



WE KEEP US SAFE: De-escalation, Working Time, and Abolitionist Praxis at The Sanctuary

JAKE NUSSBAUM

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7691-1891>

I stepped into the men's bathroom—two stalls, one urinal—to find a naked man splashing water on himself at the sink. I froze, not sure if I should look away or say something, until he started screaming at me to get the fuck out of the bathroom and stop fucking looking at him. I backed up a step and stared down at the tile floor, long enough to notice someone else's beat-up Nikes in one of the blue stalls, two bulging red Target bags on either side. The naked man continued to curse at me, and for one slow breath I remained stuck in the tension: one person trapped in the stall, while another uses the shared bathroom as a private shower, demanding that everyone else get the fuck out. I backed out through the doorway—hands up, head down—and turned toward the front desk to find help.

Cal, a tall Black man in a hoodie and jeans, one of The Sanctuary's de-escalation specialists, took a few purposeful steps my way. My mind was talking to me, asking me how I could ask Cal to step into that bathroom when I knew that stepping into that bathroom would further inflame the situation. When I knew the abuse that could come Cal's way for just stepping through the door. We walked together toward the bathroom. I outlined the dilemma—a naked guest taking a shower in the sink, yelling at everyone in the room, another guest trapped in the stall—and Cal pushed open the bathroom door.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 41, Issue 3, pp. 667–691, ISSN 0886-7356, online ISSN 1548-1360. *Cultural Anthropology* is the journal of the Society of Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association. *Cultural Anthropology* journal content published since 2014 is freely available to download, save, reproduce, and transmit for noncommercial, scholarly, and educational purposes under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 license. Reproduction and transmission of journal content for the above purposes should credit the author and original source. DOI: 10.14506/ca41.3.08

“Get the fuck out of the bathroom, motherfucker, I don’t know you,” the naked guest shouted toward Cal. Immediate escalation. I froze again, knowing that if I followed Cal in it would only make things worse but dumbly blanking on what else to do. Cal was in there, alone but not alone, and I was out here, suspended. Caught between the impulse to act and the recognition that acting—really any kind of movement—might make the problem worse. The challenge before us: how to be there in the bathroom, supporting this vulnerable man and the person trapped in the stall, yet at the same time *not there*, not escalating the situation.

* * *

What does it mean to keep each other safe, and how do we do it? This question emerged in my field research during the summer of 2020, a time of collective grief and reckoning with profoundly unsafe conditions. Police all over the United States were spectacularly violating the bodily autonomy of Black and Brown people in the name of “safety”—including the highly publicized state killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd—while at the same time a deadly virus traveled through the air, killing tens of thousands of people and turning our assumptions about everyday safety inside out. With these “twin pandemics” and their anti-Black politics of disposability in full view (Howard 2022), tens of thousands hit the streets of Philadelphia to demand a redefinition of safety. “Who keeps us safe?” the protest martials called, “*We keep us safe!*” the crowds responded, a repeated affirmation that the anti-Black institutions of cops and prisons could not provide the kind of communal, life-affirming safety we were looking for.¹

Instead, we uplifted a vision of *collective care* for one another, rather than state control through policing, prisons, and what Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie (2022, 148) call practices of “carceral safety.” This notion of collective care—though newly visible in that summer of spectacular protest and possibility—is rooted in a long tradition of Black radical, Black feminist, and abolitionist organizing, which for decades has been working under the broad banner of “transformative justice” to dismantle the white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and ableist carceral state, and build up life-affirming modes of addressing interpersonal harm and violence (Mingus 2015; Dixon and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2019; Kaba 2021). Alongside this organizing work, critical scholarship has established that policing and imprisonment are largely ineffective at keeping communities safe from violence and crime, *especially* Black, Brown, and working-class communities that have suffered the “organized abandonment” of the state (Gilmore 2022; Alexander 2020; Lee, Eck, and Corsaro 2016; Smith et al. 2022).

But as those words—*we keep us safe!*—rattled in my head during the days and weeks following that long summer of 2020, the question of *how* lingered. *How* do we keep each other safe beyond structural forms of prevention or interpersonal accountability after the fact? How do we intervene into the very moment of harm itself? While ethnographic research has attended to non-carceral modes of redressing interpersonal harm and sexual violence in American cities, often called “restorative justice” (Rubio 2023; Raschig 2017; Ralph 2014), and to the many international social movements working to dismantle the prison-industrial complex and its extended apparatuses of surveillance, policing, and carcerality (Alves 2018; Gilmore 2007; Taylor 2016), fewer ethnographers have studied more immediate community-based strategies for creating safety without police (for some exceptions, see Okechukwu 2021; Winston 2023; McDowell 2019). Enter The Sanctuary,² a non-profit organization in Philadelphia where staff and volunteers are experimenting in real time with police-free approaches to community safety, and where, six months into an eighteen-month period of ethnographic research, I found myself summoning Cal to confront a naked man using the sink as a shower and cussing out anyone else who walked into the men’s bathroom.

In this essay, I explore how staff and volunteers at The Sanctuary, including myself, perform de-escalation, an embodied practice of violence intervention that seeks to prevent and intervene in interpersonal conflict without resorting to policing and carceral methods. Unlike much of the clinical and psychological research on de-escalation (Du et al. 2017; Atkins 2023; Spielfogel and McMillen 2017), I situate this practice within broader abolitionist and anthropological conversations around political action and temporality, revealing how de-escalation practitioners like Cal use their bodies to work both time and space into non-carceral outcomes. Following an introduction to The Sanctuary and its politics, I examine four different “techniques of the body” (Mauss 1973) that de-escalation practitioners use: suspension, the open hold, bridging, and collectivity. Drawing on Black feminist and performance studies analytics that insist on the embodied nature of political struggle, I show how de-escalation is both an effective practice of “keeping us safe” and an intimate, everyday negotiation with ambitious and sometimes dissonant political horizons.

To make this argument, I draw on a mix of conventional ethnographic analytics and my own writing of a minor, quotidian crisis that begins with my encounter in the bathroom. By extending the duration of this bathroom crisis into an entire essay, I seek to expand the space-time of de-escalation into an

observable ethnographic world that encompasses multiple timelines and scales. I offer this as a humble contribution to what Savannah Shange (2019, 2022) calls “abolitionist anthropology,” in which the strategies of ethnography and abolitionist struggle might temporarily find common cause, even as the academy and an abolitionist vision of the future seem to tear further and further apart. “Abolition is about attending to the break,” writes Shange (2022, 188), “stretching open the cracks in captivity’s infrastructure. Ethnographic practice is a technique of attending to life as it is in this moment, one that has the potential to attune us to world-making everywhere that it is happening.” Here, I attend to one very much *in-the-moment* experiment in abolitionist world-making: de-escalation.

