

Transfeminine brokenness, radical transfeminism

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ΩTransfeminine Brokenness, Radical Transfeminism

for Mijke & Chryssy

1.

To name the states of our brokenness:

depression, hurt, trauma, fatigue / exhaustion,
overwork, sadness, loneliness, stress, mental
and physical tension, isolation; anomie &
boredom & discontent; unemployment,
underemployment, low wages;
to be disregarded as a sexual subject; surviving
abuse & abusive relationships, incarceration,
violence including sexual violence;
anger, Madness, & the labels of ‘crazy’,
‘psychotic’, ‘mentally ill’;¹ the transphobic slurs
that are too familiar;
to be outcast, or the pariah, to be exiled;
the disqualification of the transfeminine;

To speak of desire in its multiplicities: the survival and breathing and possibility of
transfeminine desire amid and beyond our social and material conditions – of
austerity, racism, xenophobia, transphobia and transmisogyny, ableism, whorephobia.²

How can we connect the social and material conditions that undergird the negative
affects of transfeminine life, to ground a politicized understanding of our brokenness?

To speak of our states of brokenness: states where bodies are jammed, de-
powered, isolated, the struggle to begin to speak of these conditions; states of anger,

distress and depression, each feeding into the next; the horizon of the day closing,³ closed, the pull of inactivity, tending towards the rejection of sociality; a state in which we suspend care for our bodies, or are isolated in caring for our bodies; the fact that the quick fixes in self-care offered by capital, commodity exchange and consumption are largely unaffordable; the state in which concentration disintegrates in front of one's pleasures; to go to the workplace or Jobcentre Plus,⁴ silent, alienated, reinforcing one's depression; the state of understanding the workplace as a ruse of the expression of one's self and gender;⁵ the state in which one's humanity is disqualified due to the work one undertakes, disqualified as feminists or as women for selling sex as a means to money, the psychic fallout of such disqualifications; the state in which community and cohesion do not materialize into socially reproductive, sustainable care (beyond lovers and individual friends); a state in which discourses of sexuality and sexual reproduction elide the lived particularities of our bodies;⁶ a state without a discourse to speak of abuse, and its impact on trans and queer bodies and lives in our/their particulars; a state in which desire and need and love emerge only through the inauguration of worlds that do not yet exist. Such are these states of our brokenness.

2.

At this pivotal, historical moment of neoliberal structural adjustment following the 2008 financial crisis and the ascendancy of far right politics across the West this decade, the position of transgender people is marked by extreme contradiction. There is little doubt that public discourse and consciousness of trans issues in the West is developing, in part through positive media representation and trans celebrities, hailed as 'The Transgender Tipping Point' by *Time Magazine's* May 2014 issue which featured Laverne Cox on its cover.⁷ Along with this new visibility comes a fresh push

for transgender legal rights, including the pursuit of widespread legal gender recognition, employment rights, rights for trans-related healthcare, and marriage rights. However, the stratification of livable trans and gender non-conforming lives along the lines of race, class, gender, dis/ability, nationality and migration status remains firmly and increasingly in place, as neoliberal governments disinvest in social security, ramp up racialized policing and the criminalization of certain – largely Muslim and Black – migrant persons, and facilitate innovative methods in the upward redistribution of wealth while amplifying xenophobic rhetoric and policy. This moment of liberal transgender politics, which I have elsewhere described as “trans liberalism,” harmonizes with global capitalist restructuring and reaffirms this stratification (Raha 2015).⁸ Such capitalist restructuring takes forms known as austerity, structural adjustment and the extraction of wealth from surplus populations including incarcerated people, alongside migrant persons and refugees.

Following the election of Donald Trump in the USA, the outcome of the UK’s referendum to leave the European Union (aka Brexit) and the far right populism that is captivating Europe, the politics of trans liberalism faces potential backlash from the far right. While the particular local and national contexts of trans politics and consciousness of trans issues across these countries varies considerably, the project of trans legal enfranchisement through parliamentary democracy may be fractured through increased policing at the level of one’s citizenship, as ‘immigration enforcement’ is both rhetorically invoked and practically implicated across all spheres of public and private life. In the case of the UK, Brexit further undermines the means to economic survival for all who do not hold a UK passport working in the country – that is the rights to remain in the country to work and live, which have already been undercut this decade for Black and/or Muslim people from parts of Africa, the Middle

