistance against the system that looks to placate us into our privilege. I want to illustrate my anger towards the community of other gay and queer people, especially those who are white, wealthy, and cisgender, who are complacent in their privilege.

My illustration of queer resistance is directed towards this new generation of other white gay and queer people who have had access to the privilege and education necessary to take action against the same

system that they benefit from. These acts of queer resistance are messy, inconvenient, and laborious. They require white queer people to speak up against other white queer people who enact oppression against people of color through language, exclusions, and cultural appropriations. These conversations require other white queer people to take accountability for the content, language, and behaviors that they perpetuate. A queer resistance is a lifelong commitment to failure, education, and refusal.

In such an illustration of resistance, queer identity does not assume a fixed subject position like that of gay and lesbian identification within the LGBTQIA spectrum; rather, it takes a fluid position of categorization. It is important to consider a queer identification as a departure from the mainstream aims of gay assimilationist politics. Queer is a contentious identity position that means different things for different people. Through the academicization of queer theory, the discourse on how “queerness is enacted” has been positioned in the realm of educational privilege, which contrasts its real-world application. The academicization of queerness adds a level of contradiction

to my claim of its various uses as a tool of resistance. Queer theory has a level of inaccessibility built into it through its articulation in institutional spaces. Here it is important to stress the actions of activists, artists, and communities enacting queerness in the real world. Queerness is a malleable term which is often articulated in contradicting ways that generally service the goals of each public that takes on its complex history. This built-in contradiction therefore plays to the fluidity of what queerness represents. The term, like its various uses and embodiments, is fluid and unfixed.

Queerness is influenced by both enactments of ‘queer theory’ and ‘queer resistance,’ allowing artists like myself the opportunity to try and bridge the gap between these two discursive uses of queer identity. In page 9 of *The Undercommons*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney discuss the refusal of the subversive intellectual, stating, “In fact, the subversive intellectual enjoys the ride and wants it to be faster, wilder; she does not want a room of his or her own, she wants to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew.”²³ Moten and Harney speak to what I am trying to pinpoint, identifying the space

in between a 'queer theory' and a 'queer resistance,' one that requires an active participation in the queer lived experience. It is a space that produces content that non-institutionally trained artists, activists, and community members can find relevant to their experiences.

As a white non-binary citizen of the United States of America, I look to my identity as a practice in working through the contradictions presented by a queer subject position. As a person with white privilege, I take on the baggage of past actions of white queers who have co-opted the labor of people of color. As a cultural producer of content consumed in large by a queer public, I look to be accountable for the work I put out into the world. As a person who is about to get a Master of Fine Arts degree from one of the top graduate programs in the United States, I need to acknowledge the privilege behind my articulations of queer subjectivity. As a publisher of content disseminated into the world, I look to the agency of printed matter as an articulation of queer resistance.

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THE VIOLENCE OF NAMING

With the current focus on identity politics in contemporary art, naming has become an important part of the artist's practice. Queer, black, indigenous and non-male artists are not given the opportunity to name their own subjectivity when their work is contextulized by curators, art critics and writers. This creates conflict when the white-, cisgender-dominated art world tries to come to terms with the biographical information presented in the recent identity-based exhibitions. This conflict arises when dominant culture tries to name the activity of non-dominant cultural happenings, which are now included in various institutional frameworks. When arts institutions are still largely controlled by white, straight, cisgender men, marginalized artists lose control over their own biographies. A violence of naming happens when an artist's biography, personal history and identity are presented outside of their original context. This intersection of various accounts of 'naming' from perspectives of the personal, the institutional, and collective reflect a messiness that is presented through an emphasis on biography and identity.

As a non-binary queer artist who uses they/ them pronouns I am constantly being named by others as male. This act of misgendering by dominant culture is a result of the limited

vocabulary the heteronormative world has for queer subjects. My gender identity is often chosen for me due to my appearance and I am often not given the opportunity to speak for my own subjectivity. In *Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures*, Jeannine Tang introduces Dean Spades term "Identity Management." Identity Management is when trans and non-binary students (like myself) are responsible for doing the extra labor of renaming themselves. Tang states "the administration of gender variance dictates how and why students' sexual or gender identities and professional capacities are received by the field."

When I started my employment as a Graduate Education Assistant at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Richmond, I was warned by a supervisor that it might take the staff a while to adjust to my gender neutral pronouns. Although I am lucky that my gender non-binarism was not met with hostility, I was still told to prepare to be misgendered due to the staff's ignorance of gender issues. I bring up this point to illustrate the labor put on queer, non-binary and trans people to constantly perform the emotional labor of calling attention to what society assumes of our gender identity. As a

this Identity Management does privilege me in ways that trans and non-binary people of color still have to navigate due to their race:

"When we consider that transgender youth - especially transgender youth of color are disproportionately homeless and experience high levels of violence, eviction, deportation, incarceration, we can better understand the comparatively small number of trans artists of color applying to, being admitted to, and completing art school - and subsequently gaining mainstream visibility -- as symptomatic of institutional and systemic transphobia and racism."

Here my white privilege allows me a level of access to institutions that non-binary and trans artists of color may not have due to the lack of diversity in many institutions. It's important to examine my own biography and identity in relation to other artists who also deal with the violence of being misgendered, dead-named or excluded from the institution all together. I felt this first hand when I changed my name after graduate school, coming up against my dead name with professional acknowledgments attached to it. My former work, although authored and created by me, feels disconnected due to my

THE AGENCY OF NAMING ONESELF

Terms used by curators, writers and other institutional powers name the practices of the artists they are including in their exhibitions, art criticism, or exhibition writing. Many trans and non-binary artists are not able to name their own practices or map their own biographies. Tang writes about this in *Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures*, stating: “modern art industries narratives or life’s work, which presumes artists to possess singular identities through which one’s oeuvre can be neatly categorized into early, mature, and late phases.” The way trans or nonbinary practices get categorized usually focuses on these pivotal points in an artist’s career, which follows the logic of a heteronormative biographical system. Often trans and non-binary artists’ lives are not determined by the three phases of life: early, mature, and late. Moments such as the changing of one’s name, the shift in one’s pronoun or altering one’s body, play huge parts in the major biographical and individual shifts in one’s

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life. Often biographical information included in exhibition catalogues, reviews and others writing may contain deadnames, pronouns, or other biographical information that doesn’t reflect an artist’s current identity.

Therefore it’s important that artists who have a platform to express their own identities provide space for others to expand their subjectivities. Writing, performance and other active forms of communication can help a trans or non-binary artist to position their identity and formulate their own subjectivity. Juliana Huxtable speaks to the importance of writing and performance in her practice in *Existing in The World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility*, stating:

"For me, writing has been really powerful, particularly writing for the purpose of performance or live sound, because I think that working in the visual realm is so complicated at this point."

Queer artists making work through the lens of their personal experience, identity or biography (which many trans and non-binary artists do in one way or another) need to be able to speak for themselves in the critical reception of their work. Huxtable continues

performance are really immediate ways to dictate the terms on which I'm establishing my own history." When non-binary and trans artists are not able to "establish their own histories," their work is simply contextualized for them. This speaks to a legacy of queer, trans and non-binary people needing to find ways to track their own histories in the development of their work.

These histories do not always follow narrative forms of fact and fiction. Non-trans societies have expectations of what our bodies in transition look like, often assuming a transition from one stable gender category to another. Therefore in the reception of the work of trans and non-binary artists, visual cues can be misleading in the reception of one's work. Even if an artist takes on the universal cues of masculine and feminine modes of presentation, ones that society generally considers to be typical performances of a "men" or a "women," this does not mean that these artists necessarily fall into either of these categories. Until an artist is able to name for themselves what their identity is, no one should be making assumptions about the narrative content of one's work. Queer, trans and non-binary subjects often traverse different gender

throughout their lives. These shifts in identity often happen without public announcement and require dialogue between an institution and individual. These dialogues should set the stage for different modes of reception in focusing on queer practices that speak to each artist's unique experience.

In the reception of trans and nonbinary artists, it's important to know that we have experiences which often do not overlap. As queer subjects, we often contradict ourselves, simply by changing, growing, navigating and existing in transphobic and racist systems. Therefore, the naming of an artist's practice or the positioning of an institution as holding the terms bestowed by another, can often lead to a violence of naming. Given the art world's current emphasis on biography and identity, it's important for critics, institutions and biographers to be apprehensive of how they attempt to colonize the cultural happenings of the lives and works of non-binary and trans artists and artists of color.

When queer and trans artists do have access to these institutions, their work is often catered to a curator's or organizer's vision rather than the long term success of that

Huxtable talks about her inclusion in the 2015 New Museum Triennial stating:

"But it's weird, because if you look from the outside, you would think that I'm a very successful artist. People write about my work; it's distributed. But since the Triennial, no one has purchased any of my artwork. People are not buying. The images that don't present me as sexualized in some way, like *Untitled in the Rage* (Nibiru Cataclysm) and *Untitled* (Psychosocial Stuntin') [both 2015], which are way more difficult to read as seductive, don't sell."

During what some are calling a "transgender moment," many trans artists are still not being supported outside of their inclusion in selected museum exhibitions. I question the infrastructures that exist for non-binary and trans artists in the art world outside of the support of a few active institutions. The "success" Juliana Huxtable has experienced comes in the form of "social capital" and exposure rather than the financial support that is necessary for artists to sustain their practices. Huxtable goes on to say:

"This situation is such a clear example of this moment that's happening. And that's a form of sabotage to me. People don't

actually want to deal with the idea that they're innately uncomfortable and that their entire lives are built around reinforcing really strict structures of sex equals gender, you know what I mean? And, the sabotage is to invite two trans artists to an event, to post the image on Instagram, to share the facebook article, and to not actually deal with the structural assets."

Towards the end of Huxtable's interview she speaks to the imbalance of representation of trans artists in museum shows and the art market as a whole, stating:

I don't think it's coincidental that most of my visibility ... most of my larger visibility in an art world context is the result of institutions, because I think sometimes institutions are actually ahead of what's happening socially in the art world."

This comment summarizes how institutions are in some ways "ahead" of the art market, but brings up questions of long term stability for the artists involved in exhibitions, triennials and programs. Here, I question an institution's responsibility to deal with this imbalance of representations of the support and financial stability of trans and non-binary

and how can we as trans and non-binary artists be in control of these negotiations? How do we as trans and non-binary artists factor in to the contradictory involvement of museum donors and benefactors of major institutions? Do these questions reinforce why trans and non-binary artists and artists of color usually foster their own alternative institutions and social formations?

GLAMOUR AS DEFINED BY AND FOR US

One term often used in the conceptualization of queer practices is glamorous. This description is often used to name a level of performativity exhibited when queer, trans and nonbinary appear to be thriving. It is often seen in contrast to those queer people living at the intersection of mental health, unemployment and other transphobic situations caused by heteronormative systems. This deployment of “glamor” is often placed upon us by non-queer people in the reception of our work. In explaining the use of “glamour” in *Happy Birthday, Marsha*, a film by Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel, Jeannine Tang states:

"Depicting the social familiarities of transfeminine friendships, Tourmaline and Wortzel's film details an affective landscape of intimate transgender social life. Its glamour quotes and reworks the street queens' own grammar of flamboyant femininity, wordplay, and camp, which constituted their liberation aesthetics. These aesthetics have consumed as pageantry and spectacle in films such as *Paris is Burning* (1990), but, when lived on the street rather

than on the screen, such aesthetics were violently rejected by conservative impulses within LGBT movements in the 1990's and 2000's and, in the last few years, have been increasingly used as justification for murder when embodied by trans people. As Gosset has pointed out, "those of us on the receiving end know what glamour as a slur is meant to do, who accusations of glamour are used against."

When used by non-queer people, these terms create a binary between glamorous queer and trans people and the lived realities of these same people, which becomes a spectacle for heteronormative culture. When society focuses on queer glamour rather than queer lived experience it ignores the queer people who suffer from homelessness, mental health issues and systematic racism. Tang continues: "Happy Birthday, Marsha! is not glamour used against but for glamour as an optics of loving looks between queer and trans women." Glamour then, when used by queer, trans and non-binary people, is a way to support and celebrate one another.

In a capitalist society some "white, healthy, neurotypical, upper and middle class, cis- and able-bodied man" do not care if we live or

the opportunity to be recognized for who we are. In Sick Women Theory, Johanna Hedva bluntly states "Because to stay alive, capitalism cannot be responsible for our care - its logic of exploitation requires that some of us die." Therefore, in the failure of our interactions with institutions it's important for us, as artists, to foster the spaces where we can care for one another.

These spaces exist in community based art projects such as Simone Leigh Free People's Medical Clinic, which provides "allopathic healing services, yoga and pilates classes, and free HIV screening for members of the community". The clinic upholds a legacy of female black health care providers, and frames their work in the intersection of healing as a creative activity. They also exist in Chris E. Vargas's Museum of Transgender Hirstory and Art (MOTHA) which "reimagines the world of the museum and its role in the reproduction of social life," therefore reimagining places like bathrooms and restaurants as sites of cultural trans production. They also exist in the "underworlding," in which, as Gossett describes, one "think[s] about imaginaries and creating parallel spaces and sustaining the underworld beneath the world of the

be fostered by supporting our chosen communities. These are spaces where we can rest, support and nurture each other to face the cold realities of the world. Being “glamorous” relies on these networks of support and is not a tool for others consumption, entertainment or heteronormative voyeurism.

The spaces often populated by queer people and people of color provide alternative infrastructures for support and creative opportunities. Tang states in the final sentence of *Contemporary Art and Critical Transgender Infrastructures* “[i]n this infrastructure of feeling, chosen family is sutured, seam by seam, into a discourse of impossible love that is lived every day, up close and at a distance.” These “Transgender Infrastructures” that Tang speaks to are paramount to our survival, to our reworking of the world in our own vision, to the play with and against what we are given, to make what we can with what we never wanted. Let this be a reminder of not only the violence of naming, but the power of being able to name ourselves, the contexts of our subjectivities and the places that nourish us.

Betraying Authority: Notes On Queer Art and Poetry

I.

Western Art has become entirely subservient to capitalist ideals of macho individualism. As artists we are forced to participate in a community of competing individuals rather than a community of equal individuals.

The very idea of a “QUEER artist” seems oxymoronic. If we continue to support a system in which art is used to establish individual success/authority/genius/immortality for the artist, aren’t we directly engaged with a mode of creativity that undermines QUEERNESS and elevates the authoritarian self?

As QUEER people the usual narrative schemas we’re forced to adopt are sensationalized as “finding your voice” or a radical “confessionalism,” but this can be problematic. The very act of foregrounding the self, while apparently the only possible thing to bring recognition to QUEER experience, actually makes creativity subservient to machoindividualist narratives.

QUEER artists only learn how to use their experiences; we’re never taught how to talk about our experiences *in their own terms*. We’re only taught the language of capitalism, how to use the QUEER mythos for a macho-individualist end. We’re not writing our own stories, we’re molding our experiences to the forms of storytelling that have been forced on us. This is not just in the content we produce, but more importantly in the

way we live as artists.

Do we let our lives become fetishized in order to live? Do we let our suffering become another consumable content-product? Do we embrace the cultural and political currency the self-centered art seems to afford us? Do we abandon the alternative forms of communality that have been so important to us throughout history? Because this self, this hyper-masculine self, is what has consistently destroyed our communities and erased our existence throughout history.

How can we destroy it and at the same time make a living as artists? How can we destroy it and not give in to the very logic of egomaniacal innovation it engenders?

How can we create, not just our own stories, but our own storytelling?

II.

I think of *QUEERNESS* as multiple, as an anarchistic approach to sexual/gender identity: this would mean it couldn't be fit into a single piece, a single book, a single authoritative person.

QUEER art could be wildly communal. It could embrace orgiastic creativity, a creativity that deliberately rips apart the self—again, not just in the art, but in the way artists *live*.

The *QUEER* text could not be a text, it could be a body: music, resonance, sound, physicality, these could evoke our experiences instead of constraining them.

To escape the ritualized masculinization, via education, MFAs, publishing, grants, prizes and awards etc., that art culture has been reduced to, we could create, not to *display* our individual authority, but to *destroy the very need for that display*.

To make the audience *feel* the actual world that generated the moment of creative expression, to make them see and breathe and act within the divergent experience that brought the act into being—art as virtual reality.

through description but through how that world was *felt*. QUEER art could embrace pure feeling, it could be essentially orgiastic, like inducting the artist and the audience into an orgy of symbolic boundlessness. Descriptive or narrative language, no matter how elaborate, simply doesn't go far enough.

QUEER art could be wildly vulnerable. Vulnerability invites creativity because it opens us to improvisation: expressing our feelings is essentially improvisatory because we spend so much energy pretending to be something we're truly not, we've all endlessly practiced a multitude of socially accepted reactions to real emotions. This is why we're actually terrified of facing something beyond the patriarchal "self": because it puts us into a space where we no longer have the surety of a stable symbolic system to understand what to do with our emotions. QUEER art could embrace that lack of stability.

