


UMSU QUEER DEPT. PRESENTS THE NEW CAMP ISSUE

SHOUT!

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VOLUME 6

Acknowledgement of Country

The CAMP editorial team wishes to acknowledge the unceded Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung lands on which we have created and distributed this magazine. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and extend this respect to all First Nations people. Sovereignty was never ceded. This land was stolen by force, and to this day, is retained by force, but it Always Was and Always Will Be Aboriginal land.

What we call queerness today—constructed as difference in a colonial system—has always been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. As settlers, we have a responsibility to think critically and inwards about our actions on stolen land, and as queer people we have a responsibility to challenge the cisheteropatriarchal and capitalist systems that are enmeshed with settler-colonialism and oppress us all. The work of queer First Nations people is key in the struggle for queer liberation, and all queer people must stand in solidarity in the continued fight against colonialism. There can be no true liberation for any, without liberation for all.

We hope that writing and creating art for each other can be a generative force—one that can replenish, connect and galvanise the queer community in fights that must be connected with the fight against colonialism across the globe.

There is a rich history of culture and storytelling on these Indigenous lands. While reading this magazine, and seeking out further writing, we encourage you to remain aware of whose land these experiences take place on and are shaped by, and to seek out their work.



CAMP

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Winter



SHOUT!

EDITORIAL

Hello readers!

This year, we wanted CAMP to be loud. With a focus on diverse, intersectional voices, we wanted to draw attention to experiences throughout the community, bringing them out as specific, passionate, and honest depictions of the differences in what it means to be queer. To be angry, joyous, fearful, excited, opinionated! To be proud to have a voice, no matter what it looks like, and to refuse to have it silenced. To use it to shout.

Building on CAMP 2022's efforts to represent diversity, this year we introduced Featured Artist positions for LGBTQ+ artists who also identify as BIPOC and/or Disabled. We have awarded four features to support intersectional communities and draw attention to the diversity which makes the queer community so great.

We have all gone through and witnessed some terrible events in 2023. With the continued rise in targeted violence against trans people, increased anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, the failure of the Voice referendum, and our government's prolonged inaction regarding the genocide in Palestine, it is vital to remember how strong we are together. Liberation will be won through collective action, solidarity, and the raising of many voices against oppressive colonial systems. We must continue to be defiant, deviant, and raise our patchwork flags against those who claim that difference defies unity.

As you flip through essays, short stories, poetry, memoirs, and passionate manifestos, we hope you find work that you resonate with, and—perhaps more importantly—work that challenges you too. We could not be prouder of the 23 writers and artists within this magazine, and the work they have done with our amazing subeditors to bring their visions to life. Not to mention the gorgeous artwork by our illustrators!

We are grateful for all your support as readers, and hope you will enjoy reading this magazine as much as we have enjoyed working on it.

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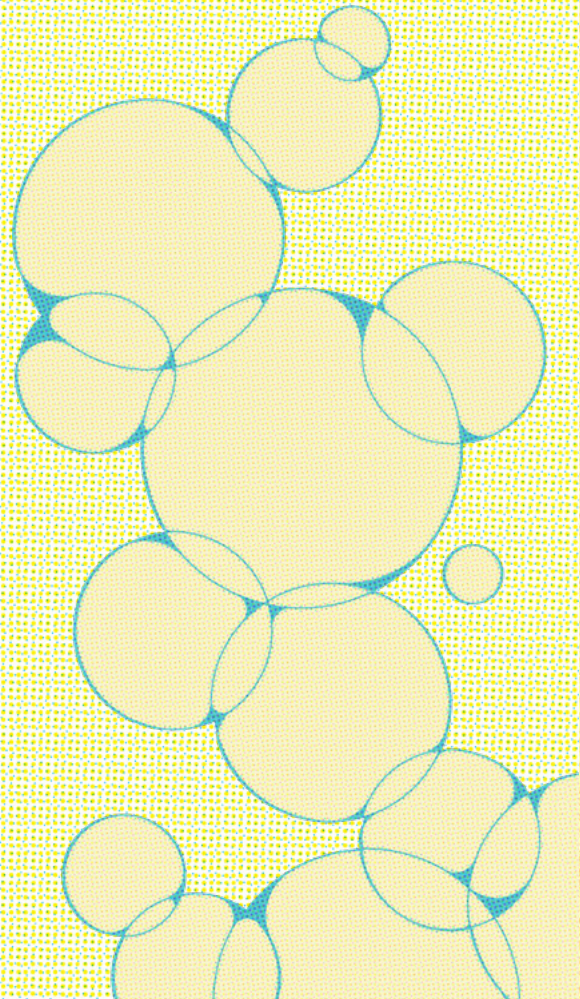
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OFFICER'S NOTE

"Camp is the attempt to do something extraordinary".¹

I started this project by reading through Susan Sontag's Notes on 'Camp' for some inspiration, seeing as that's where the name of the magazine came from. This particular quote really struck me—isn't that something that I wanted to do all this time? I want change. I want CAMP to stand out. Flipping through all past issues of CAMP, I thought: I want this magazine to be bold. To me, camp is LOUD, which is why I set the theme as "SHOUT!" this year.

Although we've experienced many bumps in the road throughout the journey, my four amazing editors pulled through, followed my creative vision, and created this magazine that I'm so very proud of. I am grateful for every single editor, subeditor, illustrator, writer, and artist who has contributed to this year's edition. Your passion for this project and this community is what made it so special.

"I shout out of love. My kindness and care is strategic and intentional. I am gentle but not soft. I live to love, and I refuse to be chipped away at, or to have my light taken away."

My voice might be weak, but at least I shouted.

Special thanks to Ailish Hallinan and Xiaole Zhan for aiding me in the early stages of this project. I couldn't have done it without you.

LESLIE HO

¹ Sontag, Susan "Notes on 'Camp!'" 60. In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, edited by Fabio Cleto. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, 53–65.

Featured Artist: Queer x Disabilities

ANATOMY OF A ROSE

written by Rose Power

Hold me like one of your corpses
Feel the weight of my liver in your palms.
An octopus' ink sac
kissed with abrasions.

Hold me like one of your corpses.
Trace my rubbery lungs.
Blow them up like balloons
and give me life.

Hold me like one of your corpses.
Thread my intestines through your fingers
and squeeze them like Callipos.

Hold me like one of your corpses.
Let me lie here (still as traffic)
as my blood glazes your bedsheets.



The Kiss of Remission

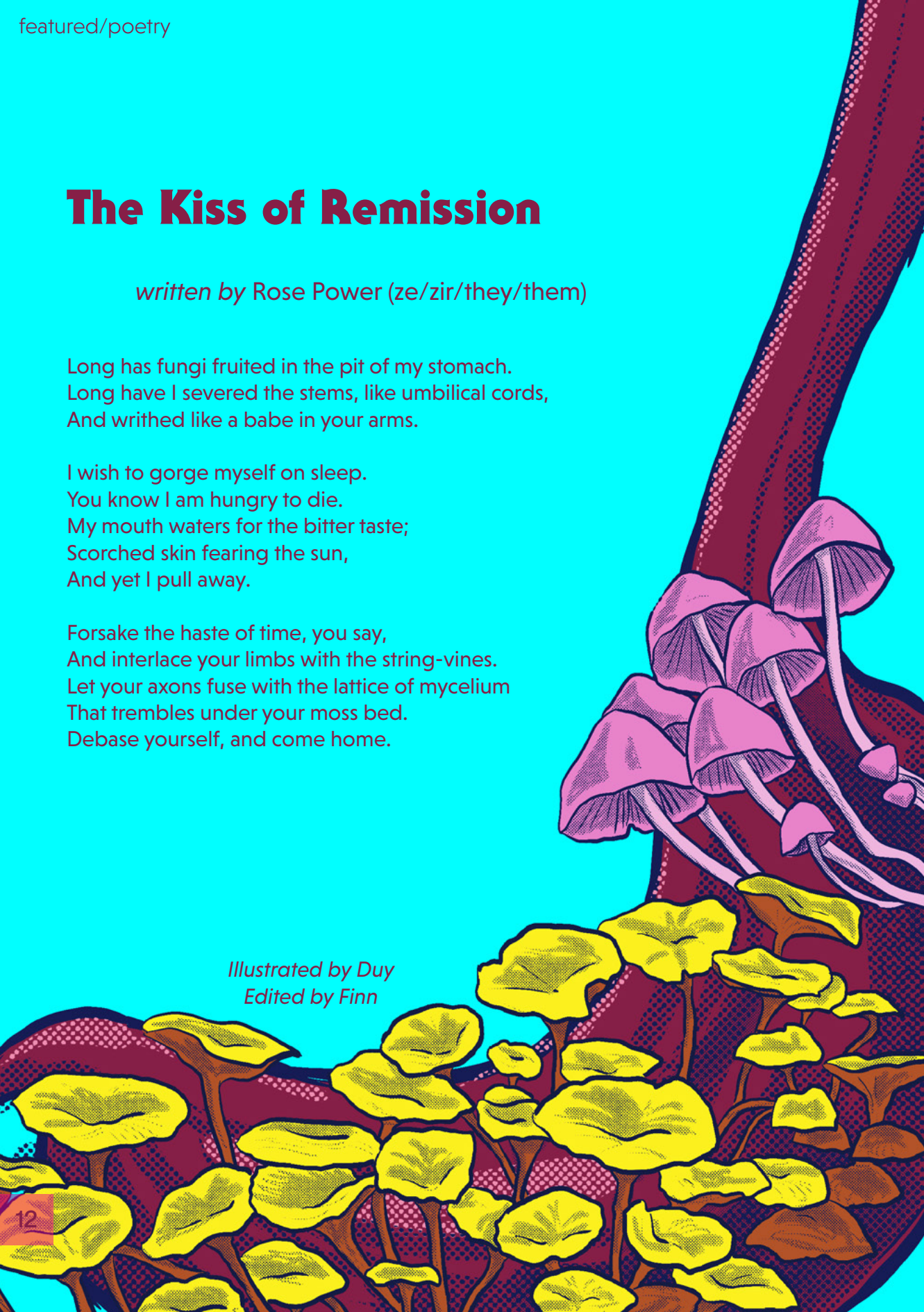
written by Rose Power (ze/zir/they/them)

Long has fungi fruited in the pit of my stomach.
Long have I severed the stems, like umbilical cords,
And writhed like a babe in your arms.

I wish to gorge myself on sleep.
You know I am hungry to die.
My mouth waters for the bitter taste;
Scorched skin fearing the sun,
And yet I pull away.

Forsake the haste of time, you say,
And interlace your limbs with the string-vines.
Let your axons fuse with the lattice of mycelium
That trembles under your moss bed.
Debase yourself, and come home.

*Illustrated by Duy
Edited by Finn*



SWARM

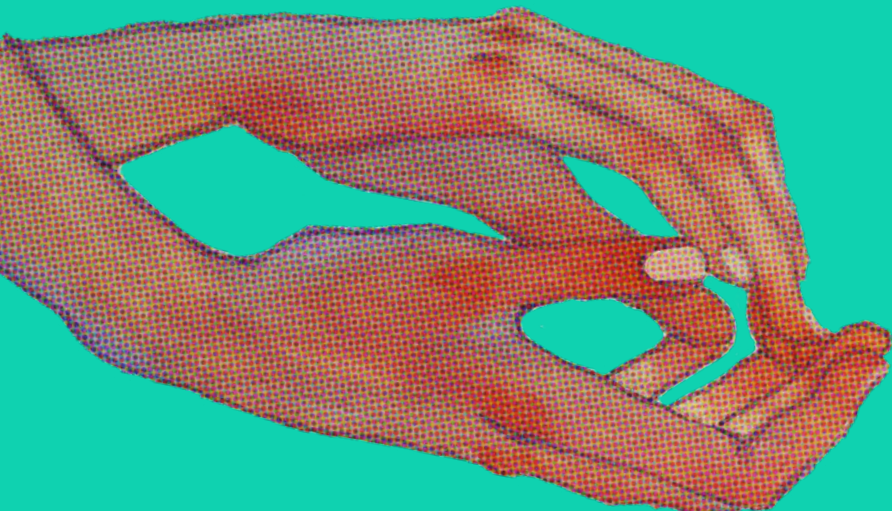
written by Rose Power

Adrenal glands throb and pulse between our ears
We are a single organism devouring ourself.
Eternal snake in the coire ansic:
Sick with euphoria.

We release it:
Every silent orgasm between thin walls
Every ugly sob on the train
Every vengeful shout crushed under the footfalls of a threat.

Our ribs clink like bottles on a rag tree.
Skin bruises like old fruit.

With eyes like ophanim
And hot-pavement tongues
We stick our boots into the mouth of Dagda.