East, South Asia and the Caribbean. Alongside the refusal of the Conservative Government led by Theresa May to guarantee job security for EU workers is the spike in racist and xenophobic violence following the referendum, amid the naturalization and perpetration of xenophobia by newspapers. While the Conservative Government can claim a progressive attitude on LGBT issues following the legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in 2013,⁹ and while fresh trans equality legislation may be put to MPs this decade, the Government has made immigration enforcement a statutory duty of employers, universities, schools, and landlords, and the UK continues to attempt to deny the right of asylum to LGBT asylum seekers. Legislation including the prevent duty (part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) and the Immigration Act 2016 – both architected by Theresa May as Home Secretary – make it a statutory requirement for employers to check passports, visas and work permits of all those they employ and in some cases potential employees (with the possibility of facing criminal charges if they do not comply); for universities to report student attendance to the Government, at the risk of losing their power to sponsor visas for international students; for teachers to refer students at ‘risk’ of ‘radicalization’ to the Government. Landlords face criminal charges for leasing property to people who are in the UK illegally and the Government has extended their ‘deport first, appeal later’ scheme to all migrant persons in the UK.¹⁰ This is part of the materialization of the border in the workplace, the border in the landlord, the border in the school, the border in the university, the border at the Jobcentre Plus, the border at the detention centre, the border in the hospital, the border in the marriage registry, the border in the street.

We undoubtedly face a new era of identity checks that will disproportionately impact people of color and trans and gender non-conforming people (of color), especially for people without documents or moreover with anything but a UK

passport. Trans and gender non-conforming people face particular challenges in finding work, including but by no means limited to issues with documentation, issues around discrimination despite limited trans protections in employment and during the hiring process under the Equality Act 2010,¹¹ the psychic difficulties of working within cis-dominated workplaces, alongside the underfunding of the LGBT voluntary sector amid general conditions of downsized, disinvested and precarious work, housing and public services, and the ongoing criminalization of sex work. Further checks on one's identity documents and immigration status will only compound these intersecting issues and create additional mental distress. The pursuit of trans rights, and LGBT rights more generally, through the channels of parliamentary democracy entails pursuing rights while the means of accessing those rights become predicated on our status as UK passport holders with access to wealth, or as a non-UK citizen, poor or otherwise. This is not to say that the rights we currently have – particularly the Equality Act 2010 – must not be defended; we must however be hyper-aware of how they may be undermined through other means that may not be clearly demarcated as 'transgender issues'. The most visible instance may be the Government's current plans to scrap the UK's Human Rights Act 1998, which codifies the European Convention on Human Rights. The next stage of the transformation of material conditions under austerity in the UK couples the dismantling of social support, the welfare state and the privatization of the National Health Service to the introduction of the border into all aspects of life. On which side of the border trans activism places its support will be critical for the efficacy and power of this movement.

It is statistically and socially evident—wherever such statistics exist—that capitalist restructuring and austerity policies have a disproportionate impact on

LGBTQ people and people of color.¹² Manifestations of intermeshing forms of transphobia and transmisogyny, anti-blackness, racism, xenophobia, whorephobia, femmephobia and ableism, working in concert to create conditions of slow death, social death and actual death for poor trans women and trans femmes / of color and/or trans sex workers are inextricable from these structural economic transformations exacerbated by the fresh governance around immigration considered above.¹³ At the extreme of this continuum of violence is the murder of trans women, and trans women of color and trans sex workers in particular, variously across the globe, and the over-representation of trans and gender non-conforming people in the prison populations such as in the USA.¹⁴ As of the beginning of October 2016, 26 trans people have been reported murdered in the USA, the majority of who were black trans women.¹⁵ In 2015, 23 trans women were killed in the USA, of whom 20 were trans women of color.¹⁶ In suggesting that these social and economic conditions create a situation of slow death for poor trans women and trans femmes / of color and/or sex workers, I draw on Lauren Berlant's formulation where "*slow death* refers to the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (2011: 95). Berlant argues that this is part of "the phenomena of collective physical and psychic attenuation from the effects of global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality" (95).¹⁷ This formulation presents a conceptual bridge the affects and experience of transfeminine brokenness—the constellation of affective states named in the previous section—to our position as poor feminized bodies within neoliberal capitalist societies, whose situations may never be alleviated through trans rights, hate crime laws, et al. In suggesting that poor transfeminine people exist and live within a situation of slow death, I do not intend to romanticize or fetishize trans life in general,

and transfeminine life in particular, in a manner that dehumanizes these/our lives (which in the context of cultural representation, leaves audiences to take pity on our lives while we are stripped of agency); nor do I intend to re-inscribe the pathologization of trans life – especially disabled trans life. It is to politicize our sense of feeling as a part of social and material injustice that must be transformed; and to center this physical and psychic attenuation in a historicized understanding of our experience.

