

Oreet Ashery

staying

Dream, Bin, Soft Stud
and Other Stories

5 Introduction

7 Staying Now and Later

Oreet Ashery

**8 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Trans People and Persecution**

Experiences of LGBT People
and the UK Asylum System

Jill Power

**14 Reflections on Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Trans Asylum/
Human Rights Applications**

Some Thoughts From an
Immigration Solicitor's Point
of View

Catherine Robinson

17 Better Than Therapy

Alter Ego Performance and
Being-Togetherness

Julia Austin

22 Characters

Staying: Dream, Bin, Soft Stud and Other Stories was created by artist Oreet Ashery in collaboration with a group of twelve lesbian refugees who are officially protected by the UK government, and asylum seekers who are in the vulnerable process of asylum application.

This publication is based on the project which took place over a course of six workshops in 2009 but it is also intended to facilitate an opening-up of the work, to invite a broader participation and engagement with the issues surrounding asylum law and human rights, to examine taboos, and to encourage empathy and compassion towards people who seek sanctuary in the UK and beyond. It includes a set of twelve conversation cards, instructions for how the cards could be used, extracts from the twelve character alter egos and three essays.

Oreet worked with twelve women in a group context, all from different places with vastly different experiences. They developed individual alter egos which mediated between the realities of what they have experienced and a more symbolic, metaphoric and exaggerated version of those experiences. These alter egos are manifestations of an aspect of the women's stories; developed in a group context they become a linguistic shortcut, facilitating a shared understanding of what that character represents without the need for explanations. The characters presented here in this publication are archetypes – symbols which represent hopes, fears, traumas and conflicts, which we all have the capacity to relate to in some way.

There are twelve character pages based on the twelve women's alter egos. Here we present

extracts of unedited content (the full transcript is available to download from artangel.org.uk). The women were invited to create their own content. The twelve characters offer a very broad range of voices and experiences; some are hopeful, simple and calm, others are angry and frightened. All are different, and collectively they command a range of emotions as they transport us through their stories.

In places the conversations are quasi-adolescent, expressing or exploring sexuality openly and freely for the first time, they are new voices spoken aloud; ideas, thoughts and feelings trying to find form. The experiences which have brought them to this place are drastically varied; they carry with them varied experiences of physical, emotional and systematic violence, experienced in their home countries, and here in the UK. Some have found and lost love; others have never known love. Elspeth Probyn describes in her essay 'Suspended Beginnings', that many people describe life before they identify as LGBT, whether childhood or the best part of adulthood, as a sort of 'suspended beginning': that life begins anew at the point when identity as LGBT is acknowledged and embraced.

Some of the content is explicit. At times the violence of the writers' experiences erupts in the violence of their expression. They are giving us access to that violence in their writing; brutal, painful, ugly, offensive, vicious and abusive. They trust us with their experiences, allowing us some participation, at a long remove, in that it makes us more than witnesses.

From our brief encounter with the asylum system we are overwhelmed by how much there is

to do, both in the court room and on the streets, to shift people's attitudes and to help support the people working for change. What change are we seeking? Perhaps to begin with – a change towards accepting diversity in all its forms, towards listening to and trusting other people's experiences, hearing their accounts without judgement, so that the legal systems can evolve with relevance and fairness.

This project is pioneering and hopeful. In a society which is divided by controversial and opposing views of asylum rights, where public debate is more concerned with economics than human rights and the inequalities between race, gender and sexuality are liberally discussed without upsetting the status quo, this project steps into new territory and invites its audience to look differently at a very invisible group of women. It has the potential to shake the comfort zones of some and refresh others with its honesty.

The women involved in this project hoped that by exposing themselves they might help raise awareness, further break down barriers to understanding and acceptance and improve the support and provision available for LGBT asylum seekers.

We would like to thank Oreet Ashery for creating such a special space where the women could feel comfortable and be themselves. We would also like to thank all the women who participated in the project; Aisha, Aziza, Bizle, BlackDiamondUnique, B.Star, Builder, Doreen, Dream, Fatmah, Karen, Lovejoy and Ola.

At the onset of the project, Jill Power from the UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) kindly described to me in detail the specific procedures that a gay person seeking asylum might expect on arrival to the UK. Apart from the experiences of court cases, appeals, repeated appeals, detention, deportation, uncertainty and unemployment shared by many asylum seekers, a lesbian or gay person who would like to stay in the UK on the grounds of their sexuality, has to write a twenty-page profile, proving their sexual identity. The text should also establish how this sexual identity is endangering their life back home. This textual self-portrait might involve presenting photographs and witnesses to strengthen the case.

As an artist who works extensively with the performances, scripts and constructs of identity and subjectivity, I asked how does one actually 'prove' their sexual identity in a legal document? Is this process humiliating and invasive? How could one accountably recall disassociated traumas, overwhelming stories and fragmented incidents that formed their sexual history? How else can those stories be told and shared? And could they be used in any way?

I wanted the participants to be able to recall their authentic experiences, something they all seemed very keen to share, in a way that allows for gaps, slippages, repetitions and new structures of embodying and imagining the self. I wanted these recollections to be debated in the present context of the workshops. To this end I chose to facilitate the development of participants' alter egos and fictional characters in a group situation.

I became so fascinated by the wider propositions the various alter egos and characters introduced, that I decided to create a set of twelve cards, each card based on a participant's alter ego. The cards are to be used in a group situation, in order to continue what we have started in the workshops, generate discussions, debates, shared information and potential new art works. The questions accompanying each card are based on what took place during the workshops and the resulting texts, and are simply questions that I wanted to get answers to from the women involved, or from future groups. The questions, like the characters, reflect a political dimension, mainly to do with the legal system, alongside a quest for a deeper understanding of an individual's set of circumstances.

For full details of what took place in the workshops please visit the Artangel website.

For a theoretical reflection on the workshops, please read Julia Austin's essay in this volume and on the website.

I would like to thank Lois Weaver, Cherry Smyth, Campbell X, Magdalena Suranyi, Mariana Arribas, Eileen Daly and Marit Münzberg for their involvement in the workshops and this publication.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans People and Persecution

Experiences of LGBT People and the UK Asylum System

Jill Power

Currently there are 80 countries in the world that criminalise homosexuality and condemn consensual same sex acts with imprisonment. On the 22 April 2009, the President of Burundi signed a law to criminalise same sex relationships for the first time in Burundi's history. Homosexual acts are punishable by death in seven countries: Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, 12 northern states in Nigeria and in the southern parts of Somalia. Many more countries that have repealed their laws against lesbians, gay men and trans people still discriminate and do not protect their lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities from hostility, hate crimes and community violence.

There are many types and particular forms of harm that are specific to LGBT people who are fleeing from persecution. Some have fled from the threat of execution or the death penalty. Lesbians and gay men who have been imprisoned report routine torture, beatings and corporal punishments, including humiliating treatments such as enforced nakedness. Some police and prison guards encourage 'queer baiting', and 'queer bashing' is also common. A considerable proportion of LGBT asylum seekers report that while being detained they have been sexually assaulted and raped by fellow inmates, the police and prison guards. Persecution of LGBT people that is state sponsored not only carries penal punishment but sends a strong message to non-governmental actors and to the public that it is acceptable for them to mete out their own punishments.

Many LGBT asylum seekers have been forced from their communities because they have been

publicly disowned, forced to marry, confined to psychiatric wards, threatened with honour killing, targeted by mob violence or named and shamed by homophobic witch hunts. In Uganda, the *Red Pepper* newspaper routinely publishes the names and photographs of people suspected of being lesbian and gay. In Cameroon, the hunting down of gays has reached colleges and universities, with suspected pupils being expelled and handed over to the police for arbitrary arrest. In Jamaica residents have proclaimed a 'gay eradication day' giving notice to lesbians and gay men to flee the community.

Similarly many trans people have faced a host of problems including high levels of hostility, violence, medical abuse, sexual exploitation, rape and death threats. In many countries trans people are not accepted in societies where legal procedures do not exist to allow individuals to change their identity or name to reflect their gender identity. Some have experienced imprisonment and torture for offences against public decency and cross dressing. Often they have been excluded from society and discriminated against, making finding jobs, homes and health care impossible tasks.

It is important to note that lesbians and gay men may face different types of persecution. Gay men are targeted more often by legal sanctions, mob violence and by entrapment tactics where they are open to arrest and blackmail. Lesbians more often are punished with gender based violence; they are open to constant sexual harassment, from verbal insults and threats to actual rape. Lone women or women seen with the same female companion will raise suspicion and if there is a

visible lack of men in their lives or if they turn down male sexual advances they are labelled as lesbian. Being accused of being a lesbian carries double discrimination: both the accusation of not being a 'proper woman' and of being beaten, raped or gang raped in the name of a 'cure' or to be taught a lesson. In a bid to put down rumours or suspicion of being lesbian, many women have been forced into bogus marriages where they are forced to subjugate themselves to daily rape in order to avoid further rape by the community or police or to escape honour killing.

When LGBT individuals flee their countries and ask for asylum in the UK it is a difficult and often long and harrowing process. There are many problems relating to the nature of their claim, their history, sexual orientation or gender identity. Asylum seekers have to prove that they are LGBT and that they cannot be 'discreet' about their sexual and gender identity, to avoid being sent back to their home country. They also have to prove that they cannot relocate to a different area in their country.

The UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) specialises in working with LGBT people who are seeking asylum from persecution in their country of origin because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Our work centres on a belief that LGBT asylum seekers should not be returned to countries where same sex relationships are criminalised; where the state actively supports homophobia and transphobia or to countries that fail to protect them from homophobic or transphobic hate crimes.

When working with clients our first priority is to support them with dignity and respect through the asylum process, producing country evidence reports and supporting statements to confirm persecution and identity, which can then be presented to the Home Office and to the Immigration Asylum Tribunals. As well as one-to-one work we hold monthly legal meetings and have set up a rota of legal aid solicitors who are willing to volunteer their time to assess cases and to take referrals from us. Since the rota began three years ago, we have referred over 200 people to these solicitors. As awareness of this service grows, more and more LGBT asylum seekers are requesting referral and many have won the right to remain in the UK. Each month our asylum meeting is attended by between 30 and 60 LGBT asylum seekers. Our second priority is to raise awareness and to improve capacity within the UK asylum system to properly support LGBT cases. Currently we are in the process of training UK Border Agency staff on the issues that are specific to LGBT asylum seekers.

We meet with clients on a regular basis and help them write very personal statements about their life history, the persecution they have suffered and their fears of being returned to their country of origin. These statements are crucial to the success of a case, as the Home Office requires them to prove that they are LGB or T. If someone has fled their country with nothing, which is frequently the case, this statement may be the only evidence they have to support their sexuality claim.

