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Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal

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“I’m Not Talking to You” “You Don’t Have to!”

Trans/scripting the Bland-Encinia Case

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor¹

This manifesto and trans/scripting is a response to the specific violence that occurred between a Black female driver (Sandra Bland) and a white police officer (Brian Encinia) in Texas in July 2015 which resulted in Bland's death. As an urgent #BlackLivesMatter concern, the author considers post-structuralist theories of identity and trans/scripting as resources to inform identity performance and trans/imagination with more opportunities for life-giving rather than life-taking results. The author provides a series of questions and challenges to Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners for trans/scripting and trans/imaging moments of racial discrimination and terrorism for long-term rehearsal into, through, and beyond racially motivated violence toward rehumanization.

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An Academic Manifesto of Rigorous Outrage

There are political, artistic, and corporate manifestos. This is an academic one: a theoretically grounded public declaration to employ the thinking tools of our trade to engage with outrage, to study the *is* of the injustices of our time, and to vulnerably wish for a better tomorrow. No, to burying scholarly ideas in esoteric, unreadable theory. No, to shirking away from the distressed moment of our racialized present because we don't have the "answers" or we're afraid to be wrong. No, to reading and thinking instead of doing. No, to believing the written word has no power. No, to neglecting racial politics and the connections between race and all injustices of our time. No, to talking about racialized violence and not including women like Sandra Bland in the list of names we name. No, to blaming the police for our collective social problems. No, to exculpating police as if their public service were a free pass from blame. No, to presuming that Black scholars are the only ones who should be writing about racialized violence. No, to presuming White scholars cannot write about racialized violence. No, to journal issues about Black Lives Matter without Black scholars involved (Jaschik, 2017). No, to quick, facile, shallow thinking with corporatized sound bites. No, to long, jargon-filled theoretical thinking that alienates 90+% of readers, even academic ones. No, to believing it can't be done in academia. No, to the uncertainty that accompanies this hybrid academic-manifesto form. Yes, to the word "manifesto" as a part of a bold invitation for submissions to bridge academic-public writing genres. Yes, to the opportunity I have here to analyze and trans/script a piece of Internet-downloaded video of police violence against an African American woman to slow down real time, to engage in this lived moment of fear and violence and propose that Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners can do something about it. Yes, to rethinking what constitutes data. Yes, to data-driven theatre activism. Yes, to the tools that discourse analysis, poetry, and playwriting provide together. Yes, to art-activist license to take scripts of what is and transform them to what might be.

What Happened and Why We Need Theatre of the Oppressed

At about 4:30 p.m. on July 10, 2015, Sandra Bland was driving a silver Hyundai Azera south through Waller County, Texas on FM 1098, near Prairie View A&M University (PV), when a state trooper, Brian T. Encinia, pulled her over for what he said was failing to signal a lane change. Encinia asked Bland to put out her cigarette and she refused; Encinia used this to justify her arrest for “resisting arrest.” Later, Bland was found dead in her jail cell on July 13. The autopsy ruled her death a suicide (Rogers, 2015).

Bland was driving from Chicago into Texas because she’d just gotten a job at PV, a historically black university, a job she would never actually perform. The police department claimed Bland hung herself in a jail cell, but there were suspicions of foul play.² We have no recording of what happened at the police department cell, but, unlike so many cases of police violence against Black Americans³ over recent years, we do have the dash camera footage of Bland’s arrest where we can all bear witness to much of what was said as she was handcuffed, before she was taken to the jail on July 10, 2015 just before her death (Uygun, 2015; Grim, 2015).⁴

The goal of this manifesto-article is to bear collective witness to this moment as one embedded in recent and historical violence against African Americans using Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) theory and tools (Boal, 1979/1990, 1995) as well as Foucault’s (1978/1990, 1984) understanding of power and the aesthetics of existence. This case represents a unique and too often overlooked case of police violence

² Reid (2015) published “10 questions” regarding possible foul play in Bland’s case, including the fact that she was noted as suicidal and still placed alone in a cell with a plastic trash liner, the item by which she is said to have hung herself.