The quantification of social and material challenges facing LGBTQ people in general, and trans people in particular, often leaves little space to conceptualize the affective and emotional experiences that cohere and dematerialize under these conditions and their political implications. Quantitative or statistical analysis also circumvents questions of agency and the opportunity to conceptualize transfeminist life and struggle as enacted and supported through forms of collectivity – of practical support, knowledge sharing, or politicized world-making.¹⁸ This essay offers one account of the social and material basis on which transfeminine life is fractured and the affects of such fractures. I offer it with an awareness that the political and material background of trans and queer liberalisms within contemporary neoliberal capitalism ensures that certain groupings of poor, trans and queer people are class fodder as cheap, precarious labor for the reproduction of capital—at best granted formal legal rights, but with a cost. We struggle to afford to access to these rights in the same way that neoliberalism has us struggling to pay the rent,¹⁹ and with our rights we encounter fresh forms of racialized, xenophobic policing from the street to spheres of public and private life. I offer it in hope of the trans and queer world-making project that builds a coalitional politics, mutual care and support, around the affectivities of transfeminine brokenness (a project ongoing in certain places); and in the knowledge that new forms

of (potentially militant) femininities may grow through such projects.²⁰ This essay carries with the negative to synthesize possibility and inform action, to politicize our conception of these feelings for radical praxis.

The politics I and others have named radical transfeminism emerges in this political context. Radical transfeminism is a collective political praxis and critique developing in the tenuously-United Kingdom and Europe, centering transfeminine bodies that are or find themselves precariously employed, poor, overworked, pathologized – bodies of color and various shades of white; migrant bodies; dis/abled bodies; and/or ‘working’ bodies. Radical transfeminism is oriented around forms of care and support, and through “working” together,²¹ over and across material precarity. The forms I am speaking of here include forms of cultural production – art can be a powerful means for affective solidarity – alongside moments of political protest and solidarity and forms of socially reproductive labor: the care work of cooking and feeding and housing, resting and rearing, cleaning and washing and dressing, the work of creating our performative genders, the loving and sexual pleasure, and the emotional support, that maintains our trans and queer bodies and lives.²² Radical transfeminism intends to turn the tides of trans and queer liberalism through ground-level action in the world: showing the limits of such reformist politics and understanding their situation in contemporary Europe’s ascendant far right politics and the refusal of its governments to register the humanity of people fleeing war and violence perpetrated by both Western states and ISIS in the middle east and provide a humanitarian response to the so-called refugee crisis.²³ While we situate and conceptualize varied trans and queer struggles as part of this century’s challenges through direct democracy, we are also aware that the assertion of our bodies as transfeminine bodies within such struggles is both necessary and draining. Political

work can open us up to forms of damage, even when riot police are out of sight; and the precarity through which we organize does not necessarily entail the possibility of safer spaces.²⁴

3.

When the lack of air is the cut of the thought that does not refract through another body. On the other side of the Western world I meet a poet. Our conversation tends to a story either of us could have told, with different colleagues or collaborators, different geography, different queer and trans scenes, different bodies of different shifts through land and location. We drop off mailing lists, are absent from the spaces we have help organize and create. The ideas and critiques on our voices do not carry. The disqualification of our knowledge, of suggestions, of creating the time for our involvement, of our work within forms of queer and trans community and cultural spaces – as, but maybe not addressed by others as, trans femmes or trans women, or constellating near these descriptions – are the same. We name this phenomenon textbook transmisogyny.²⁵ But I also think of how Susan Stryker connects the disavowal of our knowledge as rooted in transfeminine bodies as antinormative bodies to a “more fundamental and culturally pervasive disavowal of intrinsically diverse modes of bodily being as the lived ground of all knowing and of all knowledge production” (2008: 154). Stryker argues that consequently the knowledge of how antinormative bodies are materially affected, and how such material effects transform knowledge, are “delegitimated as merely subjective”, which “circumscribes the radical potential of that knowledge [in] critique...as feminism, communities of color, and third world voices have long maintained” (154).²⁶ Between the designation of the experiences rooted in transfeminine bodies as “merely subjective” and the

disavowal of transfeminine knowledge as a sign of knowledge in its multiplicities, the potentiality of our thought – and one might add our work – are circumscribed.