The details of a person's case are sensitive, intimate and highly personal, especially when we

are talking about rape, beatings, torture and imprisonment. For many asylum seekers sexuality is a taboo subject; it can be difficult and culturally unacceptable to talk about their sexuality. A recent example is a lesbian who was not believed by the Home Office because, feeling very scared and embarrassed to talk about her girlfriend and her sexual identity, she made a late disclosure of her sexuality. It was assumed, therefore, that she was lying. We have many clients who have lived their lives in secrecy or denial and have only felt safe to openly express their sexuality once they have fled the threat of persecution, found sanctuary in a safe LGBT space and slowly developed an understanding of and belief in themselves.

It is common for lesbians and gay men from countries where homophobic persecution is rife to be reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation or identity. Many have spent the majority of their lives concealing their true sexual identity in order to be safe. Sometimes we are the first people that they have 'come out' to or the first openly LGBT people they have ever spoken to about their sexuality. If a person has spent most of their life concealing their sexual identity, they will typically bring with them a sense of shame and self-loathing. Many clients say it is their fault that they have been persecuted and that they have brought it on themselves. In these situations it takes time to build up sufficient trust for a person to divulge and disclose all their life experiences, even to us, let alone to the Home Office.

We get to know our clients very well and although a few cases are successful, sadly, the Home Office initially refuses many clients. We know

their claims are genuine, yet the most frequent reason for refusal is that a person is not believed to be LGB or T. Even when they are believed, they can be told to go back to their country and be 'discreet' or that they can relocate to a different area. We are often asked whether it is possible for someone to go home and be 'discreet' about their sexuality once they have lived an open LGB or T lifestyle. It is our opinion that once somebody is psychologically comfortable with their sexual and gender identity it would amount to persecution to force them to live the life of secrecy about every aspect of their feelings and their life that 'discretion' in their country would demand.

No matter how much we prepare people for the likelihood, a refusal is a devastating blow. It carries the message that either they are lying about their sexual or gender identity and life experiences or that they do not deserve to live safely and can spend the rest of their lives lying about who they are. They face the prospect of always hiding and of a life that can never be spent with a partner.

Asylum decision makers frequently rely on stereotypical, western perceptions of sexual and gender identity. They have said that men who do not look gay, who do not appear effeminate, cannot be gay or that women who have been married (even when forced) or have had children, cannot be lesbian. Indeed, if you have never told anyone about your sexuality or identity then that is deemed sufficient reason not to be believed.

If you have been refused you have a right to appeal in an immigration court. Court hearings are nerve-racking and frightening experiences. Our clients feel anxious, exposed and afraid because

the most private aspect of their life is being put on trial. UKLGIG attends court hearings both to offer support and, in most cases, to give evidence. We are able to testify as to why we believe they are genuine. We can attest that they have spoken with us in very intimate detail regarding their sexual or gender identity. Not telling the truth while providing an in-depth, detailed and consistent story would be difficult for someone to maintain over the long period that we work with them. It would very quickly be obvious to us if someone tried to 'act' a lesbian, gay or trans persona and lifestyle and to regularly attend LGBT events for the purpose of embellishing an asylum claim.

Sadly, being detained in an immigration removal centre, or detention centre as it is more commonly known, is a reality that many asylum seekers have had to face. Detention almost always means that a case is fast-tracked, a process that is designed to remove people as quickly as possible. Clients do not have time to prepare their case because the claim is decided so quickly that all possible appeals are exhausted in a matter of weeks. The most common reason for being detained is that a person is thought to be not 'credible' or if they are from a Home Office list of so called designated safe countries, where sexuality and gender identity has not been considered in the decision to proclaim a country safe. Almost always Jamaican and Nigerian asylum seekers are detained, despite the fact that these are two of the most homophobic countries carrying long penal sentences and widespread persecution, stigma and homophobic intolerance within the community.

Detention centres are extremely bleak and intimidating places and although they are not meant to be jails, in every aspect they mirror prison conditions. Being detained, locked up and living under surveillance without committing an offence is a harrowing and frightening experience. Most people who are 'locked up' relive the trauma that they have fled from. In addition, they are likely to be subject to abuse and sexual harassment from fellow detainees, who frequently come from either the same homophobic country where they have been persecuted in the first place or one with the same attitudes. Detention centres are not safe environments for vulnerable people who have already fled torture and persecution.

LGBT people who have been detained often feel very isolated and fear the worst: either further retribution from homophobic detainees or of being sent back to their countries to face further abuse. Clients often report they feel frightened and scared to be left by themselves and have reported being spat on, called derogatory names and threatened with violence. Often the staff reaction to homophobic and transphobic abuse is to tell people to keep themselves in isolation and to avoid mixing with other detainees. In detention centres people are very distressed and emotional; everybody is living in fear and dread. The whole process seems to be designed to break people down and dehumanise them. The longer a person is in detention the more they lose hope, to the point where they feel criminalised and no longer feel like they have a voice – they become so demoralised that they often convey that they feel their only hope is to take their own lives.

However, it is good news that in the last year many LGBT asylum seekers have been successful at the tribunal stage. But we continue to support many people who are in the distressing situation of waiting for a decision and some who have failed and all appeals are exhausted. Some of these people have been removed and sent back to unsafe countries with uncertain futures or are living an underground existence. These people are very vulnerable; many are destitute and have been forced into exploitative situations or to live on the streets. Occasionally, through our networks, we are able to secure temporary accommodation or donations of food and money, but this is rare and dependent on the goodwill of supporters. Recently we were able to house a lesbian from Pakistan with a Pakistani gay couple. For six months they offered a room, food and a sense of family to our client who was previously living on the streets. However, all too often the reality is that all we have to offer is a safe space where people can come and talk to someone.

We have also developed an ongoing programme of social gatherings where people can meet for food, music, a massage and social contact. The support and empowerment that LGBT asylum seekers gain from each other is invaluable and gives a sense of belonging – sometimes to people who have never belonged. Finding people with a shared background and making friendships is vital in keeping people hopeful and fighting for their survival, especially when they have experienced setback after setback from a demeaning asylum process that frequently leaves them feeling desperate, depressed, alone and helpless.

We have very much welcomed the invaluable art project that Oreet Ashery and Artangel have created. By projecting their life stories onto characters the women were given some necessary distance to talk about the experience of being an asylum seeker. The women were able to express themselves freely around issues of immigration, flight, gender, sexuality, religion, politics and sex. It was a welcome break to get away from the many problems they face and their perceived identities of being simply asylum seekers. They showed great skill in portraying their true identities as strong, vibrant individuals with tremendous talents and achievements. It was a positive experience with lots of fun and laughter and their resilient spirits enabled the women to tell stories and develop characters, real or imagined, to show the public that they are human with goals and aspiration for the future. I would like to thank Oreet Ashery, Satoko Fujishiro and Artangel for working with us and giving us this opportunity to grow, bond and hold onto our hope. Most of all, I would like to thank our asylum seekers for sharing their lives with us and taking part. I have huge respect and admiration for the courage and resilience that I witness every day from people who have fled unimaginable horrors.

Since this essay was written, a new anti-homosexuality law has been proposed in Uganda, reflecting the changeable circumstances for LGBT asylum seekers. The following information was reported by SMUG (Sexual Minorities in Uganda) NGO group:

On the 14 October 2009 the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009 was tabled before the Parliament of Uganda. The Bill proposes that any person alleged to be homosexual would be at risk of life imprisonment or in some circumstances the death penalty for 'aggravated homosexuality' if it is their 3rd time arrested or if they have had consensual same sex relationships and are HIV positive. The Bill includes a provision that could lead to the imprisonment of anyone – including families and Human Rights organisations – who fails to report to the police within 24 hours the identities of LGBT people.

For example, 'Any parent who does not denounce their lesbian daughter or gay son to the authorities would face fines of \$2,650.00 or three years in prison; or any teacher who does not report a lesbian or gay pupil to the authorities within 24 hours would face the same penalties; or any landlord or landlady who happens to give housing to a suspected lesbian or gay man would risk seven years of imprisonment. Similarly, the Bill threatens to punish or ruin the reputation of anyone who works with the gay or lesbian population, such as medical doctors working on HIV/AIDS, civil society leaders active in the fields of sexual and reproductive health, hence further undermining public health efforts to combat the spread of HIV. All of the offences covered by the Bill as drafted can be applied to a Ugandan citizen who allegedly commits them – even outside Uganda.'

Reflections on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Asylum / Human Rights Applications

Some Thoughts From an Immigration Solicitor's Point of View

Catherine Robinson

When someone is scared to return to their country of origin they may be able to ask the United Kingdom for protection. An individual may be unable to return to their country of origin due to fear of physical attack from members of the community or their family because of their sexual identity. An individual may know that the police in their home country would not protect them if they were threatened or attacked because of their sexual orientation. An individual may face criminal prosecution or even the death penalty for consensual same sex practices. An individual may face violence and be at increased risk of being raped precisely because of their sexual orientation.¹

To obtain refugee protection in the United Kingdom an individual has to show they have a well-founded fear of persecution for one of five reasons: race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. The individual has to be outside their country of origin and owing to such fear they are unable or unwilling to avail of protection from their country of origin.² It has been accepted for some time that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) individuals can in principle constitute a particular social group for the purposes of the 1951 Convention.³

Alternatively, an individual may be able to obtain human rights protection if they are able to prove that there is a real risk that their human rights would be breached on return to their country of origin. The most relevant human rights provisions are: Articles 3⁴ and 8⁵ of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 3 ECHR is the right not to suffer torture or inhuman or degrading

treatment. This could be relevant if an individual is at risk of physical attack. Article 8 ECHR is the right to family and private life. Private life has been found to encompass a person's sexual life. The case law also shows a move towards recognising same sex relationships as family life.

From the foregoing it is clear that there is a legal framework in place to provide protection to individuals who would be at risk if returned to their countries of origin. However, LGBT asylum seekers face particular problems when making applications for protection. Below I set out a number of issues that I have had to deal with.

I think that the main challenge facing LGBT asylum seekers is to get the decision makers in the United Kingdom to understand issues of sexuality, gender identity and the cultural context of a case.

LGBT asylum seekers will have to prove their sexual orientation as often claims will be refused because the UK Border Agency or Immigration Judge do not believe that an individual is gay. This can be difficult to do, as Barry O'Leary has pointed out 'there is no straightforward answer to "proving" sexual identity.'⁶ Representatives have to think carefully about the evidence they need to adduce. If the individual is in a relationship in the United Kingdom then it may be possible to obtain a witness statement or other evidence from their partner. However, it can be more difficult if the individual is single. Evidence from support organisations such as UKLGIG or Imaan (a social support group for LGBT Muslims) can also be helpful, as can evidence from friends. Also it is important that the UK Border Agency and Immigration Judges in the United

Kingdom understand that 'sexual identity is not the same as sexual conduct.'⁷

Another problem can be proving that an individual will be at risk if returned. To prove this an individual needs to provide the decision maker with objective country evidence. Sometimes it is difficult to find information as to whether the LGBT community is targeted in a particular country. Moreover, it is often particularly difficult to find out information about the situation for lesbians in a particular country.⁸

Sometimes the UK Border Agency will accept that an individual will face discrimination in their country of origin but it will not agree that this treatment will be bad enough to amount to persecution. Again to prove that the treatment amounts to persecution it will be important to submit up to date country evidence to the decision maker.