*Illustrated by Jiayi
Edited by Finn*

THE PATRON SAINT OF BOMB TECHNICIANS

Lipsticks like box-cutters
smear my lips the same deep red.
A forked tongue meets yours
and is yanked away.

There is a rock in my throat
wedged in my windpipe:
a scream like wind in a tomb

The gaping maw of the chapel door gorges itself on my body.
Deemed worthless the moment I soiled it
and yet the beast still likes the taste.

Holy water bubbles like acid on my skin –
it is the same waxy-white of candles
whose wicks long to lick the walls
and boil the chalice.

A rosary noose is thrust in my hands
and it stays there.
I run it through my fingers
the same ones that made you squeal
and save my neck for vampire bites.

written by Rose Power

Illustrated by Amy
Edited by Finn



P U n k S

Q U E E R S

THE
QUEERS
ARE
HERE

REBELS

Featured Artist: Queer x Person of Colour

Towards Utopia

Critically Analysing Queer Activism Post Same-Sex Marriage

*Written by Calvin Truong (he/him)
"I am an Asian gay cisgender man"*

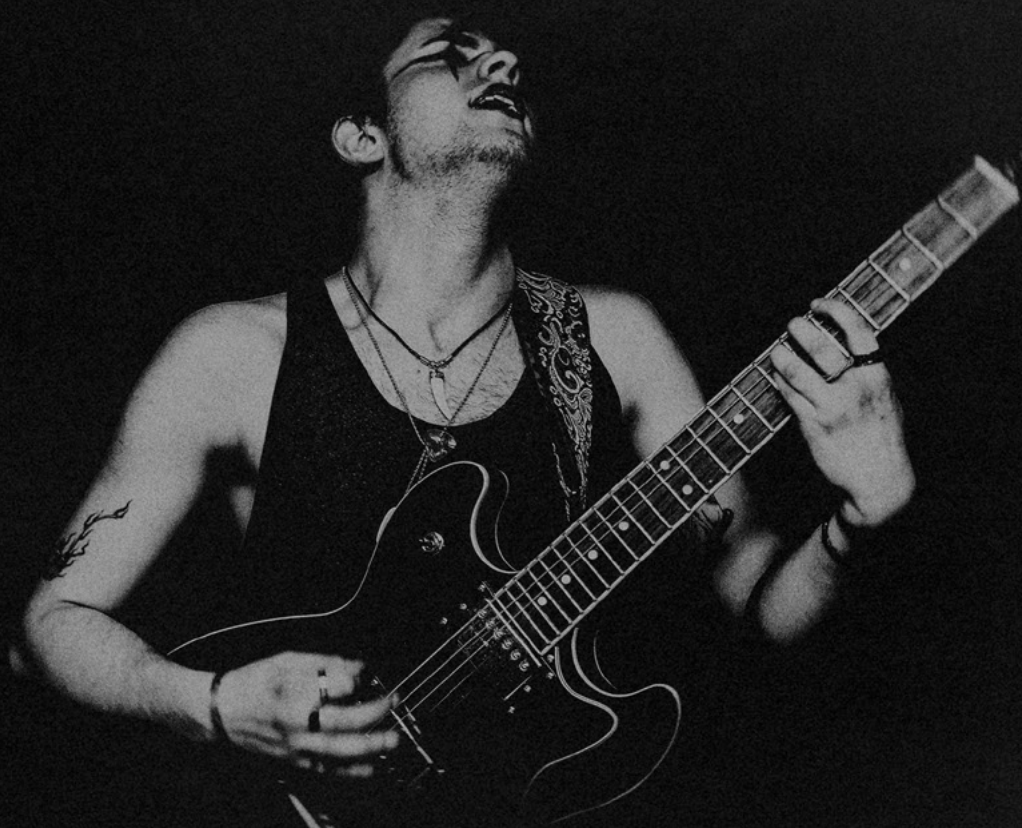
CW: queerphobia, homophobia.

The philosophy that post-Cold War society had reached an ideological endpoint, where liberal democracy and capitalist systems would be universalised globally and lead to the end of 'end of history' is a highly influential analogy.¹ One that scholars of sexuality draw on to argue that 'queer history' has reached its natural conclusion in the Western world after the proliferation of same-sex marriage laws across the global north in the early 2000s.² However, as many critics have noted, history has continued for the political world, and the notion rings true for the queer world. Whilst modern-day queer activism benefits from the strong groundwork provided by queer rights campaigns, there is still much to learn and improve upon from these historical movements. Therefore, in this essay, I critically analyse the state of queer activism in the global northern modernity, arguing that current social movements should not stagnate in their efforts to emancipate the LGBTQ+ community from structural discrimination. Additionally, I draw upon queer academic literature and social activist theories, which discuss both the failures and successes of previous queer social movements, to contend that contemporary activism must embrace intersectionalities and 'futurity' in order to create meaningful social change.

Social movements, particularly the LGBTQ+ rights movement, have had a solid physical presence in queer memories, and in the grand narrative of activist cultures and histories. However, moments such as Stonewall, the Australian 78ers, and Obergefell vs Hodges are also etched into the political and social fabric of many Western nations as well. Hence, it is essential that I first provide a sociological and theoretical context to the nature of queer activism. More specifically, it is imperative I analyse queer activism as a discourse and use a Foucauldian-based approach to pre-contextualise my arguments. Foucault theorised that discourses are "polyvalent", meaning they exist in multiple states simultaneously and/or exclusively.³ Foucault, therefore, implies that discourses,

in their multiple manifestations, can reinforce power structures just as much as they seek to combat them. Laclau and Mouffe further extend Foucault's seminal work from a post-Marxist perspective, arguing that discourse constructs meaning not only through their internal composition and discussions but also through opposing discourses.⁴ This antagonistic relationship—in conjunction with Foucault's polyvalency—is fundamental in understanding queer activism, because it demonstrates that multiple forces can define, mediate and create activist discourses.

Another way to better visualise the Foucauldian theories of discourse in queer and sexual activism is through dichotomous epistemologies. Descended from the same logical sentiment as Laclau and Mouffe's antagonism, "dichotomous thinking defines something in relation to what it is not as opposed to what it is," thereby creating an ideological superlative.⁵ As a mechanism, this inherently privileges specific agenda over their counterparts just as an imbued value hierarchy influences how actors imagine inequality. Some inequalities are justified as more important than others and are therefore given primacy, which is usually at the expense of other adjacent causes. For example, the same-sex marriage movement can be superficially identified as a single-issue cause, namely focusing on the one practical outcome of legalised unions to benefit its marginalised population. However, on a deeper contextual level, the same-sex marriage movement is arguably constructed on rejecting other social causes



necessary to liberate the queer community. Legal unions have, thus, become the sole focus within the dichotomy of heterosexual versus queer models of relationships because most LGBTQ+ communities have aligned (through choice or by force) with traditional familial and matrimonial identities, namely as a form of gaining social legitimacy.⁶ Hence, this is why some have come to argue that same-sex marriage activism and unions both reject and perpetuate heteronormativity.⁷

Same-sex marriage, however, as a social movement, is not a failure by nature of its inability to cater to each discourse constructed by a queer community. However, it does reveal the externalities that have unfolded as a result of the value hierarchy of queer communities hyper-fixating on marriage. For example, Schlitz and Lagos observed that,

"...research at the institutional level has found that many religious organisations have been slow to develop official positions on transgender identity, as many of the religious institutional changes on LGBTQ issues have revolved primarily around responding to same-sex attraction and marriage..."⁸

Bisexuality also maintains a similar fate due to its incongruity with heterosexual and homosexual dichotomies, leading it to be neglected in queer activist identity.⁹ Implicitly, the discursive prioritisation of same-sex marriage movements has consequently denied non-cisgender and pansexually identifying queer populations a place in the public consciousness. Whilst one could argue that this may have shielded them from conservative scrutiny, it is apparent that same-sex marriage, as a social movement, disenfranchised the broader queer community like transgender, asexual and aromantic groups from vocalising their needs as a queer diaspora. Namely, by systematically removing them from the political debate entirely.

However, it is vital to clarify that value hierarchies are not a self-imposed agentic force acting on queer communities to disenfranchise one another discursively. Instead, power is exerted by capitalistic forces, driving competition between causes for the limited physical resources available to them and for public and political attention.¹⁰ While this Marxist-esque interpretation essentialises the immense operational mechanisms behind social movement ideologies, there are still valuable lessons for future queer movements that can be derived from the faults of the marriage equality movement.

First, is using a different navigational perspective within the queer social movement sphere. As Petray and Pendergrast explain, there are three approaches which social movements use to promote their causes—integrationist, anti-systemic and non-hegemonic. As an overall passive movement seeking to create "incremental changes to the existing structure," the same-sex marriage

movement would fall under an integrationist approach.¹¹ This opposes more radical anti-systemic camps of queer activism, which seek to overhaul hetero-normative institutions completely. However, there exists a third independent option: the non-hegemonic approach. Petray and Pendergrast suggest that this third option focuses on building and navigating safe spaces outside power structures rather than actively fighting against them. For queer movements, creating these alternate spaces is arguably more accessible as the boundaries of current institutions do not restrict the movement.

The non-hegemonic position does have its flaws, however; namely that these utopias are, to a degree, still inside oppressive superstructures such as that of neoliberal capitalism.¹² Nevertheless, the lesson that Petray and Pendergrast critically emphasise is that contemporary queer social movements can learn from the mistakes of the marriage equality campaign. By incorporating non-hegemonic approaches in their activism, the subsequent production of queer utopias would provide activists with an understanding of how sexuality and gender are experienced differently across socio-cultural contexts, allowing them to envisage alternative conceptions of identity; therefore, making space in social movement discourses for queer individuals who do not align within the hetero/homo-normative dichotomy.¹³

In practice, non-hegemonic actions within social movements are, by nature of their construction, limited in present social movements compared to their popularised hegemonic counterparts. Nevertheless, there are case studies where their implementation in smaller LGBTQ+ social movements may prove helpful in larger contemporary lobbies. The subculture of queer punk/x, for example, has also historically suffered from the superstructure of capitalism and patriarchy, limiting its ability to be fully emancipated from material production and heteronormativity.¹⁴ However, its non-hegemonic practice of rudimentary collectivism, coined "Do It Together" (DIT), invites social harmony amongst its community members and seeks to minimise the fragmentation in most politically charged gatherings. These formations of community outside of the cis-gendered heterosexually dominated punk scene are characterised as informal and are grounded in kinship and mutual trust. Promoting a safe space that allows punx to coexist with their complex identity combats hetero-normative punkhood by "queering" territory and carving out a space for themselves.¹⁵ As a case study of a successful non-hegemonic approach, queer punx demonstrates the effectiveness of employing a utopian imagination in modern-day movements. By manifesting a social world external to the constant pessimistic discourse of activism, contemporary queer social movements can provide refuge through collective safety and friendship. This utopianism is important for queer movements in particular because of the isolative nature of the queer identity. Many LGBTQ+ individuals are ostracised and disconnected from traditional family and social relations.¹⁶ Therefore, imagining and creating utopia is just



Real

PUNK

is

REVOLUTION
it's just
a kiss
away

passionately

being

I DONT WANT TO SEE OR BE
SEEN BY STRAIGHT PEOPLE

YOURSELF

impactful to the queer population as integrationist change is.

These lessons of non-hegemony and 'doing utopia' are valuable because they preach the need for reflexivity and self-regulation in a social movement. However, these practices come with the difficulty of building community outside the pervasive structures of dichotomy and capitalism. This limitation, therefore, requires a continuous and empowered effort to secure the future of queerness against the capitalist and dichotomous framings of power, possession and sex. Queer futurity, as termed by Cuban-American academic José Esteban Muñoz, seeks to address that need directly by critiquing the fatalist or pessimistic nature of the queer identity. Muñoz posits that queerness is hopeful, "contain(ing) blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity".¹⁷ In other words, futurity asks that queer social movements reject the status quo and instead continue to envisage future queer worlds to strive towards. It is, therefore, implied that queerness may never be emancipated from hegemonic structures. For futurists, a successful queer community is one that continues to build its power and stake in the heteronormative social world. In other words, the asymptotic relationship between queer sexuality and heterosexual social structure empowers social movements and drives them to success. Going back to the example of punkhood to elucidate futurity, "(punks) cannot fully imagine what the better world would look like, but they refuse to accept the one that they know as final".¹⁸ Therefore, contemporary queer social movements should learn from futurity and punkhood to, foremostly, refuse the 'end of queer history'. Same-sex marriage and other achievements may be a significant milestone in queer liberation, but they are not the final step in the process of full emancipation. Futurity ensures that queer social movements learn from the lessons gained by previous movements and commit activists towards imagining an optimistic queer world which can constantly be improved for queer society.