To (at best) be bearers of civil rights and socially or micropolitically disqualified as bearers of knowledge is nothing new. It is nothing new for trans femmes as it is nothing new for people of color as it is nothing new for women as it is nothing new for migrants as it is nothing new for people with disabilities as it is nothing new for intersex people of various genders. The difference is when we are organizing with fellow queers, fellow trans people, fellow feminists, fellow disabled people; sometimes we hold up the moments where we all get the issue – one person points to it as us all getting the issue that maybe next time only two people in the room will get. But the structure is such that sometimes we're not even in the room (when there are no trans women at your party) or near the politics (when there are no trans women in your feminist community). The disavowal of not only the knowledge of trans women and trans femmes, as Stryker suggests, but also the exclusion of our bodies and the disregarding of the work we undertake, materially and psychically affects those excluded from and included within these rooms. This is the separation of our bodies and work and lives from queer, feminist, and trans world-making projects, which itself is a basic fracturing of such worlds, and the erasure of the poor trans femmes (often of color) who have inaugurated them – of the names known and now held up: Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, Miss Major. Sometimes we witness the really beautiful spectacle of queer / feminist / of color community holding up its sisters and siblings, only to be reminded again of our deviance through exclusion. The psychic and emotional impact of this is sometimes too hard to bear; let alone to begin speaking of it. Sometimes we are either broken or not too broken such that we can speak to each other (as trans siblings, or queer sisters, among ourselves or to build

solidarity across these lines), to build the moment of recognition that something social and historically specific kept us absent from whatever room it is or was, this or that month. Sometimes this knowledge cascades into and through our interiors, into accumulating collective, communal bodies. Sometimes the conversation doesn't even begin to cohere this way. Sometimes it doesn't materialize.

4.

I want to connect the epistemological disqualification of the transfeminine body as an antinormative body (in the sense articulated by Stryker) to the material precarity of antinormative bodies in general. The disqualification operating through vectors of transmisogyny, on a micropolitical level, is intimately connected to the undermining and devaluation of poor, feminized bodies under capitalism. This devaluation takes place both in regards to one's social position and one's relation to wages. The devaluation of poor, feminized bodies under capitalism is the basis of our brokenness as transfeminine bodies. This devaluation is compounded through a racialized and gendered division of labor where poor, feminized bodies and/or of color – often from or in the Global South – sustain the lives, spaces and desires inhabited by (predominately white, but not exclusively white) privileged, bourgeois bodies in or from the Global North.²⁷ That our transfeminine bodies are barely deemed worthy of affective support either within capitalist society or within anticapitalist queer, feminist and trans community organizing dovetails our devaluation through this racialized and gendered division of labor. Furthermore, the knowledge that might emerge through such affective struggles as considered above, be they individual or collective, is only valued when it is posited in certain, limited forms of narrative (*the* trans narrative) or is contained within narratives of recognition. In the context of trans and gender

nonconforming people generally inhabiting the lower echelons of wage distributions (to think again of our unemployment, underemployment, overwork, boredom and isolation),²⁸ our position within a racialized and gendered division of labor ensures further circumscription of the radical potential of our knowledge as rooted in antinormative bodies. The dull white collar, service sector, and/or manual work we undertake may entail dissonance, isolation and distress through its reifying qualities;²⁹ while work such as sex work faces risks of criminalization and the affects of stigmatization. The distress and precarity surrounding work in both formal and informal economies reasserts a situation of slow death; while criminalization may lead to incarceration and deportation; and as Toni Mac argues, the use of multi-agency immigration raids such as in ‘Operation Lanhydrock’ in London enforce measures criminalize migrant workers including sex workers, while evacuating their agency before the law.³⁰ Our labor within all such work faces the possibility of the same epistemological disqualification alongside its economic devaluation. However, between precarity, reification and the increasing presence of the border, methods of undercommoning might sustain us through difficult emotions, bring moments of affirmation, and steal a few hours back for our living.

If the politics of trans and queer liberalisms is based on the reform of and assimilation into the structures of neoliberal capitalist society,³¹ what form of transfeminist politics must be articulated, and through what kind of praxis, in order to turn the tide against such disqualifications and their historical impact? This is also a question of how poor, transfeminine bodies and the bodies of work we are responsible for have influenced queer, feminist, socialist, anti-racist, decolonial movements of past and present, bodies and work that, next to trans bodies in general, have been and often continue to be rendered invisible in the histories of these movements. As Che

Gossett, Reina Gossett and AJ Lewis remind us, the work of LGBT politics has always entailed work against police violence, and that trans genealogies of Black feminism show that Black feminism has always been trans.³²

5.

The poet Anne Boyer likes my tweet about the temptation to write this essay entirely on public transport as a (creative/necessary) constraint. The fabric of queer and trans social reproduction surrounds the space between this writing. The poet (not Anne, yours truly) must leave her house to write, as her desk is currently occupied by her second job. The fabrics of social reproduction—of domestic space and the forms of queer feminist sociality—are the garments in which the trans femme is dissatisfied, undersupported, unable to clasp and contain the negativity of her emotions. The waged and caring labors she undertakes leave too little time for dressing to express that carefully constructed self associated with stereotypical narratives of transition.