The UK Border Agency may say that an individual can go home and be discreet about their sexual identity and then they would not come to the attention of the authorities. The case law on this issue has not been settled. However, I think that it is very important for an individual to explain to the decision makers exactly why they would be unable to return and act discreetly. It will also be helpful to adduce evidence of the kind of life that they are living in the United Kingdom and how they are able to express their sexual identity in the United Kingdom and what that means to the individual. I agree with Barry O'Leary when he says that, 'Freedom of sexual identity cannot be defined but must include not having to continually lie about who you are, being able to live with your partner without fear of

harm, or the opportunity to meet a partner without fear of harm.'⁹ It is important to explain this to the UK Border Agency and Immigration Judges.

Finally, it can be difficult for LGBT asylum seekers to access good legal advice.¹⁰ I have seen LGBT asylum claims badly presented by representatives who do not have experience in preparing cases on the basis of sexual orientation. To help combat this particular problem UKLGIG refers their service users to specific solicitors who have experience in these types of cases.

Although it can be difficult, it is possible for LGBT asylum seekers to obtain refugee status or human rights protection in the United Kingdom. One of my clients, a lesbian from Jamaica, was recently granted refugee status following a fresh asylum and human rights claim on the basis of her sexuality. Her first asylum claim was rejected following a poorly prepared appeal where the Immigration Judge made negative credibility findings about my client's sexuality. I submitted fresh evidence to the UK Border Agency including a country expert report that confirmed the risks that she would face if returned to Jamaica, a witness statement from her British partner and a supporting letter from UKLGIG. Subsequently, she was granted refugee status.

Initiatives such as Oreet Ashery's project with Artangel make a vital contribution to raising awareness of the challenges that LGBT asylum seekers face when they make a claim for protection in the United Kingdom, giving a voice to a group of asylum seekers that is not often heard.

- 1 Graham and Kiguwa, 'Experiences of Black LGBTI Youth in Peri-Urban Communities in South Africa', Community Media for Development (CMFD) and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), 2004, at 15 found that lesbians face violence twice as frequently as heterosexual women, and are at increased risk of being raped precisely because of their sexual orientation quoted in O'Flaherty, M and Fisher, J 'Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and International Human Rights Law: Contextualising the Yogyakarta Principles' Human Rights Law Review, 2008, 8(2), 207–248 at 209.
- 2 Article 1(A) of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.
- 3 See the case of Shah and Islam [1999] UKHL 20.
- 4 Article 3 ECHR provides: 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.'
- 5 Article 8 ECHR provides: '1 Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. 2 There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'
- 6 O'Leary, Barry "'We cannot claim any particular knowledge of the ways of homosexuals, still less of Iranian homosexuals.'" The particular problems facing those who seek asylum on the basis of their sexual identity', *Feminist Legal Studies* (2008) 16: 87 – 95 at 90.
- 7 O'Leary, Barry "'We cannot claim any particular knowledge of the ways of homosexuals, still less of Iranian homosexuals.'" The particular problems facing those who seek asylum on the basis of their sexual identity', *Feminist Legal Studies* (2008) 16: 87 – 95 at 90.
- 8 O'Leary, Barry "'We cannot claim any particular knowledge of the ways of homosexuals, still less of Iranian homosexuals.'" The particular problems facing those who seek asylum on the basis of their sexual identity' *Feminist Legal Studies* (2008) 16: 87 – 95 at 92.
- 9 O'Leary, Barry "'We cannot claim any particular knowledge of the ways of homosexuals, still less of Iranian homosexuals.'" The particular problems facing those who seek asylum on the basis of their sexual identity', *Feminist Legal Studies* (2008) 16: 87 – 95 at 91.
- 10 Although I acknowledge that this is a frequent problem for all asylum seekers.

Alter Ego Performance and Being-Togetherness

Julia Austin

1 When I think of Oreet Ashery, Marcus Fisher springs to mind. Which is another way of saying that alter ego performance is as closely bound to Ashery's practice as checked trousers are to Rupert Bear. The character Marcus Fisher, a soulful-eyed and somewhat diminutive Orthodox Jew, is Ashery's most famous creation. In her early performances as Marcus, Ashery – in full drag – followed the lead of artists such as Adrian Piper and took to the streets in order to expose the operations of gender and ethnic codes.

The case of Staying however calls for a different critical approach, for the simple reason that this time the artist's use of alter egos is embedded in a socially engaged, process based project that has been developed in partnership with a specific constituency. Furthermore, in Staying, Ashery vacates the role of performer. In her new position as concept originator, she structures or facilitates an open-ended series of alter ego experiments in which the bodies, fantasies and autobiographical material of others is foregrounded. The ethics, aesthetics and politics of this turn should not be overlooked. All the same, situating the piece in the context of Ashery's wider practice reveals that the project marks less of a departure than a continuation of a line of enquiry that has run in parallel with her long-standing interest in the socio-political dimensions of alter ego performance.

Ashery's engagement with Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics dates back to 1999 when she was an undergraduate at Sheffield University.¹ Influenced by the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija who famously cooked Thai curries for

gallery attenders, Ashery prepared a hummus meal in order to investigate the possibility of 'translating food, exile and context'. In Ashery's own words, 'I boiled the chickpeas all night, but fell asleep and they got burnt. So I had to buy readymade ones.' This tragic sequence of events – singed with Ashery's trademark sense of bathos – was intended to metaphorically echo 'the process of "burning" as a new immigrant'.² Culinary themes reappeared 15 years later in the piece *Will You Cook For Me?* (2005), in which the artist and her father cooked a Jewish/Middle Eastern meal, and again in the human rights project *Welcome Home* (2005–2006) which held feasts for approximately 400 participants.

Bourriaud's theory, or more accurately manifesto, was formulated in response to a perceived breakdown in the social bond; the remedy which he proposed could be achieved by a dematerialisation and redefinition of art. *Après* Bourriaud, art activity should be now be geared toward the production of utopian 'communicational situations' that are marked by a participatory, DIY or 'hands on' ethic-aesthetic.³ By way of response, Ashery has joined voice with critics of relational aesthetics who have suggested that Bourriaud's theory merely licenses palliative 'solutions' (or worse still, serves as a pretext for an 'arty party').⁴ It is important to note that an exilic perspective underpins all three of her culinary-related pieces, tingeing the celebrations with a distinctly more political awareness of loss, disappearance and displacement. Nevertheless, Ashery herself acknowledges that the works form part of a broader shift or social turn in contemporary practice that owes much to Bourriaud's writings.⁵

In the project *Staying*, the influence of relational aesthetics is put into play with more established traditions. To underline the obvious, the project is organised around a group of women who have been forced to abandon their countries of origin and seek asylum because of their sexual orientation; as some of their writing so powerfully evinces, the intersecting oppressions of gender, ethnicity and especially sexuality not only determined their passage of exile but continue to shape their everyday struggles in the host country. In the face of such grave exclusion, critics can ill afford to jettison identity politics discourse, not least because its propositions plainly inform Ashery's intervention. In a similar vein, the ethical bent of the project stands in marked contrast to the current vogue for antagonistic and openly exploitative forms of collaborative socially engaged practice that derive their shock value precisely from their well-preserved distance from – or two-fingered salute to – identity politics discourse (think Artur Zmijewski or Christoph Schlingensiefel).⁶ Instead, *Staying* retains an 'old school' liberatory ethos of empowerment and dialogical exchange that bears close resemblance to the ethico-political rubric of community theatre. To the extent that the project straddles or unites these largely generational divides, it falls to the critic to follow suit.

Bypassing the no doubt absorbing task of undertaking a close textual analysis of the women's writings from a literary or sociological point of view, I want instead to draw attention to the aesthetic and political resonances of the dense network of social relations that accompany Ashery's use of alter ego

performance. Mapping this arena of psychosocial relations, located as it is at the crossroads of identity politics art and socially engaged practice, raises a host of questions: What are the communicative possibilities of a scenario in which participants showcase as well as workshop their alter egos, occurring as they do in a performance space that mimics the playful but focused testing ground of a rehearsal room or laboratory? How might these performances constitute a model of convivial sociality that also acknowledges the limits of community? Finally, taking into account the specificities of the group in question, how might the use of alter egos in a therapeutic social setting allow for a novel address of trauma? Reading these communicational alter ego performances as a form of *intersubjective theatre* may go some way to providing an answer.

2 Why even draw a comparison with therapy? Guffawing with laughter whilst debating the merits of sex toys certainly doesn't remind me of any trips I've paid to shrinks; the mere thought seems faintly sacrilegious. Jokes aside – though Ashery's practice reminds us that we should never forsake humour, even or especially when the stakes are high – many of the alter ego performances in *Staying* involve the revisiting and retelling of traumatic events. Whether writing alone in the guise of an alter ego or narrating their stories live during a workshop, these acts of transmission can in part be understood as trauma narratives. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma ruptures our consciousness, producing a chronic gap between

what has occurred and our ability to comprehend the event. That which has penetrated what Freud calls our 'protective shield' cannot be assimilated: in this state of unknowing, trauma is characterised as a wound that cannot be narrated.⁷ The goals of psychoanalysis, and here the links with *Staying* are made transparent, are to enable subjects to make sense of the blow to their consciousness by telling or transmitting the story of their trauma. By re-externalising the events via an intermediary object (in *Staying*, alter egos replace analysts) that which is schematised as outside the self may slowly be brought back inside.

But the process in *Staying* is only loosely analogous with psychoanalysis. Gavin Butt's notion of taking up a paradoxical position that runs 'para – against and/or beside – the *doxa* of received wisdom' aptly describes the stance of Ashery's project.⁸ while *Staying* cannot or perhaps would not even wish to situate itself outside the discourse of psychoanalysis, it can and does strike out against some of the core tenets of psychoanalytic practice. To return to Bourriaud's idea of egalitarian communicational situations, a key difference between *Staying* and psychoanalysis is the democratic opening out of the therapeutic process. In Ashery's project the boundaries between analyst and analysand are thrown into disarray, with participants simultaneously occupying the roles of audience, narrator and co-author/collaborator. Likewise, the figure of a detached and authoritative analyst who is readied to diagnose and 'cure' is replaced by an amateurish and emotionally proximate band of sisters-in-arms who are united

– if only for the duration of the project – by their collective experiences. In this wholly unorthodox support group/social club, pick-up tips are as likely to be dispensed as interpretations of one's early childhood.