³ I use “Black American” and “African American” interchangeably as our language is in flux regarding the life sustaining use of each term to connect language to histories of the African slave trade, skin color, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

⁴ As of March 2016, Officer Encinia was fired from his position with the Texas Department of Public Safety and pled not guilty to the perjury charge before a District Judge. The criminal case took place in May 2016 and Encinia was charged with misdemeanor perjury. In September 2016, Bland’s family agreed to a \$1.9 million settlement in their wrongful-death civil suit against Waller County. As of June 2017, perjury charges against Encinia were dropped in exchange for his agreement to never again work in law enforcement (Associated Press, 2017; Kaleem & Hennessey-Fiske, 2017).

against Black women. My purpose here is to identify, define, and illustrate the value of trans/scription and trans/imaging tools for use by TO practitioners to rehumanize those involved in this tragic incident as well as those who may continue to experience similar circumstances until something dramatic is changed. In this manifesto-article, I inquire how we can apply creativity and the imagination as components of engaged, ethically responsible, scholactivist work. How might we do as Boal (1979/1990) suggests and "rehearse the revolution," changing the conditions of police brutality through rehearsal, reflection, and embodied dialogue? In a time when many are filled with hopelessness and despair, what can these tools offer TO practitioners for re-scripting present and future struggles of this dire, dehumanizing kind?

Foucault's Theory & Dash Cams

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1975/1990) argues that since the 18th century, prison authorities used forms of constant surveillance through the panopticon structure to induce compliance where a prisoner becomes totally seen, without ever seeing their seer or knowing with certainty one is seen at any given moment. In describing the major effect of the panopticon of the penitentiary, Foucault describes the goal as one "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1975/1990, p. 201). According to Foucault, knowing one may be constantly watched but never fully certain one is being looked at in any given moment has provided social discipline well beyond the prison systems and into schools, hospitals, and everyday life.

Recently, new dash and body cam technologies and personal digital devices have democratized surveillance, providing unprecedented disclosures and views of police violence that have, at times, resulted in death/murder. Visually-recorded images and audible transcripts of communicative exchanges that took place just before lives were lost assist public witness, inspiring intervention, protest, and demands for change. DuVernay's (2016) documentary, *13th*, helped make years of scholarship regarding police violence and mass incarceration of Black Americans more publicly visible. The film reminds viewers of the ways in which images of violence and murder of African Americans have, throughout history, charged the public to

demand change. These images range from 19th century photographs of whipping marks across slave backs to those of the brutalized face of the young, murdered Emmett Till to recordings of Eric Garner pleading from the ground to officers, repeating, “I can’t breathe, I can’t breathe”—these deeply disturbing images can force much needed conversations and change. Whereas the dividing practices Foucault described were deployed to maintain social order—to separate, categorize, normalize, and institutionalize—the Internet affords the public new horrifyingly explicit and immediate exposure to outrageous violence against Black Americans. While some might remain hopeful these new democratizing surveillance technologies will lead to changes in police force conduct and reduce victims, we must attend to Foucault’s (1975/1990) observation that such acts occur within *regimes of truth*, where “humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination” (p. 85). Foucault’s (1984) genealogical method is helpful for tracing historical processes that have shaped practices we take for granted today as self-evident (e.g., police activity which stigmatizes the Black community) as well as the Black community’s response through preparedness for threat and injustice.

I argue theatre and performance arts are necessary, additional interventions into dehumanizing practices. As a white TO practitioner and advocate for #BlackLivesMatter, I believe recent cases of police violence which have resulted in numerous injustices, including murder, present an ethical imperative. Building on Zentella’s (1997) *anthro-political linguistics* and Rymes’s (2016) *citizen sociolinguistics*, I offer a process called *trans/scription* that merges discourse analysis, playwriting, and performance with #BlackLivesMatter *scholactivism*. By scripting and performing the evidence we have of discourses of punishment and criminality, we may be able to discover what allows these discourses and criminal images to endure and perform alternatives for human actors to demand recognition of their full humanity in everyday life.