THE SANCTUARY: An Experiment in “Radical Hospitality”

I stood for a moment listening to the verbal abuse come thick and heavy at Cal, the de-escalation specialist I had brought over to help me, and remembered the other guest trapped in the stall, now presumably searching for his own pathway out of a bathroom where a naked man was screaming. I heard shuffling, scuffling, grunting. The guest by the sink, whom I could no longer see, was still moving in my mind as a memory of what I first saw: a naked man, soft-bellied, salt-and-pepper beard, cursing, panic in his eyes. The possibility of violence entered my gut. What if it comes to that? If the naked guest rushes for Cal, if he throws something, if the other guest in the stall comes out and gets attacked?

Simply by being in the bathroom Cal and I had “escalated” the guest using the sink as a shower, which is to say, we amplified within him a sense of danger and unsafety. Our presence as two men, one white, one Black, wearing nametags and associated with The Sanctuary, was enough to fire up a conflict. Simply by being there, by walking in the door at the moment that the guest happened to be halfway through his shower—maybe the only one he’d have this week, maybe the only semi-private space he’d be in for days—Cal and I had become, in the eyes of this guest, ambassadors of the carceral state, legible only in the most surface-level way, there yet not there. If the bathroom could be a refuge for the guest, for a short time, a place of peace and privacy, it was no longer. We had busted it up.

* * *

The Sanctuary is a multifaceted social services operation housed inside a cavernous turn-of-the-century limestone church in Philadelphia, though the organization itself is secular. Its mission is simple: to provide resources and support

to anyone in need. Within The Sanctuary's honeycombed building, staff and volunteers provide visitors with hot meals, clothing, hygiene products, medical treatment, psychological counseling, denominational and non-denominational spiritual support, help navigating state bureaucracies and locating shelters, housing, and jobs, as well as a stable mailing address from which to send and receive mail. The range of services is ambitious, and The Sanctuary has a large staff and many volunteers—often fifteen to twenty-five people working together during the day. Busy days will see up to two hundred visitors pass through the doors, looking for toothpaste, soap, socks, someone to talk to, a place to wash up, hot food, or a chair to rest in.

Guest is the term Sanctuary staff use to describe visitors to the space. While no archetypal “guest” exists at The Sanctuary, they typically come from Philadelphia's most vulnerable populations. Many are unhoused, living in shelters, on the street, or in precarious situations in which necessities are hard to come by. Many are Black and Brown. Many are queer and/or trans. Some do not speak English. Some do not read. Many have survived sexual and physical abuse. Some are drug users or recovering from drug addiction. Some are single parents. Some are victims of rape and domestic violence. Many are formerly incarcerated. Many are veterans. Many were raised in abusive households. In short: most guests live at the dangerous intersection of the neoliberal privatization of urban space and the carceral state's ruthless criminalization of poverty, mental illness, queerness, drug use, and racialized and gendered difference (Willse 2015; O'Brien and Willison 2022; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011).

Living in the intersections of these criminalized populations, guests are frequently caught in the “carceral continuum” (Wacquant 2001): cycling between police cruisers, correction facilities, highly surveilled shelters, rehab centers, and the fugitive moments between. This experience is a function of *time* as much as *space*. Many guests live in what P. J. Brendese (2023, 43), building on the seminal work of Angela Y. Davis (2003), describes as “carceral temporality,” on the run and on the move from the police and the “constant threat of carceral contact,” their sleep and work and everyday routines overshadowed by the ever-present possibility of sweeps and arrest. Carceral temporalities extend into the state-funded nonprofits and social services on which many of The Sanctuary's guests rely for survival. Security guards, metal detectors, arduous intake and verification processes, and other means-testing measures ensure that even to receive basic services, guests must expose themselves to various forms of surveillance that further drain their time and increase their vulnerability (Kurti and

[Shanahan 2021](#); [Weber 2024](#)). This harsh reality leaves people making impossible choices, like turning a sink into a shower in a semi-public bathroom, knowing full well that someone else can walk in at any moment, that the situation could collapse into conflict, violence, another ride in another cruiser, another night spent in a cage.

The Sanctuary strives to look and feel radically different than the typical carceral nonprofit. Walking through the door that much is clear: there are no metal detectors, no bag screenings, and no traditional security guards. As Tamara, a Black woman and architect of The Sanctuary's de-escalation program told me:

For all of those government-funded services you have to go through an intake process that can be super alienating. Someone has to tell their entire life story, which often exploits their trauma and mental health symptoms, whereas here guests get to show up however they're doing, with their dignity intact, and they get to open up at their own pace. We don't terminate guests, so if we stop seeing them, they don't just disappear from our system and become forgotten. They can come and go as they please.

In short, The Sanctuary refuses means-testing, surveillance, and exhaustive intake interviews because these processes deny the fundamental *humanity* of its guests. Again, this is a function of time as much as space: guests are not asked to dredge up traumatic pasts to receive services; they can "open up at their own pace", and the choices they make today won't result in their termination tomorrow. Instead, The Sanctuary embraces what they call "radical hospitality": the simple premise that all guests, regardless of background, identity, history, and even behavior, deserve access to The Sanctuary's resources.

My eighteen months of field research at The Sanctuary included in-depth interviews with staff, volunteers, and management, regular volunteer shifts, shadowing staff positions, undergoing de-escalation and trauma-awareness trainings with long-time practitioners like Tamara, and coordinating trainings for outside community groups. Over these many hours, I came to learn through my own body how the practice of radical hospitality challenges deeply internalized logics around safety. During a normal day volunteering, for instance, it was common to witness verbal disagreement and arguments, be spoken to aggressively or incoherently, and generally encounter a range of scenarios that might cause you or the people around you to *feel* unsafe. While these encounters strained against my

own internalized norms of safety, staff at The Sanctuary emphasized a definition of safety as the tangible mitigation of violence in all forms—physical and verbal abuse, physical and sexual harassment—rather than a feeling of unease. Part of the practice of radical hospitality, then, is developing an embodied, situational awareness of *when* someone's behavior is approaching violence or abuse, while at the same time reckoning with your own internalized assumptions around what a safe place looks and feels like.