While the participants in *Staying* can be seen to operate as a close-knit, coherent community – a view supported by the transcripts of the workshops – it is also important to emphasise that the project licenses a catholic mix of stories. Rather than presenting a singular or homogenised picture of life as a lesbian asylum seeker in the UK, *Staying* not only delivers a 'final product' that testifies to a plurality of experience but structures along the way an environment that celebrates difference. The political implications of a heterogeneous approach to trauma narratives should not be downplayed: as Ann Pellegrini has observed in another context, the construction of established trauma narratives initialises an interpretive framework of suffering that prohibits the emergence of transgressive accounts, resulting for example, in the suppression of stories of unruly desire.⁹

Ashery's bid to avow the diverse and sometimes surprising narratives of women who must negotiate the effects of a double silencing – being lesbians as well as asylum seekers – thus carries a particular political imperative.

It must be stressed however that *Staying* is not simply directed toward the recovery of 'authentic' trauma narratives. The technique of using alter egos to mine the past and re-envisage the future marks a major departure from psychoanalysis. By utilising alter ego performance to manufacture and affirm

an alternative brand of 'truth', the project offers a prime example of what Lois Weaver refers to as 'creative truth' theatre. Whereas psychoanalysis labours to decode the realm of the imaginary, Weaver's model of socially engaged practice contends that 'in the process of making personal performance, lying is always an option'.¹⁰ Moreover, whilst fantasy is used as a medium and material in both creative truth theatre and psychoanalysis – enabling participants to divulge their fears and desires, confront difficult realities in the past and present, and to imagine alternative ways of being – in creative truth theatre, fantasy is not so much tamed by reason as granted free reign; to use the somewhat rusty terminology of community theatre, the marvellous becomes a strategy for self-empowerment. Creative truth theatre thus constitutes a complex admixture or interweaving of fact and fiction that allows for the collective realisation of a heterotopia in which the asymmetries and atomising effects of the outside world are countermanded.

3 In *Staying*, this protected, parallel sphere is also a rehearsal room. An inchoate space, it also moonlights as a laboratory and a refuge, enabling the women to safely formulate their alter egos and hotseat them in front of their peers. Indifferent to the objectives of regular actors, the women rehearse without the end goal of an opening night; stripped of this rationale, the makeshift rehearsals become the main performance and the relationships between the assembled company are as much the fabric of the show as are the star turns of individual

performers. At the core of this inherently relational project is the co-operation between the performers who work together to develop their alter egos. This unique communicational situation results in a distinctive social contract, the implications of which amount to more than a policy of *quid pro quo*, most especially in the arena of intersubjective relations.

Two straightforward observations about the project's use of alter egos can help us to pinpoint these affects: first, alter ego performance cannot be conflated with the relationship between an actor and a fictional character. Unlike an actor in a play, alter ego performances cannot be uncoupled from the performer's own ego (being legitimate if sometimes alarming offshoots of her-self). Second, the alter egos in *Staying* were workshopped not created in isolation. Precariously balanced between personal performance and collective performance, the characters acquire a peculiar ontology: while CameraGunMan does not exist as a separate entity from Patricia, this same character is also not-not the progeny of the other women as they too played a central role in bringing CameraGunMan into being. In this kaleidoscope of refracted egos, the borders between self and other become hazy since the story of one woman's alter ego or 'other self' is not-not cathected to the imaginaries of all the other women in the group. In view of the project's intimate and supportive ethos, the stratagem appears to literalise and offer a new slant on the proverb *alter ipse amicus* (a friend is another self).

This shuttle or oscillation between what is designated as 'my story' and 'not my story' takes us

to the heart of what Nicholas Ridout has called the 'theatrical relation'. As Ridout has illuminated, the processes of surrogation that define the conventional system of theatrical representation (the actor playing Hamlet is only ever a stand in) fundamentally shapes the function of theatre and its capacity to include and/or exclude. The gap or slippage between a fictional character and its onstage surrogate, and our correspondingly imperfect suspension of disbelief, forms the basis of the theatrical relation. This relation, or call of exchange, is founded on two conflicting but nevertheless interdependent impulses: first, a claim to universalism (*Hamlet* tells our story) and second, as a precondition of surrogation, the introduction of a 'minimal distance' between performers, audience members and represented characters (in this version of events, theatre, with its procession of surrogates or stand ins, does not or cannot ever perform my story).¹¹

It is this dichotomy that haunts and makes possible *Staying's* afterlife, as encapsulated in the alter ego character cards that Ashery has likened to tarot. While the cards record characters and stories that are specific to the 12 individuals that participated in the project (all of whom were positioned at one remove from their alter egos) they also operate as a playing pack of archetypal characters that can be shuffled, re-distributed and re-imagined *ad infinitum*. As a salutary parting gesture, Ashery designed the cards to be double functioned, on the one hand providing a document of *Staying's* performance past and on the other serving as a template for future communicational situations.

- 1 Strictly speaking, Ashery's first relational work took place long before Bourriaud articulated the idea of relational aesthetics. At the tender age of 10, Ashery thought she was a witch and proceeded to use her preternatural powers to stage a series of group hypnosis sessions.
- 2 Email correspondence with the artist, September 2009.
- 3 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel), 2002, p47 and p9 respectively.
- 4 The phrase is Hal Foster's. See 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books*, 4 December 2004, pp21–22. Other notable critics of relational aesthetics include Claire Bishop: see 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', October, 110, Fall 2004, pp51–79.
- 5 Charlotte Huddleston, 'One-to-One: Distance and Proximity', New Zealand: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Publication Visit, No.8, Summer/Autumn, 2006.
- 6 For more on exploitation art and the work of Zmijewski, Schlingensiefel and other enfants terribles, see Julia Austin with Claire Bishop, 'Trauma, Antagonism and the Bodies of Others: A Dialogue on Delegated Performance', *Performance Paradigm*, 5.1, May 2009, <http://www.performanceparadigm.net/category/journal/issue-5.1/>
- 7 See Ann Pellegrini's discussion of Cathy Caruth and Freud's work on trauma in her essay 'How I Learned to Drive'. In Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach ed., *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan), 2007, pp413–414.
- 8 Gavin Butt, 'Introduction: The Paradoxes of Criticism'. In Gavin Butt ed., *After Criticism*, (Oxford: Blackwell), 2005, p5.
- 9 Pellegrini, 'How I Learned to Drive'.
- 10 Lois Weaver, 'Doing Time: A Personal and Practical Account of Making Performance Work in Prisons'. In Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston ed., *The Applied Theatre Reader*, (Oxon: Routledge), 2009, pp57–58.
- 11 See Nicholas Ridout, 'Performance in the Service Economy: Outsourcing and Delegation'. In Claire Bishop and Silvia Tramontana ed., *Double Agent*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts), 2009, p131.

Characters





TreeMan

As a tree I feel very strong, very energetic, very graceful and brave, but as a man I don't know what to do. The man doesn't know what to do. The man needs help. It's not funny, what? Why are you laughing? I am half-tree half-man. So many things happened to me when I was like the tree. But there were also so many times that I thought: 'This is it, I am going to die ... something really bad is going to happen to me.' Then all of a sudden it goes through me like a shot of energy ... even though I am so worried, I somehow find that I pass through it. I am still here. I am still breathing. I feel it; I am a breathing tree (*smiles*). I surprise myself sometimes ... once I was put in detention for two months and suddenly, out of the blue, I was escorted from the centre to the airport and it was five minutes before the plane was to leave, so I shouted at everybody: 'I DON'T WANT TO BE DEPORTED.' There were four officers holding me, two on each side, they were consoling me, telling me to keep my voice down and to stay calm. I said: 'NO. I DON'T WANT TO GO. GET ME OUT OF HERE. My girlfriend called and told me on the phone: 'Shout, shout, don't let them take you.' So I shouted and they had to take me off the plane.

Just before that I'd been thinking: 'OK, they can do what they want to me. I am tired of my life. If they want to take me away, they can, they can do what they want to me. If they want to kill me they can kill me ... I give up.' I was really so down, I was ready to go. I'd given up on my life ... but in the last two minutes, I suddenly felt this energy inside.

It was July ... it was very hot, I remember it being very hot. They just came to the detention centre and told me to pack my things. 'You are going,' they said, but I did not accept this because I thought that my lawyer was working on my case and had told me not to worry. So it was a big shock.

I was wearing Converse shoes and tight jeans, I was trying to tell them that I'd left all my belongings behind, and that I'd been living here for a long time.



When I was first on the plane I did not shout because I noticed another girl I knew was there from the detention centre, sitting on the other side of the aisle, and she saw me and waved and said: 'Home sweet home,' and I said: 'OK, home sweet home for you, but not for me,' (*laughing*). The officers tried to convince me to sit next to the girl, but then I started shouting and the distraction was so loud they had to stop the plane and take me off.

I've never screamed so loud in my life. I even surprised myself, I never knew I could shout so loud. Everyone on the plane came with their cameras and promised to take pictures of me. I was shouting at them to take pictures of me so that everyone would know what had happened to me.

I hate men or women in power. It's not just men, it could be a woman, like Jacqui Smith. It is very hard for them to understand people like me. They don't care about people.

So you see, there is The Man, the man in power, and there is the man in me. This is the man who does not know what to do. The weak part of me is because of the man in power, but the one in power is weak themselves, you understand? They are weak because they cannot understand us, people who are on a lower level, you understand?

It is very hard for people at the Home Office to understand an individual migrant's problems, and really accept the individual circumstances. They look at migrants as 'overall', not as an individual character, and that is so annoying (*rolls her eyes up*).

So it is The Man in power that makes the man inside me weak.



Bin

You have a big bin, you know what I mean by a big bin? Someone is in it, and there are five people or so trying to cover the person with their hands, you get what I'm saying? They are trying to put the lid back onto the person in the bin. Their facial expressions show disgust, some show anger; now, let me explain what these facial expressions mean.

The person in the bin is a bisexual, gay or lesbian person. Why is that person in the bin? It is because according to society, that is the majority of society, to be involved in such an act, such sexuality, is regarded as taboo. Back where I come from, that means that you are something they don't want to reckon with.

The person in the bin is saying: 'I still want to come out, this isn't me, I want to be me. Stop pressurising me. Stop making me what you want me to be.' But they keep pushing the lid down, they are trying to make the person listen: 'This is the way society is, you have to do what we want.' They're dominating the person in the bin.

That is the gesture.

That is the meaning of the bin.

That is the meaning of them trying to put the lid down on the person.

They try to rephrase the person's outlook and decision. The other power of this gesture is the physical attack the person in the bin has to endure – the physical attacks, the humiliation, the disgust that people make them feel towards themselves. People make them feel that they are scum.

The person's head is slightly coming out of the bin, and the person says what they feel, they know what they want. This person wants to come out, this person wants to be recognised. The facial expression of the people around the bin is like this (*shows a perplexed and indignant expression on her face*). When someone is tortured in a corner, this is the expression people always have.

I feel like trash because society does not recognise me.