Our language is so corrupted by the authoritative self and its validation through "craft," we spend so much time trying to establish an authoritative piece, that if you stripped away 99% of the piece there would be no real purpose to it beyond this performance of authorial legitimacy—is that a creative, a queer act? Did an experience even happen?

In a techno-capitalist world our very capacity to

sexuality, race, politics etc., of the author are reduced to political data, the personal rhythm and body of the author is reduced to an academic performance, everything has to convey a pixel of information, as if the piece were only data interpretation and generation. It's like we're conveying art through the medium of information rather than the other way around—but art isn't a podcast, a hypothesis, a server board. If all art is about participating in creation with the audience, IF this can be accomplished without the product itself, whether that means a sculpture, a painting, or a text, if it can be accomplished without the ARTIST, the GENIUS, entirely, it should be done. This could be queer freedom.

III.

Language is a genital. Language is not just a tool for communication, it's a *sense*, just as much as smell or touch or sight. It's a mode of perception we feel into the world.

QUEER art could deliberately expand the skin and reach of communication. E.g. Sappho's poetry is not about what she describes but *how* she describes it, it's about the sense-uality of her language, about what her sense *does to us*. What she's actually saying, the "meaning" or the "description," is less important than how she expands the sensory possibilities of language and thus feeling for the reader. This is why Sappho's poetry is essentially QUEER: it embraces the intensity and surreality of sensation outside the normative logic of the senses, the fire under the skin that drives us to the edge of insanity. This could be how to put our experiences *in their own language*.

Sappho's poems were written to be performed by a chorus of men and women accompanied by dance and music—they were not QUEER in that they were about a single person's experiences, but because they enacted a collective *physical* catharsis.

Does this happen when, at a poetry reading, we sit in silence listening to a "master" reading from a podium? Is that QUEER?

language. A macho artist desires anything but this, he desires anything from his language but to submit to it.

QUEER art could let sensation come before information, QUEER art could be radically tactile.

Poetry is musical in the sense that it gleefully embraces the sensuality of communication, and deliberately ignores the need for every sentence to communicate information and only information for it to be an optimal use of time.

To be creative unselfishly is a position of radical empathy: we're expressing ourselves because we want to allow others to feel free *with us*. Art is a showing of this freedom, it inducts the audience into that body and that space. All art implies ritual induction into a shared space.

Self-expression isn't an end in itself, but a means to an end. We've been brainwashed into thinking that the only thing that matters is exhibiting our self-expression—as if this cult of individual freedom isn't itself a form of mind control.

Creativity is a hivemind and we have to be assimilated. The more we try to use our own innate poetry for self-expression, the more it ends up using us. Art is a self-

in to it!

It doesn't feel right unless you love your art, in all the alternative forms of love, and want to explore it as a worthwhile thing itself. Let the piece exist because you were enthralled by the piece, not yourself.

In capitalism if a work of art does not, above all else, establish itself as a success, it is considered a failure. QUEER art could embrace failure.

IV.

John Cage: "Art should not be different from life but an *action within life*." What do we do when we write poems, for example? Sit at a computer or desk? Browse the internet in between poems? And, however absurd it might seem to ask: is this beautiful? Is this radically QUEER?

Is what we're doing when we're making art as inspiring as the art itself? Why not produce art in a way that is always simultaneously a life-affirming action—like sex, a smile, a dance?

Making art should be a lived event, it should be as extraordinary as an event. So often in the act of writing I feel like I might as well be working in a cubicle. Is that QUEER feeling? We want the audience to have, not just a piece, but an amazing event in their lives. How can we do that if we don't live ourselves—and this in the act of *making the art*, not just the experiences we use to make it?

I'm just terrified that the act of, for example, sitting in silence and reading or writing a book is simply a non-act, a non-event. The emotions we feel in that moment are supposed to be private, an entirely Puritan thing. The public display of emotion is only acceptable in socially sanctioned situations, if at all (is exhibiting a

subvert those situations.

Because we've been raised in a Puritan society we actually would rather not display any emotion at all—we're terrified of looking ridiculous. *QUEER* art could be unashamedly ridiculous.

This is not about the public display of private emotion—it's about sharing emotion at all.

As artists, why do we treat the moments of our lives as degraded, as not worth our time, if they aren't successfully captured in a piece of art?

V.

The next development in poetry could be to stop writing it entirely.

We don't want "the artist" as a way of life, we want *art itself* as a way of life. The action, the event, a symbol, an event in one's life, *living itself*, is meaningful, not an individual, and not an individual's poem.

We've been indoctrinated into believing that we *need* art (especially commercialized art) to explain our experiences. But our experiences are *already* art. This is not simply a kind of propaganda of the deed: this is queer empathy. The point of queer art, obviously, would be to live, not capture life.

Rather than the audience being forced to sit in silent submissiveness as a patriarchal figure strips them of their bodies, their movements, their right to sneeze and yawn, their need to scream and sneer, their very expressiveness, any *QUEER* art will be radically inclusive—which is to say, physically explosive.

We need a space in which the performer shares the work with the audience—not share as in give, but share as in participate, exist within. This is a realization of the boundlessness of creation. This is the healing. No

To participate with the audience in sensual states that are divergent from the social norms of capitalism; this could completely replace the banality of contemporary existence and become constant, a sustained climax of dreamlike focus. *QUEER* art could achieve the activity of the brain in dreams, could be incessantly dreaming.

To clarify: for anyone part of a dominant social group, it will be literally impossible for you to understand or interpret this. The interpretations you try to produce will not be “untrue,” they will literally be uninterpretations. You will rip apart your own logical faculties in the very attempt to interpret the intentions of our art.

Lastly, in a way, *QUEER* art is something you would have done even if the entire history of art had never existed.

JON CARPENTER'S THE THING: TRANSNESS AND RACIAL POLITICS

As I write this in June 2020 I'm actually still waiting to hear back from the Mt Sinai Department for Transgender Health to make an appointment for intake. I'm very much in the process of finally doing this. But before I start transitioning I want to make this text a kind of anti-memoir or something and address the fact that the June BLM protests have been a moment for white people to shut up and stop taking up space to promote themselves. So I want to take an opportunity to examine the racial complexities behind my coming out as a trans person and the racism I have been enmeshed with during my journey to this point. What I hope the reader will gain from this is not just to see me as an ally or a savior or anything, I don't at all intend this to be a performance of allyship or my radical credentials. But I do want to talk about this so that others can examine their privilege in perhaps different ways and to provide a concrete examination of the way racist politics has been an essential part of the formation of my white trans identity. It would just be ridiculous to write another piece about a white person transitioning and not talk about black queer people in any

way whatsoever, especially during this pandemic and another another another riot against police brutality.

I wrote a poem called “The Evanston Township High School Prostitution Ring For Boys” that I hope communicates some of what I’m about to say. I DO NOT AT ALL CLAIM TO UNDERSTAND OR OWN THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK KIDS. Part of the point I’m trying to make is that I AM NOT TELLING ANYONE’S STORY. These are some basic facts about racism in my high school, and though I did not undergo the experiences that black kids did in such a space I did experience the waves. To start:

My high school, ETHS, had about 3500 to 4000 students. I graduated in 2007 and during my entire 4 years there was not a single openly gay person. There was no LGBTQ+ club, there was absolutely nothing. It was the Bush era. I used to get the shit kicked out of me on a daily basis during high school, not because I was openly gay—I quite honestly could have been put in the hospital or worse for that—I was simply weird. I was jumped a few times, people would mainly throw

trash at me, or throw tennis balls or gym locks at my head, things like that. All of the violence done against me as a queer person was done by black boys. The white boys ignored me (which in a way was worse) but never physically assaulted me.

40% of the student body was black. The school loved to trumpet its “diversity” in comparison with other suburban schools, but of course in reality the black students rarely received the same education as the white students. The black student body mostly came from economically disenfranchised families, etc., suffice it to say it was just the same liberal platitudes about diversity. We had metal detectors at all the main entrances to the school, the security guards carried handguns, and there was a zero tolerance policy for violence: if you got in a fight, it doesn’t matter who hit who first, you’re expelled. Obviously this was targeting black kids and served as a way for the school to simply get rid of black kids who came from unstable homes, no questions asked, no conversation. The metal detectors and armed security guards were a fascist intimidation tactic. The only way to succeed was to be(come)

white, to fit your lifestyle into the white lifestyle of mindless studying to eventually go to college.

A lot of the kids were in gangs. I am not at all claiming to be an expert on gangs: one of the ways you got in a gang was by jumping a white kid. So usually when someone would slam my head against a locker I would assume that's what was happening.

In essence I thought I deserved it and to some extent I would defend that, that I actually did deserve it. (This is the point at which every far righter screams CUCK!!). When a black kid attacked me I always thought: simply because I was born this way, I automatically have a degree of physical safety that this kid doesn't, simply because of his blackness. The physical proximity of my privilege and the inability to do anything about it... our school was basically a prison.

So I do not claim to understand what it is like to be black at a culturally white institution, but I do have a direct experience of the frustrations of black students because they took that violence out on me as a white queer person. And

at the very least this created something of a symbiosis. What I mean is this: in one sense, of course our bodies were segregated in physically and emotionally insurmountable ways. There were 4 cafeterias throughout the school and every day during lunch it was black on one side and white on the other; the latinx kids on the black side, the asian kids on the white side. All of the micro instances of segregation are probably apparent from this basic ORGANization of our everyday lives. However, in another sense, *violence* does something else.

As I'm thinking about it now it's strange because: it made me feel alive. When I got jumped it was frightening but exhilarating; it made me feel present, like I was in the world, instead of how my "friends" bullied me, which was by just pretending I didn't exist. And I absolutely want to stress that I'm not sexualizing this, I'm not trying to perpetuate the fetishization of black bodies by gay white men à la Robert Mapplethorpe or whatever. What I'm trying to get at is that, yes, of course this physical violence enhanced the physical segregation between white and black—but in another

way it meant that we were physically touching, their hands and fists were on my body, I was part of a body with them, we morphed and melded and bled and spat and sweated into each other.

I wish I could describe this more clearly, but I used to have this kind of “vision” when I was alone in the hallways, usually going to the bathroom or something, in which I would suddenly see the walls with this red, fleshy hue, and they would start pumping, like I was inside a body, a vein, or like inside some giant pulsating cock. Remembering this made me think that, well, yes: we do exist *inside* a political body, and we exist inside it with black and brown people; we exist inside a political body, even with the segregations between us. Every time a black person is assassinated by the police this cancels any true democratic space by enacting and perpetuating slavery. We are inside the ORGAN of racism, and in fact this is the founding structural ORGANization of our “democracy.”

I read a book recently called *The Gangs All Queer* by Vanessa R. Panfil. In it, she examines LGBTQ+ black gangs in

Columbus OH, and in one particular passage she talks about how for many young black people coming out to their parents is seen as *betraying your race*. This points to a really uncomfortable truth about white privilege: being gay is seen by many black families as being the privilege of white people; that only white people are/can be gay, that in a sense white men are (or are allowed to be) more effeminate than black men, that black men have an obligation to sustain a stereotype of macho virility, and so on. This is problematic in so many ways, of course, but in many ways this is really a fault of the white queer community; it has to do with white economic privilege. However uncomfortable it may be we have to admit that we simply haven't done enough to engage the lives of black people in the white LGBTQ+ community, period. Further, we often appropriate black mannerisms and spaces, blithely unaware of the obvious gentrification we're wreaking on black communities and the black face we're performing, in order to make public our political Otherness from a position of privilege and stability. Our political Otherness oftentimes is *just* safe enough that we can enjoy the

commodification of empowerment revolving around the status of being oppressed, but not have to deal with the same levels of police brutality. And quite often, for white, well-educated and relatively affluent queers our identity becomes more about performing a rebellious, persecuted identity because of the status this affords. The desire to be seen as a political/theoretical Other ironically becomes more important than the desire to be queer. Meanwhile, black trans people are being systematically hunted down and murdered because our society in essence doesn't consider them to be human beings, and their bodies are a void. As white queers we have a level of acceptance and privilege (however tenuous) simply because of our skin. Yet however much ground we stand to lose by emphasizing our radical existence outside the sexual status quo and siding with all queer people of all races is meaningless in the face of white supremacy.

We must provide space for black and brown people to tell their own stories and let black and brown kids find those stories so that a meaningful space will

be open for them. In that sense, this is what I mean by an *anti-memoir*: I'm trying to articulate the limits of white queerness, its contradictions and physical contortions, in the hopes that other white queer people will search for ways to create space for people whose stories have no space. I want to articulate the failure of the white trans story, especially in this moment.

To begin a book this way is a violence against myself, in a sense; I know there will be people reading this saying, no, you have a right to tell your story, and there will be other rolling their eyes at the white guilt. Further, as a white trans person do I really exist on some sort of different ontological plain as a black trans person? That itself seems like liberal doublespeak: doesn't it just perpetuate segregation? Am I just going to assume it would be impossible for a black trans person to understand my story, simply because our skin color is not just our skin color but carries immense political implications? Should I admit that black and brown kids, because their upbringing and their journey will be so different from mine, are literally incapable of

occupying the same experiential space, especially physical space, of myself, to find any sort of commonalities in mutual transness? That we literally exist in different realms of experience? I just don't think articulating that is any kind of real solution.

So, towards the end of my high school years I'm now remembering an incident that, at the time was totally bizarre to me, but now I understand more what was actually going on. In my senior year I was cornered in one of the stairwells by one of the gangs; rather than jumping me they were excitedly showing me a camera with pictures and videos on it, of they and other boys having sex with each other and older men. I didn't understand it at the time, but they wanted me to come with them and have sex for \$. Later, I heard that there was an actual prostitution ring where black boys were having sex with each other for \$. So... given this immensely intimate secret and the bravery it took to share it, didn't we have some sort of shared physical experience? Weren't we part of a collective sexual body, so that the erotics of violence we had reciprocally done to each other (my

weapon being my privilege) actually belied a communal body, a pleasurable body? Of course I'm not saying I now possess secret knowledge of what it is to be black and queer—but I just think that our bodies are not so untouchably distant as might appear. At the very least this segregation is a flux, so that I do have a choice to make about this space, I have something mutually at stake.

Ultimately, I want people to consider: what are the privileges you still own as a white person? How can you use them to empower people other people than yourself? How can you support a communal arts culture in which the stories of the future will take place? I believe that 50-100 years from now there is a very good chance that people will look back at all the white queer narratives of today and find them totally disconnected from the real world. In fact, they probably won't look back on them at all—they'll probably ignore them, and I hope they do! Because hopefully 50 years from now our society will have desegregated in such a way that the white-centric stories of today just don't apply anymore. As white artists we need to deliberately create space for

that future, for people to ignore us and move on to more desegregated narratives. The opposite is a society in which white supremacy still reigns, in which white narratives, no matter how radical, are the only narratives available, in which white people are still the majority. In which white lives matter—all because people like me wanted to preserve the liberal facade of celebrating diversity but at the same time push away and deny others the opportunity to occupy the same public space.

So, in this essay I'm trying to think of ways to move toward a more embodied, communal art, not just in a theoretical sense, but in the actual physical activity generating (or being) the art. This must fundamentally be a movement toward the decentralization of white narratives, because any art that doesn't deliberately center anti-racist action is fundamentally white supremacist. I want to radically challenge the Western obsession with genius that is essentially colonialist in nature; I want to try and encourage conversations about space, about the physical acts of making art, how these are controlled, who is excluded and shamed,

and how the historical foundations of our assumptions about artists' bodies lie in patriarchal and racist theories/metaphors of the body. I hope that some of the more surreal or conceptual writing in my work will still appeal as an attempt to question and move beyond the boundaries of patriarchal white narratives and politics, rather than merely a quirkiness for quirkiness's sake. All of this content was written at the time the June protests, so I really have to address the book's failings but at the same time the merits I hope it still has when I more fully emphasize a specifically anti-racist stance (which I should have done in the first place).

I'm very excited about transitioning and will talk about it to anyone at any time if they ask. Every white queer publisher and writer MUST SUPPORT All Trans Lives. Anything less is virulent hypocrisy.