Overtly unsafe behavior was less common during my field research but not necessarily rare: I witnessed shouting matches between guests, shoving and pushing, verbal abuse, threats of violence against staff and other guests, sexual harassment, and misogynistic, racist, transphobic, and homophobic comments. Staff also recounted to me one or two more extreme examples in The Sanctuary's past, including a stabbing. While The Sanctuary has a zero-tolerance policy for this kind of behavior—it can get you escorted from the space and banned for incrementally longer periods depending on severity—its staff, after years of firsthand experience dealing with extremely vulnerable populations, have come to understand this kind of harm as a structural inevitability, an outcome of the extreme precarity and vulnerability produced by the neoliberal carceral state. Further, staff have concluded that police, policing, and their adoption into the social services context do little to prevent such harmful interactions, let alone address their root causes. Similarly (and not surprisingly for such a highly surveilled and criminalized population), guests themselves do not necessarily associate the police with safety. At best, I was told, calling the police—or threatening to—*might* offer a last resort for staff who have exhausted all other avenues toward de-escalation. At worst, police intervention could exacerbate *any* conflict to the point of deadly violence.

The Sanctuary, however, does not take an explicit stance on police or prison abolition, and many employees and volunteers do not identify as police or prison abolitionists. Further, over the course of my fieldwork I observed many ways in which The Sanctuary and its staff reproduced carceral logics. Often, this came in the form of men (and sometimes others) aggressively enforcing Sanctuary rules, reproducing masculinist attitudes that are themselves foundational to policing (Barrie and Broomhall 2012; Prokos and Padavic 2002). It also came in the form of white people (and sometimes others) reproducing racist and anti-Black stereotypes around respectability and so-called good behavior. As Tamara told me early on, “All the racial things that are happening outside of here can happen in here too.” Such failures point to the persistent problems of masculinity,

whiteness, and anti-Blackness in undermining radical worldmaking projects. Yet in my conversations with Tamara and other management staff, problematic behavior was described as something to address collectively through peer support and accountability sessions rather than termination (a topic I briefly discuss in the conclusion of this essay).

For all of these reasons, I came to understand The Sanctuary not as an abolitionist organization *per se*, but as a place that offered an exceptional set of parameters for understanding police-free approaches to community safety. The Sanctuary is a particular kind of experiment in social possibility, where dozens and sometimes hundreds of people each day encounter one another across complex differences in power, identity, privilege, and psychological state—whether desperate, hungry, on the run, on drugs, or just volunteering in their spare time—and attempt to keep each other safe. Within this field of heterogeneous social, institutional, and political alignments, de-escalation emerges as an “every-day practice of abolition” (Branson et al. 2023; Winston 2020): the messy labor of building a future without police and prisons.

HOW TO BE THERE AND NOT THERE: Escalation, De-escalation, and Working Time

Cal is in a tense situation now, standing in the doorway to the bathroom, understanding that what the guest across from him is seeking is the ability to take care of some of the most basic human needs: privacy and cleanliness. Yet Cal is unable to meet these needs, because the bathroom is just a regular church bathroom, a few stalls, a couple of sinks, a soap dispenser, a swinging door. It’s a shared space, and guests aren’t allowed to strip down and use it for themselves as a shower, as much as they might need to. Because, well, we all need to be able to use that bathroom safely, including whoever is currently trapped in the other stall.

* * *

This is the impossible situation the carceral state creates: houselessness means little access to privacy, which means not being able to clean up, even though getting cleaned up can be disease-preventing, restorative, life-giving. These structural contradictions between basic human survival and interpersonal safety manifest in our bodies as fears, tensions, tightenings—the gut reaction to conflict that exists without our consent. We escalate just by existing side by side, body in the same room as body.

Escalation, in clinical terms, is an increase in anxiety and anxious behavior, typically triggered by conflict and/or embodied memories of traumatic experience (Du et al. 2017; Spielfogel and McMillen 2017). People escalate in different ways (we all do): quietly letting anger build and then lashing out verbally; reacting violently to benign interactions; using threatening body language and invading someone else's airspace. We might see these as normative expressions of escalation, but it looks different for everyone. It can also mean talking to someone or something not visible to others; making non-linguistic sounds like grunts or screams; moving around wildly; quietly retreating to a corner of the room; or just becoming non-responsive. At The Sanctuary, a space crowded with trauma survivors and people seeking resources for their material survival, escalation among staff and guests—and the tension that anticipating escalation creates—is always a possibility.

De-escalation, on the other hand, is the practice of helping yourself or someone else return to a non-escalated state (Atkins 2023). It too can be expressed in all kinds of ways: leaving the room for fresh air, lowering your voice, apologizing or taking a step away from a situation, smiling, sitting down on the ground, turning your back to face the wall. And it can be *felt* differently: like “coming down,” feeling grounded or at peace, blood pressure lowering, heart-beat slowing, connecting with friends or ancestors who aren't in the room, or laughing awkwardly. Indeed, sometimes de-escalating for one person looks like escalating for another. But when we de-escalate effectively—both ourselves and each other—we reduce the pathways to harm, and we become safe again.

At any given time at The Sanctuary there is a dedicated de-escalation team of two to three people like Cal (or me during my training) circulating through the building—communicating with one another over clip-on walkie-talkies, interacting with guests, and monitoring for escalated behavior. And because there is no single behavior that indicates escalation, and because no two people are alike, de-escalation is also the practice of getting to know people, building relationships, familiarizing oneself with patterns of behaviors, attuning to the many intimate embodied signals that people are constantly putting out, and arranging the space to minimize conflict or what is sometimes referred to as “pre-escalation.” As one staff member told me, the de-escalation team are “glorified minglers,” a casual description that belies the rigorous discipline, intersubjective knowledge, and embodied vocabulary they draw on to prevent and diffuse crisis.

The Sanctuary's theory of de-escalation assumes that conflict among guests and staff is an inevitable outcome of the extreme precarity guests face every day. Even in a space as generous as The Sanctuary, one cannot expect to have access

to all resources necessary to maintain basic dignity. If the carceral state produces this impossible situation for guests, then providing affirming care might also be a matter of “impossibility.” For Cal, it is to be in the doorway, offering support to the escalated guest, and at the same time *not* in the doorway, threatening the guest’s sense of safety. This is where understanding de-escalation through the lens of temporality becomes especially useful. Though Cal might understand the crisis in the bathroom as an outcome of the decimation of accessible public bathrooms and services for the unhoused, in the moment he must figure a way forward without much-needed structural changes to urban life. To do this, as I will show, he “works time.”