Trans/scription, Trans/imaging, & TO in Response to Racial Violence

Trans/scribing contrasts with many TO practices where rehearsals are often improvised spontaneously and orally and rarely engage with original transcript data or more prepared, written language documenting the triggering occurrence of oppression or *power over* another. I have found trans/scribing to be extremely valuable in helping pre-service educators navigate challenging interactions in educational spaces regarding racism, language discrimination, citizenship status, and other sensitive topics that are too often silenced due to their complexity (Cahnmann-Taylor, Wooten, Souto-Manning, & Dice, 2009; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014).⁵ In this collaborative work with others, I analyzed transcripts of TO sessions (using Forum theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and other techniques with educators regarding their ongoing school-site struggles) then created *trans/scripts*—abbreviated scripts based on transcribed TO sessions—that allowed future groups of educators or *spect-actors*⁶ to slow TO discourses down and thoughtfully consider the menu of alternatives presented throughout the triggering moment of struggle. All participating educators were both spectators *and* actors, listening to one another's individual stories and how they connected to universal educational struggles for social change (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010). These narratives always presented the teacher as the protagonist (against a challenging student, parent, colleague, or administrator) engaging educators in ongoing struggles that future groups of teachers were likely to encounter. This was extremely useful work, but because teacher education is profoundly white and female, the protagonist teacher stories were

⁵ Many TO practitioners are so busy that we don't have enough time to record our work for public access and the exchange of ideas. Video clips on teachersactup.com showcase elements of my own work with educators where the antagonist in the classroom was students' distracting and inappropriate use of technology during Spanish foreign language instruction. The [Improv education](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6YkGp8Qp8Qp8Qp8Qp8Qp8Q) YouTube channel features improvisational games and activities with children, university students, and pre-service teachers as a way to exercise what I refer to as *embodied creativity within constraint*.

⁶ Boal (1979/1990) employed the term *spect-actors* to merge “spectator,” one who sits passively in an audience, with the term “actor,” one performing in the dramatic scene. In Boal’s Forum Theatre, spect-actors join actors in a scene to rehearse solutions to community problems.

often those of young, white women and/or were often missing opportunities to engage with a more diverse range of lived experience, specifically those of African Americans. It is necessary for those of us in teacher education, police education, and other public service fields to invite stories that are both in the room and not in the room for full human engagement, and to do so with dignity and care. Thus, I argue for the importance of studying and performing trans/scripts based on recent, video/audio recordings of ongoing and violent struggles between law enforcement and minorities in communities across the US. TO practices based on recordings and transcripts can allow us to thoughtfully listen, read, and see what *was* (in addition to or beyond one spect-actor retelling the story) and better imagine a series of alternative *trans/scripts* and *trans/images* as a collective.

Collective witness to these dehumanizing images with counter images is urgently needed as a form of hypervigilance, public *conscientização* (Freire 1970, 2014) or critical consciousness, and rehumanization. Trans/scripting and trans/imaging practices provide the intellectual as well as artistic tools to stand in the presence of violence and pain and believe there is still something we can do about it. I believe the ultimate goal of doing this type of transgressive TO work is to become conscious of how we can record and bear witness to embodied social and linguistic practices, slow these practices down, and experiment with new ways of being in radical care with one another. If the principle of Foucault's panopticon was the disindividualization of power, then TO trans/scripting is the reindividualization, returning agentic capacity to all of us as spect-actors in the racialized crisis of our times. When we share in one another's suffering, we learn to care for one another, we learn to ask more of each other, and we learn to love.

While I have used trans/scripts to rehearse extreme risks with educators who were fearful of being fired from their positions (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010) or those who were accused of racism (Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014), I have not successfully rehearsed trans/scripts or trans/imaging to

address racially motivated violence.⁷ Rehumanization and racial justice work is not to be taken lightly, and I am concerned that offering any kind of strategy may be justifiably perceived as naive and/or woefully insufficient. Therefore, I want to be clear not to claim trans/scription, trans/imaging, or any TO work is any kind of *fix* to the issues at hand. Rather, I identify tools with potential to add remedy where peril and devastation have for too long reigned supreme. The #BlackLivesMatter movement requires greater depths of listening and seeing to oppose criminalization with humanization. TO tools intend to further humanizing goals and require *scholactivists* of all races to explore the possibilities and limits of these tools.

Learning how to listen and see differently are qualities deeply connected to learning how to speak as an advocate for oneself and others. Freire (2014) emphasized the importance of learning how to listen:

There are those who believe that by speaking one learns how to speak, when in reality, it is by listening that one learns how to speak. One cannot speak well who does not know how to listen. And listening always implies not discriminating. How can I comprehend the students from the slums if I am convinced that they are just dirty children who smell? . . .