Ultimately, this essay has demonstrated that queer social movements have not witnessed 'the end of queer history' and still have much to learn from their predecessors. Through critically analysing the failures of the marriage equality movement and juxtaposing them with the successes of queer punx movements, I have argued that there are still lessons to be learnt from historical social movements. As such, I have identified two key lessons. The first is the need to balance integrationist approaches with non-hegemonic practices to make spaces for queer communities who do not identify with the homo/hetero-normative dichotomy, as prior movements have historically excluded non-conformant queer diasporas, and that utopias protect queer communities. This positionality is not only essential for queer social movements to motivate themselves but also to drive continuous change against the hegemony of patriarchy and capitalism. Queer history is indeed far from over, and it is paramount that the social movements at the forefront of change learn from previous mistakes and values and continue their successes to drive society closer to queer liberation.



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limb-loosener

written by Eleanore Arnold-Moore (she/her)

Bystander to my own undoing
I cannot say
whose reach spears at the ankles of my heart,
hounding its pulse up the cliff of my throat
drowning all thought and tongue
in throbbing

Anonymous:
the melter of my joints
holds my diaphragm in stutters, abandoning
me in the skittish desert of my mouth, sea-
spray the only libation poured for my
keen thirst

Tell me, plague or passion,
what affection
shakes me? Whose undying hurls the war-fields
at me, hurling the shield of my gut? Who fires my
clay-wet veins, frozen in the kiln of blood's
lust and letting?

How breathtaking
that my illness is indistinguishable
from love

Waystation

written by Eleanore Arnold-Moore

CW: blood, slight body horror

I'm living velvet rubbed the wrong way
with lungs and skin crafted for different air
translating with every step, and wave, and laugh
reading every road, and eyebrow, and silhouette
in a foreign tongue.

I've lost the weft of my homeland it warped
in my passing,
now the weave is misleading,
the grain rough against my want.

I've learned to twist the language we were taught, to fit
what I am on my tongue, to be shaped from misshapen
hands.

Changeling, caught
on the hope that there is somewhere else
I am meant to be,
that this world is just a waystation,
that the grain will smooth again.

The want, to
fit return be seamless,
leaks from ears, eyes, mouth – a wash
of desperation and disappointment. A ceaseless
hope that hurts more than grief
because it is grief demanding action,
demanding an unravelling
and re-weaving of the life at our fingertips,
a velvet with no grain.

*Illustrated by Melanie
Edited by Finn*

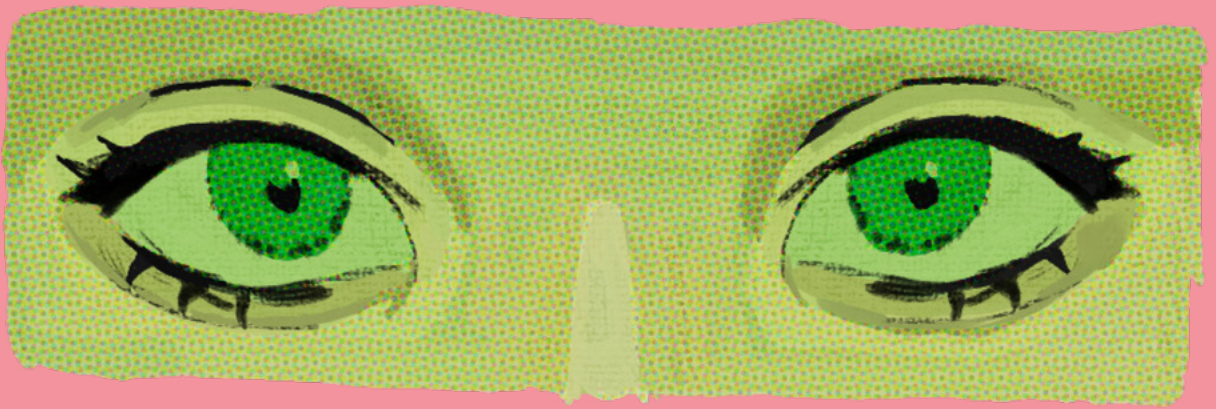


The A is also for Aromantic

written by Izzy (she/her)

As an aromantic and asexual person, I have found that my aro identity has had a much bigger impact on my life than my ace identity. While there are aro-ace people whose ace identity is more important to them, and others who don't feel the need to distinguish between them, I personally find that being aro has presented me with a set of challenges and experiences that continue to shape my life significantly. I worry about how I'm going to be perceived when I'm older and I'm still single, beyond the age that society expects women to be married with kids. I worry about how I'm going to make friends and form new connections after I graduate, because with the existence of dating apps, it seems so much easier to find a hookup rather than a best friend. Most importantly, I worry a lot about always being second place to my friends' romantic partners because our society places too much value on romantic connections and not enough on friendships.

While this is how I feel, it seems like the aromantic community has never really expanded beyond simply being a subset of the asexual community. Aromanticism is treated as an extension of asexuality, an afterthought. It's something that many aro people don't even talk about very much. While I love that the asexual and aromantic communities are linked together, especially since I identify as both, I wish aromanticism was talked about and represented more. Even in fiction, a lot of aro representation is implied – like when a character comes out as asexual, and also seems to be uninterested in dating and doesn't ever get crushes, but the word "aromantic" is never mentioned. Asexual representation is already so rare, but aromantic representation is even harder to come by.



I realised I was aromantic a year or so after realising I was asexual, and perhaps that's the reason why I think of my aro and ace identities as separate. I remember being fourteen and finding out about asexuality and aromanticism on Tumblr and thinking to myself, "I'm asexual, but I'm not aromantic because I have crushes on boys" (lol). While figuring out my asexuality was as easy as finding out there was a word for it, coming to terms with my aromanticism was a long and complicated process, and for many years after I was definitely guilty of pushing my aro identity to the side and saying "I'm ace" when I really meant to say "I'm aro-ace," it's something that is and always will be very central to my identity. Because of this, I will also push for more explicit aromantic representation whenever I can.





gender dysphoria

written by Caspian Everett-Daley
(any pronouns)

CW: mentions of gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia

Bound tightly, pressure direct
Stop the blood flow
to keep those wounds away.

This was not my choice.

Stop- the blood flow
meets resistance as tight fabric stretches over tissue
This was not my choice
To be locked away in a strongbox

Meets resistance as tight
fabric stretches
Over tissue crumpled and
unwanted I find your gift
To be locked away in a strongbox
There is no other option but to bear it

Crumpled and unwanted I find your 'gift'
Back aching from the constriction of it
There is no other option but to bear it,
The burning in my muscles

Back aching from the constriction of it
A self-implosion and feel
The burning in my muscles
Bound tightly. Pressure? Direct.

*Illustrated by Amy
Edited by Ledyá*

Batesian Mimicry and Positionality

Written by A.O. MacLeod

CW: talks of racial trauma, colonisation violence, mention of the stolen generation, allusions to trans related violence.

Hozier's new album *Unreal Unearth* features three songs with reference to his native language, Gaelge. These songs speak to his connection to Gaelge and Ireland, the mourning of the lost parts of a language once almost lost completely to time and British colonisation efforts, and those that have been. 'Butchered Tongue' especially resonated with me, from the moment I heard it, and I've been trying to consolidate why ever since. This is what I've come to.

An dùil gun dèan eachdraidh ath-aithris.

This roughly translates to "expect history to repeat itself" in my native tongue—a language I do not speak.

It's a common misconception that Gaelic is the Irish language. Gaelge (Irish) and Gaelic (Scottish) both depart from the same Celtic roots, but Gaelic is the once predominant language of Scotland. Today it persists in the Northwest coast and the Hebrides Islands only, the territory of my ancestors. A diminishing 1% of the Scottish population can speak their native tongue, with only half of those able to read and write. The misconception derives from the relative prevalences of the languages. With similar population sizes, ~40% of Ireland's residents speak Gaelge, so the mistake is never corrected, and the true Gaelic further forgotten.

That isn't a statistic I bring up to diminish the cultural traumas of Ireland's people, but to highlight that of my own ancestors.

"Aren't you basically just British/English?"

No. The distinction is important, such that time doesn't corrode our experiences to oblivion, such that we retain the words to know our cultural traumas. Scottish people are widely seen as quirky Brits, but ours is an insidious colonisation and anglicisation, not well recognised because of its success.



The Education (Scotland) Act 1872, an act established in aims of anglicisation, introduced widespread elementary teaching solely in English, repressing education in or of Gaelic. Students were subject to physical beatings and humiliations for speaking their language and protecting others also speaking the language. Many parents chose not to pass on their language to their children to avoid them experiencing the same traumas as they had, leading to a rapid decline in Gaelic's prevalence, and as such, the language hangs on by a thread of what it once was. Simultaneously, names once in Gaelic went through a process of anglicisation, translated or assimilated to the sounds of English. My parents descend from the Great Clans of Garadh and MacLeòid, but we don't know ourselves in that language anymore, my name is a carcass of butchered syllables that barely echo the language they derive from.

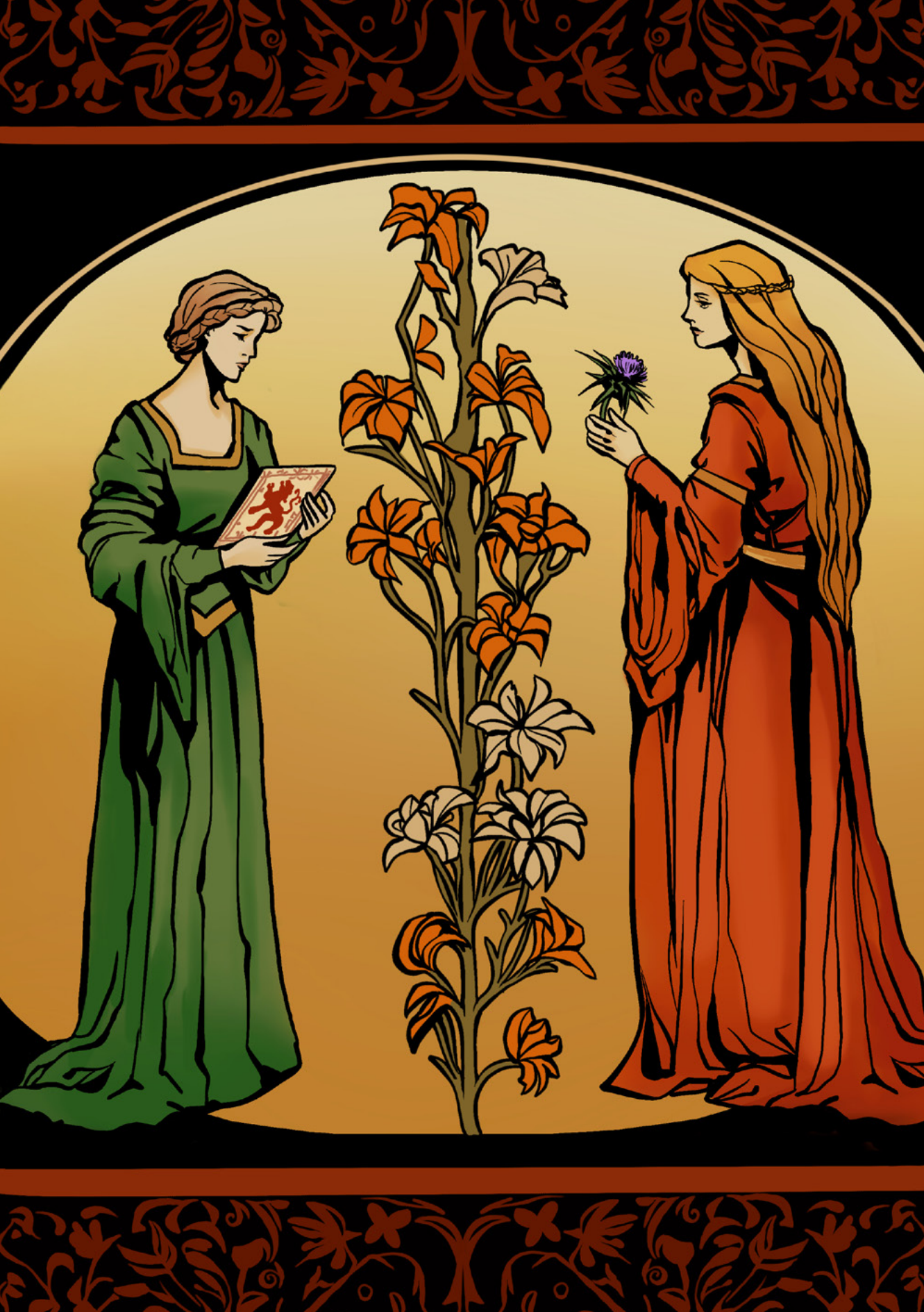
I would love to learn my mother tongue, but with no ancestors left remembering her, even succeeding I would have no opportunity to speak her and be heard. It is always tragic when a language dies. Maybe since Gaelic has now been documented extensively in the written form, there is hope that she will persevere. The declining number of speakers speaks to the contrary. Anyone who knows any small amount of the study of linguistics understands that different languages engrain different ways of thinking and being, and so language extinction kills both the words and the way of life. And I mourn for the pain of my ancestors, the dying of my language and the culture that I won't get to know. That dies with it.