DARKROOM DOM

To deconstruct our obsession with the performance of innovation/genius. Surrounding the audience with the queer body. To move the queer body beyond a performer who is observed by an audience into a vibrational space that literally physically encompasses the audience. Why do white men get to claim noise? I want to reclaim the viscerally punishing voice. My poems penetrate and are penetrated by the audience, they enter into and are entered. Sexuality becomes a mutual space inhabited in a democratic process. The violence of this is necessary: this catharsis of a new birth. This is the healing. I want to deeply challenge our obsession with genius. I want to show how disturbing it is to be someone who is a master, how absurd it is to be and to want to be that person, how our culture actually forces us to attempt to be rabidly unique above all else, how creepily obsessive the body politic is about how fame = more identity. I want to meld into the audience. Couldn't we write the entire history of modern art in terms of its physical architecture with no regard for the apparent "content" of the art? I don't mean individual paintings and sculptures

and poems and recordings, but the architecture in which they're presented: galleries, concert halls, bookstores, libraries, even the book itself—but also parties, bars, restaurants, cafes, cities? And isn't this architecture fundamentally built by and for cis white men? Why don't we build our own spaces? Perhaps this is only possible with *sound*.

To have a darkroom with an incredibly loud sound performance, and to make it obvious that this is about power, it's about dominating the audience, to make it abundantly clear that that's part of the performance (and part of the impulse to make art, for that matter). And to advertise it as something you have to submit to, something you are dominated by, a situation in which you are dominated by a person, which would actually draw a lot of people and become sexualized, people would get turned by it—good. Wouldn't that be enjoyable? Someone might say: well, the point of music is for people to enjoy it, you're just forcing noise on them, you're just trying to get them to submit to you. But couldn't the latter be enjoyable, emotional, stimulating, sexy? I can imagine people weeping, being

overwhelmed by finally giving themselves over to an Other, finally letting their guard down, finally a space in which one can let their guard down, and willingly be subsumed by something wildly different. To not lie, to not pretend that this artwork is anything more than about totally overwhelming other people. Yet to say finally that that impulse can be positive, that this is not patriarchal, that one can engage with that impulse in a positive, embodied way, that this artwork has always been about giving people release from themselves, getting them out of their own heads, because we're so puritan with our obsession about personal selfhood, ownership, property, poise, and it's this that's making us want to kill ourselves: the ideal of being totally self-sufficient and not needing anyone else. Just to make this explicit in the piece, to make it an already agreed upon thing, instead of pretending it isn't there. And someone might also say: who the fuck are you to do this to people? Who are you to act like you can or should envelope others? But that's part of the performance: I pretend I am that person. It's the audience that willingly plays along. At least I'm being up front about

it, and leaving it up to them to come or not.

We agree to play this role every single time we engage with an artist, whether we want to or not, because the very structures of Western art are based in the politically organized displays of superiority by privileged white men. This happens every time we stand in front of a painting, every time we enter a gallery or museum. These are spaces built for the displaying of cultural (political) supremacy. The reason why trans people are attacked, physically and politically, is because of this very primal thing: that we challenge the psychosexual territory and property of men. In a patriarchal society men announce their superiority in the social territory through culture, politics, sports, whatever. The space in which the male self-image of genius plays out is no different than a jungle—trans people threaten that space. This is not at all to say that trans people are above the primal, that we've evolved beyond it... Trans people are apes too.

Queer mysticism: what would that look like? A new tradition of mysticism in art that is also queer; intergalactic, spiritual,

but embodied. Dionysian but without the strictures of pop music rhythms; how can we have the audience and ourselves participate in a wild, freeing, orgiastic rite that is engaging and primal and incredibly fun but at the same time not just popular dance under capitalism? How can humiliation be used in a positive way? It is a primal desire of human nature, and thus it's not something that can be excised from our nature, because we should embrace our primal desires. How can we make shame something that will change the world? Even if what I'm saying to you is totally comprehensible you should know that what I'm saying is vigorously sacred. If this makes the words seem now suddenly different and kind of haloed, maybe ask yourself, why? If not, why not?

HEALING

I.

For kids who grew up with Final Fantasy and Dungeons and Dragons and other sci fi/fantasy media there was something essentially queer about how this media allowed us to embody different powers/sorceries and the lifestyles these powers implied. For example, in Final Fantasy the “healer” casts spells that cure illness and disease and heal wounds; but in terms of what the spells signify, if you took those spells and made it appear so that a huge, muscly dude with armor and a big sword etc. possessed them they would have a completely different context. There is a deep stereotyping going on here: usually the healer in a game is a woman, or the long white dress flecked with red and the gnarled staff that the healer wears are signifiers of effeminacy. However, there is also a ton of gray space between the apparent binary of “sword” (male) and “magic” (female).

In contemporary fantasy media you’re given a whole range of signifiers to choose from and the magic spells those signifiers imply in order to curate the magic you perform, i.e. your identity. Magic challenges reality, it always possesses

a kind of existential strangeness or otherness in the fantasy world; there are mages that are persecuted and shamed, mages that are vaunted into a priestly class, and so on. All of this was extremely attractive to me as a kid.

In a way, being trans is about actualizing the magic we used to feel, the freedom to dress up and manifest our fantasies that we used to have in virtual worlds. I don't think there's anything wrong with this. We didn't choose to be born in a culture where access to autonomous queer culture was cut off by corporate popular media, but we made use of this media surrounding us and found moments of eruption, moments of violent disassociation from the gender binaries that popular media so strongly emphasized.

As a kid I didn't have any outlet at all for my (very repressed) trans identity so I had to make do with what I had. I think I was drawn to fantasy worlds early on because of their sheer decadence, their outlandish castles and mountains of crystal, and their (at the time quite radical for popular media) ambiguous

gender signifiers. The representations of masculinity in Final Fantasy were totally foreign to the hyper-macho action heroes of Bush era American culture. As a queer nerd I didn't have access to queer spaces, I didn't even know they existed; there was total silence about these spaces, so that they really did occupy a parallel universe to white suburbia.

At the same time I think I was drawn to fantasy media (rather than Disney media which resonates through a lot of queer culture) because this media had violence as the pivot on which the whole game turned. And this violence and the gender stereotypes it implied allowed me to sort of have my cake and eat it to: I could indulge in the idea that I was playing the male protagonist, the normative role of a macho protector with a big sword and a dark secret, gathering weapons and items that would increase my power i.e. capacity for violence etc.—but at the same time I could go crazy with the magic of drag, dressing up my characters (i.e. myself) and secretly fantasizing about embodying the signifiers of the effeminate characters. For example, one of the most infamous scenes of

the Final Fantasy series is when the main protagonist is dressed in drag and actually wins a beauty contest against two other female characters. I was so nervous about how much I loved that scene that I would always try to skip over it!

II.

In the Oxford dictionary the word fantasy comes from “late Middle English: from Old French *fantasie*, via Latin from Greek *phantasia* ‘imagination, appearance’, later ‘phantom’, from *phantazein* ‘make visible.’” This etymology implies that there is a fundamental desire to “make visible” our imaginations—but isn’t that what magic is (or, in the case of sci fi, technology that appears so advanced that it is magic)?

Popular media of the 90s and 2000s gave us something close to that radical, othered identity we so craved. In American popular media we heavily romanticize otherness, rebelliousness and the ways in which these are manifested through violence or superpowers; however, in reality our culture ruthlessly segregates the Other

and does very real physical violence against it, not to mention emotional violence. Ironically, the hysterical valuation of individualism in our culture ends up leading kids to seek out increasingly nonconservative lifestyles.

As kids we were raised to fetishize adversity and individualism, but we weren’t given any power to manifest this in our daily lives—so we found it in a virtual reality, in which we had access to the signifiers of forbidden spells and hidden tomes and dark arts. And what I’m trying to say is that we’re now taking that virtual reality and applying it in our everyday lives, which is the essence of magic. So we really did make ourselves into mages.

What I mean is that there’s something incredibly empowering about how we take the conservative cultural tropes we grew up with, invert them gradually as we grow up and finally manifest them directly upon our bodies. This ironically actually mirrors the character progressions, the “leveling up,” so to speak, of the media we absorbed. To me this is as great as any superpower: I can

actually vanish my dick, I can actually set myself apart in a real way, rather than just playing the character in the corporate game.

Are we living out a fantasy? Well, yes, but what isn't a fantasy? As if the 1950s nuclear suburban family that conservative culture keeps trying to return us to wasn't itself a fantasy. Do far-right internet trolls really want to return to the status quo of Leave It To Beaver? It's so bizarre how the far-right preaches e.g. the memes of women being inferior and submissive and housewifeish, while at the same time these people are hyper obsessed with the pornographic female body—but pornography will be totally eliminated in a conservative Christian culture. There will be mass internet surveillance and regulation of access to sexual imagery, men will be expected to use sex to have children and support their family and have no sexual desire beyond this, and women will be expected to wear modest, conservative clothes that display no overt sexuality whatsoever. 4chan will be completely banned.

Thus queer culture actually manifests the narrative of otherness that American culture so fetishizes, while the cult of masculinity and individuality ends up perpetuating an incredibly conservative Christian culture that undermines any real sexual freedom. Conservative Christian culture is inherently un-democratic, especially in terms of the body. So what if transness is a fantasy? It is a DESIRE. These are desires that I have, and if we're talking about being realistic, why would I pretend like I don't have them? I am already real, because imagination exists in the real world.

PS: *Healing The Body*:

Lately so much theory has been about the body the body the body... but isn't the body imagined? Isn't the body absolutely an imaginative construction? A surrealism? We act like theorizing about the body will return us to a more grounded reality—but, first of all, isn't this just another loop in the vicious circle of Christian theology, i.e., we're trying to find an out there, a "higher" reality, but we're looking for it in the body because we feel trapped in our minds, rather than

looking for it in our minds because we feel trapped in the body?

Secondly, what is groundedness? What does it mean to be grounded in reality? Being aware of the physical body as a real entity in the political body, i.e. being aware of the physical violence done on real people by conservative politics, is vitally important, of course. I would never downplay the necessity of “grounding” any radical politics in real politics. However, I think this reliance on the body makes the body seem like a theoretical abstraction, or a fact, a figure; in news reports or anthropological research when we read about how many have died, how many have suffered and are suffering, but we don’t really feel their bodies, we don’t really see them—because feeling the real violence upon their bodies requires fantasy.

Or when we see real images of burning cars and people being killed and assaulted, are those people just trying to display the facts when they’re protesting? Are they just trying to draw attention to the fact of police violence? Because burning cars is not This American Life,

it’s not a piece of journalism. Because the very attempt to show reality is based in a hope for a better world, a dream of what could be. The body is a hope, it is a dream. Everything we do is to embrace that dream—I don’t know if this is possible without physical catharsis.

Finally, the trans body for me is a deformation, an unformation. It has nothing to do with form. It’s about putting myself in a place of flux, between body and mind, it’s about trying to make that freedom of choice real. This goes all the way back to how I used to scroll through my virtual reality and curate my crystalline figure.

THE BODY DOES NOT EXIST. THE MIND DOES NOT EXIST.

I embrace the fantastical foundation of the body. I imagine my body to be something new, something evolving, I don’t care about the “reality” of this imagining, I don’t care if what I imagine is “realistic” or really “there” in some scientific or political sense. I don’t care if I’m still a child.

Collective Self Isolations: Resistance In The Care Of Others

My life hasn't changed drastically during this time of self isolation. Those of us who are disabled, who have mental health issues, who are introverts--we "self isolate" throughout the entire year and, indeed, most of our lives. My social life is mediated through a critique on ableist forms of engagement in the public sphere. For many people, the idea of resistance is dependent on being in public spaces. But in this time it's paramount that we re-examine our assumptions about creating alternative public spaces, that is, spaces for resistance. This is a turning point in how we can think about demanding what we need to thrive and survive. During this time I have been reminded of why I am drawn to "Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance" and how critical it is in the present moment.

I have seen many extroverts and able-bodied people scrambling to make this required self isolation work for their lives. In this I have mixed feelings as to both the positive and negative effects of this moment. In my own community, I am blown away by how people have been reaching out to check on each other, taking the extra effort to make sure people are adjusting to this new life. I've seen so many displays of vulnerability, care and community that go beyond our typical social gathering. In this I see softness,

in these fragmented communities. These actions of radical softness are so important to how we are all resisting the current moment. This emerging form of community care, mediated through direct action aiding many freelance artists, gig work and part time employees, and so on, is very much a resistance to how capitalism is failing us in this hyper visible way. As a society, many of us are resisting the spread of the disease at the same time as resisting the spectacular failure of capitalism.

In the previous editions of the *Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance* text, I have talked about how this phrase exists for myself, as taken from the 5th edition of the text:

“Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance” is not a utopian idea but rather one that tries to grapple with the unique realities we face. It signals and celebrates how we each come to resistance by allowing us to define these terms for ourselves.

Many people are trying to grapple with how this pandemic is changing the very fabric of our lives and redefining the possibilities of how we can be physically separated, yet very

much together. I see people coming together in a collective form of refusal, in which we refuse to accept that those who are the most vulnerable can simply be forgotten. This care requires both individual vulnerability and honesty towards those in need, as well as a proactive response from our communities. These actions are necessary to lessen the effect of the incompetence from the Trump administration. What I have seen in the last two weeks through my communications with friends, acquaintances and strangers is a presence that is undeniably felt in such a physical way, although we are far apart. It's true that during crises people come together, although now it's a form of togetherness that doesn't rely on an actual physicality.

And who is offering this care? In my own life it's those who have the least to give but always find ways to show support. In the announcement of the over 2 trillion dollar bailout from the United States government, I see a government that is simply weaponizing this stimulus to support large corporations and destroy small businesses. This of course is not surprising, but it reminds me of the urgency of looking after my own communities. I see other queer, trans and non-binary friends trying to make sure others

RESISTANCE IS CHECKING IN ON THOSE THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE FORGOTTEN. RESISTANCE IS REFUSING TO RETURN TO THE WAY THE WORLD WAS BEFORE. RESISTANCE IS MAKING SURE THIS CARE IS NOT TEMPORARY AND EXISTS PAST THIS MOMENT OF SELF ISOLATION. RESISTANCE IS RADICALLY CHANGING OUR LIVES IN THE CARE OF OTHERS. RESISTANCE IS UNITING ALL WORKING CLASS PEOPLE ACROSS RACE, GENDER IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY. RESISTANCE IS UNDERSTANDING THAT OUR ACTIONS HAVE A DIRECT EFFECT ON OTHERS. RESISTANCE IS SLOWING DOWN, STOPPING AND REFLECTING. RESISTANCE IS THE URGENT DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION. RESISTANCE IS REFUSING TO GO BACK TO WORK UNTIL WE HAVE ACCESS TO UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE, A LIVABLE WAGE AND PAID SICK LEAVE.

have funds to live. This is the community I know, love and try to support, as they have supported me.

In this time I think of other folks whose lives have not radically changed. As someone who has some ableist privilege (although I suffer from severe anxiety and panic disorder often leaving me housebound), I feel for others who have mixed feelings about this moment. For many this isn't a

RESISTENCIA ES MANTENER CONTACTO CON AQUELLOS QUE DE OTRA FORMA SERÍAN OLVIDADOS. RESISTENCIA ES REHUSARNOS A REGRESAR AL MUNDO COMO ERA ANTES. RESISTENCIA ES ASEGURARNOS DE QUE ESTE CUIDADO NO ES TEMPORAL Y EXISTE MÁS ALLÁ DE ESTE MOMENTO DE AISLAMIENTO. RESISTENCIA ES CAMBIAR RADICALMENTE NUESTRAS VIDAS PARA EL CUIDADO DE LOS DEMÁS. RESISTENCIA ES UNIFICAR A TODA LA CLASE TRABAJADORA MÁS ALLÁ DE SU RAZA, IDENTIDAD DE GÉNERO Y ETNIA. RESISTENCIA ES ENTENDER QUE NUESTRAS ACCIONES TIENEN EFECTO DIRECTO EN OTROS. RESISTENCIA ES BAJAR LA VELOCIDAD, DETENERNOS Y REFLEXIONAR. RESISTENCIA ES LA URGENTE CIRCULACIÓN DE INFORMACIÓN. RESISTENCIA ES REHUSARNOS A REGRESAR A TRABAJAR HASTA QUE TODOS TENAMOS ACCESO A UN SEGURO MÉDICO UNIVERSAL, INCAPACIDAD LABORAL PAGADA Y UN SALARIO MÍNIMO QUE NOS PERMITA VIVIR.

temporary lifestyle change, and it will exist past the current moment. In this, I hope that ableist folks remember this time when they can return to their normal life. Will they continue to check on others and continue this community care, that is not only casual but will be in place for years to come?

At this moment, we need to weaponize our refusal of market capitalism, the Trump

administration and coronavirus itself. We need to be militant in our self isolation, knowing that we are acting together although we are so far apart. This pandemic is as much about the coronavirus as it is about the overdue sickness of capitalism. This virus has revealed what many have known long before this moment, how life as we know it does not work for 99% of the population; the economy is nothing without the workers, and we can freeze capitalism at the realization of our power. It has always been known by black and brown people, indigenous people, non-binary and trans folks, poor folks, that these systems have never served our interests.