This is what the Bin says: 'I see you. I recognise you and I hate it. Do I need to say that? And if I do, what would the other bins around me say? How would they feel? I feel the hurt. I can hear her shouting. She told me that they don't want her to be around them. They tell her that she cannot stay. Will she fit in? Is she big enough? Can she face it? Can she cope?'



CD is the character of the singer, the songwriter, the influences, what the song's about, all of that. It is different every day. I get my inspiration from people ... when I hear what has happened to them, I write about that and also about everyone I miss.

Neither making love, nor breakfast in bed ... nothing can wake me up to a happy pleasant morning except the sound on the CD. It's all I ever wanted to be, a reflection of who I am and no one can ever take it away from me.

I discovered I could sing when I was given a verse to sing in a traditional song. I saw the potential in me even though I was ignored because priority was given to class monitors and to the head girl to run the activities in school. But, my potential grew stronger and stronger when I sang to friends and family.

As I grew older, I heard Céline Dion sing and I said: 'Wow, wow and wow' every time I played her music. My lyrics are derived from those less able to help themselves, mirrors, dreams, stories, love and much more.



I get rhythms from the sound of the rain, the sound on the train and the different instruments. My mind spins with different words which my heart agrees to in a heartbeat, and my body responds through dance as the instruments play along. My head moves, my eyes wink and waist says it all as I perform. This reminds me of a legend, the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, who has influenced my dreams especially since his death. Life may not live for generations but works do. May his soul rest in peace.

Many people appreciate my music and think that it's a way of relaxing their minds, a way of entertaining them, a chance to change their way of life, an opportunity for a successful career and a way of making money. Others think it's a means of communication, a medicine to heal, a way of discovering and extending the skills that come along like dancing and writing. A way of discovering who I am. A way to socialise, satisfying desires, meeting people, like celebrities and exercising rights.

I definitely love most music but when my favourite plays, there is lots of energy in me. When I sing along to a live performance, fire explodes in me, leaving the CD hot. I then secrete sweat which is part of the water in me. We all know that water is life and I have a lot of life in me. We all live once for those who believe, without seeing. But I believe that when I die I will rise again to live an eternal life, this makes my belief stronger because I believe twice.

When I rest after my performances, I feel lightweight and feel the light of a bright future, which makes me sure that I believe twice. There is nothing I say that has not been said before but how I say it matters.

By now you should know what I think about music. If you don't, then you should play the CD. It says it all.

Cloud

I am a Cloud, a Cloud with sun. Yeah, but the cloud in me is my fear. I know I come across to people as this strong person, but I have my fears. And I think that's too much. Too much. One minute everything is all right and then the cloud goes right through. The cloud is always too much, too much. When we were standing here last week, saying whatever came into our minds without thinking about it, that was the only thing that came to me – a cloud. I can be positive, I mean, I think I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that, but once I start with the fear uuuh and it just takes over. One minute I'm optimistic, I'm gonna say, apply to be police



constable or I'm gonna be a prison officer, one minute I'm gonna be that, and then it just goes, it just goes ... ✂ Oreet: You know sometimes I look at the sky and there is a really heavy cloud, it's very grey and heavy, and then you see the sun struggling to get through, you see a little ray of sun coming through, which makes everything light. And it's amazing. ✂ But for me to have a sun, it's sad to say but for me to have somebody to... in terms of a partner, to motivate me, that's where I get my sun. Loads of sun, from love. Yeah, and I never, I mean, if I'm not in a relationship, I'm not motivated. ✂ O: Do you want to be like the sun even when you're on your own? ✂ Even I ... all right for instance, up until Monday I was really despondent. I know I can do so much when I put my mind to it. But then I just stop, I would like go for it, but I just stop. But then I'll say: 'I need a job, I just need something to do for a quarter.' Anyway, I was doing this hair job and they meant to call me to give me some other dates. But then my friend called and gave me some other work that I wanted. So now I'm thinking: 'They're meant to call me to give me some shifts, but now I'm going to get another job, what am I going to do?' I don't really want to do the two jobs, I just wanted the hair job in between, in the end they didn't call me for a shift today or tomorrow. Then that gives me an excuse to say: 'OK, I'm gonna go do the other job.' So, for that minute, I think that my sun has come out.

Extract / Group conversation with Cloud

What has your life been like as a Cloud? What has your life been like as a lesbian in the UK? ✂ As a black lesbian woman in the UK, I've changed so much over the years from being afraid of myself to being able to express myself and being comfortable with who I am. ✂ What was it like in Jamaica? ✂ I've always been comfortable with being myself, but in Jamaica, people back home had problems with me. It's different. Back home, people want to stone you, talk about you, beat you and do all bad things. Anything bad you can think of. But here in the UK, we are free and safe. ✂ Is it different now? ✂ It's much better. I am light. The dark side represents the bad days and the light represent the good days. ✂ So Cloud, you now have good days, bright days, just radiating like the sun through the clouds. Excellent.

Exctract / Interview: Rebel With A Cause with Cloud

CameraGunMan

A Gun. My character is Gun. I could talk about the Camera, but I don't want to, I want to focus on the Gun. ✂ Soft Stud: Gun Brother (*laughs*). ✂ Oreet: OK. What is the connection with a gun? ✂ It's only when you've got a gun that you've got respect. It's kind of like being a gangsta. ✂ Cloud: She's talking in the third person, that's how she's talking, innit? You want to talk in the third person, OK, go for it. ✂ When I was young I was using knives all the time cos I was mostly fighting every day. And I always thought that when I grew up I was gonna become a gangsta. You know, I'm gonna get guns. So I want to focus on this type of character. ✂ O: It's like a child's fantasy about being strong and being able to protect themselves. The gun is a symbol of being protected, powerful, maybe the Gun can become a Camera. Cameras also give a lot of strength: they document, they hold knowledge and they inform. They help the person behind the camera make sense of their lives and other people's lives. So can you tell us more about the fighting in your childhood? ✂ It was like year 6, it was a long time ago. I was 10 years old. I was in a small town in Angola, in farmer's school. One day at school, two brothers were really teasing me. They were teasing me about being too dark. When I was young, people

were really taking the mickey out of my skin colour because most of my family are lighter than me. I don't take bullshit from anyone, I just punched one of them. I was always, always wearing small shorts under my skirt because I knew I was fighting every day, and I had a small knife too. And then one of them, the big brother, just punched me and I pulled out my knife and cut him from here to here (*gestures with her finger*). He was bleeding. Every day of my life was like that, I had cuts everywhere. No one ever messed with me. ✂ O: That was basic survival wasn't it? Surviving your childhood ... and now, what's been going on? Do you find now that you get teased? ✂ When I came to this country for the first time, I was like that image from my childhood. You know, the way I look at people when they tease me ... people were even scared of me on the bus. They said: 'Yeah you, fucking nigger, go back to your country, this isn't your country,' things like that. I hit one of them on the head with the tripod. But the thing that really, really made me calm down is that there are police everywhere here, so that anything you do the police will be behind you. In my country there are no police and you can do whatever you want, you can even kill someone. The police here have really made me calm down. But I still don't

take any bullshit from anyone. If there is something wrong ... girls just keep on shouting, I hate that. Girly girls shout, always, even in court, they always shout. I don't know, since I was small I was always fighting, not shouting, I was really the bad one.

✂ O: So what about the gun? ✂ My dad used to beat me badly, really badly. I started shaving my head when I was eight, and one day when I was about 15, I went to this place that young people go to and fight. On this particular day I went to shave my head really skinny and I told my mum: 'I'm going to the fighting place to get a gun, and the first person I'm gonna shoot is your husband.' ✂ TreeMan: You can use a gun and make very, very simple mistakes, like with those kids on the bus. Would you say to use a gun would be a kick for you? ✂ O: We are talking about what is the Gun as a character. We are trying to understand the nature of the gun. That's what guns do, they overreact, they make stupid mistakes, they kill. ✂ Coming to the UK made me realize that violence is no mean for self-defense. This country helped me built up my confidence in any

situation no matter what. Being alone in this country made me think twice about this idea of holding a gun. My anger and need for revenge stays only in my mind. Now I have to face a new world and think about my future. I always wanted a better future for myself. I decided to join college and study media. The way the Home Office dealt with my case was so wrong, unfair and deceptive to me. For this reason I decided to become a filmmaker and show the world the reality of migrant people's lives and the way they are treated in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, as so many migrants think that those countries are paradise on earth. The Home Office is a stressful army upon all asylums: gay lesbian or heterosexual. Being a lesbian does not help your case.

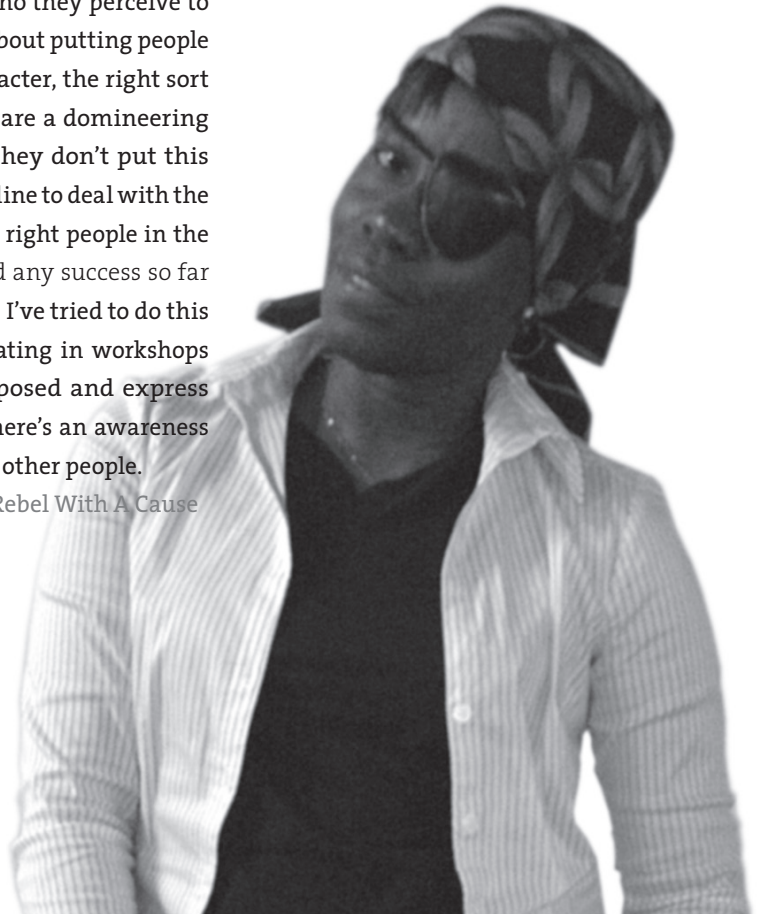
Extract / Group conversation with CameraGunMan



Rebel With A Cause

Hello. My name is Rebel With A Cause. My alter ego is a rebel because I do not like authority figures. They try to put people in an embarrassing position, they try to degrade them, they try to publicly embarrass them, and because they have some sort of authority, they believe that they ... ✂ I must interrupt you, Rebel With A Cause ... if given a chance, what would you change about authority figures? ✂ What I realised about authority figures is that there is a type of personality behind the front, you know? People who tend to exploit their power or authority tend to be people who are insecure about themselves and so they project this other image onto whoever they think is less than they are or who they perceive to be less than they are. So it's all about putting people who have the right sort of character, the right sort of personality in place. If they are a domineering person, or a prideful person, they don't put this other type of person at the front line to deal with the public. It's all about putting the right people in the right jobs. ✂ OK. Have you had any success so far in putting your point across? ✂ I've tried to do this on a personal level by participating in workshops like this where people are exposed and express themselves freely, and where there's an awareness of how people in authority treat other people.