Sometimes the work she undertakes works against her gender. She finds herself undertaking men's work, or feminized office work in which trans doesn't signify. Some days she is a communist spy writing academic papers on stolen time, smiling at customers as she greets them, serving them lunch. The precarity of her waged work dovetails with the precarity of her gender expression.

Her lovers may be the arms of healing, unsure how best to hold her, arms of few arms. Her chosen lovers or johns may fetishize or abuse her. She will capture intimate moments among those she can trust as a sister or sibling, to unravel toxicities, toxic masculinities, the odors of transmisogyny and sexism. It is these moments of violence that graze deeply, the concert of romantic ideology, the trans women as scapegoat,³³ scarce life under capital. It's here where every tone of voice

transgressing a felt gender, or supposed gender, may be used against us. Where the gender norms cohering around the color of our flesh and the char of the garments, where our love or our breathing may end.

6.

October 2016: in Glasgow, we hear Reina.³⁴ In a discussion titled ‘life in flight from every prison’ – part of *Refuse Powers’ Grasp* arts and politics festival organized by Arika, where we hear Reina Gossett, Miss Major, Che Gossett, Dean Spade, Eric Stanley, Kai Lumumba Barrow, Joshua Allen, Sondra Perry, Juliana Huxtable, members of We Will Rise, Mujeres Creando, SCOT-PEP and the English Collective of Prostitutes, among others – Reina Gossett speaks of five aspects of oppression. She identifies isolation as one of these aspects. This resonates with the hearts and lungs of the trans women and trans femmes in the room—at least, those friends I compare notes with after the discussion. Joshua Allen ties this to scarcity, its condition in the contemporary United States, how Black trans excellence [#blacktransexcellence] can thrive despite the systems working against such life (these systems prevented trans prison abolitionist CeCe McDonald from getting her passport in time to be in this particular room). Reina suggests that there is no healing sometimes, that recovery from certain wounds is neither possible nor necessarily desirable. We hear to be weary of the appropriation and individualization of self-care. We know there is no self-care without the production of self and care; and that we cannot live without our lives.³⁵ We later hear Dean Spade who points again to isolation and ties it to our social deskilling, sometimes through too much living online. With Reina chairing this discussion, the question becomes what forms of mutual engagement break isolation and cultivate care. The isolation in question is explicitly that of incarceration in jail;

but also of isolation within (and from) communities, with an undercurrent of the atomization of capitalist life once described by Marxists.³⁶

Mijke van der Drift and I discuss the following across the next few days (and across days that are yet to follow). The cultivation of care enacted in the spaces we inhabit this particular weekend visibly resonate through various trans (of color) and feminine bodies. When conversations turn difficult, we sense moments of disagreement, frustration, in the bodies of friends current and new; these bodies remove themselves momentarily, physically from the space or psychologically into an interior, to be brought back into and supported through discourse in the measured, calculated manners of critical speech. These feel like new bases for articulations of mutual support; of abolitionist work within the everyday, here an everyday of public, activist speech, as Reina says, of prefiguring the world we want to live in.

If at times healing may neither be possible or desirable, we instead work at the cultivation of care and mutual support that inaugurates a more livable world and calls for the transformation of the material conditions that fracture and break us, conditions structured against the sustenance of poor, transfeminine people / of color and of poor, feminized people / of color more generally. Checking in, comparing notes, collectivizing lunch and dinner, bringing bodies back into conversations and spaces, keeping tabs on what kind of interactions might bridge fractures in social structure, and which interactions might graze. We work ourselves out of the liberal myths of enfranchisement and the exceptionalization of struggles. Trans liberalism might alter our sense of enfranchisement in the West, but rights will reaffirm the sense of law by which certain bodies of certain genders, races, nationalities, abilities and religions deserve the right to live on a world owned and managed by so few people; and falls far short from establishing a sustainable basis of worldmaking through the co-

production of care, in which we might be centered alongside other marginalized people. We radically revise our individualized histories and experience into a collective understanding built through our particulars, to understand that our individual struggles, the embedding of sadness, the negative affects we turn inward toward our bodies, are about the absence of a sustainable immediate world within which we could really reside.

The dialectic of struggle against a world that breaks us, and for the inauguration of a world of mutuality and support where we can begin to live and thrive is always in progress, pushing the work of transformation below the visibility of the surface of neoliberal capitalist society. It is in the moments of dailiness which feel im/possible that the co-production and autonomous support of thought and feeling and work in and through our bodies pushes back against contemporary divisions of labor, epistemological disqualifications, precarious work, devalued wages and strain of passport controls; where social reproduction and solidarity delay slow death, psychic strain, and/or deportation. If we might be fractured through the accumulation of such negative conditions, qua the contemporary accumulation of capital, we also know that the work, support and histories that might transform them are buried and disqualified as ourselves – which need to be unearthed, teased out and held up.