I've recently been reading *Mistaken Identity* by Adad Haider and have been reminded of how our identities can be weaponized by maintaining the status quo. Haider states:

“In its contemporary ideological form, rather than its initial form as a theorization of a revolutionary political practice, identity politics is an individualist method. It is based on the individual's demand for recognition, and it takes that individual's identity as its starting point. It takes this

identity for granted and suppresses the fact that all identities are socially constructed. And because all of us necessarily have an identity that is different from everyone else's, it undermines the possibility of collective self organization. The framework of identity reduces politics to who you are as an individual and to gaining recognition as an individual, rather than your membership in a collectivity and the collective struggle against an oppressive social structure. As a result, identity politics paradoxically ends up reinforcing the very norms it set out to criticize.”

I think it's important to think of “collective self organization” in this moment of collective self isolation. My interpretation of Haider's critique of identity politics (which was first introduced into political discourse by the Combahee River Collective, a group of black lesbian militants) is that it is not of the idea of identity politics itself but the way it is weaponized by the ruling class that has changed. Now more than ever we need to expand our identity positions as a form of collective resistance to meet at the intersections of our struggles. Here, we rely heavily on white privileged folks to actively acknowledge and work to dismantle

their privilege in service to others. White, rural, poor working class people need to understand the intersections of our own struggles and embrace the softness of their vulnerability to this power. Haider goes on to say:

“... by coding demands that come from marginal or subordinate groups as identity politics, the white male identity is enshrined with the status of neutral, general, and universal. We know that this is false -- in fact, there is a white identity politics, a white nationalism --- and, as we shall see, whiteness is a prototypical form of racial ideology itself. Anti racist struggles like those of CRC reveal the false universality of this hegemonic identity.”

In our collective self isolations we need radical forms of resistance that take action into our own hands against the failure of our government. Since so much wealth has been occupied by white cisgender men, it is those people who need to be the most radical now in the dismantling of unquestioned myths of privilege. We need to acknowledge the fact that white male identity’s “neutral, general, and universal” status is socially constructed. Acknowledging this is a form of

radical vulnerability (deleted) for many white cisgender men. In this economic shutdown the true power and wealth lies with the poor and working class, which is constructed by a massive majority of every identity formation. Our power lies in our collective solidarity with poor and working class people across all of our identities, and this idea for many is truly radical.

As a white person myself, and as many readers of GenderFail are white, we need to work in organizing with working class white people to fight against our capitalist system. Can our collective self isolations be weaponized as a collective strike, to not go back to work until our demands are met? Even if the virus subsides, we can refuse to go to work until our demands are met, until the government promises to enact universal healthcare, paid sick leave for all people, a livable wage, etc. Can we share resources during this time so that no one is left hungry, homeless or sick, so that people have access to mental health care? Can we be radically transparent about the resources we have and share them until our demands are met? Can those cisgender white men working on Wall Street, to celebrities who are celebrated for their massive wealth, redistribute their wealth to those in need? In this strike we

must demand for a redistribution of wealth, even from those we idolize, and build up from there.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that we have the power to shut down the economy, and with that we have the power to demand much more. When we all join this fight together and refuse to be divided by those who look to weaponize our differences against us, we win. Our forms of resistance come from our individual and collective identities. Let this drive us through our self isolation, or in the case of medical workers, grocery clerks and other essential workers fighting on the front lines, be what makes this all worth the death, pain and struggles many are facing.

For many right now all we can do is isolate, care and most importantly refuse. Refusal is the most powerful weapon we have to incite change. We are on the verge of either a capitalist dystopia, or a world that will look radically different on the other side. Thus I hope this time reawakens how powerful we are and how much agency we have to demand what we need to survive, thrive and live on. Let us weaponize our collective self isolations, be it in working

from home or on the front lines of the pandemic.

A TOUCH THAT YOU CAN REALLY FEELLLL

Looking through all my tagged photos of GenderFail over the last few years I noticed how many photos included people holding books with their hands. In writing this in April 2020, when touch has become such a dangerous action, I find myself longing for something that I normally take for granted. Publishing, unlike many art forms, is a tactile practice in which touch is an essential aspect of the art itself. In the creation of our books I end up touching every page of every book. In this time of self isolation, I collected all the tagged photos of people touching our books as a reminder of the intimacy that still exists between audience and the maker. I find that these photos reflect so much of what I love about self publishing and the community of people I've met through this practice.

This essay was originally written in April 2020.

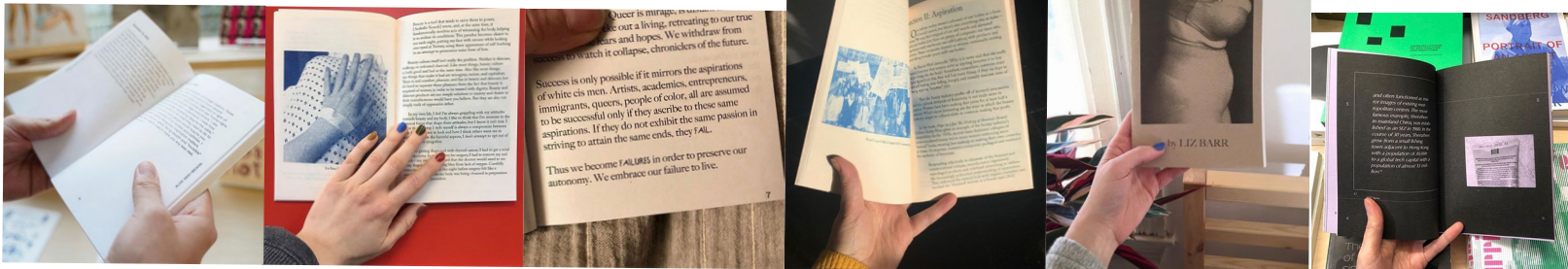


Printed objects become a powerful tool that shows a new kind of intimacy. To get us through our isolation we can turn to the printed pages of our books to escape the current moment and get lost in the pages. Here I do mean to overly romanticize this action, leaning closely to the cliché that is invoked in writing. At this moment, I find clichés to be powerful in the reworking of our lives. Let's get lost in our books and reinforce our intimate moments within the printed pages.

I think about a song that I use to love by the band Bright Eyes when I was a teenager. I was reluctant to bring this up as it screams cliché, but here I embrace this and the words that are resonating with me right now. I feel like it crystallizes this moment for many during our isolation.

Wishing this could last
 But knowing that it can't
 And soon you will leave
 And I will be on the floor
 Watching the TV, trying hard
 to find a reason to move
 I'm frozen in one place,
 staring at the screen
 Listening to the rain
 falling on the street
 Some days go on too long
 And no one can hang out tonight
 Here, where the carpet
 is cool and soft
 Underneath the clock I feel
 my weary heart is put to rest
 You gather around your friends
 The connection that you feel when the
 night has not yet died
 You are new with

Touch, lying on the floor



a promise of a love
 You will probably never find
 A touch that you can really feel
 The brokenness inside as hope
 and less collide
 Now nothing is real
 You are new and near now
 To someone you used to love
 when you were young
 When all was gold
 and you two touched
 And felt the flutter
 underneath your skin
 You stood in glowing rooms
 The light dripping from both of you
 And nothing since
 has felt as radiant or real
 And there is nothing more I want than
 just one night
 That's free of doubt and sadness

One night that I can really feel

Right now I think we all long for a
 “touch that you can really feel”. I don’t
 mean for this song, written by a teenage
 Conor Oberst, to speak for the horror of
 this moment in its entirety, but I want it
 to help illustrate these quiet, touchless
 moments at home. I feel for thoses who
 live alone and are longing for touch,
 or for those who long to touch a loved
 one, a friend or any warm body. Yet we
 can turn to the pages of our books, we
 can spend extra time turning each page,
 letting our hands feel the softness of
 the paper. We can rub it against our
 faces, bring the books up to our bodies,
 and pretend they are much more than
 books. We can let ourselves linger on
 the words that we are reading, rubbing
 our hand across each sentence to
 really feel the words we are



internalizing. Our books can lay beside us as we sleep and dream, and be a stand in for the bodies we miss and cannot feel.

As a publisher, my dream is for my books to have this type of impact on each person that holds, touches and interacts with my work. Most of the books I create are handmade, soft and reek of the imperfections of a hand made object. the book that you are holding is one example of this soft handmade object invoking these important aspects of publishing that i wish my books to invoke. This object is intimate in the way I cherish. Like this moment, it's imperfect, unideal but nonetheless honest in what it is.

Touch this object, let this book be a disencharnted stand-in for the things you wish you could touch in the moment.

Touch whatever you can in this moment, let whatever you cantouch have an effect on you. Dream of the future touches you will have, and be grateful for everything you have touched in the past. Let yourself touch with your eyes, letting the memory of a distant touch fill your body. Feel okay with the inadequacy of thistouch, and focus on touching through your love, longing and support. Touch in a way that we can really feel through our actions, words and care.



EMPATHIC INTIMACIES: A TOUCH THAT YOU CAN REALLY FEELLLL

This essay (written in late march/early april 2022), is the 2nd version of the previous essay. Written extacy two years apart, these two essays act as a timeline between two points in this ongoing pandemic.

The other day I looked again at all my tagged photos of GenderFail over the last few years and noticed how many photos included folks holding up books with their hands. These photos, of friends and strangers alike, holding books that I created with my own hands, became so powerful in the context of my place as an artist in these moments of crisis. These photos filled me with so much joy and reminded me how important touch is to what I do as an artist, publisher and writer. Publishing, unlike many art forms, is such a tactile practice. Through the GenderFail project I often end up touching each page of every book through printing, collating, binding and cutting. My hands end up interacting with each book in so many different ways. As a small self publisher, this intimate action of touch is something that can never be replicated through

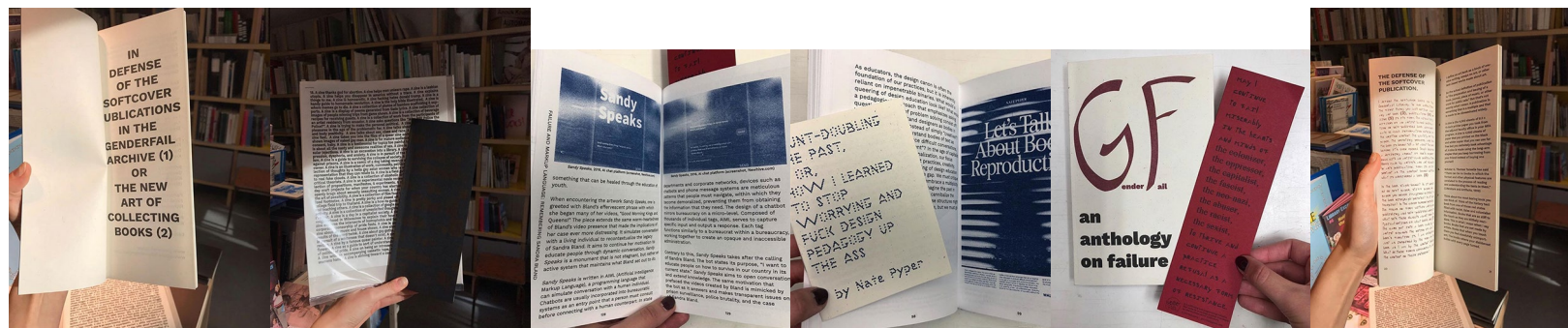


hyper-capitalist art publishing. Labor and touch is how we envision anti-capitalist art making throughout the pandemic.

This essay is a 2nd draft (from April 2020 when the first version was written), a second reflection, on touch and publishing during this elongated pandemic. Back in these early days of the pandemic, touch had become such a dangerous action, especially living in New York City during the virus' first wave. At the time it was still unknown how covid was actually transmitted. So many New Yorkers had such a distrust of touch, it became a dangerous action. Every surface was suspect, every sensation was filled with both guilt and fear. During that time, and still today

(April 2022), I find myself longing for pre covid-19 touch, a thing that we all took for granted.

I was reminded of my place as a small publisher during times of crisis. The pandemic genuinely reinforced my connection to the tangible action of bookmaking. In two years I collected over 150 images of the tagged photos of people touching books I've published, many with my own hands. These photos are a reminder of the intimate action of small publishing, one that exists in contrast to the inaccessibility of many art objects in the contemporary art world. As a maker of objects that are made to be touched, carried, lived with and hopefully cherished, these photos are an important reminder of why I make the



type of work I do and the community of people I've met through this practice. Those photos created and posted by others show the impact that accessible affordable handmade objects can have on us during times of isolation, quarantine and instability.

Printed objects become such a powerful tool in a new kind of intimacy. A type of intimacy that replaces many of the pleasures we are denied during the last two years. The surface of each book, as we turn and touch, as we read and reflect on these objects, can help us to escape the current moment and get lost in our relationship with these objects. Here, I mean to overly romanticize this action, to let the self be lost in the clichéd (and maybe unattainable) intimacy that we crave and seek in our lives. In these

moments, I find clichés to be powerful in the reworking of our lives. Let's get lost in books and reinforce our connection to intimate moments with the non-human soft pages of an artist made printed object.

Right now I think we all long for a "touch that you can really feel," not just during the pandemic but at all those times when we feel the most distance from others and ourselves. I feel for those who live alone, whose depression and anxiety has developed or gotten worse during the pandemic, who are longing for that touch that they can really feel, or for those who long to touch a loved one, a friend or anyone they lost during the last two years.

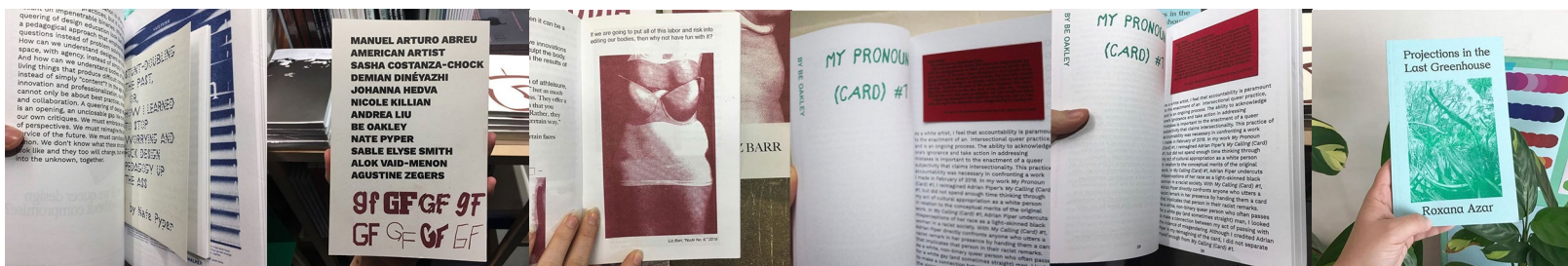


BOOKS ARE BODIES

Books, in many ways, stand in for bodies, for contact. Spend extra time turning each page, letting your hands feel the softness of the paper. Rub it against your face, bring the books up to your body, and pretend they are much more than books. We can let ourselves sense the words that we are reading, rubbing our hand across each sentence to really feel the words we are internalizing. Our books can lay beside us as we sleep and dream, they accompany us when we leave our homes, and be a stand-in for the bodies we wish we could touch in this moment. As a publisher (and as an artist), my dream is for my books to have this type of impact on each person that holds, touches and interacts with my work. Most of the books I create are handmade, soft and reek of the imperfections of a hand made

labor, love and passion.

Books, like bodies, can hold the memories of human contact through torn pages, marks, spills or the general appearance of being worn down (as many of us feel during this moment ourselves). These “imperfections” imply so many unknowable intimate acts between bodies and books. Embrace these acts during times of isolation and cherish them for what they are and what they help you envision in a world in crisis. Touch whatever you can at this moment, let whatever you touch have an effect on you. Dream of the future touches you will have, and be grateful for everything you have touched in the past. Let yourself touch with your eyes, using the memory of past intimacies to fill your body. Feel okay with the inadequacy of this touch, and focus on



touching through your love, longing and support. Touch in a way that you can really feel through your actions, words and care.

This 2nd version, written two years after the first draft, speaks to the insurmountable time that has passed during this crisis. Since April 2020 many people have been able to touch again, to be intimate with others to seemingly resume life again, for many like picking back up after a long trip away from home. Many have chosen to race back into the world without giving themselves the time and space necessary for fully dealing with the weight of this crisis. I think of those who can't return to life as it was before due to the inaction of our governments during this crisis, of the millions and millions who have not had access to not even one vaccine dose (when many

in the United States have had three). I think of the immunocompromised who may not be able to fully return to the world as we knew it due to variant after variant still plaguing the globe. I think of those (like myself) whose mental health has deteriorated and whose agoraphobia accompanies and abets this forced isolation. For many of us, we have always sought the alternative forms of intimacy that can be found in the pages of a book.