Extract / Interview: Cloud with Rebel With A Cause



I HATE authority in the form of the police, security services and hard-nosed front desk operators (receptionist) for many reasons. How they make me feel INSIGNIFICANT, reduced to public embarrassment. I don't belong, you're NOT welcome here, I have some power and I am going to unleash it on you because I fit the socially accepted stereotype of social outcast so I do not deserve any respect. I am prejudiced before I even open my mouth to speak.

I hate those who project an authoritarian attitude towards me so my alter ego rebels at rules, regulations, laws, time, schedules, so I hate boundaries, limits. I do not believe anarchy but I hate those who exploit their power of authority, such as prison wardens, detention wardens and security officers as well as most police.

It is strange how my personality has changed because I was the one who suffered at the hands of bullies, having to cower and hide and absorb insults, endure threats, hide myself and become someone else to fit into some image of who I should be. I did this for over two decades. It all exploded when I was arrested, running from my domineering imprisonment and landed in my worst nightmare, having no choice in the matter. I faced my fears and overcame them by speaking back. Challenging and asserting myself. Suddenly I have a voice, I have rights. You can't take my self-worth, my dignity, unless I surrender to you.

A Reflection of Who I Am

Sometimes I wonder how I got into the position of a 'refugee'; being pitied, given handouts, being a second class citizen, labelled and displayed: come see them have a good look at them, see how poor she is, in need of food, clothes, shelter and money. Let's pity her before she dies in front of us and people say we are cruel and heartless.

I don't need your pity! I am your equal, but you say I belong in that box and that I should stay there, so that you feel good about yourself. I exist to make you look good: who is helping who? But like my ancestors before me I refuse to conform to your views of who I should be. When I dress, speak and act like you, all I am seeing is a reflection of you looking at me. That's not who I am. I want to be me. Whatever I choose that to be.

House

My character is House. I chose a House because it represents everything inside of me that is hidden. One thing I would put into the House would be relationships: moving away from home, trying to continue these relationships and finding your own space. Another part of the house is the daughter, me as a daughter. This is how I understand myself; the daughter is how other people make me into myself. The 'family house' (*gestures the sign of inverted commas*) is a lifestyle; it has a table, sofas, that kind of stuff. A relationship is a House as well. Abuse is another House; it is like a house within a house. Child abuse is another House that is hidden inside my family House; society doesn't know about it. It is a house with many rooms. Many rooms under one roof. All of them are me.

We could photograph a long corridor with many doors: a door for the family, a door for my old life, a door for my relationships. Maybe I could be a 'house doctor' and do house visits, knocking on every door.



[Room 1]

Why am I feeling this way?
 I'm scared, there's no one to talk to.
 No sisters around, brother too young!
 I'm running away, hiding within myself,
 it hurts till it makes me cry, why on
 earth am I still alive?
 Mother hates me she wishes I was a boy.
 Told all her friends 'this pregnancy was no joy'.
 Spent most of my days hiding out of her sight
 This way I could hold back my fight.
 All my young years just past me by, when mum's
 not at home I'm outside,
 Climbing trees, pelting balls, looking up high and
 standing tall, but then I hear a voice,
 it's strong and clear, better not let her
 find me out here.

[Room 2]

Years pass by when I suffered as a child.
 The torture was no more, the fright was out the door.
 My life was about to change as I thought
 to myself, I met someone for the first time,
 I had a friend.
 She was there for me, to listen and she
 cared, soon afterwards everything we shared.
 I ask myself, is this right or is it wrong?
 But how was I to know when there was no
 one else around.
 My feelings were strong and unclear, but
 was it because I was looking for mother's
 love here!!!?
 It tasted so nice and for the first
 time in my life, I was happy and felt free
 every time she was next to me.

[Room 3]

Eight years past by and it was so
 sweet, freedom was great until I made
 the mistake, I had to start dating
 guys. Community was small there was
 no hiding at all, the word was out
 I was now granted a boy scout,
 This was not great (no cookies, no cake)
 the lectures, the hate, boy this was
 my fate.
 Tell me was all my family
 STRAIGHT?
 The guys was fine until it was bedtime,
 no stories was told,
 no filling of the holes that was
 left inside of me by my community.

[Room 4]

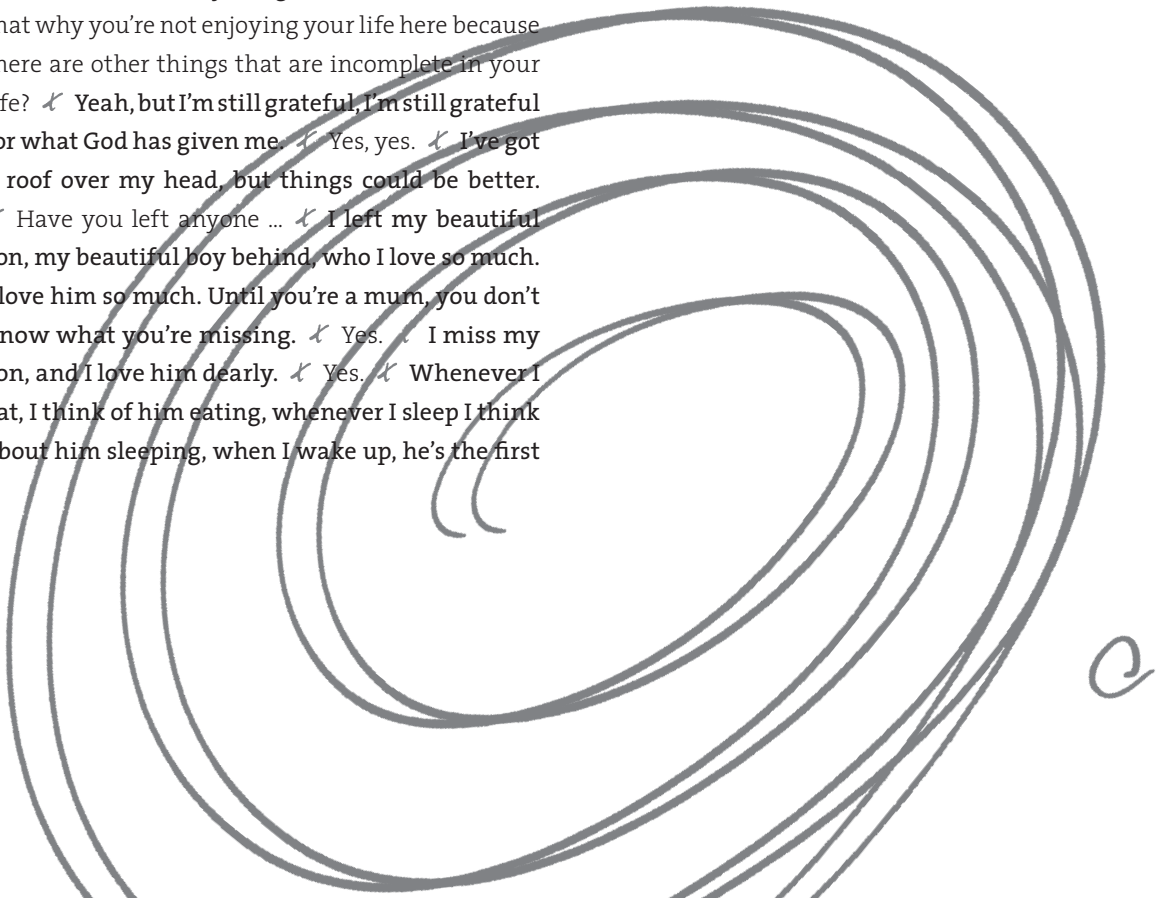
Time flew by and I kept the men by my side,
 the ladies I kept too but between me and you.
 My house was full of the secrets I
 kept within, but on the outside
 I was with him.
 The older I got, the smarter
 I be and realised it was she
 who made me scream.
 This was it I was now in
 for keeps, whether I was
 looking for mother's love was
 still unclear to me!!!!
 The women kept coming
 the men was a thing
 of the past
 As for my community, I told them:
 kiss my ass. (Lol!)

Dream

Hi. ✂ Hi. ✂ How're you doing? ✂ I'm good. What made you leave Gambia to come and live in the UK? ✂ I had to run away from my life because I just couldn't take living the way I was, it was just too much for me. I had to leave it behind and come to England. I thought everything was going to get better but it's even worse. ✂ In what way? ✂ Because when you're in Africa you think when you come to Europe, you know, that there are gay rights, this and that. ✂ Mmm. ✂ But it's not like that. There are so many issues that I'm dealing with right now, which makes things even more difficult for me, so I'm in a big battle. And until I win that battle, everything is on hold. ✂ OK, so is that why you're not enjoying your life here because there are other things that are incomplete in your life? ✂ Yeah, but I'm still grateful, I'm still grateful for what God has given me. ✂ Yes, yes. ✂ I've got a roof over my head, but things could be better. ✂ Have you left anyone ... ✂ I left my beautiful son, my beautiful boy behind, who I love so much. I love him so much. Until you're a mum, you don't know what you're missing. ✂ Yes. ✂ I miss my son, and I love him dearly. ✂ Yes. ✂ Whenever I eat, I think of him eating, whenever I sleep I think about him sleeping, when I wake up, he's the first

thing I think about. I love him, he's a part of me that I left behind. ✂ If you were to see him now, if he could see this video, what would you like to say to him? ✂ I wanna tell him that everything I've done, I've done it for him and that I love him and that one day he will understand. I pray for that day to happen. ✂ Thanks.

Extract / Interview: House with Dream



Before I came here I had this dream. I dreamt it a long time ago and what I dreamt about actually happened. It was like ... when you are in chains and ... yeah ... so I spent one day in prison or something like that. Yeah, I had this dream.

I was in chains and then my eyes ... When you apply for asylum, they take your photo, and everything I saw was in this dream ... it was so disturbing. I'm like, what, what, what sort of dream is this? It was so real, everything was so real, and it was all in my mind.

This dream was the root of evil, just evil. So it all came true, everything that happened when I came over here, everything that I'm going through right now ... I feel I'm a prisoner, yeah, that's how I feel.