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¹ I use the word Madness with a capitalized letter M in the spirit of its reclamation by Mad activists, psychiatric consumers and survivors (c/s/x) and scholars of the emerging discipline Mad Studies. The intersection of the labeling of transfeminine people as ‘crazy’, due to supposedly erratic behavior and emotions, must necessarily be understood in the context of gendered norms that privilege certain forms of sanity and through transfeminist understanding of sanism. Given the length of this discussion, this essay refrains from undertaking this work. For a discussion connecting trans activism to Mad activism and Mad Studies in a Canadian context, see Ambrose Kirby (2014) ‘Trans Jeopardy/Trans Resistance: Shaindl Diamond Interviews Ambrose Kirby,’ in Bonnie Burstow, Brenda A. LeFrançois and Shaindl Diamond (eds) (2014) *Psychiatry Disrupted: Theorizing Resistance and Crafting the (R)evolution*. Montreal & Kingston, London & Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press. See also the work of Cat Fitzpatrick. For an account connecting the pathologization of trans people to transmisogyny, see Serano (2007: 115-160).

² This combination intends to reflect the mutual reinforcement between these social and material conditions – for instance that whorephobia may motivate moments of transphobic violence, or that racism, transphobia and whorephobia need to be understood through an integrated, historicising lens in order to understand the multiple forms of violence levied at trans women of color, including trans women of color sex workers. For a nuanced discussion of the issues around transfeminine stereotyping and these bodily intersections, see Aizura (2014).

³ I think of the horizon of the everyday closing as in a dialectical relation with José Muñoz’s formulation of queerness as a horizon of possibility, where Muñoz describes “the here and now” as “a prison house” (2009: 1).

⁴ The Jobcentre Plus is the central, front line office for unemployment benefit in the UK (known as Job Seekers' Allowance) and work-related disability benefits (such as Employment and Support Allowance, ESA). The treatment of Jobcentre Plus users has been violently rationalized since the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government in 2010, which includes a number of media controversies surrounding suicidal claimants.

For a brief account of the historical development of the Jobcentre, see Gabriel Bristow (2014) 'A Brief History of the Jobcentre', *Mute* (4 August 2014). Online at <http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/brief-history-jobcentre> (accessed November 28 2016).

There are currently no critical accounts of trans people or of transfeminine people's experiences of the Jobcentre Plus. Accounts of how ESA has been used as a means to force people with disabilities back into work are numerous. Data published by the UK Government in 2015 revealed that thousands of people with disabilities had died despite being classified fit-to-work by Government assessors. See John Pring (2015) 'Long awaited deaths stats do not tell the whole story', *Disability News Service* August 28 2015. Online at <http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/long-awaited-deaths-stats-do-not-tell-the-whole-story/> (accessed November 28 2016).

⁵ That is, unless the expression of one's self is foregrounded in one's workplace. This is not common, however in context of certain forms of gendered labor, the expression of one's gender may be part of the work. For a discussion of the latter, see Weeks (2011). For a discussion of the relation of the self to wage labor, see Karl Marx (1959) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers), online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm> (accessed November 2 2016) and Lukaçs (1971).

⁶ For a significant, brief enactment and discussion of transfeminine sexual reproduction, see micha cárdinas (2016) 'Pregancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 3, Nos 1-2), 48 – 57.

⁷ Katy Steinmetz (2014) 'The Transgender Tipping Point', *Time Magazine*, 29 May 2014, online at <http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/> (accessed October 28 2016).

⁸ My conception of 'trans liberalism' is influenced by the work of scholars identifying forms of queer liberalism (Eng 2010), homonationalism (Puar 2007), and homonormativity (Duggan 2003) and more recent critiques of assimilationist trans politics (Spade 2011).

⁹ The problems of the 'spousal veto' clause of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 in England and Wales – through which a partner can prevent their spouse from obtaining legal gender recognition of their chosen gender, once having changed their gender in the terms of the gender binary – have been raised at length within trans activist circles.

¹⁰ Sian Lea (2016) 'The Immigration Act 2016 in Plain English', *Rights Info*, May 31 2016, online at <http://rightsinfo.org/immigration-act-2016-plain-english/> (accessed November 30 2016).

¹¹ In the UK, the discrimination of employees in the workplace, or of potential employees during the hiring process, for the characteristic of their 'gender

reassignment' (broadly understood as anyone who is undergoing or has undergone a process of transition) is outlawed under the Equality Act 2010.