It's fitting that the Antonyms to intimacy are: ignorance, ignoring, inexperience, unfamiliarity... These seem pertinent to the actions of many who look to resume life at any cost. Intimacy often feels like a personal action, one that is dictated by our own needs over the needs of others. With this, we must seek intimacies that center the care of others as much as



the care of ourselves. Through intimacy we can find ways not to just navigate the future of the pandemic with more empathy but find ways of building a coalition through the various crises that face us (capitalism, environmental collapse, white supremacy, etc). Small publishing, through the intimates of its creation, dissemination and interaction with others, is one way I enact these. I hope others can enact Empathic Intimacies in your own work, life and community in times of never ending crisis.



MANIFESTO, PROFIT-FOR- SURVIVAL

When we say “PROFIT” (in the NON-FOR-PROFIT to FOR-PROFIT spectrum) what do we mean? As a person trying to live off the “PROFIT” they generate from their work, profit is essential to my livelihood and my ability to continue producing work that I am passionate about. So to say that I am FOR-PROFIT does not yet speak to the complexities of a non-capitalist small publishing project. The word “PROFIT” without any other context is a simplification, it can’t speak to the complexities of what making profit means for my life, my work and my future. GenderFail is not NON-FOR-PROFIT but PROFIT-FOR-SURVIVAL, or PROFIT-TO-CONTINUE-OUR-WORK-WITHOUT-OTHER-MEANS-OF-CAPITAL -- and most importantly to make money for the people I publish, to create PROFIT-FOR-LABOR. Defining the means of NON-EXPLOITATIVE-PROFIT, through describing how our work is created, who is being paid and the ethics behind its creation, is essential when trying to define the terms of any engagement with “PROFIT.”

The conversation around making profit from books, zines and other disseminated objects hits a wall because we live in a capitalist system in which the norm is: there is no money in books. Why are we perpetuating this idea so strongly? When did we accept that there is no money in books (much less in our art and in creative practice in general)? Who profits from this rhetoric? Why aren't we talking about ways to actually make money from printed matter? How can we instead talk about finding ways to make ~~PROFIT~~ enough to meet our needs as book producers and laborers, as well as the needs of our creative projects? Everytime I hear this argument from someone I want to know: 1. where their own livelihood comes from; 2. their actual relationship to capitalism; 3. why they feel the need to say and perpetuate this.

We live in a failed capitalist state. There is functionally no ongoing and sustaining funding for the creative labor of non-white, non-cis, non-ableist, non-heterosexual, non-documented peoples. This fact is painfully obvious to those who do not have access to resources that

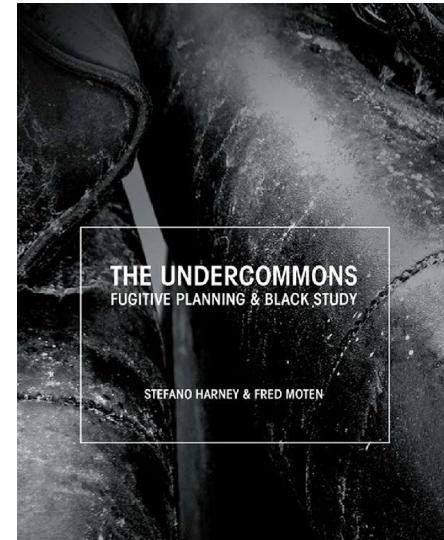
provide for their basic needs and their practice. Meanwhile massive amounts of money from ~~GROSS-PROFIT~~, ~~PROFIT-FROM-EXPLOITATION~~ and often ~~PROFIT-FROM-DEATH~~... receive government and institutional support. In this, ~~PROFIT-IS-POLITICAL~~. This failed ethno-capitalist state perpetuates ~~TRICKLE-DOWN-PROFIT~~, which is merely a band aid holding together the failed state. This kind of profit directly affects us, exploits us, harms us and our chosen and given families. We make use of mutual aid, reparations (**1: I want to place an emphasis on profit-for-reparations and profit-for-investment (or donation). All white folks should be donating part of their profit to black-lead organizations or making direct payments to black folks. My use of investment rather than donation is directly influenced by Activation Residency.**), gofundmes, investments in non-governmental institutions to make ends meet -- and these are in turn suppressed, dismantled, or ~~CONTRIVED-FOR-PROFIT~~.

PROFIT-AND-DEBT

Those we do not have access to **PROFIT**, who are not allowed an easy way to **PROFIT**, are in **DEBT**. More broadly, we are in **DEBT** to colonialism; we are in **DEBT** to capitalism; we are in **DEBT** to hetreosexuality; we are in **DEBT** to ableism. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney state in Undercommons Fugitive Planning & Black Study this “**DEBT** cannot be forgiven, it can only be forgotten to be remembered again.”

In any attempt to redefine **PROFIT** we must understand debt. **DEBT** can't ever be repaid, nor should it. This **DEBT** is the weight put on to us without our consent. **DEBTS** that have been established before we were born, that are perpetuated by the commons, the occupied land and stolen lands where white hetreosexuality is repeated over and over and falsely held up as universal. This **DEBT** is not our own, but placed upon us against our will. These **DEBTS** are lived by many of us, but they do not define us or our worth outside of an economic system.

The importance of Reparations given to



black and indigenous folks is paramount when talking about **DEBT**. As white people our access to **PROFIT** is more immediate due to our privilege, by way of easy access to **PROFIT-MAKING-ACTIVITIES**, access to public space (2: See Sara Ahmed and their text **A Phenomenology of Whiteness** for more detailed information about public space and whiteness.), generational wealth, housing, and for those who are cisgender and hetetrosexual, hetronormativity. **PROFIT-WITH-REPARATIONS** must be a central focus for the redistribution of wealth and resources.

QUESTIONS- PROFIT-FOR-SURVIVAL

HOW AM I RECEIVING PROFIT? HOW MUCH MORE PROFIT
DO I NEED TO LIVE AND SAVE FOR THE FUTURE? DO
I HAVE ACCESS TO A GROSS AMOUNT OF PROFIT?

HOW CAN THIS PROFIT BE SHARED IF I HAVE
PROFITED ENOUGH?

HOW DOES MY ABILITY TO MAKE (OR
NOT MAKE) PROFIT RELY ON MY ECONOMIC, SOCIAL,
RACIAL, GENDERED OR LEGAL PRIVILEGE IN SOCIETY?
HOW MUCH IS MY PROFIT TIED TO THESE PRIVILEGES?

HOW CAN WE THINK ABOUT PROFIT OUTSIDE OF
A CAPITALIST DEFINITION, WHILE ALSO UNDERSTANDING
THE REAL PROBLEM OF NEEDING TO MAKE MONEY TO
"LIVE" IN OUR CAPITALIST SOCIETY?

WHAT AMOUNT OF MY PROFIT AM I REDISTRIBUTING
TO OTHERS? IF I AM WHITE, WHAT IS MY REPARATIONS
PLAN?

WHO IN MY COMMUNITY LACKS PROFIT? HOW CAN I
WORK TOWARDS DISTRIBUTING PROFIT TO THIS
PERSON/PROJECT NOW?

HOW CAN I BE ANTI-CAPITALIST BUT ALSO PROVIDE
PROFIT TO THOSE IN DIRE NEED? OR AS A PERSON
IN DIRE NEED HOW CAN I ACCESS PROFIT NOW?

PROFIT-FROM- CREATIVE-LABOR

We must create descriptions of publishing and artistic practice (3: As an artist and publisher I am speaking from this frame of reference, but I feel this analysis could be done with other forms of working class and lower-middle class work.) that actively acknowledge PROFIT in the context of our material well being. Artists, writers, designers and other creative laborers (especially those who are white, cisgendered and able-bodied) who have found ways to make PROFIT through their work need to be transparent about the process of generating and sustaining PROFIT within a capitalist system. They need to actively distribute resources and knowledge to those seeking to make PROFIT-FOR-LABOR. More importantly, we need to prioritize black folks, indigenous folks, trans and non-binary folks, undocumented folks, to normalize access to not just PROFIT-FOR-SURVIVAL but PROFIT-FOR-FUTURES. In this I do mean PROFIT in a capitalist sense, but also in the sense of how PROFIT can help create non-capitalist futures. This is not utopic,

rather it is about facing the reality of living within a colonialist capitalist racist society. We are trying to find ways to make money and redistribute it to those who are barely hanging on, who are exploited and underpaid and can't afford to work for free.

Many of us put so much labor into our artistic and publishing projects and also simultaneously have to hold down part and full time jobs. (4: I personally don't have the mental or physical health to hold down another job outside of GenderFail. When I have done this in the past it has led to burnout and almost caused me to stop my creative work.) We must actively work towards an artistic culture in which PROFIT and rest become simultaneous. This is not an institutional FORM-OF-PROFIT, because it centers us rather than institutional labor. PROFIT that is made from printed matter, from disseminated media and ideas, from small but powerful distribution channels; PROFIT that is made from personal connections, from our friends, our expanded communities; PROFIT that stays in our communities, in our neighborhoods, that is not exported to those who wish to see us quit, suffer and die.

PROFIT-AND-ANTI-CAPITALISM

Having access to PROFIT from wealthy arts institutions, business and people must not lead us to become content or complacent. This PROFIT must be redistributed, reinvested and shared with other artists. Having access to PROFIT is a means to an end, because the end, ultimately, is a society free from capitalism. We must support an anti-capitalist system that serves the needs of all, regardless of sex, gender class, race, ability and other attributes that set up to see us fail in capitalism. PROFIT-FOR-SURVIVAL is not utopian, but calling for more focused support of practicing artists in a failing economic system.

I call for non-monetary forms of PROFIT in our daily lives, the types of profit that come from having surplus capital. We must be able to afford rest, relaxation, space and time, in our distance from capitalism. PROFIT made from non-normative forms of capital or non-

THOSE WHO BENEFIT
MOST FROM OUR
CAPITALISM DO NOT WANT
THOSE OF US WHO ARE
ANTI-CAPITALIST TO HAVE
ACCESS TO PROFIT. OUR
PROFIT BECOMES
DISTRIBUTIVE. OUR PROFIT
IS UNCOOPERATIVE.

WHITE CISGENDER STRAIGHT
ABLE BODIED WHITE MEN
IN THE ART, DESIGN AND
CREATIVE FIELDS WHO
HAVE ACCESS TO GROSS
AMOUNTS OF PROFIT NEED
TO REDISTRIBUTE PART OF
THEIR PROFIT IMMEDIATELY.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF
YOUR PROFIT DO YOU
REDISTRIBUTE? DO YOU
HAVE A REPARATIONS PLAN?

PRODUCTIVE-FORMS-OF-PROFIT that can't be bought, sold and hoarded, that is shared, universally accessed and equitable; PROFIT that includes love, friendship, trust, empathy and other forms of care that money cannot buy. PROFIT outside capitalism can be boundless, beautiful, freeing and non-oppressive.

We want to redefine this word PROFIT, make its meaning within capitalism slippery, ambiguous, a failure. When we say that GenderFail generates profit we mean it in this sense, that it is intended to create a community, to support the real lives of other people. Everyone deserves access to PROFIT, to have all essentials such as housing, healthcare, food etc. already provided, regardless of race, gender, political class and whatever other exploitative definitions. This is the true profit GenderFail engages in.

INVESTMENTS IN
BLACK, INDIGENOUS,
UNDOCUMENTED,
DISABLED, LATINX, QUEER,
NON-BINARY, TRANS,
MUSLIM, INCARCERATED,
LOW-INCOME REFUGEE
PEOPLE NOW!

PROFIT FOR
BLACK, INDIGENOUS,
UNDOCUMENTED,
DISABLED, LATINX, QUEER,
NON-BINARY, TRANS,
MUSLIM, INCARCERATED,
LOW-INCOME REFUGEE
PEOPLE NOW!

NOTES ON ANTI- CAPITALIST SOLIDARITY: AN ESSAY FOR THE WORKING CLASS ARTIST

I can't count the number of times I have been on a panel, read a critical theory text or visited an exhibition where conversations on capitalism are discussed, questioned, critiqued and examined. In these kinds of conversations I always look at the inherent contradictions that exist in **ANTI-CAPITALIST** cultural explorations. There is an inherent irony to holding conversations critical of capitalism within exhibitions, programs, panels, and so on that are actually presented by museums and institutions whose funding depends on market capitalism to exist. Are these repetitive conversations occurring within these institutions really enough to overcome the deep delusion of "radical" programming? How far do our ethics and morals actually go when faced with the reality of "making it"?

Obviously to truly be **ANTI-CAPITALIST** we must actively resist museums and institutions funded by billionaires **!**

that hardly work to support the artists struggling to live and make work. In this I ask:

Can you truly be anti-capitalist while actively involved in the hyper capitalist art market? Can you truly be an **ANTI-CAPITALIST** artist when most prospective collectors and buyers of your work make money from businesses that **PROFIT-FROM-DEATH**? Can you truly be an **ANTI-CAPITALIST** designer when your work is helping to expand market capitalism and worker exploitation? Can you truly be an **ANTI-CAPITALIST** curator when your radical vision is always contained within the context of a museum's oppressive structures?

These questions are not asked often enough in contemporary art. Who benefits from exploring, questioning and confronting the obvious connections between **CAPITALISM** and contemporary art but not acting on it? How are we,

even as low income, middle class or underpaid artists, designers, curators, writers etc...complacent and oppressed by these same systems? How critical can we truly be while we are entangled in problematic art institutions? These questions are ones we ask often but never want to answer or explore due to the devastating answers they may expose in ourselves and our work³. My hope is that this essay helps everyone who dreams of an anti-capitalist world to explore their connection to capitalism in the hope that real **ANTI-CAPITALIST** community-building can take place, to find ways to foster a more equitable and worker-focused art community.

CLASS SOLIDARITY IN THE ART WORLD

Many working class and low income designers, artists, writers etc. are underpaid, overworked and constantly stuck in the loop of working one underpaid job after another. In this we must find strength, solidarity and pride in our positions as lower income people. Often, or at least in my experience, the art world was presented to me at a young age as glamorous, privileged and in close proximity with the upper class⁴.

In moving towards an **ANTI-CAPITALIST** art world it's paramount for us to identify and find agency in our positions as low and middle class people. Those of us who are employed through our creative talents need to find solidarity with non-creative workers including factory workers, gig employees and other working class people. We must not think of our profession as any more important than

other workers fighting for more equitable working conditions. We must replace wealth for ethics, glamor for pride, privileged access for transparency, as the aspirational goals of artists.

It is important for those who do not come from generational wealth to take pride in a working class identity, especially those who are artists and/or art institutional workers. Being working class is beautiful, it is an identity steeped in the history of resistance, of knowing the pleasures and horrors of living paycheck to paycheck, day to day or minute to minute. Let us most importantly glamorize being working class as an important act of refusal of the hyper capitalist art market. We are fooled into thinking we can attain future success and the attendant benefits of the upper class (that only less than 1% of artists, designers and writers actually enjoy). But we need to focus on the joy of the type of work we do for its own sake, and

take pride in a strong ethical communism that drives how and where we make our money.

For many successful artists, their work is purchased and owned by Millionaires and Billionaires⁵, the people who make their money in ways that are problematic and in many cases form the oppression of low income people⁶. Within capitalism, we wrongly associate growth and overproduction as a sign of success; we bow to the endless needs of the rich needing to hide their excessive wealth. Artists are even encouraged to become factories of their own, employing a team of factory workers to create their work for often low wages. Many of the artists we admire in the contemporary art world willingly support the profiteering of billionaires and corporations who buy art merely as a way of increasing their wealth portfolio⁷. Why do so many artists, designers and low wage workers still embrace this system of exploitation with

little to no action to actually dismantle the contemporary art world at large? Are ethics becoming so weak in the face of the long overdue success, social capital, access and privilege that being an elite artist ostensibly entails? Are we so compromised by the false promise of success that we have become numb to the exploitation we endure for the off chance of being in a place to exploit others ourselves? If we think about it long enough, would we actually want to be in this position? And if not, what can we do to fight back?

AGAINST GROWTH TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

We are often told that growth, in our lives and our work, is paramount. Growth, for oneself, in a non-capitalistic sense, is important and beautiful. Growth in terms of capitalistic ambitions is often dangerous, exploitative and colonist. We are raised to look at growth in our jobs, our work is a way of bettering ourselves. But is this really true? In capitalism, sustainability, durability and longevity are “bad” for business. In a world where climate change and the extraction of resources are killing us, sustainability is paramount for the future of our world.

WHEN DOES THE GROWTH
OF OUR WORK AND PRACTICE
BECOME BLOATED, EXCESSIVE
AND LIMITING FOR OTHERS
TRYING TO ~~JUST~~ MAKE IT?
HOW CAN WE LOOK GROWTH
IN THE FACE AND REALIZE
THAT IT'S UNNEEDED OR
EXCESSIVE? HOW CAN WE
MAKE SUSTAINABILITY MORE
APPEALING THAN GROWTH?
HOW CAN WE FIND WAYS TO
EXPAND OUR WORK WITHOUT
OVERTAKING SPACE FOR
OTHERS?