I've never committed a crime, but in the dream I was a prisoner, and I did not understand why. I was taken in handcuffs like a criminal. The dream came true.

Sometimes when you're screaming, nobody can hear you. People don't understand you ... My character is going to be some kind of prisoner or somebody in chains. Everything is closed. Sometimes when you go into depression and you come back, you're just trying to grow stronger. Well, this dream is a dream I still have today. It's one of these dreams that will [always] be with me because I don't know about asylum. I don't know about these things, I've never had to know about these things. I was locked in a room and they started taking my fingerprints ... took, took my, took ... yeah, I was you know, I was jailed for like five minutes between one point and another point.

You're treated like a criminal. I fight all of these things because where I come from, you have to do something really, really, really big to be handcuffed. And I haven't done anything bad. So it's hanging over me. The dream is following me.



Soft Stud

Women & Stud

Women like to be treated like a bitch. I don't know if it's just me but that is what I've learnt from being a soft stud. She likes it when you don't ring her, when you don't return calls or text. Likes being treated like a doormat or booty call. Now that's where I've got a problem ... I'm a stud, a soft stud to be precise. Women are attracted to me thinking I'm a heartless bitch but they're surprised when they get to know the real star. I'm expected to act like a bitch, fuck without emotion, act careless and smoke skunk, but I'm not all of that. I'm different, different from all studs ... at least that's what they say after the madness ... they come over and over again ... 'That's the best sex I've ever had' ... 'I feel so relieved with you' ... 'You are awesome' ... 'Can you please stop cos you are making me so crazy, I can't take too much good stuff' ...

However ... none of these bitches pleased me, why? Because they try to do stuff I do to them and were not good enough. Still, she shows her attention, cares for herself because she always likes to make her come continuously. Women don't like it when you show them that you care, that you wanna be there for them ... they get over their head when they hear that. Then you are nothing without them. 50-70% of them (women) like being treated like a bitch. I don't know if it's just me but I'm sure you know that's true. They tend to love you more when you don't give a shit about them. I think they find it sexy. They actually moan and complain about it, but deep down, that's what they want because the minute you are giving a shit or show some form of care, they switch.

I appear to you like a stud. I act, look, talk like a stud from the distance. I play football, which sends the girls crazy.

My Character & Fantasy

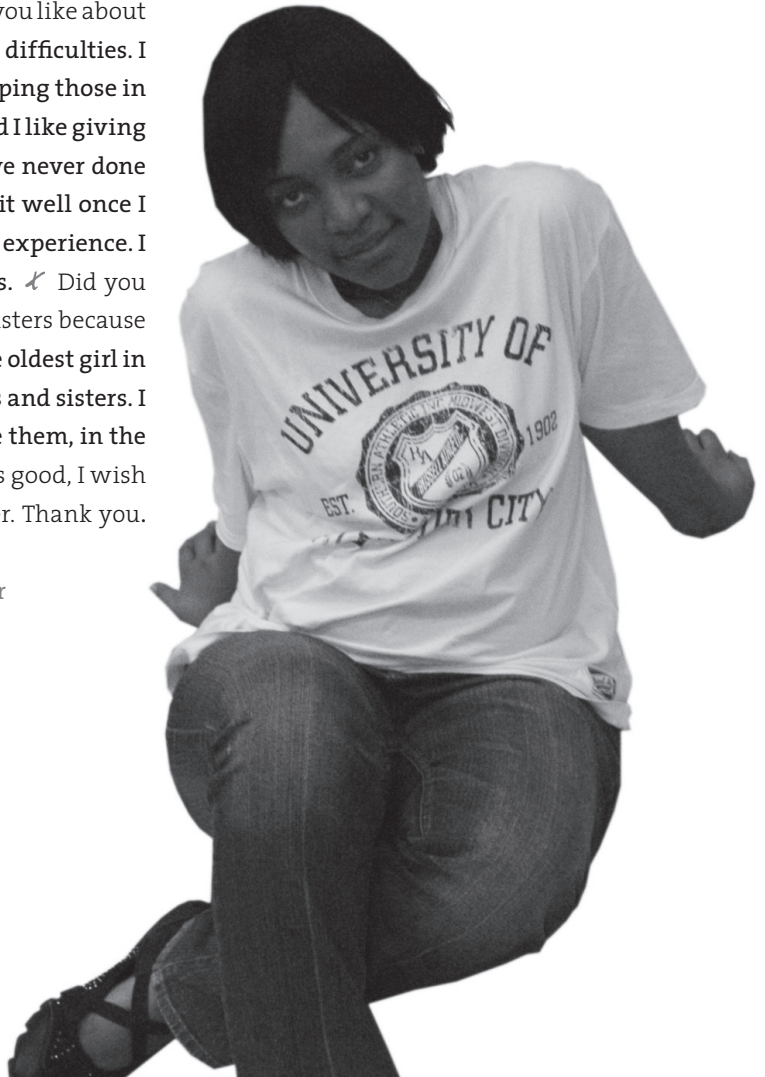
- * I am a football player
- * I see myself becoming a professional football player in the nearest future
- * I want to be in front of the camera, modelling sportswear
- * I want to become a famous lesbian athlete
- * I want to be known for my talent and my sexuality
- * I want to be the stud version of Halle Berry because she's smart and sexy
- * I feel all these from my heart



Carer

Have you ever cared for someone? ✂ Yes. I cared for my father before he died. ✂ Oh. Sorry ... Who would you like to care for? ✂ I would like to care for older people and younger people particularly. I would like to be a carer for all sorts of people, for example disabled people, because many of them do not have anyone to help them with their daily needs, such as bathing, feeding, etc. If I ever became a carer I would do it with whole my heart, with love and pleasure. ✂ What do you like about caring? ✂ I like helping people with difficulties. I like to see people be happy. I like helping those in need. I love giving love to people. And I like giving to people without hope. Although I've never done care work before, I know I could do it well once I had the experience. I have had some experience. I looked after my brothers and sisters. ✂ Did you used to look after your brothers and sisters because you were older... ✂ Yeah, as I was the oldest girl in the family I looked after my brothers and sisters. I will give the same care I used to give them, in the same way, to those people. ✂ That's good, I wish you the best to find a job to be a carer. Thank you. ✂ You're welcome.

Extract / Interview: Farmer with Carer



I am a coffin. I think of death, lovers, singing and change, but I'd prefer to be a farmer. ✂ Oreet: Maybe you could be two characters. ✂ TreeMan: A farmer who dies and is put in a coffin. ✂ No! I am going to be just a farmer. I will grow fruits and vegetables, keep cows and goats. I will have a large farmhouse. When I was a child our neighbour was a farmer. We used to go to his house. He was a good man, he was very rich and kept lots of cows. That's why I would like to be a farmer. ✂ TM: You want to look after cattle? If someone gave you a farm, how would you feel? ✂ I would feel very good. I would like to keep lots of cows and lots of goats. ✂ CD: How do you feel about looking after so many cows and goats? ✂ Really good. ✂ Rebel With A Cause: But it's hard, waking up at five in the morning. It is exhausting, it is tiring ... ✂ TM: I think she needs a sense of belonging. ✂ CD: Belonging to animals instead of humans? ✂ House: Are you on your own in the farm? ✂ No, I am with my partner (*points to her*) and we have a lot of people helping. ✂ O: Is it like a fantasy or is it a vision? ✂ A vision. ✂ Carer: What type of things would you like to do as a farmer? ✂ I would like to keep cows, goats, sheep and to plant as many vegetables and as many types of fruit as

possible, for instance, Ugandan fruits, matooke, bananas ... ✂ Ca: How do you make money in farming? ✂ I would have a small market where I'd sell my meat and milk. I'd also be selling fruits and vegetables, like matooke, potatoes, cassava ...

Exctract / Group conversation with Farmer



Super Lover

Oreet: What do you think? Is Super Lover a good lover? ✂ Group: yes, yes ✂ Cloud: Does she have sex all the time? ✂ G: yes, yes ✂ Cl: I know someone like that. ✂ O: So she likes sex, she is good at sex and she is open to talk about it. ✂ Builder: Her talking is more a way of seducing other people. ✂ O: We could all give Super Lover material to write the *Memoirs of a Super Lover*. Different stories that we could all give her. ✂ Bin: Could it be stories from films or something like that? ✂ O: That's the idea, anything that interests you. What do you imagine she looks like? What photos can we make? ✂ Rebel With A Cause: I imagine her with an absolutely tight, fitted, black dress, with a whip. Almost like a dominatrix ... very sexy. ✂ Bin: What about ... she turns up and her feet are slightly apart and she has women all over her feet ... ✂ House: Very sexy. ✂ CameraGunMan: Nice spiky stilettos. ✂ H: Nice red lipstick and nice round lips. ✂ O: OK, OK ... we do have budget limits, but we will try and see what photographs we can make (*everyone laughs*). On a more serious note, generally in mainstream porn lesbians tend to be represented as strait men's fantasies. Writing and talking about women's erotic experiences with women, by women, is an important thing to do politically. Maybe there is another way to write about sex that we are not used to that is not pornographic in the usual way. ✂ Bu: So Super Lover writes alternative porn. ✂ (*Everyone laughs*) ✂ Bu: Yes, what is lesbian porn? Porn is very stereotypical, like a tall blond woman that has no keep or care. What is a lesbian fantasy? ✂ Cl: What do people

find sexy? What do we find sexy? ✂ CGM: A sexy girl is someone who has big boobs and a shapely behind, proper. ✂ TreeMan: Huh... (*disappointed sound*) ✂ Cl: I find butch girls attractive, sexy. ✂ CGM: What do you find sexy about them? ✂ Soft Stud: That they tell you what to do in bed? ✂ Cl: Yes, I just lay there and they do it all. ✂ (*Everyone laughs*) ✂ Cl: No, no, I don't just lay there, it's the masculine, the masculine in girls. ✂ Bu: That is your sunshine, isn't it? ✂ (*Everyone laughs*) ✂ O: Soft Stud, what do you find sexy? ✂ CGM: She likes Polish girls. ✂ SS: What? No! What? I don't know ... I like a girl that is presentable, nice and decent. ✂ CGM: What? Decent? How do you manage that? ✂ (*Everyone laughs*) ✂ CGM: You can't judge a book by its cover ... ✂ O: You like someone decent, femme. ✂ SS: Not too femme ... I like natural beauty. ✂ CGM: That is Polish girls ... ✂ SS: I don't like girls who won't go out unless they have make up on, too femme ... ✂ Cl: And do you like sex equal? ✂ SS: I like it equal, but I like to dominate too. ✂ O: Are you taking notes Super Lover? ✂ CGM: They have to have nails as well you know, to scratch your back with. ✂ (*Everyone laughs and argues about their desired length of nails, showing each other their nails and scratching each other and laughing more.*) ✂ O: What do you find sexy? ✂ Dream: A beautiful smile. ✂ (*Everyone goes: 'Ah!' in sympathy*) ✂ RWAC: But what kind of girls do you like? ✂ D: Pretty girls. ✂ H: Do you like girls with long hair, like mine? With a nice smile, like mine? ✂ D: Girls with a good figure. ✂ Bu: What is a good figure? ✂ D: I just want to admire her, to look at her and admire her.