Learning how to listen implies not minimizing the other, not ridiculing the other. How can a

⁷ I did participate in two TO workshops with established TO experts (one with a white male and the other with a black female) in which the group chose to explore a racist incident through Forum Theatre and Rainbow of Desire. Both cases resulted in re-wounding a person of color in the mostly white-identified group. Both cases were brief, one-day workshops in which the group: 1) did not know each other, 2) did not establish trust, 3) were heterogeneous in many ways including race and gender, and 4) ended because time ran out rather than with any purposeful closure. These experiences have taught me to use great caution when using TO in addressing issues of racism and other very sensitive topics such as violence and abuse. This is not to say the work should not continue, but that it must go forward with the utmost care. There have been a few occasions when I have purposely steered a group away from trying to work out a moment of racism in a TO session because I felt we did not have sufficient time or trust to do it honorably. On the other hand, when exploring the results of the 2017 election with a group of mixed race undergraduates with split votes for Clinton and Trump, I decided to see if Forum Theatre might help all classmates and instructor to see diverse perspectives that lead to the vote. While this session was extremely tense and uncomfortable, the group had worked together for weeks and had built trust. Personally, I grew considerably through the exercise. As the instructor, I was able to understand aspects of race, gender, and class privilege informing these young voters during the election that I hadn't understood prior to TO ensemble exploration.

teacher have good communication with a student having previously devalued or been ironic toward that student? (pp. 22-23)

How might the specific events on July 10-13, 2015 and the continued murders of Black Americans falsely arrested by police officers⁸ have turned out differently if either Officer or Victim had been afforded rehearsal time for embodied listening and speaking? We have important, unprecedented access to the entire video footage of Bland's arrest (Grim, 2015; Uyger, 2015). Haunted by this footage, I listened to it over and over to transcribe it for myself (prior to networks adding subtitles; see Appendix A) and explore how discourse analysis can be combined with poetic and performance skills to engage outrage with artistry and scholarship. Recordings such as this one between Bland and Encinia can be used in professional development in a variety of public service and educational fields. What happened? What might have been done differently? Readers may be interested in using this transcript for their own trans/scripts; I am eager to learn what rehearsing our collective imaginations may teach us about this moment as well as to better prepare us for the future.

Trans/Scripting the Bland-Encinia Case

Let us together slow down the lived experience and wonder: what can trans/scripting and trans/imaging teach us about the potential of TO practices to help navigate #BlackLivesMatter concerns generally and the specifics of what occurred between Bland and Encinia? Trans/scripting begins with the long, unedited, actual transcript, the words as they were spoken, rendered into written text. One can argue that transcripts, like photographs, are always partial and subjective, as much a product of the person who captured the words or images as a true reflection of the images themselves. I have done my best to

⁸ For a devastating review of this list of names, some of which have become familiar in U.S. grieving (e.g., Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Mike Brown), the film *13th* by DuVernay (2016) is a powerful cinematic call to witness.

transcribe what was audibly recorded but not visually available. I hated listening to this transcript yet I was gripped by the need for close examination.

What struck me most about my transcription was the violence in the discourse and my own potential willingness to accept this event and move on. The repeated listening and transcribing allowed me to imagine being in the car with Bland, standing outside the window with Encinia, and watching as history repeated itself and resulted in a cruel and unnecessary arrest and then death. After I transcribed the scene, I examined what was said and what went unsaid, rehearsing a rainbow of thinking that may have informed Encinia's and Bland's words and actions. Using discourse analysis, poetry, and applied theatre tools, I focused on moments of non-listening in the original transcript. I imagined a revision, a trans/script that did not occur but that might provide alternative pedagogies and new hope. It was through this process that I found the final lines (118-119) to resonate with symbolic meaning.

2ND OFFICER: You know what? I'm not talking to you.

BLAND: You don't have to!

Bland was right. No talking had to take place. This false arrest had been performed many times before. A script that officers of the law have been performing with African American victims for generations, resulting in unjust penalties, imprisonment, and loss of life as well as Black American preparation for injustice from the law. TO theory and practice remind us that our discourses and actions are constructed "out of the messy variability of spoken interaction" (Gal & Woolard, 1995, p. 129).