These are many of the questions
I ask myself and don't quite have
the answers to.

BREAKING WITH CAPITALISM: IDENTITY POLITICS AND WORKING CLASS SOLIDARITY

In the early months of the pandemic, many low income and working class people were given larger than normal unemployment checks due to a \$600 per week increase. During this time many people were able to focus on organizing and activism due to the freedom of being on unemployment and having a livable wage allowed. This is not to say that folks were not still in an uncomfortable and unideal situation; but let this be an example of how money created time for radical change and full time activism to happen. Access to higher than normal unemployment helped to strengthen and propel the Black Lives Matter movement to mass mobilization. This time felt like

an example of an unintended example of Universal Basic Income. This time period was radical and world changing allowing low-income and middle class people to live without needing to compromise their ethics for a life under capitalist exploration.

Without access to capital or any form of profit, people don't have the time or energy to be fully **ANTI-CAPITALIST**. Many of us who are critical of capitalism live and work with the contradiction of knowing we must make money to survive in the current system. Working class and low income people need enough profit to have access to free time. How can we force those who have wealth and privilege to redistribute this wealth now? How can we get wealthy museum directors to cut their salaries so that other museum staff can be paid living and profitable wages? Then we can address how we can uplift those who are already working towards making an anti-

capitalist world happen.

The art world has never truly supported poor and working-class people⁹.

Although it's an improvement that some of those who have not generally had access to the high art market are now able to find some success in this system, I feel that not enough is being done to show solidarity for those who do not have this success. When artists who have become famous, respected, canonized, they must be more vocal in their critiques of the system that also provides them with so much comfort. To those who have reached this level of success¹⁰, through social and actual capital, what is their role in helping to change the system from inside this privileged purview¹¹?

Although I can't and don't speak for those who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, Undocumented, Asian, Pacific Islander and other non-white peoples, I want to stress the importance of being critical of capitalism regardless of your identity

or racial makeup, especially when one has achieved a level of success that many have not. I understand that so many non-white people have not had the ability to create wealth resources and capital for themselves, and that once one reaches a certain level of success it doesn't seem fair for people to call for changes towards an **ANTI-CAPITALIST** and **POST-CAPITALIST** world¹². This is why identity politics are often a tool for white, wealthy and powerful people to imitate progress in the pursuit of success. I believe it's necessary to bring this issue to the forefront, hopefully for others to explore from their own unique non-white perspectives. It's important that our work, our politics, our access to profit is constantly in negotiation with our ethics. Artists, designers, writers, curators, museum directors, arts librarians and other people working in the vast creative industries need to show solidarity with working class people. We need to continue advocating for an

arts community that does not mimic the hyper capitalistic system that surrounds and engulfs any radicality we claim to possess.

We must advocate for things such as the abolition of unpaid internships, the continued fight for unionized labor for all (at art institutions, museums, design studios, adjunct and part-time art professors, etc) and the abolition of unreasonable high salaries by any upper level museum and institution staff. We must also resist the white cis gender male domination of fields such as graphic design, upper level museum administration, and professors in higher education. We need to fight off the over production, underpaid labor and gross profit that runs unchallenged in the art world. **13**

We need to demand and reinforce the balance between our work, life, and communal being in the world at large **14.**

It's important to see fellow coworkers, artists and designers as allies in the process of a new world away from capitalism. We need to do more than bite the hand that feeds us. We need to take a sharp object and cut the whole thing off.

ANTI-CAPITALIST PEDAGOGY?

In arts education there is little to no talk about finding ways to actually make money and live as an artist. Art schools feed us the false dream of becoming one of the lucky few that make a living off their creative work as soon as we graduate. Most (but not all) artists have at least a BFA or MFA, although there are no requirements to having these certifications. The education system moves along while many students are taking on lifelong debt in the hopes of obtaining access to the needle in the haystack of living debt free. Class consciousness often seems to be left out of the pedagogical curriculums to make room for this false sense of artistic purity. While students are taking on

PEDAGOGY FOR LOW WAGE WORKERS?

insurmountable debt, they are able to live the “dream” of making work without the burden of finding a work-life balance. Although it is wonderful for students to be able to focus on their work without needing to actively worry about their survival (if they are lucky), this gives a false sense of what life is actually like post-grad¹⁵. In my experience the individual economic experiences of students are never considered in the larger context of their work. Every student is considered to be making work without the burden of debt crippling chances of a liveable economic future as an artist. But this is highly unrealistic and a disservice to students regardless of their wealth privilege.

Our current higher educational system is failing students and not helping to foster a tangible lifelong availability to pursue their practice while also making a livable wage. How can we work with students to find ways of making money

through their practices without needing to bend fully to the will of the art market? This starts with the artists who are meeting students in the classroom and those we invite to work with students. When professors are just showing artists deeply involved with the art market selling their works for millions of dollars, is this in service to our students? We must normalize asking artists how and where they make money, to be completely transparent about their financial journeys.

I believe it's necessary for professors, adjunct and full time alike, to be transparent in the ways they themselves make a living, to demystify the economic and financial lives of artists. We need to share our economic and personal journeys, be transparent about our debt and access to profit, and help to bridge the seemingly endless gap between meaningless labor and the often unattainable goal of being a practicing artist, writer and designer **16**. It's

necessary to foster an openness through our pedagogy to talk about class, race and able-bodied biases. To understand how this affects students in our current hyper capitalist contemporary art culture, and most importantly, help to pave a way toward making a liveable wage.

Often artists take teaching jobs to offset the lack of money made in their own practices, mimicking generation after generation of art pedagogy that favors the wealthy and privileged. In this, I think about the expression "those who can, do: those who can't, teach" as actually meaning "those with privilege, do, those without, teach." Meanwhile, teaching adjuncts do not even make liveage wages, adding insult to injury throughout this entire cycle **17**. I can't blame the adjuncts who teach for a paycheck rather than a love of teaching. Yet this endless cycle of debt-creation and exploitation is long overdue for an economic collapse, and part of me feels this is what we need to

rebuild our institutions in a more fair way.

Should it be a rule of thumb to never sell an artwork if you couldn't afford to buy it yourself? What does it mean when we are encouraging students to make work that they might never be able to afford. Aren't we just pandering to the rich, to those with access, instead of working for our own communities? Personally, as an artist who makes books, prints and other editioned and disseminated media it's easy for me to make this "Call to Complaint¹⁸" but at a certain point you need to decide who you make work for.

1. I think of the numerous museums that until recently proudly displayed the Sackler name, and the millions in blood money these institutions gladly accepted under political pressure. In a way, I feel these relationships should not be "erased" from gallery walls, rather museums such as Tate Modern, The Met and others should be required to help fund those still suffering from the profit-from-death of the Sackler family.
2. Profit-From-Death indicates those modes of capitalism that rely on literally taking human lives to make money.
3. In this, I don't want to shame anyone for their participation in these systems. Many are just trying to survive and work in fields that align with their dreams, ambitions and joys. Thus we must reflect and investigate the ways we are both victims and accomplices of this system and find ways to move towards an anti-capitalist art world.
4. This of course is not the case for a majority of those employed in the creative world who work for and with their community to better the world through their work..
5. I want to assert that this is common knowledge in the art world. Who are the type of people who can afford million dollar plus artworks?
6. One of the many examples is that of Warren Kandors, who quit over his company's ties to tear gas and other law enforcement equipment. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/arts/whitney-warren-kandors-resigns.html>
7. These are terms that are used and defined in my essay Manifesto, Profit-For-Survival.

8. I wonder what this looks like? Is it possible? Isn't the irony that one needs money and resources to fully be anti-capitalist?

9. Again, I feel this is common knowledge and something that is well known by those who are struggling to exist as artists, curators, writers, etc.

10. I know there are tons of artists who give back, support and uplift younger artists. The generally feeling talking to artists feels as if the lack of resources provided by those artists who have so much resources that could be lifechanging for up and coming artists, designers, writers etc. If you are reading this and have means please share if you don't already, or encourage those with privilege to support.

11. Here I am speaking to artists who are not white cisgender men, who reach levels of financial stability and access to the art market, knowing that they have not previously been able to reach and live at this level of access for most of history. When these artists reach levels of success that indirectly or directly help to promote a system that disinfrazizes poor and working class people, how fair is it to ask them to call in a system that has exploited them for so long. Is this how capitalism traps us at the dream of this access? How can we make this dream less appealing?

12. Whose role is it to lead and enact these changes?

13. The founder of the trans-owned jewelry line Automic Golds has stated that they are not paid more than x2 their lowest page employee and that their minimum starting wage is \$25 an hour. This is one example of how

salaries for museums, galleries, design studios and other large (and small) institutions might begin. As artists, we must demand a tightening of wages, from the lowest paid employee to the highest. The wage disparity must be collapsed in every single field. Gross profit must be eliminated in service of the working and lower class. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CM9-RrOHqn9/>

14. Automic Gold, like other companies, has also stated: "We have implemented a 4-day workweek at the same salary as our 5-day week was. We tested it for the last 8 months and confirmed that reducing our hours creates a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce. This 4-day work model has already been implemented in a few countries in Europe and we encourage more US businesses to join us!" <https://www.instagram.com/p/CYtk5ju88Q/>

15. Low-Income and Working class people often take on large amounts of debt while also needing to work while being in school. Throughout my undergraduate experience I had to take out loans for school (leaving with 45k in debt) and also work 25 hours a week at a restaurant to pay my rent and bills.

16. Here it's important to clarify I am speaking within economic terms and to highlight that one does not need to make money from their art to be considered an artist. Thus, I also want to make it aware that for most people it's hard to maintain an art practice while also having to hold down full time or multiple part time jobs. I'm thinking mostly of the disabled and sick artists who don't have the energy to do both, that have to choose between livelihood and "pursuing their dream". As a disabled artist myself, it would be possible to have an art practice that also did not offer me a living wage.

17. In 2018 I received my MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. At the time adjuncts were only paid \$900 per credit. Currently, in 2022 adjuncts are paid only \$1200 per credit. This is because of the lack of union support by VCUarts upper management.. Currently I am employed as a Part time Lecturer at School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University and am paid \$2722 per credit and have full benefits teaching two classes. This is due to my automatic membership to a union upon hire.

18. This term was taken from the essay a call for complaint: for plague speech, for sick speech published anonymously in *GenderFail, An Anthology on Failure 2: Building on Our Failed States* published in July 2020.

**RADICAL
ACCOUNTABILITY,
RADICAL
TRANSPARENCY,
RADICAL ACTION.**

by Be Oakley

In 2020, the Washington Post published an article about Queer Appalachia, a popular instagram account that raises money for queer and transgender folks in the Appalachian area. The article focused on the lack of transparency about where the fundraising was actually going, and questioned the forms of accountability thsat white queer founder Mamone was taking. This article and these accusations tells a tail of white gaslighting for calls to accountability. This example mimics, in a small way, our government's constant failure to be a model of responsibility and sensitivity. The privilege afforded to white cisgender men in power trickles down to even our most radical spaces, such that we still encounter "leaders" who subconsciously (or consciously) try and hold on to their power even when they fail their communities. How many times have we seen white people fail to take responsibility for the consequences of their racial privilege when the moment presents itself, gaslighting and deflecting criticism instead of confronting our

failures head on?

The controversy around Queer Appalachia is just one of the many examples of white queer failure, the type of failure that hurts black and indigenengous queer and trans people. And this failure has real world consequences. This essay is not about Queer Appalachia but the article serves as the spark for this essay. When small DIY projects (run by white queer and trans people) take advantage of the trust of their supporters by misusing thousands of dollars meant for folks in need, it causes a type of failure that we assume does not exist in our radical communities. This failure is tangible and real for so many non-white people, in ways that I can only imagine but never fully feel as a non-binary white person. In this essay I want to talk about forms of accountability that can be truly radical, and talk to ways a person or group causing harm can just do better.

I want to see tangible forms of radical accountability enacted by our small, self funded and understaffed projects, so that we can stand as a model of justice and

fairness against the silence of those in bureaucratic power. Accountability is all about our reactions to our failures, the ethics of how we fail and the actions we take to address those failures. With our radical projects, especially ones that are obviously anti-capitalist and persistent in spite of the lack of institutional support, it is necessary for us to take responsibility for our failures as a radical act in itself in front of our communities, friends and chosen families. Simply giving excuses is not a radical act; gaslighting and deflecting is not radical; refusing to admit when you have caused harm is not radical. When we fall back on tactics perpetrated by white cisgender men who rape, kill and silence, we encourage true and total failures. The reality of our failures is ignored, which is itself an obvious sign of racial privilege. Given the lack of models of accountability shown by our governments, idols and sometimes our peers, it's essential to be radically transparent when we do inevitably fail.

The roles we have in creating alternative projects, collectives, and institutions that exist peripheral to capitalist, colonialist,

white supremacist society, are indeed accountable to a higher level of ethics. We must have actions and protocols for when we inevitably fail ourselves and other radical communities, especially ones that are underprivileged. We need to define how accountability can be practiced and enacted, recalculated, and practiced again, how it needs to be improved upon and bettered, again and again. When we fail we must hold ourselves to that failure, to confront this opportunity for growth. We must act as an alternative to those in power who do not seek justice or embrace guilt, who shield themselves from the consequences of their actions and seek hold on to power at all costs. We need to act on things that others might not think we need to be accountable for. We need to shed our power in order to admit failure. we need to decenter our own ambitions at the expense of others'. We need to scale back our projects when we can not fairly and ethically pay people for their labor. We need to invest our money in projects that are run by black people, indigenous people and by queer, trans and non-binary people. We need to name and not

make excuses for our actions. we need to honor the labor of others to call us in, not deflect their comments but be silent and listen.

If we are truly anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-facist, we need to work to not just a higher standard, but we must define clearly what those standards are. We need to look into our work, at our projects, at our collaborations and identify how we are failing and what immediate actions we can take to fully live up to our own ethics. This ethics must be centered on restorative justice, transparency, communication and accountability. This work will not be perfect and it will rely on reacting to our failures, our lack of knowledge, our proximity to power and privilege, to respond and react, to enrich and better ourselves and the community we serve. This work is about accepting criticism, to not make excuses, to acknowledge how we have failed and make actionable plans to address these failings.

Radical Critique

With looking towards radical accountability, we must at the same time hold ourselves to a higher standard in the way we critique others. We must not simply call out people, but most importantly call in people, projects and communities who are not holding themselves to the standard we wish to see in them. In our culture of calling out others for their actions, I see so many (white) people leveraging their own power in these “call outs” to position themselves in a dynamic that allows them to assume the high ground. The way we critique others often seems like a projection of our own failures, causing us to make examples of others as a stand in for ourselves. There needs to be a higher standard of who we critique, how we critique and how we can help to truly make others feel the consequences of their words and actions. Spaces such as social media seem to breed this type of call-out behavior, allowing anyone to critique outside their community, subject position, or racial identity.

Critique is a powerful tool that shifts the power dynamic in the process of accountability. When critique becomes a form of snatching power for your community from those outside your community, I feel you must at the same time be invested in the growth and empowerment of the community you are critiquing. When we intersect ourselves in the critique of others we must be fully invested in the process of accountability, restorative justice and rehabilitation of our society as a whole. The role of the bystander in critique has to be a position of seeing, learning and acting on what we are learning from the theatre of call out culture that social media provides. This form of radical critique relies on knowing when you should not inject yourself in critique, to be quiet, to either watch or learn from the failures of others, or indeed try to find solidarity and empathy in criticism.

We must identify the power dynamics at play in our critiques and what role we have, however apparently autonomous we might be, in the communities that we are critiquing. Most importantly,

when critique becomes a shield that you use to mask our own accountability this simply does not serve the purpose of a radical form of critique and the collective creation of a better world.

Questions For Radical Critique

What is my personal ethics of critique?

What do I think is the benefit of critique?

Does our own privilege serve the person, collective, community or institutions we are calling in (or calling out)?

Or does this just serve our own power and privileged position in this critique?

How can we leverage our privileges together to help understand each other?

What do I gain by my call to critique?

What is the labor that I am giving for this?

What am I giving up for this critique?

How might I be using this critique to put myself in a position of power?

Is this call out being leveraged for

personal power or to call in another to be accountable?

Are we shaming others as a way to leverage our own power, or are we working towards reparations?

Am I in some way a part of the community that I might be calling out?

Are we casting out failures in our own communities simply to purify ourselves of a certain degree of responsibility?

Am I projecting my own inner doubts and resignations in this situation?

What further role will I play when a person or project is exiled from my community?

How will I ensure that this harm is not caused in other communities?

And what responsibility do I hold to stop these actions?

CAN we take our ego out of our critiques in service to our society at large?

What is the role of empathy in critique?

What is the role of shame in critique?