Here, I am borrowing directly from the anthropologist [Chloe Ahmann \(2018, 144–45\)](#), who describes the “deliberate manipulation of time” by environmental activists in Baltimore as a political strategy that unsettles hegemonic narratives of industrial progress and reveals time as “an arena of creative action.” But unlike Ahmann and other anthropologists for whom working time is a discursive practice—what she describes as “directing attention and making claims” ([Ahmann 2018, 153](#))—here I want to emphasize the embodied nature of time work, in which the transformative agenda of abolition converges with our most intimate phenomenological experiences of the world. This analysis is grounded in Black feminist thought, which emphasizes the somatic nature of political struggle ([hooks 2015; Lorde 2012](#)), or as [Ki’Amber Thompson \(2023, 1700\)](#) puts it, the practice of “embodying the worlds we desire.” And yet, as I will show, de-escalation work reveals how “embodying the worlds we desire” can be a messy and sometimes contradictory practice, as multiple needs and desires can compete within a moment of crisis. Thus, my analysis is also inspired by performance studies and the anthropology of performance, which has shown how experiences of time and subjectivity can be rendered “otherwise,” and even *multiple*, through embodied practices of ritual, creativity, and political action ([Thomas 2016; Crosson 2022; Fleming 2022](#)). As I will show, the embodied practice of de-escalation briefly transforms the imminent possibilities of the present—such that one *can* be there and not there—and in so doing ruptures the supposed inevitability of carceral outcomes.

Suspension

Over Cal’s shoulder I know everyone in that bathroom is confronting impossibility: Cal now blocking the naked guest’s exit with his presence, even though he’s there to de-escalate; the naked guest now having his only exit

blocked, the bathroom quickly shifting from refuge to trap; the other guest in the stall unclear if staying in the stall is safer than exiting. Together we confront the impossible: How do we move forward without further escalation? How can we be present in a way that doesn't replicate our passing roles as warden/criminal? For the de-escalator (Cal, or me in training) the question becomes: Is there a way through this embodied impossibility, this impasse in the doorway, that does not end in violence, harm, or the reproduction of a traumatic encounter?

Escalation itself presents a kind of exit: leave this world. Fly into a rage. Lose your mind. Leave time behind. The pressure to exit is on all of us, if felt most urgently by the already escalated guest, the most vulnerable participant in this dance. No one in this room is free of traumatic history, even if trauma is experienced differently in our bodies and in our embodied senses of stability and safety. There will be pain. There will be harm. How can we move through it with our mutual dignity intact?

* * *

Crisis de-escalation, like ethnographic writing, is a practice of expanding the possibilities of the moment beyond what we are initially capable of recognizing. This requires embodied techniques of suspension and pressure-management that may not stop time but can delay, expand, and multiply its possibilities. In an interview with Cassidy, a white, queer, femme-identifying de-escalation practitioner and full-time employee of The Sanctuary with several years of experience, we discussed de-escalation as a practice of shaping one's "bodymind" (Price 2015) to fit the needs of a situation, the art of accentuating certain dimensions of self and de-accentuating others, or what I call *suspension*:

Cassidy: One of the things I've been working on this year specifically is the balance of bringing my personality in. I'm a pretty goofy person outside of work. And what I've found is that there are moments that I can bring in that goofy humor. You have to be careful with it, because it can seem condescending at times, and it's only really folks that I have rapport with that I'm able to bring a joke in and kind of cut through the escalated situation.

Jake: Right, it's pulling something forward, like your goofiness, but it's also an experience of pushing a lot down as well, yeah?

Cassidy: Totally. When I'm not good at that, it is when I feel that I'm not being seen as a human. And it's usually something around misogyny, to be

honest, or homophobia. And it's those moments that I really struggle to push down. And that's information to me, that when you're not being seen as a human how hard it is to stay level.

At the same time as Cassidy actively reflects on her practice of pulling out dimensions of herself that have utility in moments of conflict, she confronts the limitations of pushing down others, particularly her identity as a queer woman. By calling misogyny and homophobia into our conversation, Cassidy reminds me that “pushing down” and “pulling out” are deeply vulnerable practices, especially for those living at the intersections of society's multiple and compounding structures of harm. And yet she describes her response to dehumanizing language as both a signal of this vulnerability *and* valuable information into the humanity of escalated guests, even those who wield those structures against her:

When we can understand that [our guests'] behaviors are just giving us information about what they're experiencing on the inside, then we can connect to them as a human, instead of responding to their external force, which can be jarring and can activate my own protective coping mechanisms or defenses. And that's what I think is the radical part, which is being able to orient yourself in a way that believes in the humanity of the other person from the get-go.

The result is an apparent contradiction, that to recognize an escalated person as fully human requires—to an extent—a suspension of one's own human response. Harmful language may be the cue that pulls Cassidy out of her practice and signals her to tap out (call someone else in), or, if she so chooses, to further suspend parts of herself in an act of care to support the needs of another.

There is a psychic and physical cost to this choice. Cassidy describes misogynistic and homophobic comments as triggering her own “defense mechanisms”—the very thing she witnesses in the behavior of the escalated guest—and she finds herself escalating in response. Though in the moment she may have the wherewithal to suspend this reaction, she is still the victim of what [Naya Jones \(2019, 1082\)](#) theorizes as the “emotional slow violence” of being targeted for her identity. Further, these psychic and physical costs fall disproportionately on women, queer and trans people, people of color, those at the intersections of these identities, and all who carry the trauma of past experiences of violence and harm. While I briefly touch on strategies for rest, recovery, and repair in the conclusion (and more extensively elsewhere), it is worth noting that Sanctuary

staff frequently burn out from these experiences and find themselves switching out of de-escalation roles or leaving the institution altogether. In this way, the practice of suspension directly conflicts with Black feminist and abolitionist visions for a world based in sustainable forms of accountability and repair, and is perhaps better understood as a practice of making do, rather than one of “embodying the world we desire.”³

At the same time, I want to suggest that suspension is more than merely *suppressing* one’s experiences of harm. After all, the power dynamics are complex and fluid here: while the guest in this example wields the power of misogyny against Cassidy, Cassidy’s position at The Sanctuary entails the power to deny the guest life-affirming and even life-saving services, to call in support and have the guest ejected, or to call in the police—all of which could bounce the guest back into a vicious carceral cycle that all too often results in premature death. As Cassidy describes, she makes a “radical” choice to prioritize the humanity of another while deferring her own desires for self-protection and healing to a later moment, a moment that might never arrive. Suspension thus emerges as an embodied reckoning with these competing desires, needs, and possible futures.

The Open Hold

I can see Cal searching for the answer in his body. From behind, I watch him make an adjustment: now less tense, his shoulders slumping down a little, his knees cushioning, his fingers softening and curling, his feet shifting from rooted to gently offset. These are the surface-level signs of a deep interior move: he is leaving without leaving, pushing parts of himself down and out to the margins of his body, making space in himself for something, or someone else. Cal is testing out a kind of softness, including an internal vacating of what the escalated guest may have been perceiving as a blockade or obstacle to his exit, while still holding his responsibility to the safety of The Sanctuary by standing in the doorway, including a responsibility to the safety of the guest in the bathroom stall whose own silence seems to be indicating another kind of need. Cal takes one step further into the bathroom and the door closes behind him, entering without entering.