Reading the recorded incident can cause psycho-social harm and further the feeling of inevitable racial profiling and violence on one hand—or highlight threats of insubordination to the law on the other. When there is conflict involving legal and lethal power, it is excessively challenging to imagine an alternative. This is why we need aesthetic education to "discover not only possibility, but to find the gaps, the empty spaces that require filling as we move from the *is* to the *might be*, to the *should be*" (Greene, 2007, p. 4). The Bland-Encinia transcription can help us to explore what occurred and rehearse, in safe

spaces, alternative scripts (trans/scripts) and images (trans/images). The written trans/script can provide spect-actors permission to engage in the mindsets of Encinia and Bland as a rainbow of embodied discourses that each inherits from long histories of oppressive and violent relations. Trans/scripting can help break through what John Dewey (1954) calls "the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness" (p. 183).

The Internet provides a medium for vigilance but only insofar as we can slow down the barrage of information and use our skills as artists and scholars to give these moments meaning and spur new future action. Trans/scripting helps TO *scholartists* translate spoken language into written words and provide a process for reinterpretation of the subtle, embodied and discursive decision-making moments we each have but may not be fully aware of or prepared to use.

Trans/script: "Whatever you want me to do"

ENCINIA:

1. Okay, M'aam. You, okay?

BLAND:

2. I'm waiting on you. You, This is your job. I'm waiting on you, whatever you want me [to do].

ENCINIA:

3. I don't know, you seem very irritated

BLAND:

4. I am, I really am. Cause I feel like this trap is what I'm getting a ticket for. I was getting out of your way. You were speeding up, tailing me so I move over and you stop me. So yeah, I am a little irritated but that doesn't seem to stop you from giving me a ticket, so.

ENCINIA:

5. Are you done?

BLAND:

6. You asked me what was wrong and I told you.

I rendered this trans/script from the original verbal transcript (Appendix A, lines 1-6) of the encounter when the officer first speaks to Ms. Bland prior to her arrest. Nearly identical to the original, this trans/script provides an important basis upon which to employ all image- and discourse-based TO rehearsals that allow spect-actors to halt the original scene in order to trigger multiple, optional performances that may take place in future iterations. These rehearsals help one to reimagine Greene's (2007) "the *is*" of the original transcript: to rewind real time and ask what alternatives might have been present for either actor that may have altered the situation's outcome. For example, might things have turned out differently if Bland in Line 4 had said nothing; called upon a passerby; pleaded with the second, female officer; or performed what Davis (n.d.) refers to as "Jim Crow racial etiquette," and responded "yes, sir" instead of challenging Encina's authority? Rehearsing the protagonist's options in a safe space away from the actual and/or perceived antagonist's violence and power allows the collective wisdom of an ensemble⁹ to wonder: what might one do in this exact situation? What is possible to do differently?

Knowing that the discourse that followed escalated to a high level of aggression and resulted in death, it is important to have as many different rehearsals of this situation as well as reality checks to question what allows this kind of violent exchange to transpire. What is our role as academics and artists to intervene and help prevent future escalations of violence and injustice? By the time an African American is under arrest, is it too late? What, if any, options are available in the face of state-sanctioned police power?

Scholarartists can use our imaginations and be in service to this urgent call for change. Imagine the rainbow of images one might perform to illuminate the officer's final recorded words, "I'm not talking to you."

⁹ This work is complex and risky. It is often best done with ensembles that share an identity: all police officers, all participants who identify as people of color, all women, all men. This work can be effective in heterogeneous groups after a great deal of time is spent performing exercises that cultivate trust.

An embodied litany of “because” could be newly imaged and scripted. Understanding both arresting officers as complex characters (with any number of reasons they are *not talking* to the victim) is one route to new forms of embodied dialogue that must take place in training for future cycles of conflict. The list poem below represents my isolated drafting—I often work alone as poet, conjuring up other voices I have heard or might imagine (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2016). What I value about TO work as opposed to poetry writing is the depth of imaginative potential when an ensemble of human actors explores a range of voices together. This poem draft may serve a future TO ensemble who may rehearse what aspects of Encinia's voice are here, what is left out, and what lines might be newly created in a group-driven trans/script.

I'm Not Talking to You...