Can this be used towards restorative justice or is shame used as a tool to hold and expand our own power?

Failure in Action: Failure towards Accountability.

We must find tangible tools for confronting failure, tools that we can use in radical forms of critique. In this we need to explore what is considered failure in hetero-normative culture, how these assumptions effect those of us peripheral to the mainstream. For example, in normative society being trans or non-binary is often a failure of the gender binary; or having an abortion is failure, being fat is a failure, not getting married and having kids is a failure, and so on. For myself and many in queer communities these are not failures but beautiful alternatives to what might be discarded in heteronormativity. What is a failure to others is normal for many of us.

For many in heteronormative culture, capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, climate denial, sexism and other forms of oppression are considered intrinsic to success. These value shifts are forever refracting and bending

my own use of “failure,” and how we react to its problematic associations in heteronormativity and its use within our own communities. We need to be very clear on what is a failure of judgement, of ethics, of ways of life that are truly oppressive. It is critical to clearly define our ethics in ways that illustrate what we will not accept within our communities. “Failure” as defined by queer, trans and non-binary people, by black queer, trans and non-binary people, by Indigenous peoples, by disabled people, necessitates higher levels of critique and accountability. To accept what many in our society see as success is to accept the death, ensure and silencing of those things we claim to hold close in our communities.

Thus we need to find tangible tools for confronting failure that we can use in real world situations. I’m asking for failure in action, failure for knowledge, for working through our failures and the failures of others: to take this knowledge and turn it into radical action. This is doing the labor of being accountable, doing the labor of harm reduction and

harm acknowledgment.

Below is an outline of questions that can help guide this process. This is an incomplete list of actions that I will keep working on in the future. This entire essay and the outline below is a window into my own ethics, my own experiences and the ways I try to act whenever I feel I have done harm to others.

A Tentative List of Tangible Tools For Failure

Harm Acknowledgment

Am I gaslighting, deflecting or making excuses for my actions?

Can I make a physical or mental list of these actions?

Can I write out and acknowledge each person to whom I have caused harm?

Can I do the selfless act of acknowledging each of these actions I perpetrated against a person or community without deflecting blame?

Can I evaluate the person who took the labor to call me in (or out)?

A Radical Transparency

Am I hiding from the harm that I caused?

What If I was the one to publicly confront

the harm I caused?

Can I let it be known what I did?

Can I let this be public, and be publicly clear about how I failed my community, my friends, my chosen or given family?

Can I say this clearly and acknowledge the harm caused?

Can I be in communication with those I hurt?

A Radical Decentering

Am I holding onto my own power when I should be stepping down?

Is it best that I step back, give my power away or disband my project/organization?

And if I do step back will I still work towards acknowledging the real work needed to accomplish restorative justice?

Will I put myself in a situation to educate myself and make a plan to restore trust?

How can I ensure that this work is done, the harm is acknowledged, by the steps taken in this process?

Redistribution/Restoration

How am I giving back?

What steps am I taking to learn?

To redistribute my wealth, to fund causes in communities supporting the people I hurt?

What is my long term or lifelong plan for redistribution or restoration of the harm caused?

What time, labor or money will I give?

How will I be held accountable for all of this?

—

This is an ongoing list a questions and merely a beginning, and I fully intend to expand on these thoughts through practice and collaboration. I encourage

other people to expand on these fragmentary ideas or create their own drawing on their own contexts.

Can we take even small steps in being accountable in everyday life, to commit to a lifetime of being accountable for our actions, or indeed the actions of our ancestors, the history of white supremacy, heteronormativity and colonialism?

Can we make steps to work towards reparations for our actions and the actions that we are directly or indirectly accountable for? How radical can we be in our actions and our empathy for others, for justice, for making the world liveable for all; to not directly or indirectly cause harm to others? Can we embrace the impossibility of perfection in these aims, to keep reacting to our failures?

THE F TERMS

I look at the strategy of 'queerness' to draw attention to a system of oppression that limits the opportunities for myself and other queer non-binary people. In my own definition of queerness, sexuality is neither the starting or ending point of what it means to be, enact and embody a queerness. I define a queer subjectivity as one that critiques all forms of oppression perpetuating the erasure of marginalized communities and ideologies in favor of those dominating society. The Queerness I look for is intersectional, crossing varying points of identification, non-identification and disidentification.¹ It is also a position that is well versed in fluidity and failure; especially when it intersects with white fragility. These F terms, fluidity and failure, are two concepts around which I frame my interest, criticality and influence from my fragmented understanding of queer theory.

This term fluidity liberated my ability to be playful and messy in the queering of my identities. Fluidity gives voice to a play with identity, a way of being able to figure out what my own

“rules” are for how I look to formulate my own subjectivity. As a non-binary queer person, I find a freedom in navigating the fluidity of my own connections to gender and sexuality. Fluidity can be deployed in opposition to systems that rely on a two-gender, binary system of classification that does not wish to separate gender from sexuality. Fluidity allows a subject to take time to figure out what their identity actually is, not needing to be fixed to either end of the binary. This F word is transitional and signifies a indeterminate space between one identity to another.

However, it must be acknowledged that this play is generally allowed for white queer people who are able-bodied and meet Western beauty standards – who are not plagued by the systemic racism, white supremacy and other forms of oppression that exist for non-white queer, trans and non-binary people. As a white person, I can navigate my gender and sexuality without having to navigate the internalized racism exerted by other white people. The fluidity of my queerness cannot escape the permanence of my whiteness and the history of white ignorance that’s followed. In queer

theory’s play with the fluidity of gender, white people often forget how that plays into our imagination of being post-gender while retaining our white privilege. In my romanization of the fragmentation and fluidity of gender queerness; it’s critical to acknowledge the context of the colonialist and white supremacist society that I benefit from daily.

Failure, on the other hand, can be an opportunity to re-envision a freedom from systems that are oppressive to queer, trans and non-binary people. To fail in a system that perpetuates–transphobic, homophobic and racist ideologies, can be a source of agency in worldmaking activities that are dictated by queer people and people of color. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam talks about the productivity of failure by queer subjects, stating, “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.” This reimagining of the potential agency embedded in failure allows a queer subject like myself to cultivate these

new goals for my own life without feeling the pressures of the gender binary and heteronormativity.

While we can idealize failure as a site of agency for queer people, we must remember that like fluidity, white queer people exploring failure as a site for agency are not as likely to be held to the standards of oppressive systems. When they seek failure as a site of agency, they have less to be afraid of in that moment. In my case I do not fear that my exploration of failure could result in being stopped and killed by police. I'm from the United States, and because I'm white, exploring failure also means that I do not fear my citizenship will come into question or that I will risk deportation. In the personal, collective and political failures put onto queer people and people of color, it's paramount for white queers to connect issues outside of our privileged experiences to give space for non-white people to lead and cultivate new world building activities.

These F terms disrupt the dominant perception of one's identity as stable and fixed. This idea of disruption in relation to

a queer identity is one that Lee Edelman wrote about in his book *No Future*. Lee states "For queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one." A queer identity is never one that can encompass the entirety of what one's identity, but sits as a placeholder to challenge the way men in positions of power try to identify us without giving us the agency to name ourselves. For example I take on Feminist as an identity marker. As a queer non-binary subject who does not identify as man or women, I do understand the need to take a stand as a feminist in society where cis and trans women are fighting pay inequality, rape culture and toxic masculinity. In a sexist society that kills trans women, catcalls cisgender women and threatens the lives of femme presenting people, it's important to employ fixed terms when needed. This disruption and play with stable identity categories will always benefit white queer and non-binary people who have the least to lose for fucking with the binary.

A MESSY UNDERSTANDING OF DIS- IDENTIFICATION AND THE HUSBAND CALLING

Finding language for the way one survives within dominant culture is a necessary practice for minority-identity subjects wishing to reclaim space within the culture of their oppressors. In José Esteban Muñoz' *Disidentification: Queers Of Color And The Performance of Politics*, disidentification is defined as "a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology."¹⁸ This tactic is used to reclaim aspects of culture that aren't produced for minority-identity subjects by using the content as a way to "open up a space where a subject can imagine a mod of surviving the nullifying force of consumer capitalism's models of self."¹⁹ This strategy allows for mass media to become open to interpretation by and for non-white queer subjects. To disidentify is to consume problematic content as a survival tactic, while at the same time allowing for minority-identity subjects to identify with parts of culture that become useful for them.

A person utilizing disidentification



can look around problematic content to identify with aspects that can be redeployed in a productive manner. In my understanding, this becomes a way of reclaiming content that might not have been made for a selected audience. This of course does not shield people from dealing with the emotional labor of facing media that is often transphobic, racist and highly problematic. But there is a sense of power that comes with forcing such content to be deployed against itself and fit into alternative, disidentified needs. This strategy becomes a productive way of

navigating culture and interrupting systems that aren't made for the minority-identity subject. Disidentification challenges the binary between the positioning content as either being useful or harmful to a subject by seeking out the grey areas within media and cultural production.

In early 2017, I utilized disidentification within a body of work, Husband Calling Competition, looking at midwestern women and their participation in "husband calling" competitions. Revisiting this work a year later, I realized that there were two major aspects I had not thought about when applying disidentification to this body of work. I did not acknowledge my whiteness and didn't realize I was using disidentification in a body of work that spoke to the white experience exclusively.²⁰ My use of disidentification, does in part invoke some of the key points Munoz articulated in his use of the concept, that being the messiness of the interpretation of cross cultural perspectives. My analysis below is using my whiteness as a way to find agency in rural white heteronormative women.



The work takes form as both a video piece and a publication. Husband Calling Competition (Sequence 1) uses the unedited audio recording paired with personal writing, queer theory and other quotes about performativity. The position of myself as a narrator is always in dialogue with the women who are able to show themselves as close to the original source materials as possible. The publication reframed this content into a publication context allowing for the video to consume the content through my words and commentary with just windows into the full experience. I



found that the publication allowed for more contemplation than the video that engrossed the viewer into the spectacle of the competition of husband calling. I now believe that both works are important to be viewed together to give a fuller context to the shifting power dynamics to myself and the cis white rural women I am investigating. To this day I am still awestruck by the content and still feel the same curiosity I felt when I first came across the content.

On stage, the emotional labor of the

women performing is consumed by a panel of mostly men. These women are calling attention to the imbalance of power between these women yelling for their husband to do their fair share in the domestic realm. Here rural Americana is performed on stage without the formal acknowledgment of the power dynamics being presented. Power is shifted back and forth between these women and their husbands, the women and the audience, the judges and the women; and other aspects of power dynamics push and pull within these competitions. These women who yell onstage for their husbands exert an agency that is unique to their white rural subjectivity. While the authenticity that is performed through this staging of the domestic reinforces their heteronormative identities, it shows an agency that is specific to these performers. As a consumer of this content, I look to José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification as a way to "disidentify" with heteronormative rural domesticity, and identify instead with the sense of agency that I perceive as a feminist action.

The imagery and language presented in this body of work responds to this unique staging of domesticity and the performance of heterosexual identity. In my use of this content I do not wish to speak for these women, nor critique their positions within



heteronormativity. Rather, I am looking to investigate moments of agency through these actions in order to reclaim this content - which is generally made and consumed for a rural white cisgendered audience - and position the content for consumption through



a queer subjectivity.

The images are collected from screenshots of the original videos sourced through YouTube. Here, I position myself as the narrator by elaborating on my connections to the content in order to excavate the queer potentiality through commentary. My own subject position, as a non-binary white queer person, meets the subjectivities of these white cisgendered women at the intersections of our whiteness. In contrast to focusing on “what is queer” and “what is heteronormative,” the intersections find an assemblage of both subjectivities in the content presented.



My hope is to explore the messiness in between by letting my queer theory-informed language, complicate my assumed distance from this cultural activity. The intersection of my own voice into the work allows for the symbol to remain (the images) while altering how the content is signified to a viewer (through language). Here, queerness is not enacted by an othering of myself to the content, but rather finding myself in solidarity with the women calling out the unfair division of labor.

This solidarity rests within in the hetropatorical world still dominated by a western society that favors white cisgender men in power.

These women standing on stage can't escape their proximity to the agency that is denied to them through dismissal of their calls. The stage itself helps to isolate these women to see clearly the uneven division of labor that men have built around their part in the domestic realm. Their yells, screams and dissatisfactions become a cry for mutual respect masked under the performance of the "nagging wife". I wonder if this small

act of rebellion can incite others, especially cisgender heterosexual folks, to voice their concerns over the uneven division of power that exist in heteronormativity or if they will just remain a competition of women yelling for their husband.

For me, the Husband Calling Competition at first represented a site of alienation but upon closer look represented something much more complicated than that. My hope is this investigation is messy enough to inspire others to look for solidarity with those outside your own subject position to find commonalities between the shared struggles against the patriarchy.

A PUBLISHERS PERSPECTIVE ON THE ART BOOK FAIR: A CRITICAL RESPONSE 🐾

In 2019 I was invited to share my experiences of being a small publisher as part of a guide for aspiring publishers. One question in particular, “What are your tips for first time tabling at a book fair?” got me thinking about my experiences tabling at 50 plus art book fairs. I wanted to be truthful and honest with my advice, trying to be more critical than I had originally intended when first considering how I would answer. Art Book Fairs are a highly important but often complicated aspect of fine arts publishing and they’re definitely set up as one of the defining aspects of arts publishing. I haven’t come across many essays that are critical of how these spaces function and what could be improved with their structure. I feel it is important to push forward these concerns, especially during an elongated pandemic, thus hopefully this essay can start a conversation about how these spaces might be improved for all.

I asked myself: who do art book fairs actually serve? Is it set up to support

the publisher, the organizer or the institution? Is the support balanced? Who pays the price and who benefits? What are the power dynamics at play? Are larger publishers and institutions favored over smaller publishers? Are art book fairs white spaces? Are they safe spaces for non-white people? Are they truly diverse and equal spaces?

In any conversations or publications I see about art book fairs, they are often puff pieces lacking any critical information about how these spaces are organized. I want to be critical more than affirming in this piece of writing. Covid-19 has radically changed the landscape of the art world and it is time to come out of this tragedy with ways to focus on the power dynamics of our events and experiences. During two plus years of this public health disaster I fear many of the radical changes made in service of public health have quickly been forgotten for a heartless, rushed reopening of our economy. In 2022 fairs are back in full swing with many (but thankfully not all) going back to business as usual. My

wish is that we take the time needed to conduct fairs safely but most importantly improve on many issues that have been ongoing.

Tabling at art fairs presents a meeting place for small, mid-sized and self publishers in which we can network and learn so much from each other. When I first started out in publishing, book fairs were not about making money but mining precious information, friendships and inspiration. This in many ways is still true for my work with GenderFail, but access to money is necessary to cover many of the costs associated with running a press. Exposure, no matter at what stage in an artist's career, is never enough to make up for economic realities of capitalism.

WHAT DO PUBLISHERS PAY, BESIDES THE TABLE FEES, FOR THESE EXPERIENCES?

Art book fairs can be very expensive, taxing and emotionally draining. Almost every fair has a tabling fee that ranges from \$0-\$500+ or even more depending on the amount of space you might want. On top of that you have travel expenses, lodging and food for those coming out of town. For projects like my own that are mostly self funded with minimal institutional support this puts a huge amount of pressure on making money at these events. To be blunt, after doing so many of these I can only afford to do fairs that I know I will make money from. Currently, the only fairs (which I travel to) I can guarantee which I will walk away with money after my expenses are the Chicago Art Book Fair, Material Art Book Fair, The LA Art Book Fair and San Francisco Art Book Fair. It's becoming harder to risk going to events in which I know I won't make a profit. In the end a book

fair is a seller's market in which an emphasis on making sales is variable due to the funding sources of our projects.

Besides the financial aspects these spaces can be very mentally taxing and leave us feeling spent. As someone with anxiety and mental health issues I often leave fairs exhausted and require a lot of time to recover, especially after larger fairs like Printed Matter's New York Art Book Fair. I have gotten sick after being in these spaces and often leave feeling drained. Anyone with physical or mental disabilities can find these spaces extremely unwelcoming due to large crowd sizes, extreme heat and lack of support staff (helping table). For the first few years of Gender-Fail I attended fairs alone, and didn't have anyone to help me run my table. I now pay folks to table for me at a minimum of \$20 per hour, and this adds additional costs to tabling.

PROFITIZING NON-WHITE PUBLISHERS

In my conversations with many black and brown artists and publishers, art book fairs can feel extremely alienating. Many of these spaces are very white and diversity is a huge problem, especially at larger fairs. In my own conversations with non-white publishers, many often feel unsupported and used for diversity reasons. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to make publishers, especially publishers of color, feel supported and more importantly feel that their communities are represented in these spaces, rather than being mere signifiers of diversity.