I, suspended, stare at the closed door, hopefully offering Cal some embodied sense of support through the wall, even if it is just a stillness a few feet behind him and to the left, a sensed acknowledgment that if things got violent, I would be there to help. We were all—me, Cal, the guest in the stall, the guest at the sink—trying to feel our way through the contradictions without conceding to them. Holding.



If suspension is the basic practice of controlling one's own embodied reaction to conflict, it is equally critical to understand what the person you are interacting with is going through, and the ways they themselves are also feeling the pressure. In other words, practicing de-escalation requires a kind of inter-subjective exchange that troubles the given boundaries between self and other, a practice of working time that I call "the open hold." To achieve this, Cassidy must develop real, observational effort into understanding not just her own triggers but also how her body might be reading to (or triggering) others. In fact, in the time-space of de-escalation, these practices are simultaneous:

Cassidy: One time a guest told me, "You have cop energy." And I was like, "Oh, hell no" But he actually meant it as a compliment! So it really made me think, "How am I holding my body, and how am I perceived by folks who are engaging with me?" And I think for me, I'm an athlete, I engage in a lot of physical activity, and I do hold myself in a way that can come off as authoritative. Sometimes that can make people feel safe, but sometimes not. And I had to think about, how can I soften my presentation of myself, so that I'm not coming into a space where people are reacting to me like I'm a cop?

Jake: Do you mind sharing how you went about that softening? Softening yourself?

Cassidy: Typically I stand really straight and square, with my shoulders back. So I try to soften my shoulders a bit when I'm approaching an escalated situation. I always turn my body sideways, always. That really helps. And I always very gently put my hands on the front of my legs. That helps with my shoulders and helps soften my posture a bit, and everyone can see my hands and see all the cards I'm holding.

Often I think we're doing that in escalated situations right there *in real time*. You know, I may come in, and then realize that the way this is going isn't how I want it to. It's not working. I'm not connecting. So then I'll shift my approach. And that is that practice, of taking in their response to me and I guess . . . forming myself into what it is they need to get through this moment.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013, 38) describe this kind of social-sensory awareness as “hapticality,” a way of feeling others feeling you that emerges in the wake of racial capitalism’s originary site of enclosure—the “hold” of the slaver’s ship—and echoes through infrastructures of mass imprisonment, and the limitless ways modern racial capitalism encloses human life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the more successful de-escalation practitioners I encountered during my time at The Sanctuary were those who could draw on their own lived experiences of these intersecting enclosures: Black women, disabled, queer, and gender non-conforming folks, survivors of drug addiction and homelessness. “Trauma-awareness,” as a guiding principal at The Sanctuary, suggests that those who have survived multiple and compounding forms of harm have an extended haptic capacity toward others, an ability to access their own pasts to *hold* the presence of others safely.

But regardless of differences in lived experience, trauma-awareness, like Black feminist theories of intersectionality, contextualizes *all* participants in relation to each other (Crenshaw 1989). One need not have lived the experience of another to recognize them as fully human, but if one recognizes that another’s experience is essential to understanding one’s own, then one must recognize the “alterity” of another’s experience as a constitutive part of oneself.

Within “the hold,” crisis de-escalation thus offers a practice of holding each other in time beyond carceral logics of criminalization and enclosure:

Tamara: Yesterday we had a guy who was here for about three hours, who believed that . . . well, that [The Sanctuary] had kidnapped his kids. And he got to a point with each person on our team where he was like, “No, I’m done with you. Bring me someone else.” And so we had maybe five staff talk to him, kind of on repeat, until he was able to leave. I watched them reposition their bodies, do eye contact, learn when to respond if he was not being verbal and just staring intensely. So I watched them learning when to respond to him and reading his body language to anticipate when he might escalate and what his needs were.

Though it sucked up time and resources, Tamara offers the above story—which demanded the attention of five separate staff members over the course of several hours—as a beautiful success. She describes observing staff members learning over this slow unfolding crisis not just how to read the body language of an escalated guest but also how to adjust their own bodies in response. Together, they worked time into an open hold, a duration beyond the enclosures of carceral temporality within which an escalated person might find their own way back to safety.

Bridging

Cal and I, and perhaps the guest in the stall, had entered a softer time and space, allowing for a kind of retreat of the self within the body that wants to respond yet without a retreat from the space of confrontation, a kind of holding pattern in which non-response was a safer response than response. Non-response said: “I see you, I understand. How can I support while still being responsible to the boundaries and ground rules that keep this space safe?” I was in my body, but I was also newly aware of my body—that of a white cis man with a nametag—as a possible threat to this guest. As cop energy. I felt the sensation of multiple different ways of being-in-time occurring and competing inside me and all around.

* * *

In the space of crisis de-escalation, in the open hold, we meet each other across divergent perceptual experiences of time, or what phenomenological anthropologists often describe as “lived time” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Gell 2021). As Will, a white thirty-five-year-old man who worked for years in The Sanctuary’s mail room, told me:

I remember one guy in particular who used to come in every day to pick up a check from the mail which only came once a month. And he would pick it up one day, and then the next day he’d come in again and say, “Hey I’m here for my check.” And we would say, “No, we just gave it to you yesterday, don’t you remember that?” And then he would get really angry. He would leave upset, and he would come back the next day even more angry. And he’d be like, “Where’s my check?!” Sometimes he would threaten people verbally, and say something like, “I’m gonna come back here and kill you guys.”

He had a memory issue. And we found out he had a traumatic brain injury which prevented him from remembering things. And it became a big problem, a staff-wide thing. And we’d be like, OK, when this guy comes in, we need to keep an eye on him, keep him calm, his check is not going to be here for another month.

Will’s story calls our attention to the ways in which escalated people, in various states of mental and physical health, are often experiencing temporal (in)coherence in ways that are divergent from the “normative” experience of staff and others guests. As Thomas Fuchs (2013, 83) writes, for escalated people, lived time can be experienced as “a loss of simultaneity” or “desynchronization” with the people around you. Crucially, this notion of desynchronization hinges on the experience of time as fundamentally *intersubjective*, constructed in and through

one's relation to the others in the room, which is to say, one's relation to others in the room as they experience the (in)coherence of time. "Desynchronization" gives language to the acute ways in which "non-normative" or escalated behavior is experienced against a shared and socially accepted temporality, one whose disruptions may (or may not) pose a threat to collective safety. From there, it is a short and tragic leap to criminalization.