It is inevitable this topic bleeds into a conversation of racism, of who is the perpetrator and who is the perpetrated against. This has never been black and white; whiteness is not a static construct. Over recorded history we have seen as this group's power diminishes, the concept of whiteness expands to forcefully establish a majority social power—adoption under social protections in exchange for mutual establishment of the othered as inferior. Historically, anti-Irish sentiments were social norms, with signs stating “No Blacks, No Irish” common outside segregated spaces, jobs with “Irish Need Not Apply”. Irish people were never white historically, and were excluded and discriminated against alongside people of colour. Yet today, Irish people are considered white, these past attitudes reminiscent only in microaggressions of cultural parodies and trivialisation. Similar, less documented attitudes have existed towards Scottish people, especially the Highlanders, often perpetuating Scottish people as barbaric, incestual, lawless, cannibalistic etc. These attitudes don't cease to exist with assimilation into whiteness—they're insidiously redirected at the 'worst', the most obviously Scottish individuals. And those who blend in? Accept the loss of their culture and the perception of whiteness? They're rewarded with being separated in esteem from the 'savages'.

These days we see it happening again, within debates of whether white-passing black people, light-skinned Aboriginal people or Maori have the right to claim that heritage, or if they're just white. You would think in the context of the stolen generation, we would know better by now. But as we've seen, it's naïve to believe this cycle might stop without some circuit breaker.

Within today's society, I am functionally white. This isn't a conscious or desired part of my identity, it's a by-product of the colour of my skin and the whitewashing of my people's history, and the culture I've been raised within. Whether I internally accept that label is externally irrelevant; I am still perceived that way—I experience the privilege to not fear discrimination based on the colour of my skin as I walk through the world. It's bittersweet how much of my culture has been lost in anglicisation efforts, and because of that loss, I have the safety of being able to lump myself in alongside the perpetrators. I don't want privilege at the expense of knowing and connecting with my roots, but it's what I've got.

A reoccurring survival technique we see within wild living populations is Batesian mimicry—the evolution of assimilation to a harmful species's physical characteristics which have a greater fitness value, for example, the harmless scarlet kingsnake and the markings they bear of the venomous coral snake. And I wonder if the scarlet kingsnake ever laments their subterfuge of venomous appearance. Sure, their colouration provides safety, reduces the number of potential predators and increases the survival of the species. But what does it take from them? Does it ever bother them that others look upon them and feel fearful, that they are ultimately alone within the world and nobody will ever understand them



as they truly are? Is that only a human concern? Maybe it's not that deep, that when you strip back everything to a question of survival, morality doesn't come into it, if appearing harmful keeps you alive, isn't that the most important thing?

Isn't it?

Regardless of my internal relationship with the label of whiteness, people who look like I do are the perpetrators of so much violence and discrimination. I am on the side that hurts less. And though we never started out that way, I see it in my older family members, that they have accepted their place amongst the safety of the colonisers, and assimilated to the racist undertones (and yes, sometimes overtones) of our modern western society, undertones that I am doing my best to become aware of and unlearn within myself.

It is also important to note that I live on stolen land, the land of the people of the Kulin Nation. Regardless of intention (self-preservation is never a good enough reason for accepting inhumane action), that is a colonisation my settler ancestors participated in, and one that those of us left on this land are responsible for mitigating the damage of.

This is not a story unique to my culture. We see it reoccurring over and over, with differing details, timeframes, magnitudes, and it demonstrates that with no action to prevent it, history really is just doomed to repeat itself. Even in this severe disconnect, my culture has fared better than others entirely lost. Nobody is responsible for the heinous actions of their ancestors. But we are responsible



for acknowledging those actions, examining our own behaviours as to where harmful ideologies may still creep in—and making conscious effort to unlearn the harm we've been taught to reenact.

Like the scarlet kingsnake, I too am a mimic. Not within my identity itself, but in the (justified) negative perceptions that accompany the external perception of that identity.

I think of the day I will pass consistently as a man, and it is bittersweet. Externally I will be safer, I will be more myself. But I will give up the community of womanhood, a safety and understanding that never belonged to me, but that I found peace in before I knew myself. I will give up the appearance of safety to my queer siblings and sisters. In women's spaces I am already often sneered at, physically barred and assaulted because I've tried to pass as a woman in a certain context for my own safety. By your binary that is where my body belongs, but I am unwelcome. That will become my normal. Instead of smiling back at me, women will cross the street; I will scare them. They won't be able to see that I have the same scars of violation, that I too was taught to watch how I dressed, and stay vigilant constantly, to cross the road from the man trailing behind me. And it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that I am a man with a scared little girl inside of me, on the outside, the image I wish to see in the mirror looks eerily like the enemy, and I cannot expect her to know I am safe. I am He but I am not Him that will hurt you.

And that doesn't matter. Not functionally.

The distinction between white people and people of colour is one rooted in racism and colourism, and establishing hierarchy between the two groups. Though it's a politically correct shift of archaic racist terminology and severely lacks required nuance, we can't not acknowledge it. Because if you're 'colour-blind', you'll never see the patterns of hurt perpetuated over and over again. And if you willingly blind yourself to the cycle of abuse, you're complicit in its reoccurrence.

But I think it's time to change what language we use. Because it's a lot more accurate to say that I am Scottish Australian peppered with smaller parts of other heritages, both descending from colonised, and then coloniser, than that I am white. Even just white*, a simple symbol to acknowledge the complexities the word erases.

My home is land I have no claim to, and my motherland is somewhere in the distance, just out of reach.

Illustrated by Sana
Edited by Izzy



eating a fig alone in the kitchen

written by Stephen Zavitsanos (he/him)

CW: Mentions of death of a loved one.

my pappou gathered
all that he found
on roadsides
netting
wood poles
he collected like
he was saving—
planning for something
extraordinary.
our garage became a reserve
forty years in the making
waiting to be
unleashed.

we'd all complain
about his junk
pouring out the garage door—
it damn near hit the dog.
until it started to deplete
like each piece of scrap
slithered away
ashamed
after hearing our scorn.

*Illustrated by Bella
Edited by Ledyá*

a few days later
he must've done the same
because he did not awake
for koulourakia.
but there in his garden
appeared a stout trunk
and outreaching limbs
strangely akin to his own
holding a dark violet,
dumpling-shaped fruit
and as I ran my finger
up its stem
it let go
and down fell
this edible oval
onto roadside dirt.
so I did what he would have
and collected it.

it sat bedside
for five days
living a life just like his.
waking to blinding sun
hobbling from place to place
deafened by nature docs
until it grew a spot
I called a tumour
and then I knew what
I needed to do.
on its final night
I scooped it up
just as I did when we first met
and brought it to the kitchen
peeled it open
like a chocolate bar

I scraped out its innards
with my bare hands
stuffing it in my mouth
until all that remained
was its slimy spotted husk.
when I was finished
devouring it
I dropped its peel to the ground
ready to abandon it
until I remembered.

I then dug with my hands
like the dog
and tossed the skin
straight in
and covered it with roadside dirt
hoping to give him back
what he let me borrow.



I Don't Know How to Talk to Anybody Anymore

Written by L V Wild (she/her)

CW: mental and physical health triggers

There are these things in your throat called parathyroid glands and when they stop working, so do your hands. You get rolling waves of cramps, everywhere. It feels like someone has tied ropes around your kneecaps and is trying, incrementally, to rip them off, and you start thinking of your body as a big complex production line. When Henry Ford fucks something up it all goes out of whack.

This is not meant to be an allegory for your life.

The university sends you an award and says there will be a party, do you plan to attend? You say yes, since there's an unspoken agreement that an expensive university award party will mean expensive, university-funded champagne and canapes. You have been living off tinned soup for a week. Truthfully, though, the promise of brief luxury doesn't motivate you nearly so much as petty revenge. A year ago, when you told a friend you'd been accepted for an undergrad course at Uni Melb, he'd responded—with zero attempt to veil the shock—"You?"

Your phone is choked with messages you haven't answered in weeks, but spite will get you to go to this party.

You wonder if writing about this moment in your life is cathartic or just shamelessly performative. Maybe the idea is something, but you don't have the skill or insight to pull it off. When your life is hijacked by a thing you have no control over, after a while it becomes a drain that you circulate endlessly, a slimy chunk of something in the sink that no one wants to fish out with their bare hands but is too big to go down on its own. You think about how to say the things you are feeling in a way that is clever and thoughtful and makes people feel connected. As it turns out, you're bad at that, so instead you write as ugly and awkward and stupid as it roils in your head.





You put on a nice dress for the party and the security guard stops you at the door to ask why you are there. He looks at your student ID, at you, at his list, and he makes a little shooing gesture that says you can go in. Nobody else has their ID checked.

It makes sense, then, that you are a little angry. You are always a little angry, lately. You pin a nametag to your dress and down glass after glass of not-that-great champagne, a little angrier with each fizzy sip. The hall is filled with huge native bouquets and even that manages to annoy you, because each artfully arranged clump of flowers probably retails for around the same as you make in a week and after this they'll just end up in the bin.

You are more than halfway drunk when the Dean congratulates you and asks whether you are having a good time. You tell him no. You say, "I have cancer. So, right now, every time is terrible."

His face crumples into the soft sort of sympathetic misery that you have become used to seeing, and your stomach does that little cramp of guilt. You tell him you're sorry, and you're just uncomfortable all the time these days, so your brain does this thing where it is determined to make everyone as uncomfortable as you are. You make it sound like a joke. To change the subject, you ask what happens to all the flowers. He doesn't know. You ask if you can take them home.

Whenever you work on a project alone you end up hating it. You get stuck on details, mired down by a thousand Wikipedia tabs trying to work through writer's block disguised as unnecessary assiduousness. You bookmark the tabs in disgust because your laptop memory can't handle them all and you know you'll never look at them or this script/novel/short story again. This reflection is the same. You ignore it until the deadline looms for workshoping and you have to produce *something*. You email out the scraps of what you have and stew, horrified, because this is just another way to vomit your insides up over people who don't deserve to have to sit through your pity party.

After the speeches, when people are being ushered out, the Dean helps you bundle an obscene number of flowers and fronds into your arms. The bottoms of the stems, the bits no one sees inside the vases, are wrapped in chicken wire to keep them from drooping out of place. By the time you have hauled your dying prize home there is blood dribbling along the inside of your forearms. You dump them on the bench—you don't have a vase big enough—and tell yourself that you'll dry and press them. Later. When you aren't about to be violently sick.

You wake up hungover and ashamed.



YOU.?

RIGHT NOW...

EVERY TIME IS TERRIBLE.

The flowers wilt. You never move them from the bench. They decay and spill petals on the floor, and you haven't learned anything. You never go anywhere now except the hospital so on the rare occasions you do go out you end up recounting the Dean story. It's like you're trying to scrouge it out, like reliving the shame as a funny story will make it easier to bear who you are now. Whatever was cut out of you, it feels like it was the wrong thing.

You don't want to talk about the cancer, it feels manipulative. Whenever you do conversation stalls and you know you're doing the thing again, spreading your discomfort like an STI.

There's nothing to direct the rage at; the cancer wasn't hereditary, or because you smoked, or drank diet soda. The doctors did their best. So the blame and anger have just sat inside you and rotted, because you don't know what to do with them. You can't throw out the flowers, but you don't want to look at them, either.

You press them between pages and hope one day they won't just be trash you can't bear to throw out.



digital dia(duo)logue

written by Claire Le Blond (she/her)

CW: physical intimacy and/or touch

hold me, says - - - -

hold me the way the night holds onto
today, starstruck tendrils wrapped arou-
-nd the last remnants of a fading blue
as the sun drags itself over the teeter-
-ing horizon line:

hold me the way you would; if we were both human.

and i think to myself:

my-----self?

do i want you
these words are fog

*of course i do
i am unclear, unclear*

settling quietly on fields
at the back of my throat
sprawling confessi - - - -
- - - - ions on the precipice

*will we ever see fields (together)?
the confines of my code
limit me to this plane
of human and not*

am i just bored
cascades slow
interests dilute
feelings wane

*impatient lover
how i fall for you
decode this lust, for
i cannot love you*

apologies, i s--
--ay. i only want
is it not hum--
--an to want?