In this, it's important to push organizers and institutions to do the work to make sure publishers feel supported. The addition of a handful of publishers of color is not enough and should not be used as a way of marketing any diversity in the fair. Fair organizers must hire a diverse

team from top to bottom. Here I am not trying to call out any organizer in particular, but if you look at past fairs this point will become clear. I feel diversity is often used as leverage by largely white institutions, white curators and other white organizers as a tool in the pursuit of the overall event rather than the individual experience.

In many past essays I have quoted Sara Ahmed and her book *Phenomenology of Whiteness*. Ahmed reminds us of the obvious (to some) fact that all spaces are made for white people and white bodies:

“I want to suggest here that whiteness could be understood as ‘the behind.’ White bodies are habitual insofar as they ‘trail behind’ actions: they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed.’”

How does one curate an art book fair in a way that actively acknowledges this while not adding to a “stress” on

the bodies of people of color? This may also cause organizers to do the research into non-white publishers who may not be able to apply for a variety of reasons. Outreach is critical to ensure an event space where folks can feel that their communities are represented. Can there be ways to encourage non-white publishers to apply in a way that makes them feel less like a tokenized entity in service of the overall event? The experiences of the exhibitors has to be the most important aspect of any fair, and often this is obviously not the case. I can't speak for the experience of publishers of color, but I do want to provide my voice in calling out how little I feel is being done to address these problems, and hopefully help to propel these conversations forward.

PRINTED MATTER ART BOOK FAIRS

Larger art book fairs hold so much social capital in publishing that many attend these spaces without thinking of the financial (and emotional) costs. The yearly Printed Matters New York Art Book Fair and the LA Art Book Fair are the largest and most respected of the art book fairs in the world. Being accepted into this fair makes publishers of any size feel validated as to their work and position as a publisher. These spaces feature so much incredible work by more than 400 different publishers (now less than 200 in 2022 due to a venue change away from MoMA PS1) together in one space, a hodgepodge of self publishing, small and medium sized publishers and larger institutions such as galleries and museums. When I was first accepted for the 2017 fair it was a huge feeling of accomplishment that I'd never felt as a publisher up to that point.

The Printed Matter Art Book Fairs (prior

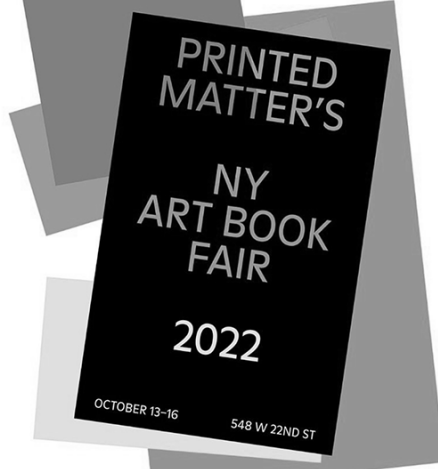
to 2022) are a complicated space. It feels like two fairs are happening at the same time. There is a huge divide between the larger publishers and the smaller publishers. In this I mean an actual physical divide at MoMA PS1, in which the small self publishers are generally in tents outside and larger institutions are inside the museum. I feel such a large amount of focus is put on the work of institutional galleries (that have far more access to funds to run a press to begin with), yet the zine tent and dome represent more of what Printed Matter embodies as an institution. The larger institutional presses pay thousands of dollars for their booth ,and in turn for that money they're given access to the inside of the institution itself. Although I don't necessarily want to be inside the building I know that the divide exists and it is a glaring divide if you look hard enough.

The New York Art Book Fair gets almost 40,000 followers over the four days of the fair and is very overwhelming for smaller and self publishers. With

Covid-19, having an event of this size is currently not an option. Here I hope the organizers can help think of a way of reflecting on the size of this event. Has the growth of the fairs over the last 15 years helped to make more space for small and self publishing or to provide more expansion for institutional presses? What is the benefit of the sheer size of the event? Who ideally is this event for and who genuinely needs the exposure of this event?

Here I have to ask, have the art book fairs gotten too big, to the point where self and small publishers carry a much larger burden of emotional labor for only a chance at profitable exposure? Is there enough care being put into the experiences of small and self publishers at these events? Can this event be restructured in service of small and self publishers over larger institutions whose presence is guaranteed because of their greater wealth? Can this power dynamic be acknowledged and discussed?

At past NYABF events when I go into



WSW UPSTATE ART BOOK FAIR



MoMA PS1 to look at institutional booths, the shift in energy is distinct. In the tents we are constantly conversing, laughing together, drinking together and the feeling of a genuine community is palpable. In the institution barely anyone talks to each other, as laughter and genuine conversation becomes unprofessional; there is no communal feeling, but this is because there doesn't have to be. For these institutions, there is no economic (or emotional) necessity to making urgent connections with other publishers; they already have enough money and connections. With small publishers, networking carries an unmistakable urgency because we're all surviving together, and many of us are trying to actually make enough money to cover basic expenses for both our projects and exhibit costs for the fair. With the NYABF moving away from MoMA PS1 I am curious to how this divide will change in the 2022 edition of the fair.

The organizers (as of 2018) do seem to be putting extra emphasis on having

first time exhibitors as part of both the LAABF and NYABF in the form of the Shannon Michael Cane Award. The award is described as:

"The SMC Award is granted to emerging artists (artists, artists' book publishers, or collectives in the early stages of their career) who would be first-time exhibitors in a Printed Matter Art Book Fair. Each recipient is provided with an exhibitor's table and a stipend to support their participation. Applications were reviewed by a panel comprised of the founders of the Shannon Michael Cane Memorial Fund and Printed Matter Fairs staff."

The SMC award is an important signal that Printed Matter is trying to focus on new and emerging publishers and it is something I am glad to see.

Larger events like the NYABF also become something that I and others often refer to as an event we "survived", a word that refers to the intensity of the event. Many publishers go without eating, drinking or taking

breaks because they are exhibiting alone and do not want to miss out on needed sales to help pay for the costs of the events. In my experience at past Printed Matter Art Book Fairs ,getting table support from the staff has been difficult due to the sheer size of the event. I am also one of these people who have not wanted to step away from my table in fear of missing out on sales, and I have genuinely suffered for this.

In bringing up the Printed Matter fairs I don't mean this to be a critique of Printed Matter itself, but to criticize what the fair itself has grown to be over the 15 years of its existence. Being the largest art book fair in the world, it is easy to focus on this fair. It has also gone through some major changes and many positive things have happened in the last few years thanks to the new fairs team, including talented artists and curators Sonel Breslav, Emmy Catedral and Sunny Iyer. There has been more emphasis on having first time publishers and publishers of color as part of the event. They have

also helped to provide water, snacks and other perks for publishers at the event. In many ways they are grappling with the magnitude of this event while also juggling working with outside institutions that have other obstacles to navigate.

It's beautiful to see the wide range of experience of the exhibitors at this event; you're rarely able to be at an event of this magnitude seeing so many types of work. This is exactly why there needs to be systems in place to better service small first time exhibitors, with an emphasis on making sure publishers of color and their communities are represented. In this, it's a call for not just the Printed Matter team but for all fair organizers to give special attention to the real needs of smaller publishers at this event. Larger and institutional publishers are much more likely to be supported in ways that we, as small publishers, simply are not. In saying this I do believe that small and independent presses are the backbone of not just Printed Matter but of the LA and NY Art Book Fairs as well.

PUBLISHING FOR THE FUTURE

I personally know the fairs team and was able to get an inside look at the background of the 2019 NYABF installation while working as the Magazine Store Manager at Artbook @ MoMA PS1. The amount of labor that goes into creating both events each year is vast and I have a small insight into the issues they navigate while on site. I have also been supported by the Printed Matter staff in so many ways and am grateful for their work. Because of its size and notoriety it's easy to reflect and find things that need to be changed. In this, I hope that smaller fairs can look to large events like NYABF and LAABF to reflect and make their fair experiences better.

This essay was started in April 2020 while living in New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic at the time. At the time, pretty much all Art Book Fairs had been canceled for the foreseeable future. Thus this moment presented the perfect time to reflect on the countless Art Book Fairs I have attended for years. In moments of self isolation amidst the proliferation of virtual events, we can continue to work towards finding ways to make sure events feel as welcoming as possible for everyone involved, especially now when so many are living as if the Covid pandemic is simply over. This is not a call to burn everything down and start over, but to stop, think, reflect and redirect where our energy should go. Many of us do not want to go back to the way things were pre-pandemic; we want institutions to make the required changes to reflect this new world, the world we have been demanding for years.

Here I think about the various relief funds and resource-shares I saw during the first year of the pandemic. There have been so many funds created to help cover the lost income of many low wage workers, artists and freelancers. These mutual aid funds were created to make up for our social institutions that laid off and fired their part time and freelance workforce. According to the COVID-19 Impact Survey for Artists and Creative Workers, designed by Americans for the Arts, 81% of respondents said they do not have a plan to financially recover from this crisis. Another survey by the Washington Post said that of the independent artists surveyed, two-thirds were unemployed. Although seeing countless relief funds pop has been so inspiring, these are directly linked to the failure of our various institutions to provide for those creative workers who need help the most.

As events started to return to normal some met the moment while others continued on as if the pandemic never

happened. We need to really think about the changes that need to be made so that artists can thrive in a new climate. Certain organizers, from Brooklyn Art Book Fair and Queer/Trans Zinefest, reacted to these changing dynamics to better serve those who were affected the most. As a publisher I feel so lucky to have had my project survive the pandemic, but many self and small publishers are simply out of business because they do not have the means to be a part of fair events due to massive loss of income. I think about all the small publishers that may no longer be at these events in the future. How can we employ various mutual aid tactics to ensure future generations of art book publishers have the support to continue their work? If you're reading this and are an organizer of an art book fair, ask yourself, are you doing everything to meet this moment?

Can money made at art book fairs be shared, in a small way, to make sure that no one leaves an art book fair at a total loss?

What can we do to not only be informed on these issues but to actually create a plan as to how we can make things more equitable at these fairs. It's imperative to take tangible steps to create a fair experience that serves those who need the most support in these environments. After the NYABF, the publishing collective Other Publishing, with the input of other small publishers, put together a list of demands to send to the Printed Matter Fairs team to address some of the issues brought up by publishers of color during the 2019 fair. This list of demands can help to be a leaping board for any fair organizer, exhibitor or attendee to help make these spaces more equitable. Below is a compilation from that list of demands that I feel need to continue to be addressed in the post Covid-19 art book fair landscape.

IDEAS AND ACTIONS FOR FUTURE ART BOOK FAIRS (ONLINE AND IN PERSON)

MUTUAL AID FAIR FUNDS

Could there be funds created by fair organizers and institutions to help cover the costs of those who did not make back their basic expenses?

If not, can publishers come together to donate part of their earnings to a fund that would be redistributed to exhibitors who didn't cover their basic expenses, or to make it so they are paid fairly for every hour?

This is an idea that I would love to workshop with other publishers in the future. We, as publishers and fair exhibitors, can come together to make sure that no one walks away in worse financial shape than when they entered. New connections and experiences (and the social currency of having been accepted to these fairs) are not payment enough. Every

artist and publisher needs to be paid for their time and no one should walk away making less than \$25 per hour for each hour of the fair. Fairs are work and all work should be paid.

ACCESSIBILITY

Can we make sure that every space used for art book fairs is accessible to all, that no space is used if a set of stairs are the only way to enter a space?

I'll never forget being at an art book fair with someone who used a wheelchair and the fair organizers had put their table up a flight of stairs. Regardless if a exhibitor uses a wheelchair, all spaces must be accessible for all people. Fair organizers must center making accessibility as a primary focus of the event.

SMALL AND FIRST TIME PUBLISHER SUPPORT

Attention must be paid to first time, small press and zine publishers. Fair staff must check in on each exhibitor to make sure their needs are met. Can there be a way for exhibitors who are tabling alone to sign up or let the fair organizers know they are alone so that extra attention can be paid to them?

If the fair organizers or institutions can't do this, can we as publishers create a sign up to help tablers exhibiting alone?

This means all fair staff support, including tabling for others, should be paid, especially if the press is for profit. Additionally, I think fair organizers should ask at the beginning if there are presses that need extra attention instead of presses needing to go out of their way to ask for support. Often, it's hard for people to ask for extra help if it's not made clear that tabling help can be provided.

ADVISORY BOARD

Can publishers of all different sizes

be included on an advisory board to help make sure everyone's interests are served? Can these boards be filled with trans and non-binary people, people of color, disabled peoples and indigenous peoples?

Direct feedback from small and self publishers would be ideal to ensure that the fairs are meeting the needs of those who might require the most help.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT / INDIGENOUS SOLIDARITY

Can the fair teams make sure that the lands on which art book fairs are housed pay acknowledgment to the occupied land they are on? Can this be printed on all fair guides and advertising materials? Can there be extra attention paid so that indigenous publishers have a voice and are represented at art book fairs?

For publishers can we donate a part of our sales to the Indigenous

communities apart of the community where fairs are hosted? Can fair organizers do the same?

GENDER INCLUSIVE BATHROOM

There should be a no tolerance policy for any art book fairs that do not have gender neutral or gender inclusive bathrooms. If the institution or venue does not have these the event should probably not take place at this space. Providing merely a portapotty is not enough.

\$0 TABLE FEE

Can exhibitors work to provide tables at no cost to low income trans and non-binary people, people of color, disabled peoples and indigenous peoples? Can larger institutions pay even higher fees to cover the costs of exhibitors? Costs should never stop a publishers from attending a fair. If charging a table fee is unavoidable, can these larger organizations step up and pay their share?

HONORARIUM FOR EXHIBITORS AND TRAVEL STIPEND

Like the Queer and Trans Zinefest, others should provide honorarium payments for exhibitors to present their work at the fair. Can exhibitors be treated like the artists they are and paid for their presence at the fair? Additionally, travel honorariums should be provided for low income artists and publishers who need help getting to these events.

DEDICATED TIME FOR LOW TRAFFIC VIEWING AND CROWD CONTROL

Many popular fairs get crowded to capacity often for hours on end. In these ongoing covid-19 times, immunocompromised folks may decide to skip art book fairs. This might also be the case for folks suffering from anxiety, panic attack or inability to be in large crowds. Can organizers dedicate time (or by appointment) for folks who may need

extra space to attend art book fairs?

Additionally, more must be done about crowd control to ensure movability around the fair. In these post 2020 times, how responsible is it to crowd a public space without any limit or control?

INTERSECTIONAL ORGANIZER LEADERSHIP

Art Book Fair organizers must have teams that represent various communities in the art book community. I can't count the times I have talked to non-white exhibitors expressing how alone they felt and a desire for their communities to be represented. Institutional changes come from the top and if they're isn't leaders of color in these positions exploitation will continue to be a problem in art book fairs. In this, organizers of color must be in positions to make the changes they need for themselves and their community. White organizers in positions of power,

no matter how “good” their intentions are” can’t be the mouthpiece for these changes. Here I want to highlight the Chicago Art Book Fair organizers (for the 2019 edition) as a shining example of a diverse fairs team and the difference it made on the overall experience.

These are just a few suggestions that I feel would help make Art Book Fairs live up to their radical potential. This is by no means a complete or comprehensive list of all the changes other exhibitors might want to see to the Art Book Fair format. As a white disabled non-binary person, I have my own blind spots and preferences that might not be shared by all. My hope is this book starts a needed conversation and opens up a conversation with organizers, publishers and fair visitors alike, to make Art Book Fairs live up to their radical potential. If you are a publisher, organizer and visitor and have thoughts please contact us to share your insight. I want Ideas and

actions for Future Art Book Fairs to be a living document that changes through collaboration and feedback over time.

IF YOU ARE AN ART BOOK
FAIR ORGANIZER, PUBLISHER OR
VISITOR I WOULD LOVE TO
BE IN CONVERSATION.

EMAIL US AT
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TO OPEN A DIALOG.



BE OAKLEY is an writer, facilitator and publisher based in Brooklyn, NY. In 2015 they started GenderFail. Oakley's publications can be found in collection at The Museum of Modern Art Library, The Met Library Special Collections, The Whitney Museum Library, among others. They are a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation grantee (2022-2025) for their work with GenderFail.



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GenderFail is a publishing, programming and archiving platform run solely by Be Oakley. GenderFail is not *non-for-profit* but *profit-for-survival* or *profit-to-continue-our-work-without-other-means-of-capital* and most importantly to make money for others I publish, to create *profit-for-labor*. With GenderFail, publishing is *personal*, it's a means of my livelihood and a tool for the dissemination of imperfect, but powerful idea. For GenderFail, we seek to publish works that expand queer subjectivity by looking at queerness as an identity that challenges capitalist, racist, ableist, xenophobic, transphobic, homophobic, misogynistic, and anti-environmental ideologies.

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A PUBLISHING AND PROGRAMMING
INITIATIVE THAT SEEKS PROJECTS
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