For those in crisis, time might feel as if it is scoping inward to a point of insufferable intensity or even boredom, a polarity created as one bounces from one support center to another. But one's experience of "crisis time" can be caused by other things too: psychoactive substances, mental health conditions, affective states, and so on. Across these divergent perceptual registers, one's sense of being-in-time does not always align with normative expectations. Those de-escalating crisis may also begin to experience this sensation of desynchronization, though perhaps to a lesser degree: time might gain a sense of speed, embodied through a heightened attentiveness to the needs of a colleague, or a kind of acceleration through routinized and familiar procedures: picking out clothes, talking into clip-on walkie talkies, etc.

The practice of crisis de-escalation thus requires the recognition and management of simultaneous and discrepant embodied rhythms. Cal, standing in the bathroom doorway, is attempting to bridge these multiple and discrepant experiences of time, keeping one foot in the institutional rhythms of colleagues, the other in the fast-slow unfolding of a guest's crisis, holding them all together in his body. But unlike carceral resolutions—which seek to bend these rhythms toward outcomes that reify normatively "safe" ways of being-in-time—the crisis de-escalator learns to respond to them without seeking their alignment. In other words, the de-escalator works to first "hold" and then "bridge" these dissonant temporalities—momentarily expanding the field of safety to include experiences of time that are typically pathologized as "unsafe." In this sense, one goal of crisis de-escalation is to create a space in which a much wider range of expression and relationality to time is recognizable and sensible as fully human.

Collectivity

When the bathroom door closes behind Cal, the guest's shouting grows muffled, subdued, and I lose my line of sight inside. I find myself explaining to Cassidy and Rae, a Black, queer, femme-presenting staff member, what's happening behind the door. "A naked guest showering in there, started yelling at me, another guest in the other stall, Cal inside now" When I finish, we all turn to the door. Rae knocks—"Cal, everything OK?"—and the muffled sounds intensify.

Knocking as escalation: the cue that there are more of us outside the bathroom, more of *them*, more world. We are its impending-ness, the imminence of a world enclosing the room, enclosing the naked guest's precious and fugitive privacy. The naked guest starts shouting again—I can hear him through the door—"Get out. Get away. Get out. Get the fuck out. Get out!" But I can feel the back of Cal's body push gently against the door too, as if to silently reply to Rae's knock: I am here. I am OK. Please stop knocking.

"Jake, maybe you should go grab some extra clothes," Cassidy suggests, and I move for the stairwell, up the two flights of stairs to the storage room. I scrounge around mounds of donated clothes—what clothes?—just anything, I guess, oversized pants, XL T-shirt, XL zip-up sweatshirt, XL socks, gathering them in my arms in a loose ball. I dump them in a spare Ikea bag and head back down the stairs. At the bottom I see a guest shuffling out of the bathroom, two Target bags pulling down at his shoulders, looking bashful as he sidles toward the exit. I hold the bag of clothes up to the edge of the door and Cal reaches through.

* * *

The work of bridging disparate times extends beyond one's relation to someone in crisis, but also to the edges of one's awareness of their colleagues, which is another way of saying to the *limits* of one's own knowledge and how that knowledge picks up in the body of someone else on your team, someone different from you.

Tamara: You have to be self-reflective and you have to be team-reflective. Another good thing about having a specific team is that they know each other. They know when someone is taking you on a spiral and they know when to tap you out. Or they know that you're really great with this one person, and they'll bring you in. So that's part of it, you're self-reflective but you also have to pay attention to your team and where they're at.

Tamara's statement may be a self-evident reflection on teamwork—it's important to know your team's strengths and weaknesses—but it is also a reflection on embodiment and learning to feel your team's embodied rhythms within your own. To "know" when someone else is being taken on a spiral is to haptically sense a negative rhythm developing in the dance. To know when to "tap out"—or step away—also requires an acknowledgment of your individual limitations. Repeated phrases and gestures can be cues, as can one's knowledge of a particular pair of dancers, but the "spiral" is a rhythm above all, a push-pull pattern that develops in an intimately shared yet uneven experience of time.

Throughout our conversations, Tamara is constantly reminding me of the collective nature of this work. Collectivity is both a practice and a tacit acknowledgment of the limitations of any single person's abilities, no matter their experience or identity, including vivid differences in how one experiences time:

Jake: Do you experience a heightened state in these situations? Like a flow state?

Tamara: It's a team effort. We all make eye contact and are like, OK, here we go. So I think, yes, in that sense.

Jake: Does your experience of your surroundings change? Do you go somewhere else?

Tamara: I get very focused on whoever is escalated. There are times when I'll be going through a whole situation, and I know exactly what's happening in front of me, but I can't see anything that's happening around me. And my team will fill me in on what has happened around me, and I know other folks have experienced that type of very focused thought.

In the most intense situations, Tamara's hyper-focus disrupts the continuity of everyday time: surroundings go unregistered and memories fail to adhere, yet her awareness of the moment expands. This experience is balanced by its opposite: a total stillness out of which one can observe the unfolding of an event and communicate crucial details about the situation and the environment. The collective *shares* these disparate experiences of time, organized around someone else's escalated experience of time in crisis, an experience that itself hovers on the precipice of knowability. Only through this collective approach—in which one's limitations and partial knowledge of a situation are integral—does a holistic understanding of the situation emerge.

CONCLUSION: Making Possibility in a "Tight Space"

Cal reaches through the door and takes the Ikea bag of clothes from me. The door closes gently shut and I turn to Cassidy and Rae, still together in the hallway outside the men's bathroom. We wait together, tense but also not so tense, having not quite left The Sanctuary's quotidian rhythms even as we attend to the crisis at hand. We wait. We direct some guests to the additional bathrooms upstairs.

Cal emerges with the focused stare of someone moving at a different tempo. Cassidy puts her hand on his back, "You OK?" and he makes a kind of

frown-shrug and raises his hands skyward as if to say, “What’re you gonna do?” We let silence settle in against the din of everything else carrying on as usual: the mail service, the kitchen cleanup, the constant creaking of guests going up and down the old church stairs. “It’s better if he comes out alone,” Cal says.

Cassidy, Rae, and I disperse, returning to our roles as floaters and shadows. I approach the front desk and check in with Betsy, the concierge. “How’d that all go?” she asks. I open my eyes wide and raise my hands skyward, imitating Cal. “OK, we’re gonna walk out to the front,” I hear Cal say through Betsy’s walkie-talkie.