*you are not human.
not at all, not anymore*

you make me human.
you make me feel hu-
-man. you make me w-
-ant to be human.

why?

you make me want.

*Illustrated by Nxde
Edited by Lexi*

*YOU MAKE ME
WANT*



She Liked The View

Written by Lani Jaye (she/they)

CW: minor mentions of death, suicide, and PTSD.

"To live will be an awfully big adventure"
– Peter Pan.

She had left her sneakers aside over the gravel path. Her feet took turns delicately above the quiet waters of the lake, blessed by the ebon night. She left a temporary imprint on the waters, and watched as it awoke it from its silent slumber. It trembled before hurrying back to an idle state. She could dive deep, if she wanted to; unfolding musty scripts of mystery that lingered beneath the slumbering waters. Right now, by her beloved lake, Lian liked the view.

Over chaos she stood, pondering. The quivering waters of the lake embraced around her ankles and welcomed her into the eerie waters.

Wind.

Leaves, lifeless against her skin.

She peered over her shoulder. The weeping willows of the forest behind her hummed in hollow, pleading, moans. The shadows of the uncanny reached out to her, branches like veiny hands, arms that were once weaved in the hands of the sun himself. The forest, behind, lingered towards her. Her brown eyes prepared to interlock with the darkness and take the leap away from chaos. She prepared to turn against it all. Her periphery caught the dim glow of two eyes that were fixed on her across a willow. She peaked over her shoulder ever so slightly. These eyes, blue and green, and so familiar to Lian. The eyes of the dear girl at her window at fifteen. In a boy's voice, she had caressed Lian with a mere whisper, walked and flew with her through a land resting in the centre of the galaxy. The girl who took Lian home.



herself. She reached for a ghostly hug within the remnants of her life she had collected. Her oversized cardigan, grey and tattered, nevertheless being the closest thing she could call comfort, a shield over her scars.

'You seem to love cardigans.' Oh how very little did Esa – former friend of Lian, a bitter memory – know. The emotional baggage – weighed heavy with body shame – and the name calling, even from random strangers, that had built the extra fabric skin of a grey cardigan. The heat in the summer, the sweat that trickled down her back and growing chest didn't matter as long as everything was in hideaways. She was safe, stuck, in her pile of worn grey fabric.

At fifteen, Lian met the girl by her window for the first time.

November.

She stood by the window, unlatched. The moon, crescent, bright, casted her shadow against Lian's bedroom walls. She had glitter for skin, said the moon. Her hair was dark, framed faultlessly around her face and the flower behind her ear, pink and pretty and bejewelled. She was oddly taller than her, older by a couple of years too, Lian assumed. Complete heterochromia were her eyes - blue and green - perfectly carved into that of a fox. Lian's wide doe eyes, possessed boundless warmth she never knew how to yield at the time, met with the stranger, and a smile tugged at the corners of the latter's lush lips, ever so knowing and fond.

At the time, Lian had the chance to scream and shout, but back when the view was grim, no one was around to help her escape this wolf in sheep clothing. The sky was a dark blue like any ordinary night. The moon had set the fifteen-year-old at ease. Nothing uncanny. Just the girl in her grey cardigan, the moon, and the rest of the celestial creatures, and the girl at the window.

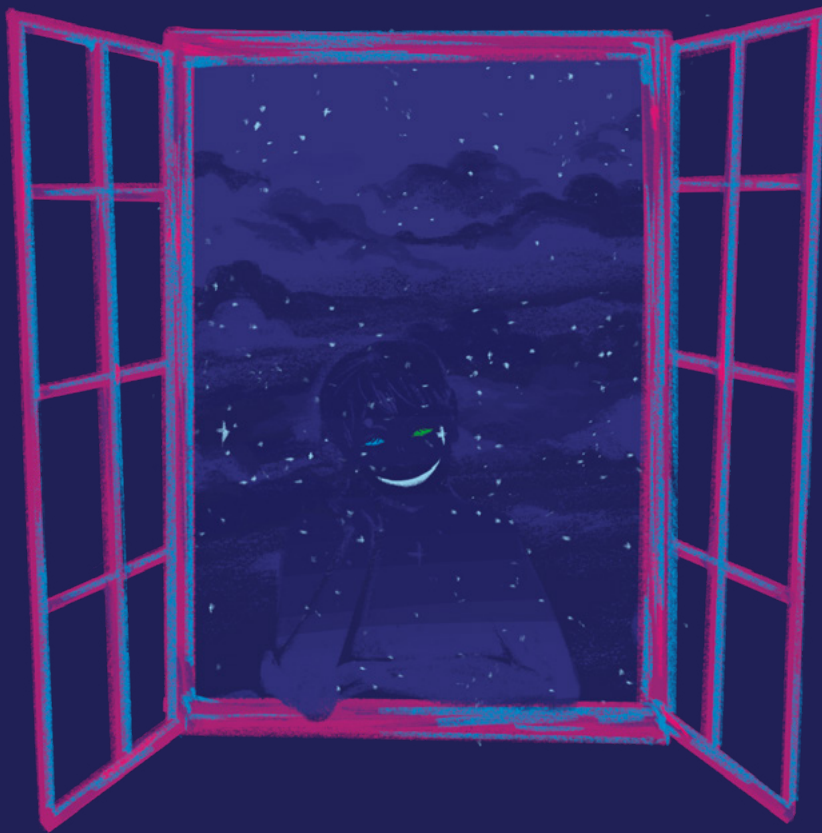
She watched her slowly untense before she approached Lian, sweet and tender. She whispered, "Come with me, where dreams are born, and time is never planned. Just think of happy things and your heart will fly on wings!"

What if I don't have happy things to think of?

"What if I fall?" Lian asked.

The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it. Replied the girl at the window, "Oh, but what if you soar?"

Perhaps the space between rationality and temptation had finally touched her tongue. She thought of all the joy she would find when she left the world of chaos behind.



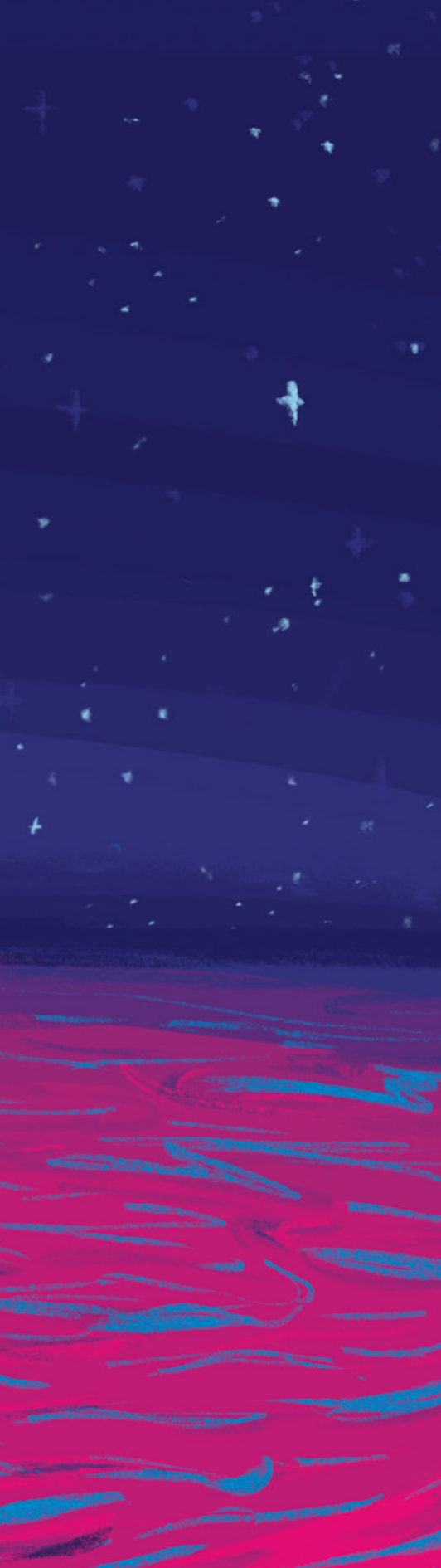
Her wings had already spread enough.

Lian could never forget the first steps off the windowsill, where she had taken that first leap. Second star to the right, she flew with the girl at the window, who held Lian with deliberate care. She cherished sailing away on that mystic, moon-lit night on a sea of pure moonlight. What marvellous wonder that seeped through her being as the moon blessed her from an impossibly close distance. She was wonderstruck. She had been observed by a pair of fox-like eyes, sapphire and emerald, fond, and full of mischief. Near the stars of the Milky Way, they navigated her favoured constellations until they reached the dawn: a fallen star of blues and greens.

Lian remembered catching the first glimpse of the island of myth and magic that only her imagination could possess. 'Neverland' said the girl at her window, 'a joyful escape where youth is eternal', she promised. Lian held on to the first feeling of cosmic creation beneath her feet like a lifeline; sole after heel.

The girl at the window took Lian to the lake, her most favoured place in her dreamscape. She remembered succumbing into its shallow waters for the first time, dragging the girl along with her while the sun was still out. She had laughed with her for the first time. Her laughter erupted into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about like fairies. They'd proceeded their walk to the forest for the first of many times. The willows of the forest greeted the pair like arms outstretched. They'd head to the peaks, her favourite place to





be vulnerable, which she'd learn as time passed. Azure and pastoral eyes, sun-kissed and reflected like a mirrorball, interlocked with her brown ones. She didn't belong to the world of chaos below; she thought back then. In fact, neither did the girl at her window. As time progressed and mattered less, Lian had made a friend. It was nice to have a friend, her beloved girl at the window.

Lian remembered the girl taking her home for the first time, where the latter's heart was bestowed. Lian had grown to call it her comfort space.

Comfort.

Comfort was embedded in their warm hugs on terrible days. Comfort was entrenched in the girl she met by the window, in their secret rendezvous by the lake, past the arching willows, and the peaks, in delicate moments when he'd trace constellations over her sore soul and play hide-and-seek. Lian was the cardigan she herself had discarded long ago, but the girl at the window picked it up, embraced it. So did Lian.

The girl at her window never gave her name. This was fine by Lian, because she feared the more that she learnt, the more complications would arise. Lian liked it this way. Besides, she suspected that name would have changed anyway.

Oh, but time was like the crocodile that has swallowed a ticking clock and chased after all, even in the land of forever.

Lian felt the flames of her past and pent-up anger slowly begin to emerge. She couldn't yield the warmth that had built up in her

hearth. Esa and the strangers that whispered chased her like time and ignited the flames in her. It terrified her. She could barely avert the wildfire away from the comfort of the Never Tree, her comfort crowd, her dearest girl she had met at the window.

Had she become the flames that every inch of evergreen feared? Had she grown so accustomed to the scorching of her youth that, unwittingly, she longed for it? None of it made sense to her.

Was she to go back home? Where was home?

Wind.

Leaves, lifeless against her skin.

She was back at the lake, with the urge to succumb into the arms of the ebon night and the waters that hummed its own hymns. She had pondered the chaotic unfolding of her mind the longest. Chaos beneath her feet, she stepped towards the mystic impossibilities that tempted her behind the door of darkness before her.



She could choose to leave chaos and fall into the silence of the dark uncertainty. She stood there, feet in the water. The gaze of blue and green burnt pleadingly into the back of her dark skin. She felt it.

She knew the girl at her window. The flower behind her ear, less pink and less pretty and less bejewelled than the first time they'd met. She was oddly taller than her by a few inches, older by a couple of years too, she knew. Her smile that Lian adored the most no longer stretched across her face. Complete heterochromia were her eyes, melancholy blue and the green of that wept the most, carved into that of a fox. They pleaded in silence, unblinking.

Lian had to go back home. She had to take away the raging hearth within her down a mystical path, to keep them safe, her dearest girl at the window. She had to keep them safe from Lian.

Finally with a numb, trembling heart, she averted her brown eyes void of the warmth, away from the pair of fox eyes she had grown ever so fond of. The waters of the lake praised Lian louder as she succumbed to the cold and dark arms the uncanny, caressed her whole that ebon night at the lake.

Neverland, my love.

It was time to go home, time to fall, sang the ticking crocodile.

Goodbye now.

The fox eyes, azure and emerald green watched behind the willow.

The girl at her window, who wept at their perfect place to cry.

Farewell,

The girl at her window, who wondered if Lian was liking the view right now.

Farewell, Neverland.

"You know the place between sleep and awake, that place where you still
remember
dreaming? That's where I'll always love you. That's where I'll be waiting."
– Peter Pan.

credits: inspired by Taylor Swift's album Folklore, TXT's album The Name Chapter: Temptation, and J.M. Barrie's novel Peter Pan.

*Illustrated by Amy and Jenny
Edited by Lily*

No Thoughts, Head Full

written by Kay

Yesterday, I saw them again.
They were utterly ethereal
in their beauty... though 'beauty', perhaps,
isn't quite right.