¹² For an account of the impact of austerity measures in the UK, following the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in 2010, see Martin Mitchell et al. (2013) 'Implications of austerity on LGBT people in public services' (NatCen Social Research), online at <http://natcen.ac.uk/media/205545/unison-lgbt-austerity-final-report.pdf> (accessed October 28 2016). A report by the Runnymede Trust argues that the Black and minority ethnic people were overrepresented in the groups most dramatically effected by UK Conservative Government's 2015 budget, see Runnymede Trust (2015) 'The 2015 Budget Effects on Black and minority ethnic people', online at <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/The%202015%20Budget%20Effect%20on%20BME%20RunnymedeTrust%2027thJuly2015.pdf> (Access November 2 2016). There is yet to be research quantifying the impact of austerity politics and economic policy on trans people in the UK, yet alone on trans people of color.

¹³ I have used the grammatical construction 'poor trans women and trans femmes / of color and/or trans sex workers' to emphasize that each of these description may intermesh with each other.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive presentation of the issues facing trans and gender nonconforming people in prison, see Stanley and Smith (2011). Social Death is a term developed by Ruth Gilmore, see Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) *Golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

¹⁵ 'These are the trans people killed in 2016', *The Advocate*, October 14 2016, online at <http://www.advocate.com/transgender/2016/10/14/these-are-trans-people-killed-2016> (accessed December 1 2016).

¹⁶ 'The 22 trans women murdered in 2015', *The Daily Dot*, October 15 2015, online at <http://www.dailydot.com/politics/trans-women-of-color-murdered/> (accessed October 29 2016); see also news of the death of Mya Hall.

¹⁷ Through this conception of slow death, Berlant argues the need for "a development in the ways we conceptualize contemporary historical experience, especially where that experience is simultaneously at an extreme and in a zone of ordinariness, where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable, and where it is hard to distinguish modes of incoherence, distractedness, and habituation from deliberate and deliberative activity, as they are all involved in the reproduction of predictable life" (2011: 96).

¹⁸ For initial thoughts on the question on the question of agency in this poor trans, feminine and/or disabled persons, see Ferguson (2004: 1); Lugones (2003: 207-237); McRuer (2006). For my thoughts, see Raha (2017).

¹⁹ At the time of writing, there has yet to be a test case of trans discrimination in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010. Following the introduction of fees to make claims to an employment tribunal in 2012, fees now stand at £250 to make a claim and £950 to take the claim to a hearing for discrimination fees. See UK Government (2016) 'Make a claim to an employment tribunal' (October 25 2016), online at <https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunals/make-a-claim> (accessed November 28 2016). While UK Government documentation suggests

“you may be able to get help paying the fee if you’re getting certain benefits or on a low income” (ibid), there have been dramatic cuts to legal aid over this decade that have affected access to the law, to the extent that criminal lawyers and barristers staged strikes against further cuts to legal aid in 2014. For a discussion of the problems of accessing legal protections for trans prisoners and how these legal protections are deployed against trans prisoners in the UK, see Chryssy Hunter (2016) ‘The failed myth of political equality through law’, presented at *TRANS*STUDIES*, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA, September 8 2016.

²⁰ I have explored this form of politics as exemplified in the work of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, historicizing the radical Third World and Black liberation politics of the group and their collectivized care work as poor ‘street queens’ of color who were sex workers – see Raha (2017). See also Jessi Gan, “‘Still at the Back of the Bus’: Sylvia Rivera’s Struggle” (Stryker & Aizura 2013: 291-301); Sylvia Rivera, “Queens in Exile: the Forgotten Ones,” in Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins (eds) (2002) *GENDERqUEER: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books), 71-85; Reina Gossett, ‘The Spirit Was’ blog, online at <http://thespiritwas.tumblr.com/> (accessed October 30 2016).

²¹ The formulation is offered in the argument made by sex workers that working together offers forms of protection among sex workers. For examples, see English Collective of Prostitutes (2016) ‘Why Decriminalisation’, online at <http://prostitutescollective.net/why-decriminalisation/> (accessed November 2 2016).

²² For a detailed conception of trans and queer social reproduction, see Raha (2017).