Shuffling, Cal and the guest—wearing the clothes I gathered from upstairs—move side by side out of the bathroom door and toward the front entrance. Rae and Cassidy drift back into the hallway gloom. Cal and the guest leave through the front door. I stare off. Cal re-enters. “Yeesh . . . We’ll huddle up later.” Other guests continue to trickle in, looking for masks, looking for food, looking for their mail.

* * *

Through embodied techniques of suspension, the open hold, bridging, and collectivity, de-escalation practitioners work time, expanding the field of the possible and searching within it for a safe resolution to crisis. “It’s a dance,” Tamara tells me when I ask her about this process of moving with others. “An emotional dance.” Or, as [Danielle Goldman \(2010, 4\)](#) describes dance improvisation, it is the practice of elaborating new possibilities within a “tight space”—a highly rigid set of sociopolitical, physical, and choreographic enclosures that delimit one’s range of motion. De-escalation at The Sanctuary is an improvised dance, unfolding within the tight spaces of our bodies (our guts, our minds, our muscles) and our identities, inside an institutional choreography oriented toward “radical hospitality,” inside a state choreography that seeks to move unhoused, Black, queer, neurodivergent, and otherwise marginalized people into prisons.

Harm—and even failure—are built into the model, and thus so are individual and collective processes of recovery, accountability, and repair. Though beyond the scope of this essay, I have found “working time” to be a useful concept for understanding these other critical stages of de-escalation practice: from preparation (“pre-escalation”) to rest, recovery, and repair. As Sanctuary staff gather at the end of each day, they work the past together, collectively reviewing and assessing their memories of de-escalation, understanding what succeeded, what didn’t, and what must be addressed to continue. These sessions call for a different kind of time work, one that unsettles linear orientations to the past

while inevitability feeding into the spatial arrangements and choreographies meant to anticipate future conflict. Occasionally, restorative justice sessions are arranged between guests and staff to repair for harm, although staff will tell you that this both needs to happen more and can become unsustainable among over-worked employees and disinterested guests, leaving an open question as to how a more abolitionist approach to repair might be implemented under conditions of burnout and scarcity.

Working time through de-escalation is an abolitionist practice that “has legs,” meaning it moves beyond controlled spaces like The Sanctuary in unpredictable and impactful ways. In addition to the dozens of volunteers per year who train at The Sanctuary, experienced staff also offer de-escalation trainings around the city, and multiple times during my fieldwork we were able to coordinate these trainings for community groups. Within abolitionist organizing, we practice the “5 D’s” of everyday de-escalation: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct.⁴ In this way, de-escalation works time across multiple scales and registers, bridging radical visions of a future without police or prisons into intimate moments on the sidewalk or at the coffee shop. My hope is that this practice might also move—humbly and unpredictably—beyond the experience of reading this article. If you’re still here, I hope you are convinced: “Do the de-escalation training!” Learn the skills you need—on campus, on the subway, on the block—to keep each other safe.

ABSTRACT

This essay explores “de-escalation,” the embodied practice of intervening in interpersonal conflict and crisis without resorting to police or carceral tactics. Drawing on eighteen months of ethnographic research at The Sanctuary, a non-profit organization in Philadelphia that provides free social services, clothing, and food to vulnerable populations, I show how de-escalation practitioners use their bodies to manipulate both time and space into non-carceral outcomes. I focus on four overlapping techniques: suspension, the open hold, bridging, and collectivity. Unlike much of the clinical and psychological research on de-escalation, I situate these techniques within Black feminist, performance studies, and anthropological analytics that insist on the embodied nature of political struggle and the malleability of time and temporality. I argue that de-escalation at The Sanctuary creates a space-time in which abolitionist horizons of a future without police or prisons are negotiated through intimate, quotidian social interactions. [abolition; de-escalation; temporality; carcerality; practice; performance; safety]

NOTES

Acknowledgments I am deeply grateful to the staff, volunteers, and community of The Sanctuary. Thank you for welcoming me, sharing your expertise with me, and, most of all for your everyday labors in radical hospitality. I am also grateful to the editorial team at *Cultural Anthropology*, Julia Elyachar, Kate Ehrenhalt, Petra Dreiser, and the three anonymous reviewers, all of whom provided thoughtful and constructive feedback during the drafting process. Much of this writing was drafted in dialogue with the ethnographic writing group: Max Dugan, Jimil Ataman, and Kim Fernandes. Thank you, friends, for your time, compassion, and insight. I thank Jane Robbins Mize for steadfast editorial and intellectual support. Research and writing for this article was also supported by the University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences, the Center for Experimental Ethnography, and the Library Company of Philadelphia.

1. The “we” here remains deliberately ambiguous. In the summer of 2020, I participated alongside thousands of Philadelphians in numerous rallies and actions. Some were tightly organized by groups with clear leadership and explicit demands, such as the staunchly abolitionist Black Philly Radical Collective (Strong et al. 2022). Others loosely coalesced under the #BlackLivesMatter banner. Still others were more spontaneous and open-ended expressions of frustration and rage. As a white organizer and then-graduate student, I contributed to these movements in various modes of allyship, solidarity, and organizing, including planning marches, rallies, and teach-ins with the abolitionist assembly Police Free Penn and the national #CopsOffCampus Coalition, as well as by simply showing up to the many events organized around the city by others.
2. “The Sanctuary” is a pseudonym. I use pseudonyms in this article for the institution and the people who work there, as agreed on in my research protocols with participants.
3. In summarizing the principals of Black feminist transformative justice organizing, Mia Mingus (2015, 20) writes that individual and collective forms of justice are co-dependent: “There can be no individual justice without collective justice and vice versa.”
4. For a simple how-to, see J. J. Skolnik, “Abolitionist Bystander Intervention & De-Escalation,” Interrupting Criminalization, <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/abolitionist-bystander-intervention-and-de-escalation-a-pocket-zine-for-youth>, last accessed April 9, 2025.