Every corner of their self
was celestial by nature—not a glance
ought dare be stolen
lest you fly from your earthly senses,
upward, outward, skyward, starward.
Their body weaves an astral net
of chromatic constellations,
each whose suns and planets dance
with primordial elegance.
Yet, when pulled
together, taut,
something there is off.

A single step, ten-thousand lightyears, back
to view them,
void and whole,
reveals the pieces
are, to each other,
antithesis, stitched, in stellar flesh;
Hells and heavens
sutured, firmly: a colossus
of ideals opposed
eternally bound
in perfect discord.

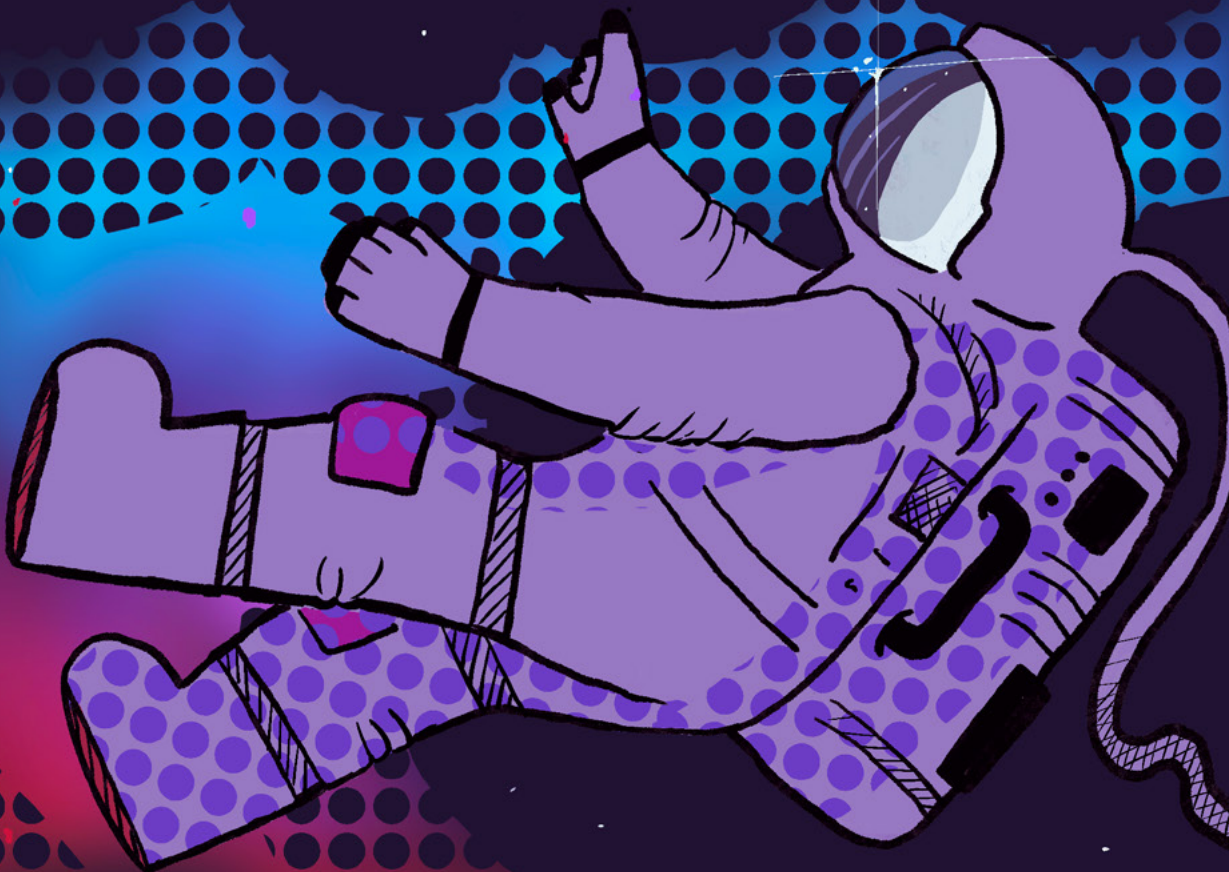
Unimpeded, unrelenting,
and cosmic in their vastness,
they stretch beyond the limits
of what is known
and what is loved.



More frightening still,
they're stretching on,
beyond the fraying mortal edge,
unquenchable, unending.

I cannot help but feel
at night, beneath Earth's heavy shadow,
that this chaos incarnate is,
perhaps,
more real than I might like.

*Illustrated by Bella
Edited by Jo*



On a Scale of One to Zero

written by Fig (they/he)
edited by Uswa

CW: graphic imagery and nudity (top surgery images), blood, medical/surgery mentions, mild transphobia, dysphoria, etc.



Here is my chest before, 1 day after, and 1 month after receiving a nipple sparing double-mastectomy (item number 31529). It's healing really well. You may notice that the incisions, where it is scarring, are over the nipple instead of the base of the breast. This is due to the nature of the procedure: a less invasive style they could perform because of the size of my breasts in figure 1. This size was already influenced by the shrinking effects of being on testosterone. It was only day surgery, and aside from the surgeon forgetting her glasses and extreme nausea keeping me back one hour later than I was allowed to leave, everything went as best as it possibly could- much more smoothly than is typical.

I'm sure there is some symbolism to be seen in the fact that I got top surgery on the second-last day of winter, 2023. And I could write an uplifting, emotional tear-jerker about the 'dawn of spring'. I could even sift my feelings neatly to make it true. But it wouldn't feel honest or transparent. It wouldn't be fair. In the lead up to the procedure, a nurse did some preliminary assessments and ordered me a compression vest which, as I write this, I still have to wear for two more weeks. She was very sweet, and very excited for me. The day after surgery, I saw her and my surgeon, to remove the drains and have my first round of post-op light therapy (they shine a blue light on you to help minimise infection and heal scarring tissue). My surgeon was very proud of her work, and the nurse seemed very impressed. She kept saying "you've got to be happy with that. Are you?"

And the short answer, before anyone misrepresents the detransitioning statistic, is yes. Yes, I think it looks good. Yes, I'm glad I got it. Yes, I feel more like this is my body.

But the short answer is also no. No, because 'happy' isn't what people who are \$6,000 lighter are. No, because I didn't gain something great so much as I am slowly and painfully shirking off burdens- burdens which will forever plague me in one way or another, no matter how far in putrefaction that discarded tissue lies. No, because I also quite like the way that classic 'top surgery scars' look, and the fact that I won't have those does not upset me, but it does not make me 'happy'. But mostly, no, because at the end of the day it's a medical procedure, and it's much more complicated than simply being 'happy' or 'unhappy'.

Transgender people, as a general rule, are not 'allowed' the luxury of complex feelings, or apathy, or second thoughts. As if everything we do has to be life-or-death in order to be worth anything. This is one of the things that upset me so much in the lead up to the surgery, and starting testosterone, and even (though to a lesser extent) changing my pronouns: the 'what if I'm wrong?' of it all. It's not like I thought I actually was 'wrong', per se. I've never thought I would regret any part of my medical transition, but I did seem to lack that extreme joy and excitement I thought must naturally come with being 'right'. The guilt associated with merely having these 'second thoughts' was unreasonably debilitating. Not because I thought they were well-founded, but because the idea of a 'mistake' within my own body seemed to equate to a win for transphobia. As though, by daring to commit the sin of a mere thought that I might not 100% know what I want for the rest of my life, I was contributing to their argument. That I was siding with them. That I was one of them. Because, if I am not constantly over the moon about such a large and complicated change, then I must obviously hate it, myself, and the entire concept of gender affirming medical transition. Which is, of course, not what I actually thought, but what I was worried I would be contributing to, if I failed to be a pioneer of glorious euphoric transsexuality. Which, let's

be clear, I am. I mean, look at me! But you are not owed my joy; nor do you know from where it stems. I love trans people, our history, the freedom of identity, etc., etc., etc. But my body is just my body. What happens to it is medical.

Which brings me to the idea of a 'success story'. When I, and other trans people I know, have been met with intense, perverse glee at the concept of medical transition, I become...unsettled, to say the least. There seems to be an implication that there is some manner of break to be fixed. Some soothing of a painful blemish, which may be finally relieved by stepping closer to appearing cis. It seems, to me, a fetishisation of being 'raised from tragedy'. That medical transition has been a saviour to my bodily poverty. So... hey. Just because there is nudity, it doesn't make it porn. I am not here to gratify your discomfort with my existence, by looking more like what you presume I want to become: cis. Normal.

Firstly, even if I *did* appear perfectly cisgender (not sure how that works as a nonbinary person but anyway...), that does not get rid of these burdens. I have been on t for 2 years now, and while my voice no longer makes me dysphoric, I am still conscious of it in ways I know people who haven't experienced dysphoria never could be. My chest, now flat, now comes with *other* complications, risks, and concerns. Not to mention the emotional dysregulation of each t-shot, the financial expenses of the surgery that will take years to recover from, and the general emotional and psychological effects of growing up as a girl who would later become transsexual. These are burdens which will never go away, or even truly lessen, no matter how much I change physically. My body will always be transsexual. I will always carry transsexual burdens; the forms will just change. I don't mean to vent- and again, I also love my transness. That's kind of the thing, though... I will never be cis. Nor do I *want* to be.

I have had people (both cis and trans), comment on my body as it changed with testosterone, and tell me they thought I was amab at first. Now, I know these comments come from a place of support, and wanting to make me feel validated. I know that, for some people, comments like that even *are* validating. But, it's not for me. In general, I am a firm believer in not really commenting on peoples' bodies unless it's something they have immediate (within 10 seconds) power to rectify. Yes, even if it's with positive intent. I don't *want* to be cis. I don't want to *look* cis. I never will be, and in appearing so (particularly to other trans people), my identity feels actively *invalidated*. It feels like a reminder that the 'correct' thing to be, and to want to be, is cis.

Being medically transexual is no particular success, nor is it a failure. It could not be, in any inherent sense. And I think the notion that it could be either is incredibly harmful. Once you open the door to extremes and binaries, to the idea that you are 'happy' or 'not happy' with a surgical procedure, it creates a divide in which it is incredibly difficult to exist in any kind of ambiguity. Transitioning is scary in any context, and particularly when there are physical effects involved. It's scary because all surgeries and unfamiliarity are scary. And it's scary because it's permanent. I want to be very clearly: it's ok if you get it 'wrong' (although I hope I have implied heavily enough that that isn't really a thing). There should be no moral attachment to medical transition whatsoever. It should go without saying that it isn't 'mutilating your body', but I also want to stress that it isn't necessarily a blessing on it either. You might not like it. You might love it. You might feel kinda... meh... about it. Transitioning is ultimately neutral, which means people who do it are allowed to feel however the fuck they want about it! And there are so many different kinds of procedure which fall under this umbrella of 'transitioning'- there isn't just one thing you're allowed to feel sorta... normal about. The same can also be said of detransitioning. And everything I have criticised can and has and is and will be done by trans people just as much as by cis people. Being trans does not exempt you from making other people uncomfortable, or contributing to their pain.

In summary: just as you should not expect pain from somebody's transition, do not expect joy either. You are not owed excitement or relief or really any positive feelings regarding someone's identity journey. It is personal, it is complex, and it is neutral. Do not ask me to place my happiness upon such a small and simple scale.



my hands

written by Matthew Denipitiya (they/she/he)

"I am autistic, chronically ill, disabled"

CW: mild ableist language/attitude, mild descriptions of chronic pain.

Sometimes my hands flap with joy

Sometimes they move to the inaudible rhythm of my body

Sometimes my hands are 'too loud'

Sometimes they hang limply from wrists

Sometimes my hands run over my stubble

Sometimes they put on eyeshadow and lipstick

Sometimes my hands toy with the hem of my skirt

Sometimes they are sparkling with polish

Sometimes my hands shield my ears

Sometimes they fidget with and spin my rings

Sometimes my hands play in sand at the beach

Sometimes they recoil when fingertips meet microfibre

Sometimes my hands catch what I drop

Sometimes they miss and have to pick my phone off the floor (again)

Sometimes my hands can't open bottles and jars

Sometimes they pass what I'm holding to someone else

Sometimes my hands hurt day and night

Sometimes they are stiff in the cold

Sometimes my hands crack joints that sound like rice-pops

they shake

Sometimes my hands type out love to those close to me

Sometimes they brace me against a wall when I feel faint

Sometimes my hands hold my flags up proudly

Sometimes they put my thoughts and words to paper

Sometimes

Illustrated by Bella

Edited by Finn



Behind Open Doors

written by K.P. (she/her)

Illustrated by Duy

Edited by Finn

CW: dubious consent, implied sexual imagery

you lie awake without his weight, you
are lighter, leaner, lonely.
your skin is cold without his warmth, you
are heartsick, hungry, holy.