A police officer's imagined internal monologue during a Black woman's unjust arrest

because people like YOU never listen,
because I'm paid to give citations and you were next in line,
because my shift's almost done,
because I'm sick of attitude,
because YOU don't matter,
 criminal,
 animal,
 filling our jails,
 taxing our systems,
because people like YOU never go down easy,
because I'm scared, I have a family,

because I've read you your rights,¹⁰
because criminals don't have rights,
because I've got the gun,
 the flashing lights,
 the bear trap, the checkpoint Charlie,
 the badge,
 the radio,
because I don't have to,
because I am trained not to,
because I want to get home,
 I don't want you to hurt me,
 the game's on,
 I don't want to appear weak,
because in the good ole days you'd go out on a stretcher.¹¹

This poem is in the form of *anaphora*, the deliberate repetition of the first word to emphasize the many different, often conflicting explanations for the officer's triggering discourse. The poem is an unfinished trans/script that might supply any number of spoken and visual images to help us understand the wide array of discourses and images that may have informed the arresting officer's July 10, 2015

¹⁰ The actual recording does not include the reading of Sandra Bland's rights which may be a part of the criminal case against the arresting officer.

¹¹ Quote from Donald Trump at a rally on February 22, 2016 where protesters including those from the Black Lives Matter movement appeared and were punched by pro-Trump supporters. "In the old days," Trump added, protesters would be "carried out on stretchers" (Diamond, 2016).

decision-making. I believe public servants—educators, police officers, political representatives, public utilities workers, and those of us who train them or conduct scholarship in these fields—could benefit from exploring the many different reasons that talking and listening too seldom take place. Actual recorded visual and audio material can inform professional development practices that call upon collective skills to imagine what lines are missing, what lines must be changed, what lines must be heard.

Trans/imagining a Way Forward

I believe the TO community is full of optimists. We believe things can change. We believe in aesthetic processes to create change, imagining and performing alternatives in order to bring them into existence. Freire (2014) eloquently describes this fundamental belief in change:

Not only must I give testimony of my desire for change, but beyond that, I must demonstrate that within me it is more than a belief; it is conviction. If I am not able to give testimony to my convictions, I lose my ethical base and become a terrible educator because I cannot get across the value of transformation. (p. 22)

I believe we are capable of change. I believe what happened to Bland should never happen again. I believe change will happen one rehearsal at a time. I believe in the power of the Internet to urgently share visual and audio recordings to arouse us from our stupor and ignite collective indignation and demands for change. I also believe in the power of increasing creative publication spaces for scholartistry such as *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal* to consider these recordings as research data and test the power of our applied scholactivism. The power in trans/scripting and trans/imagination must be further tested to determine its potential to educate and inform new approaches to witness and action. As we post and tweet our convictions online, I believe it is vital we also find physical spaces to collectively rehearse public good with our work. It will be especially important to share both successes and failures in what I imagine will be a long term process led by scholartists and scholactivists of many colors and points of origin who share the conviction that all lives can only matter if Black Lives Matter.

Post Script: June 16, 2017

I am up late at night. I grieve the news of today, the acquittal of the police officer responsible for Philando Castile's death, another victim of police profiling that resulted in unnecessary violence and death. The Latino officer from Minnesota, Jeronimo Yanez, was found not guilty even though cell phone and dash cam footage show how quickly the officer shot his gun into Castile's car after Castile's honest admission of carrying a licensed weapon (Ali, 2017). Castile was asked to show his license, he reached for his wallet, and a few seconds of fear, misunderstanding, and mistaken action (likely informed by racism) led the Latino officer to shoot Castile dead. The jury found it was not beyond reasonable doubt that the officer thought Castile was high and/or that he was reaching for his gun instead of his license.

Stop.

What?

Oh, that's what.

Can we still dare to imagine what might have happened otherwise?

An innocent man pulled over because he looked like a suspect. A black man driving a car who looked like another black male suspect. I can only imagine the aggravation Castile might have felt driving as a Black man with his girlfriend and child, being pulled over and removed from his day. How could he not have been angry? Wrongfully assumed a criminal, how did he have the courage to tell the officer he was carrying a licensed gun? What were each man's choices? What may have gone through the Latino officer's mind that lead him to immediately reach for and deploy his weapon?