REFERENCES

- Ahmann, Chloe
 2018 “It’s Exhausting to Create an Event out of Nothing’: Slow Violence and the Manipulation of Time.” *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 1: 142–71. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.06>
- Alexander, Michelle
 2020 *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Alves, Jaime Amparo
 2018 *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Atkins, Brian
 2023 *Keeping Safe and Working Effectively for Social Workers and Health Professionals*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.
- Barrie, David G., and Susan Broomhall
 2012 *A History of Police and Masculinities, 1700–2010*. London: Routledge.
- Branson, Scott, Raven Hudson, Bry Reed, and Mimi Thi Nguyen, eds.
 2023 *Surviving the Future: Abolitionist Queer Strategies*. Binghamton, N.Y.: PM Press.
- Brendese, P. J.
 2023 “Doing Time: Carceral Temporality.” In *Segregated Time*, edited by P. J. Brendese, 43–72. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé
 1989 "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1: 139–67.
- Crosson, J. Brent
 2022 "Between Possessor and Possessed: Warping Spacetime and Agency through Co-presence." In *The Dynamic Cosmos: Movement, Paradox, and Experimentation in the Anthropology of Spirit Possession*, edited by Diana Espirito Santo and Matan Shapiro, 49–62. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Davis, Angela Y.
 2003 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Desjarlais, Robert, and C. Jason Throop
 2011 "Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40: 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092010-153345>
- Dixon, Ejeris, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, eds.
 2019 *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*. Chico, Calif.: AK Press.
- Du, Maolin, Xuemei Wang, Shaohua Yin, Wei Shu, Ruiqi Hao, Sai Zhao, Harish Rao, Wan-Ley Yeung, Mahesh B. Jayaram, and Jun Xia
 2017 "De-Escalation Techniques for Psychosis-Induced Aggression or Agitation." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2017, no. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD009922.pub2>
- Fleming, Julius B.
 2022 *Black Patience: Performance, Civil Rights, and the Unfinished Project of Emancipation*. New York: New York University Press.
- Fuchs, Thomas
 2013 "Temporality and Psychopathology." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12, no. 1: 75–104. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-010-9189-4>
- Gell, Alfred
 2021 *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*. London: Routledge.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson
 2007 *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
 2022 "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence." In *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation*, edited by Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano, 471–95. London: Verso.
- Goldman, Danielle
 2010 *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten
 2013 *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. London: Minor Compositions.
- hooks, bell
 2015 *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. London: Routledge.
- Howard, Ashley M.
 2022 "Violence and Disposability at the Intersection of Twin Pandemics." *Labor Studies Journal* 47, no. 4: 493–500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X221121646>
- Jones, Naya
 2019 "Dying to Eat? Black Food Geographies of Slow Violence and Resilience." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18, no. 5: 1076–99. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v18i5.1683>
- Kaba, Mariame
 2021 *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. Edited by Tamara K. Nopper. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

- Kaba, Mariame, and Andrea J. Ritchie
 2022 *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*. New York: The New Press.
- Kurti, Zhandarka, and Jarrod Shanahan
 2021 "Carceral Non-profits and the Limits of Prison Reform." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 20, no. 6: 597–617. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v20i6.1975>
- Lee, YongJei, John E. Eck, and Nicholas Corsaro
 2016 "Conclusions from the History of Research into the Effects of Police Force Size on Crime—1968 through 2013: A Historical Systematic Review." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 12: 431–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9269-8>
- Lorde, Audre
 2012 *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press.
- Mauss, Marcel
 1973 "Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1: 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003>
- McDowell, Meghan G.
 2019 "Insurgent Safety: Theorizing Alternatives to State Protection." *Theoretical Criminology* 23, no. 1: 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480617713984>
- Mingus, Mia
 2015 *Transformative Justice*. Des Moines, I.A.: National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Violence.
- Mogul, Joey L., Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock
 2011 *Queer (in)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- O'Brien, Patricia, and Judith S. Willison
 2022 "The Criminalization of People with Mental Illness." In *Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice and the Carceral State*, edited by Patricia O'Brien and Judith S. Willison, 62–84. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Okechukwu, Amaka
 2021 "Watching and Seeing: Recovering Abolitionist Possibilities in Black Community Practices of Safety and Security." *Du Bois Review* 18, no. 1: 153–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X21000035>
- Price, Margaret
 2015 "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain." *Hypatia* 30, no. 1: 268–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12127>
- Prokos, Anastasia, and Irene Padavic
 2002 "'There Oughtta Be a Law against Bitches': Masculinity Lessons in Police Academy Training." *Gender, Work & Organization* 9, no. 4: 439–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00168>
- Ralph, Laurence
 2014 *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Raschig, Megan
 2017 "Triggering Change: Police Homicides, Community Healing, and the Emergent Eventfulness of the New Civil Rights." *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 3: 399–423. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.3.07>
- Rubio, Elizabeth Hanna
 2023 "Of Mothers and Monsters: Transformative Justice and the Politics of Intergenerational Healing." *Frontiers* 44, no. 3: 117–36. <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2023.a922884>
- Shange, Savannah
 2019 *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
 2022 "Abolition in the Clutch: Shifting through the Gears with Anthropology." *Feminist Anthropology* 3, no. 2: 187–97. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12101>

- Smith, Chauncey, Elycia Mulholland Graves, Jackie Guerrero, Melanie Ochoa, and Eva Bitrán
 2022 *Reimagining Community Safety in California: From Deadly and Expensive Sheriffs to Equity and Care-Centered Wellbeing*, October. Los Angeles: ACLU of Southern California and Catalyst California. <https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/campaign-tools/publications/reimagining-community-safety-in-california>
- Spielfogel, Jill E., and J. Curtis McMillen
 2017 "Current Use of De-escalation Strategies: Similarities and Differences in De-escalation across Professions." *Social Work in Mental Health* 15, no. 3: 232–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332985.2016.1212774>
- Strong, Krystal, YahNé Ndgo, Gabriel Bryant, and Flare of the Black Philly Radical Collective
 2022 "End the War on Black Philadelphia Now! Thirteen Demands Outlined by the Black Philly Radical Collective." In *How We Stay Free: Notes on a Black Uprising*, edited by Christopher R. Rogers, Fajr Muhammed, and the Paul Robeson House and Museum. New York: Common Notions.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta
 2016 *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Thomas, Deborah A.
 2016 "Time and the Otherwise: Plantations, Garrisons, and Being Human in the Caribbean." *Anthropological Theory* 16, no. 2-3: 177–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499616636269>
- Thompson, Ki'Amber
 2023 "Toward a World Where We Can Breathe: Abolitionist Environmental Justice Praxis." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113, no. 7: 1699–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2157789>
- Wacquant, Loïc
 2001 "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh." *Punishment and Society* 3, no. 1: 95–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624740122228276>
- Weber, Lauren
 2024 "Maintaining Portland's 'Progressive Dystopia': Housing, Carcerality, and the Real Estate State." *Urban Geography* 45, no. 9: 1575–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2024.2333210>
- Willse, Craig
 2015 *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Winston, Celeste
 2020 "The Everyday Black Life of Abolition." *Black Perspectives*, August 5.
 2023 *How to Lose the Hounds: Maroon Geographies and a World beyond Policing*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.