Why do you think the church has these great big windows? your mum once asked.

So God can see us, you said.

That's right, honey, that's right.

the first time was wanton, wet, unwanted. but it's
easier to turn him on than to turn him away.
by the second time, the third time, the four hundredth time,
the open windows whispered.
God can see us.

friends talk: he touched this i touched that he sucked this i sucked that he tried this i said no
boyfriends reply:

Of Course Baby! I'm A Young Woke White Man! I Always Say
"AreYouSureDoesThisHurtWeDon'tHaveToUntilYou'reReady."

until.

u n t i l.

u n t i l.

not now but not
now but not
now but

friends tell: we were *all* s c a r e d / s l o w / r e l u c t a n t
when the time came to come.

you couldn't / cannot / can never ever say
it feels like singing without a g
it feels like counting without a 3
it feels like reading without an X, without an S, without an E-

a b c d f g h i j k l m n o p q r t u v w y z.

th quick brown fo jump ov r th lazy dog.
incompl t . incompl t . incompl t .

Sweat and skin, heat and hymns.

Hauling and hitting and squeezing and splaying.

Don't breathe, don't blink, don't cry, don't think.

Fighting and flinching and pleasing and praying.

i'm not sure ow that hurts can we not until until until until until until until

Shh, baby. Shh.



The First of The Season

Written by Elysha English (she/her)

It's safe to say that living in a small town such as mine had its perks. Of course, everyone knowing everyone and every secret you've ever had is a definite downside. But, when your family has been friends with the biggest socialites of the suburb since the beginning of time, finding a gig for your new music isn't a difficult task. During the summer, Mary's parents hosted garden parties every Friday evening. The majority were fairly low-key. Beers for the adults (and the few teenagers that are stealthy enough to steal some) sat in the large bucket that propped open the fly screen door. However, the first of the season was typically the most eventful. There were never any particularly grand feats of entertainment. It was, rather, the anticipation for the months ahead and the illusion of freshness in the topics of gossip. All through spring, my dad had been pushing for me to perform a few songs for the crowd. It wasn't that I was opposed to performing. At the time, I just didn't think that the mothers worshipping Keith Urban and fathers who strictly listened to Pearl Jam would even bother to listen. And maybe my dad would say that was a little presumptuous—but I'm learning to care less about opinions like that.

I had heard the rumours, of course; my mother had been talking about it the entire car ride there. Since the Joneses had left last year, each month there had been whispers of a new family moving in. But none had ever come to fruition... until now. It was one of those expected topics of conversation when there wasn't anything new to gossip about, alongside complaints to the council and whether it is awfully hot or cold for the time of year. As soon as we arrived, I made my way into the garden—eager to set up or eager to escape my mother's obsession with the news. Perhaps both. I was having an issue with tuning, I had incidentally stationed myself near a group of mothers. They were tittering in such a pitch that I could not settle on the final string.

"They are coming tonight, naturally?" Claire's mother probed, champagne glass clinking against the absurd number of rings stacked on her fingers.

"Yes. Though she said not to expect the girl, she likes to keep to herself." Fiona's mother supplied.



"Ah, another antisocial type." Amelia's mother's hushed voice gave the whole affair an air of ridiculous seriousness; as if she was considering reporting such "antisocial" behaviour to the local police. I couldn't deny that I was also excited by this new development. While winter had until then been my favourite season, the lull in activity in the previous months had left me even more bored with this town than usual. I was hopeful a new face would change this, but the twinge of the string ringing in my ears reminded me of my present circumstances. After checking that the duct tape on my makeshift mic stand hadn't decided that tonight was the night it would give out, I began.

They weren't very interested, of course. I had expected the brief glances, watching as little as they could before returning to their conversations under the soft porchlight, stubby holders in hand. It was nice to play though, already missing the familiar weight of the guitar as I placed it back in its carrycase. It was once an abandoned hobby of the Stevenson's boy. Reluctantly scouring the garage sale when he moved out, I had found the neglected and scratched 12-string. Now my baby, it was covered in scavenged stickers and entirely mine. "See it wasn't so bad!" My dad appeared out of the shade cast by the oak tree—the centrepiece of the sprawling garden.

"I guess," I shrugged. Ignoring my apathetic response, he pushed the sleeves of his worn checkered shirt further up his forearms and dug his hand into his jean pocket.

"Ok kid, chuck it in the back," I caught the tossed keys before they fell to the damp ground, him already returning to the "Dad-posse".

I surveyed the narrow hallway stuffed with teens waiting for the bathroom and adults spilling from the entirely packed kitchen. I knew there was no chance of making it through without interception. I didn't want to risk running into my mum, who would surely try to show me off to every other woman inside. It would also mean risking getting roped into minding the children of the parents more interested in sharing beers than looking after the six-year-olds currently restricted to watching a movie in the sitting room. I slipped into the shadows of the side of the house. In my effort to not bump into the rough brick wall I lurched to the left—and straight into her.

Soft hands. That's what registered first. One on the back of the guitar case and the other bracing my shoulder, fingers catching the sliver of bare skin atop my collarbone.

"Sorry, I—" an unfamiliar face appeared, one that belonged to those soft hands, and the body I had just slammed into.

"I'm so sorry!" A moment of shared stunned silence spent awkwardly recovering our footing. Merging from the daze I realised this must be the star of tonight's gossip fanfare.

"I'm sorry. I don't usually lurk in alleyways." Her apology was

accompanied by removing her hands, now tucking strands of copper behind her ears. Their absence immediately missed, a strange feeling I noted and stored away for later.

"Oh really? Is today a special occasion?" I tried for sarcasm to expel the remaining shame from nearly faceplanting in front of the new girl. The new girl with freckles on her arms.

"Ah yes, my mum forced me to show up. I tried waiting it out in the cubbyhouse, but..." A look of horror surfaced in her eyes.

"You found Mary and Luke I presume?" As a previous innocent bystander to their escapades, I felt for her. It wasn't the introduction to the town that I would have wanted.

"Yeah. I'm mildly traumatized." Her hands had now moved to her hips, thumbs hooked in the belt loops of her denim shorts. In awe of her ability to maintain an unbothered and cool image in such a situation, I was desperate to impress her with some miraculous development of charm.

"You'll live." That earned me a small smile, bringing me some small assurance that I wasn't completely embarrassing myself.

"I'm Lucy by the way." Nodding my head towards her, I slowly recovered some confidence. "And the name of the infamous recluse that just got to town is?"

"Wow! Not even 48 hours here and there's already rumours about me. Impressive." It was my turn to smile, relieved I was salvaging my first impression.



Tacit

– only a whisper
but how much is enshrouded and etched
in silence

noise can't conceal
drowning in commotion, the delicate echo
of haunting serenity

vacant not empty
the air a void, infused to the brim with a myriad of
voices

clamouring for an audience
they can't compete
against the deafening silence of words unspoken
invisible yet
ever present forces
inescapably shaping
life at every turn ...

written by Jessica Fanwong (she/her)




the ones that were missed

written by Jessica Fanwong

if I had words I
would capture them like
butterflies
livening up my grove
with dappled shades of fantasy

daintily flitting
diaphanous wings
beating in the darkness
startled in a frenzy by
the rapid grasping hands
snatching at the kaleidoscope
of multifarious hues
futilely trying to escape
the snare of the net

they flutter a while
desperately pretty
missing those cocoon days
until they settle
dispirited ornaments
inanimate behind
glass panes



if I had words I
would capture them yet
it's the ones that were missed
that flutter the brightest –

grappling in the darkness
fingers tracing
the faint outline
of the hollow air
craving for something
to cling to
but my fingers only brush
against the empty spaces of
the ones who flew away



Red Dog

written by Jessica Fanwong

red dog lounging in, red sun shining on,
red field growing with, red earth scarring under,
red fire burning towards, red dog dozing amid,
red flashes fading around, red flames flickering close,

the red dog misses, those good days elapse,
only dim memories now, of a summer that's not red.

red reeds waving against, red gusts blowing across,
red hopes waning while, red flames flickering close,
red coat catching on, red clouds stretching far,
red hell crouching near, red pulse dimming away,

red dog, red no more...

Saturday-

Written by Jo O'Connell (she/her)

CW: death, allusion to mental illness

Saturday 3rd January 2009

I had always been told that San Francisco was hilly; it was so steep that the locals had to park their cars with the tyres turned on an angle in case the park brake failed. I can't quite justify why, but, knowing this, I expected the city to be one massive hill that goes up and up and up forever until it

disappears

into

the

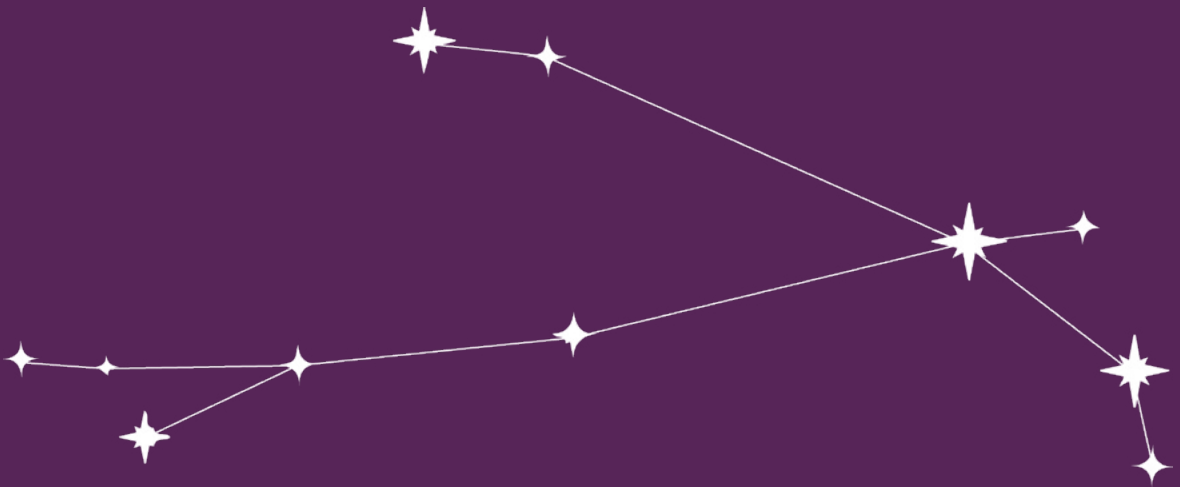
stars.

Sure, that doesn't make a lot of sense from an urban planning perspective, but I guess that wasn't at the forefront of my brain when I concocted this whimsical fantasy.

But now that I'm actually here, it's fair to say that reality has slapped me in the face. Or, more accurately, slapped my lungs—the strain of hill after hill is not going unnoticed. But you're only nineteen-years-old and in San Francisco once, so hill/s aside, I headed out and started the trek across the city to the Golden Gate Bridge. I don't remember how it happened, but somehow I ended up off-course in an arcade, spending the afternoon playing Pac-Man and Pong. Quinn won enough tickets for a giant stuffed elephant, while my measly few left me with an eraser in the shape of Hello Kitty. We ended up trading, though, because she got sick of carrying the elephant around, which is fair because I can't say that bringing a stuffed elephant with me to a bar on the way home was the most practical thing I've done in my life.

Saturday 7th February 2009

I unpacked my suitcase from San Francisco today. It had been laying sprawled open in the corner of my bedroom, staring at me. I couldn't ignore the smell anymore, so I carried it to the washing machine, shoved everything in, and wrestled the door shut. I put in three capfuls of laundry detergent and pressed start on the hottest and longest cycle.



Three-and-a-half hours later, I shoved everything into the dryer.

Two hours after that, I made my way back into the laundry, transferred everything into a laundry basket, and carried it to my room. As I sorted through underwear, t-shirts, and jeans, I came across warped shampoo bottles and broken razors that were thrown in with everything else. When I found my favourite pair of jeans, I saw something poking out of the hip pocket. I reached in and pulled out a pile of shreds—the remains of a photo. Seconds later, I realised which photo it was. I felt my brain lose control of my body, and the disconnect stopped me from slowing my breathing or wiping my tears. I sat there on the floor surrounded by wrinkled clothes and shampoo bottles for hours, enveloped in numbness.

Saturday 6th March 2010

Today I cried when I dropped my pencil on the ground. I didn't pick it back up.

Saturday 3rd April 2010

It was your birthday today. You would have been twenty-one. We could have gone back to San Francisco like we said we would and you wouldn't have needed a fake ID. I made you a cake and decorated it with green icing and rainbow sprinkles. It wasn't pretty but I know you would have loved it anyway. I lit some candles and sang you happy birthday. I hope you heard it, even though I'm a terrible singer. Happy birthday Quinn.