How can words and body movements be rehearsed in order to diminish distrust and aggression and survive ongoing violence? TO has the tools to teach us how to truly be in our bodies with one another—bodies of all different colors—and this practice gives us courage to discover scripts of which we didn't yet know we were capable, to take the original transcript lines and turn them into a positive thoughts and action for a better tomorrow. Andrea Assaf's (2017) poem (honored as a finalist for the Freedom Plow

Award for Poetry and Activism) illustrates this practice. Available as a performance poem online, Assaf embodies the irony that Bland's tragic end began as "a failure to signal a lane change." This, she commands, "is a signal for change" (2:48-2:51). She transforms the officer's original transcript line "I will light you up, get out!" (Appendix A, line 48) and trans/scripts it as a command: "Light me up!" She testifies through verse the ways in which this original transcript is connected to global movements that have become ignited for change, "spreading like liquid fire, like lava, like rage" (4:30-4:40) from Texas to Tunisia to Tiananmen Square and Tibetan Monks. Assaf's use of alliteration, litany, and performance encourage the grammars and bodies of change. Her words of advice ignite positive ways for scholarartists and scholactivists to move forward:

Write with people whom you perceive to be very different from you. Create together, collaborate, wrestle through it. Walk into your fear. Explore unexpected intersections. Open to self-examination, and allow yourself to be confronted by difficult truths. Then stand on stage together, share a microphone, and bring your audiences, your communities, into the same room. Let your work be a beginning, a spark, a catalyst, not an end in itself. (Badra, 2017, para. 16)

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Appendix A: The Bland-Encinia Full Transcript, July 10, 2015¹²

1. ENCINIA: Okay, M'aam [approaches car window, takes out ticket]. [pause]. You, okay?
2. BLAND: I'm waiting on you. You, This is your job. I'm waiting on you, whatever you want me [to do]
3. ENCINIA: I don't know, you seem very irritated
4. BLAND: I am, I really am. Cause I feel like this trap is what I'm getting a ticket for. I was getting out of your way. You were speeding up, tailing me so I move over and you stop me. So, yeah, I am a little irritated but that doesn't seem to stop you from giving me a ticket, so.[?]
5. ENCINIA: Are you done?
6. BLAND: You asked me what was wrong and I told you.
7. ENCINIA: Okay.
8. BLAND: So now I'm done, yeah.
9. ENCINIA: Okay. You mind putting out your cigarette please, if you don't mind?
10. BLAND: I'm in my car, why do I have to put out my cigarette?
11. ENCINIA: Well, you can step on out now.
12. BLAND: I don't have to step out of my car.
13. ENCINIA: Step out of the car.
14. BLAND: No, you don't have the right.
15. ENCINIA: Step out of the car!
16. BLAND: You do not, you do not have the right to do that.
17. ENCINIA: I do have the right now step out or I will remove you.

¹² Transcription conventions: brackets ([]) indicate "stage directions" (observed body movements/behaviors and/or pauses in spoken exchange), question mark (?) indicates something inaudible, and slash (/) indicates overlapped or cut-off speech.

18. BLAND: I refuse to talk to you other than to identify myself and/(?)
19. ENCINIA: Step out or I will remove you.
20. BLAND: I am getting removed for a failure to signal?
21. ENCINIA: Step out or I will remove you. I'm giving you a lawful order. Get out of the car now or I'm gonna remove you.
22. BLAND: And 'm calling my lawyer. And I'm calling my lawyer.
23. ENCINIA: I'm gonna yank you out here.
24. BLAND: Ok, you're going to yank me out of my car?
25. ENCINIA: Get out.
26. BLAND: Okay! Alright.
27. ENCINIA: [speaking to unit on walkie talkie] 25 (?)
28. BLAND: Let's do this.
29. ENCINIA: Yeah, well, you're going to
30. BLAND: Yeah, don't touch me.
31. ENCINIA: Get out of the car.
32. BLAND: Don't touch me. I'm not under arrest. You don't have the right to touch me on my arm.
33. ENCINIA: You are under arrest
[Encinitas takes out his taser]
34. BLAND: I'm under arrest for what?
35. ENCINIA: (to walkie talkie) 25 (?) County FM 1098 (?) Send me another unit. [to] Get out of the car!
36. BLAND: For what?
37. Unit: (?) need another unit FM1098 (?)
38. ENCINIA: Get out of the car, now!
39. BLAND: Why am I being apprehended, you trying to give me a ticket for a failure/[cut off]