✂ Cl: No touching? Just admiring? ✂ D: No, touching too. ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ H: I like women out of reach. ✂ Bin: What straight ones? ✂ Cl: It's a lot to do with how we come out, how we first understand that we are lesbians. When I first came out I found myself attracted to women looking like men, and it has been the same ever since, if someone comes into the room too feminine ... oh ... I could not be bothered. ✂ CGM: Yes, I would never ever go out with a girl who looked like me, like a boy. I like a feminine girl, proper, someone to go out with a man like me, not someone that walks like me, like a man, someone like a girl. ✂ O: So you're not gay at all *(laughs)*. ✂ Cl: I was in my first relationship for 13 years and if she saw me with a feminine girl it would not upset her, but if she saw me with some butch girl, even if nothing happened, she would be so jealous. A feminine girl would not be a threat ... I tried ... but it didn't work. Some people tell me that I should change, try something ... It only worked once with my second relationship. She looks feminine but she is dominant, she is what they call lipstick butch, she's like Sarah Palin, you know that woman who was running against Obama, she's like her ... I think Palin is one ... ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ O: With a butch and a femme, do you think what you see always translates the same in bed? ✂ Cl: No, some butches are only in control in bed, but only in bed, but not in life. I am very dominant in life, I like women on a level: soft in life but in control in bed. ✂ CGM: OK, we got it, the word is out! ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ CGM: Yes, you're right, my ex-girlfriends were in control of everything, but in bed I was in control. ✂ Bu: There is a saying: 'Butch on the streets, femme between the sheets.' ✂ TM: It seems that control is very important. ✂ Cl: Yes, control is very important, control is everything. ✂ *(There is lots of discussion about this; some agree and some disagree and argue)* ✂ SS: Listen, I can date a stud, or a soft stud like myself. I am a stud but not one who needs to always be in control. I am like a proper stud but actually soft, I don't mind 50:50. ✂ O: Is stud a new name? ✂ SS: No. It's American. ✂ Cl: Same as butch, but in American it's stud. ✂ O: Can you do anything to a stud in bed? ✂ Cl: No. ✂ SS: But with me you can, because I am a soft stud, that's why I'm different. I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable in bed. ✂ O: You are a gentleman. ✂ SS: I am. ✂ O: About butch women, is it also a physical attraction or is it just the control that makes it attractive? ✂ Cl: All of it, physical too. ✂ Bu: I like androgynous women, playing with gender roles, swapping and changing what is masculine and what is feminine, being playful with it. ✂ Cl: I tried that and it felt so wrong for me, so we switched again and it fell into place. ✂ Bin: For me it is about being there for that woman at that time, dating them, caring for them, dining them, you get me? Giving them the best for that night, putting them on a platform. ✂ H: Yes, but then the sun comes out and you are like: 'Who are you?' 'What are you doing in my bed?' ✂ Cl: That's you. We are not judging you, that's you ... ✂ Bin: I am a caring person, but psychologically at the moment, I cannot be with someone for two, three months. I can't cope, at least for now. I can hardly take care of myself.

✂ O: Well, it is good you know that, it's good that you don't promise someone: 'I will marry you,' then leave the next day. You say: 'I am here for tonight and that is it. This is all I can give you.' You are not misleading anyone, and they know the deal. Last question – do you always feel that you can ask for anything you want sexually in bed? Or do you hold back? ✂ RWAC: I ask. ✂ Cl: Yes, yes. ✂ RWAC: Though I don't always get it. ✂ O: Even if it's a weird fantasy, you ask for it? ✂ Cl: Yes, of course. Especially. ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ CGM: You have to be strong, you have to be brave. ✂ Bin: There are lots of ways to ask, there are nice ways to ask, you know, put a note on the fridge. ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ Bin: As a Super Lover your lovers should be able to ask you for everything. You must not shun them, that's what makes a Super Lover. ✂ SS: Does Super Lover have a high sex drive? ✂ Bu: Is Super Lover active or passive? Top or bottom? ✂ Cl: She doesn't have any rules. She is whatever you are into. ✂ O: Where is she? I want to meet her. ✂ *(Everyone laughs)* ✂ Bin: Super Lover makes a good friend as well. Believe me, these kind of people make the best of friends. ✂ O: Does Super Lover ever not want to have sex? Does she ever take a break? ✂ Bu: I want her to always, always want sex. ✂ Cl: Super Lover has a high sex drive. ✂ Bin: The thing about sex drive is that sometimes it's not that you want it, but the fact is ... ✂ Cl: But you want to please. ✂ Bin: You get me? You see a lady, a lady you like ... 'Man I've got to lay her.' Sometimes it is a challenge, an ego boost. Sometimes this person is looking at you and making gestures at you ... it will be rude to turn her down. ✂ H: Is it? ✂ Bu: Does it really help your ego? Doesn't it make you feel empty afterwards – like, its gone? I've had her. It's finished. Now I move on. ✂ RWAC: The challenge has ended. ✂ Bin: No. ✂ Bu: It's an achievement and that's all? ✂ H: But she *(points towards Bin)* is a Casanova. ✂ O: Does Super Lover ever fall in love with the people she has sex with? Has someone ever broken her heart? ✂ Cl: Sometimes when somebody breaks your heart you become like Super Lover. A lot of people ask me why am I single, people don't believe I am single. I am single by choice because if I meet somebody I want to get to know them properly. You can be my friend, but not my lover. That's how I ended up with so many friends. With most of them there is some attraction, but the relationship could not work. ✂ O: If I met Super Lover I would want to make her fall in love with me, to be the special one. Is that possible? ✂ Cl: I dated this person once for two months ... one day she would be stable, the next she was all over the place. So you know what? You just have to let these kind of people go ... let them go. They're better as friends, nothing else, let them go. Naa ... So don't try to make her fall for you, naa ... let it go. ✂ O: Does Super Lover use sex toys? ✂ Bin: Yes, I love it. I so love it, especially the strap-ons, it's so domineering. ✂ CGM: What? What is there to love about it? ✂ SS: Wait, wait, why do you want to use toys when you can just use your natural tools? ✂ *(Everyone shouting and arguing in a heated way for and against)* ✂ Cl: I tried that once and it did not work. Our own body is sexier. If I wanted to use a sex toy, I would go with a man. I

have no problem with dating a men, I have a son you know ... I just choose not to date them. ✂ CGM: Do you use a toy to type on the computer? No, you use your fingers, same thing. ✂ RWAC: I used to be very, very negative about using sex toys. I always felt – keep me away from it, don't introduce me to it, I don't want to be part of it. I always felt that my imagination is enough and physical contact, flesh, is more erotic. But then my partner (*points towards her partner; everyone laughs*) introduced me to a sex toy and it was absolutely fabulous. ✂ Bin: You serious? ✂ RWAC: Yes, absolutely. It was something that I was against and did not think that I would enjoy. ✂ O: Was it a one-off? Would you use it again? ✂ RWAC: Oh yes definitely. I've been searching for a kind of something. ✂ Bin: But there are different types of sex toys. They are different. ✂ RWAC: Ladies, until you've tried it, don't knock it. ✂ Cl: Yes, but at least a man can feel it on his penis, but what is the point with a toy? ✂ (*Everyone screams and shouts and argues*) ✂ Cl: Listen, can I tell you something? Most lesbians come out as bisexuals. ✂ CGM: Not most. ✂ SS: Not me. ✂ Cl: I said most. Shut up, I did not say all, I said most. ✂ (*Everyone laughs*) ✂ Cl: Most women come out as bisexuals. I was one, the thing is, when I was dating men, I used to date women at the same time. I did not know who I was then, I was still fighting my real self, and when men tried to have sex with me I would say to them: 'Only use your fingers,' and men would say: 'You are turning into a lesbian.' I would not do 'this' bit (*penetration gesture*). This is how I knew I could not be with men, because I don't want to do 'this bit', if you took it off (*cutting penis off gesture*), I would be fine with men. ✂ RWAC: Yes, but you haven't tried with a toy. ✂ CGM: But you can explore a lady just with your own hands. ✂ Bin: OK, let's get some facts ... there are all sorts of toys, there is one, what do you call it, there is one you wear on your tongue. ✂ Cl: Yeah, I've heard of that. ✂ Bin: And there's one that you wear or your partner wears and when she's wearing it, they kind of ... do you understand? ✂ SS: It's just you though, it's not the toys that make it good (*Everyone screams and shouts and argues for and against sex toys*) ✂ O: OK, OK, let's agree that some like it and some don't, there is no right or wrong with sex toys.

Extract / Group conversation

Staying was commissioned and produced by Artangel Interaction as part of the Interaction Traineeship programme, in collaboration with the UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group and with support from the City Parochial Foundation and National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Artangel and Oreet Ashery would like to thank all the people who helped us in the development and implementation of the project, with special thanks to all Artangel staff, Larne Abse Gogarty, Maria Agiomyrgiannaki, Maxime Angel, Mariana Arribas, Julia Austin, Angela Byrne, Cuneyt Cakirlar, Chantelle Coleman, Stuart Comer, Sarah Culshaw, Eileen Daly, Tom Dingle, Fero Firat, Anne-Marie Fortier, Alana Jelinek, Liz Johnson, Azaan Kamau, Lois Keidan, Julie Lomax, Laura Maxwell, Terry McCormack, Neil McInnes, Marit Münzberg, Vanda Playford, Erin Power, Jill Power, Catherine Robinson, Professor Carol Chillington Rutter, Rowan Rutter, Sebastian Rocca, Cherry Smyth, Magdalena Suranyi, everyone at UKLGIG, Brenda Wade, Sara Wajid, Lois Weaver, Stephen Wilson, Campbell X, Annika, and most importantly to all the women who participated in the workshops, Aisha, Aziza, Bizle, BlackDiamond-Unique, B.Star, Builder, Doreen, Dream, Fatmah, Karen, Lovejoy and Ola.

Artangel has pioneered a new way of collaborating with artists and engaging with audiences in an ambitious series of commissions since the early 1990s. Artangel Interaction develops projects and events that extend opportunities for collaboration and participation beyond the setting of the Institution.

Artangel is generously supported by Arts Council England, Artangel International Circle, Special Angels and The Company of Angels

www.artangel.org.uk

Artangel is a registered charity no.292976

This publication contains some explicit material which people may find offensive. We would like to impress that this content is part of the process of the work and does not in any way reflect the attitudes or beliefs of Artangel, City Parochial Foundation, The National Lottery or the Arts Council England.