²³ In Turkey, there have been widely-reported protests following the murder of Hande Kader, a trans sex worker, whose death has been linked repeatedly by activists to a long line of murders of trans people and gendered violence against refugees. See ‘Demonstration in Istanbul for Hande Kader: We want to die of natural causes’, *LGBTI News Turkey*, August 21 2016, online at <https://lgbtinewsturkey.com/2016/08/21/demonstration-in-istanbul-for-hande-kader-we-want-to-die-of-natural-causes/> (accessed August 27 2016); ‘Hande Kader’s Murder Protested in Eastern Turkey’, *LGBTI News Turkey*, August 22 2016, online at <https://lgbtinewsturkey.com/2016/08/22/hande-kaders-murder-protested-in-eastern-turkey/> (accessed August 27 2016). Both articles are english translations of articles originally published in Turkish at *KAOS/GL* <http://kaosgl.org/> (accessed August 27 2016). The connection between transphobic, whorephobic violence and racialized, gendered violence against refugees in and around Europe is currently under- researched.

²⁴ In regards to issues around resources and of the production of safer spaces, the Radical Transfeminism mini conference in London, June 2015, deployed a ‘politics of space’ that emphasized differences in experience of oppression and means to support understanding when one’s views are challenged. The document foregrounds the “interactive” and “public” nature of building a “radical and co-operative” politics among those in attendance. See Mijke van der Drift, Chryssy Hunter and Nat Raha (2015) ‘Politics of Space’, *Radical Transfeminism Stream, London Conference in Critical Thought*, London, UK, June 26-27 2015,

online at

<https://www.facebook.com/events/505965509556758/permalink/511009335719042/> (accessed November 2 2016).

²⁵ The closest object to the textbook on transmisogyny is Serano's *Whipping Girl* (2007).

²⁶ Stryker's conception of "homonormative disciplinarity" emerges from a discussion of the position of her own work within the issue of *Radical History Review* in which this paper appears (2008: 153-155); where homonormative is historicized and understood as a "back-formation from the ubiquitous *heteronormative*, suitable for use where homosexual community norms marginalized other kinds of sex/gender/sexuality difference", in particular gender antinormativity articulated through 'transgender' in the 1990s (147).

²⁷ See Federici (2012), Farris (2015) and Aizura (2014).

²⁸ A recent survey of trans employee experiences, conducted by Totaljobs with the support of numerous trans organizations in the UK, found that out of 404 participants: 15.35% of participants had an annual salary of less than £10,000; 21.3% of participants had a salary between £10,000 - £19,000; 15.6% of participants had a salary between £20,000 - £29,000; and 18.3% of participants did not receive an annual income. According to the Office of National Statistics, the median of annual earnings for full-time employees in the UK, as of April 2016, is £28,200. The statistics suggest that trans people are largely earning salaries under the national median salary. This is also given the over-representation of white British people in the Totaljobs survey in comparison to the national population, where 87.3% of the 432 participants identified as English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, and 3.2% identified as White other. See Totaljobs (2016) *Trans Employee Experience Survey*; Office of National Statistics (2016) 'Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2016 provisional results', online at www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2016provisionalresults (accessed Nov 2 2016).

²⁹ The concept of reification is formulated in Lukaçs (1971) to describe the contemplative character of labor as transformed by Fordist modes of production. While this essay is too brief to provide a detailed reading of this formulation, my use of the concept here is to invoke the psychic impact of undertaking labor as 'contemplative activity'.

³⁰ Discussing the raids Operation Lanhydrock's in Soho, London, October 2016, in the context of the Modern Slavery Act 2016, Mac argues that "[t]o be an undocumented migrant who sells sex is *to be a victim under the law*, irrespective of whether you see yourself that way" (emphasis added). See Toni Mac (2016) 'Swoop and Rescue'. *Verso*, October 21 2016. Online at <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2895-swoop-and-rescue> (accessed December 1 2016).

³¹ For the canonical arguments around the issue of LGBT assimilation in the context of neoliberalism, see Duggan (2003), Puar (2007) and Ryan Conrad (Ed.) (2014) *Against equality: queer revolution, not mere inclusion* (Edinburgh: AK Press).

³² Gossett, Gossett and Lewis (2012); Che Gossett (2016) 'Žižek's Trans/gender Trouble', *LA Review of Books*, September 13 2016. Online at <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/zizeks-transgender-trouble/#>! (accessed November 30 2016).

³³ Serano (2007).

³⁴ Arika, *Refuse Powers' Grasp*, Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland, October 21-23 2016. Those named in this section are the voices that build the discussions in this and the next paragraph of the essay.

³⁵ *We cannot live without our lives* is penned by Barbara Deming and the title of her 1974 book (New York: Grossman Publishers). With the prefix of '3rd World Women', the phrase was used on a banner by women in Boston marching to protest of the murders of Black women in the city in 1979. The phrase has also more recently been used to title conversations around trans prison abolition involving Reina Gossett, Che Gossett, CeCe McDonald, Dean Spade and Eric Stanley.

³⁶ See Guy Debord (1970) *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit: Red & Black.