40. ENCINIA: I said get out of the car.

41. BLAND: Why am I being apprehended, you opened my car door.

42. ENCINIA: I am giving you a lawful order

43. BLAND: You opened my car door.

44. ENCINIA: I'm gonna drag you out of here.

45. BLAND: So, you're threatening to drag me out of my own car?

46. ENCINIA: Get out of the car!

47. BLAND: And then you gonna stun me?

48. ENCINIA: I will light you up, get out!

49. BLAND: Wow.

50. ENCINIA: Now!

51. BLAND: Wow.

52. ENCINIA: Get out of the car!

53. BLAND: For a failure to signal. You're doing all this for a failure to signal.

54. ENCINIA: Get over there.

55. BLAND: Right, yeah. Yeah let's take this to court.

56. ENCINIA: Go ahead.

57. BLAND: Yeah, let's do this, for a failure to signal. Yep.

[Bland walks with officer to his car and goes out of visual; audio indicates she attempts to film the event with her phone]

58. ENCINIA: Phone down, right now. Put your phone down.

[Another officer arrives, the struggle is audible]

59. BLAND: You're about to break my wrist! Can you STOP! You are about to fuckin' break my wrist, stooooop!

60. ENCINIA: Stop moving. Stop now. Stop it.
61. 2ND OFFICER: Stop resisting, Ma'am.
62. ENCINIA: If you would stop then I would tell you.
63. BLAND: For a fuckin' traffic signal.
64. ENCINIA: Now, stop.
65. BLAND: You are such a pussy. You are such a pussy
66. 2ND OFFICER: No, you are.
67. BLAND: For a traffic signal.
68. ENCINIA: You are yanking around.
69. BLAND: For a traffic signal.
70. ENCINIA: You are yanking around.
71. BLAND: For a traffic signal
72. ENCINIA: When you pull away from me, you are resisting arrest.
73. BLAND: This make you feel good, this make you feel real good, don't it? A female for a traffic ticket.
74. 2ND OFFICER: I got it, I got her. I got her. I got her.
75. BLAND: Don't it make you feel good, officer? For a traffic ticket.
76. 2ND OFFICER: Okay, take care of yourself.
77. BLAND: I know that make you feel real good, you're a real man now. You can slam me, knock my head into the ground. I got epilepsy, you mother fucker.
78. ENCINIA: Good.
79. BLAND: I hope I/
80. ENCINIA: Good.
81. 2ND OFFICER: you should have thought about that before you started resisting.

82. BLAND: Alright, alright, real good, real good for a female, yeah. Y'all strong good, yall real strong, y'all real strong.
83. ENCINIA: I want you to wait here.
84. BLAND: I can't go no where with your fucking knee on my back, duh.
85. ENCINIA: Imma open your door.
86. BLAND: (?) so full of shit, (?) so full of shit, for a fucking traffic ticket
87. ENCINIA: For a warning!
88. BLAND: (?) Texas,
89. ENCINIA: For a warning. You're going to jail for resisting arrest
90. BLAND: Whatever, whatever.
91. ENCINIA: Stand up.
92. BLAND: If I could! I can't even.../
93. ENCINIA: Okay, roll over.
94. BLAND: I cannot even fucking feel my arm.
95. ENCINIA: Tuck your knee in.
96. 2ND OFFICER: Tuck your knee under.
97. ENCINIA: Tuck your knee in.
98. BLAND: God damn, I can't, I can't.
99. ENCINIA: Listen, listen, you gotta sit up on your butt.
100. BLAND: you just slammed my head into the ground, do you not even care about that?
101. 2ND OFFICER: listen to how he's telling you how to get up.
102. BLAND: I can't even hear.
103. 2ND OFFICER: Yes, you can.
104. ENCINIA: Sit up on your butt.

105. BLAND: He slammed my fuckin' head into the ground

106. ENCINIA: Sit up on your butt.

107. BLAND: What the hell.

108. ENCINIA: Stand up.

[bystander begins to record]

109. BLAND: All of this for a traffic signal, I swear to god. All of this for a traffic signal. [To bystander]

Thank you for recording. Thank you. For a traffic signal, slammed me into the ground and everything,

/

110. 2ND OFFICER: (?)

111. BLAND: everything. I hope you all feel good.

112. ENCINIA: This officer saw everything.

113. BLAND: And I'm so glad to put that, you just got on tape for whatever.

114. 2ND OFFICER: I was, I saw what happened.

115. BLAND: No, you wasn't, you was pulling over.

116. 2ND OFFICER: No, Ma'am.

117. BLAND: You didn't see everything leading up to it.

118. 2ND OFFICER: You know what? I'm not talking to you.

119. BLAND: You don't have to!