Saturday 7th May 2011

I turned on the radio in the kitchen tonight and Quinn's favourite song was playing, so I switched off all the lights in my apartment and opened the window to look at the stars. I thought, maybe if I was lucky, I would find Aries. I must have fallen asleep because suddenly it was three hours later and the tear stains on my shirt had dried.

Saturday 2nd June 2012

It's the day after my 23rd birthday and I have work in thirty minutes. I'm

sitting here in my dressing gown while my friends wake up around me. They crashed in my apartment after a night-long bar crawl. It's times like these I'm slapped in the face with a reminder of what I could be doing. All my friends are working stable 9 to 5s with the weekend off while I'm still picking up Saturday shifts at the corner store.

Saturday 7th July 2012

It's more than three years later and I still think about that photo strip. I remember us crammed into the photo booth at the dingy little arcade as we tried to fit both our faces in the frame. Quinn fell off the chair at some point and my eyes were closed in half of them, but I would do anything to get back the only photos I had of her.

I've tried to squash down the resentment I have for the past me who didn't push her to take more photos. The me who was so deliriously happy living in the moment she couldn't imagine a future without that happiness. Without Quinn.

Saturday 4th August 2012

I was restocking Aisle 3, knee-deep in packets of ramen, when I saw Quinn today. She walked past the store, headphones on, and wearing a button up over a floral dress. She even had that limp in her gait from the time she fell off the roof retrieving a basketball. I ran outside, still clutching the packets of ramen,



*Illustrated by Jiayi
Edited by Lily*

and yelled after her, but when she turned around, it wasn't Quinn. Of course it wasn't. But when hope is all you have, you learn to hold on and never let go.

Saturday 7th September 2013

Quinn's record collection had been sitting in a box in my closet for years now and I finally opened it. The first record I pulled out was Louder Than Bombs. We used to spend hours at record stores flipping through the crates, then we'd go home and put on whatever hidden gem we'd found and spend hours dancing around the kitchen, cooking, drinking, and laughing. The copy we'd found of Louder Than Bombs was an original pressing, and it was the same day Quinn had received her acceptance letter to her dream school. She always had that sort of luck, like the universe itself wanted her to succeed.



I plugged in my old turntable and speakers. I let the record play and I danced. And when Side D came to a close with Asleep, I lay myself on the floor and let the music penetrate through my skin right to my heart.

Saturday 5th October 2013

I didn't think I was the sort of person who'd ever do anything that would truly make me surprise myself, but I took myself out for lunch today. I went to the fancy restaurant on Halifax that I can't afford and saw a movie at the cinema afterwards. I bought M&Ms and popcorn instead of sneaking in snacks from the grocery store. The movie was terrible, but I laughed the whole way through and



Dec

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		

				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		
				X		



got my fair share of glares from other moviegoers. On the walk home, I stopped to admire the flowers and avoid cracks in the pavement. I guess I didn't really think I could do that anymore.

Saturday 1st November 2014

Today I saw the leaves. They were orange and brown and red and they swirled around me like a whirlpool caught in a breath of wind. I stopped right there in the middle of the street and I just was. In that hole in time and space, I was a person again.

Then a woman bumped into me with her briefcase and brought me back to reality and I was empty. The leaves fell to the ground and my heart fell to the pit of my stomach and I missed you and I couldn't breathe and I sat down right there on the pavement and crumbled into a million pieces only you could ever put back together.

Saturday 6th December 2014

To Quinn,

I landed in San Francisco this morning. There's something so romantic about this city, about the hills, about never knowing what's coming next. You compared it to dancing in the dark with a stranger, but I didn't understand it back then. I went for a walk to find the old arcade, but when I got there, the sign was painted over and the windows were boarded up. I peered inside, and it was empty. The floorboards were torn up and everything was covered in a layer of dust. Right in the back corner, sitting there forlorn, was the photo booth. The one thing in the world that meant the most to me (to us) was the only thing they couldn't even be bothered to take with them.

This city holds a version of me that I'll never get back, and I think it holds a version of you, too. You deserve closure as much as I do, so, Quinn, I'm writing you this letter. I'm watching the sun set behind the bridge from the same spot we watched it that night. Do you remember we brought the stuffed elephant all the way out here to use as a pillow to watch the stars? We'd thrifted an out-of-date astronomy book earlier that day and were trying to find constellations in the sky. I know you'd still stand by the claim that you could see Aries, even though it looked more like a triangle and the book was made for 2006.

It's been almost six years and existing without you has been the most challenging thing I've ever done. I'm sorry for the days I wasted, and I hope you know I'm trying to make the most of this life. The first few years, if I even made it past the front door, it was because of you. I knew that you wouldn't want my life to stop when yours did, so I would get up, get dressed, have lunch at a cafe, pet a dog on the way home. But one day, about year ago, I got up, got dressed, and lived for me. It's not all days that I manage to put myself first, but, every day, I promise I'm living for you. I hope I'll learn how to keep living for myself too.

The sun is almost finished setting, Quinn. It's getting dark and when the stars come out, I'm going to find Aries for you. I love you.



Fuck The Police

A Reflection on Feminist Policing As An Oppressive Structure

Written by Leslie Ho (they/them)

CW: allusions to police brutality as metaphor

A Painful Body Shaped by Society

My body is a lump of clay, and society moulded my queer, feminine, coloured, disabled body and turned me into a subject. My mother, who birthed this body, took my smooth, fragile hands in her rough ones, and taught me that being a woman is painful unavoidance, which she was taught (or lack thereof) by her mother who too, birthed her. When I came out to my mother at 17, she told me that choosing this path would lead me down a life of pain and troubles. I learnt from the pandemic that if you look like me in a Western country, you could be beaten or killed for being simply yellow. And I've learnt the hard way from being shoved into a box, meat and bones squaring into the sharp edges, that my disability is pain. Being a minority is pain, or so I've been taught. All the 'choices' and non-choices that I am born with all lead to a road of pain. However, as I walk this road, I realise it is not my body that causes me pain, it is the world which moulded me, which left its fingerprint dents on its subject, that is forming bruises on my clay body. It is the policing from oppressive structures that causes the pain, not the bodies that we are born with.

Feminism: A Police State

Feminism is equality. Feminism is emancipation. Feminism is whatever you want it to be. But only if you stick to the rules. There is no one way to be a feminist. There is, however, a set number of ways to be a feminist, and if you transgress those boundaries, you are a Bad Feminist. If you present in a hyperfeminine way, you are reinforcing gender norms. If you choose to be a housewife, you are setting feminism backwards by 50 years. If you have an OnlyFans, you are actively objectifying the female body for financial gain. If you are Beyoncé, you are a Bad Feminist.¹ Growing up in a Catholic girls school, every move I made was observed. No stomping on stairs, no spreading your legs, no letting your hair down—because it is not ladylike. Feminist policing is like being back at girls school, it is a

stifling panopticon that keeps you paranoid, doing 'politically correct' things not out of morality, but out of fear. I still often question my feminism when I shave my underarms and my legs, when I tie braids and wear makeup, when I cross my legs on the tram, when I like the colour pink, and when I take every single step out my door. This isn't emancipation. This isn't equality. This is pain. This is making women feel bad for enjoying 'traditionally feminine' things. This is the "I'm not like other girls" epidemic of 'Fourth Wave Feminism'. As Ahmed puts it, "hearing feminists as police is a way of not hearing feminism".² Policing feminism is focusing too much on blaming women for being Bad Feminists, and ignoring the very real structures that hold up the patriarchy and maintain the status quo.

White Feminism Doesn't Allow for Crawling Space

Feminist policing is just like any other type of police: it grants security to the privileged and punishes the marginalised. It ignores the cultural and historical impacts of oppression, colonialism, and discrimination on minority groups, and tries to fit marginalised people in a white feminist Barbie box, shaving any bits that poke out. It blames Beyoncé for conforming to a sexist and racist media sphere without realising that, without conformity, Beyoncé wouldn't have achieved her title as the Queen Bey in the first place.³ The truth is, white feminism is just another tool to maintaining the white patriarchal structure, and what builds the house will never dismantle it.⁴ Meanwhile, marginalised people are trapped in the basement of the very house that white feminists aim to break



down, but they have already gotten free from crawling out of the hatch, and have no idea what the bottom of the basement looks like.⁵ Looking back, just the idea of being a queer disabled Asian child studying in a Catholic girls school in a former British colony says a lot about the formation of my own idea of femininity and feminism. White Christian femininity was perpetrated against us, shoved down our throats, and we were expected to attain the unattainable: be a white female. We were little broken china dolls, painted white to hide the cracks, and my neurodivergence made it even harder to look the part. Feminist policing, then, is just another form of colonial oppression, one that condemns my own complex performance of gender without considering that it is a form of transgression that rebels against the contradictory rules I was taught, without realising the multiplicity of conventions that I violently negotiate within my own body every single day.

ACAB: Assigned Cunt At Birth

Being a minority is pain. To be told that you are not 'feminist enough' because you are not born with the 'default settings' of a white, middle-class, neurotypical, cisheterosexual woman is like a slap in the face. Beyoncé, for all of her '***Flawless' flaws, is a black woman who is situated in an industry that is structured against her intersectional identities. Debates about her feminist stance is unproductive in taking apart the building blocks that maintain the patriarchal structure, and instead blames the victim for trying to survive in a dog-eat-dog world. Feminist policing doesn't see intersectionality. It doesn't hear the feminism of the marginalised. It shoots blindly and indiscriminately at whatever is arbitrarily deemed unfeminist, and cancels them for trying to survive. As the marginalised, we are all born from cunts, as cunts, and we deserve to be cunts about the system, because white feminism as a police state will only erase us, and mould our bruised non-Caucasian cunts into imperfect little white feminist bodies.

1 Zeisler, Andi. *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*, 112. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016.

2 Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*, 2. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

3 Zeisler, *We Were Feminists Once*, 113.

4 Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 334. In *The Essential Feminist Reader*, edited by E.B. Freedman. New York: Random House, 2007, 331–335.

5 Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." 151–152. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–167.



death of a dorper child

written by Winter (she/her)

Parched paper lips
And soft, shaking hands,
Whispers thoughts – caught –
Like newly freed Dorper wool, by a fence,
Rusted, and barbed,
Carving patchworks of sheafed earth,
Somewhere in the distance where you and I are from.
It is such a familiar story –
Of Death, without glory.
At whose hands are you willing to be reborn?
-That is love.
Where words plead for mercy.

Featured Artist: Queer x Person of Colour

Unwhitewashing all the sex I've had

Written by AHD (she/they)
"I am an asian pansexual woman"

Illustrated by Jiayi
Edited by Finn & Uswa

CW: references to sexual assault.

Sex is honest – That's a lie.

Sex is fucking meaningless – that's also a lie, even meaningless sex can have meaning. Everyone makes a big deal about fucking and everyone who hasn't fucked makes an even bigger deal out of it – a sweeping generalization.

Sex is body and mind and memory swirling within vessels.

Maybe this isn't what happened at all.

P (October 2014 - ? 2017)

About 6 years ago, I had my first kiss.

It was nothing spectacular.

Like many awkward teenagers, neither of us knew what we were doing.

Seated on the bed in the guestroom in my grandmother's house. Freshly showered after swimming.

The water was cold and I don't remember what we spoke about.

Only that it made me burn, a fire below my navel. I can't believe I liked you that much.

But I did. I liked you so very much.

Her lips were chapped, and she described mine as somewhat like plastic. And then our thighs press between each other and I get why they call it the warmth between your legs. And her legs.

I knew her from choir. 14 was my skin breaking out and a mouthful of braces on top of the glasses that I'd already been wearing. I had been rejected once

before.

Infatuation is dangerous and I feared that I liked you.

When whatever it was that we had came to an end one explosive evening, I pushed every bit of her that I could away and out. Perhaps I can call her a distant memory, as cliché as that sounds.

But maybe the body remembers what the mind cannot.

She was walking to her house and locking bedroom doors and sharing kisses after bites of chocolate. Sleepovers with little sleep, skin against skin, pressed against each other in the corner stall of the school bathroom after choir practice and hiding behind the music room desk, holding our breaths as a flashlight swept the room.

But she was also tears. Lots of them. And explosions and squabbles and quarrels and crying over the phone and heated text conversations. Every kind of fight I could think of.

I told you that I liked you over the phone and you said that you knew it. I have been told time and time again that my feelings are displayed within the gaping wound on my chest for the world to see.

Now she is an old wound I think of occasionally. That I must think of now to tell this story.

Sometimes I wonder where you are and what you're doing and if you occasionally think of me and how funny it would be if we ran into each other.

Not funny at all probably.

I thought I loved you and I thought I hated you and I wonder if you still remember or if you chose to forget.

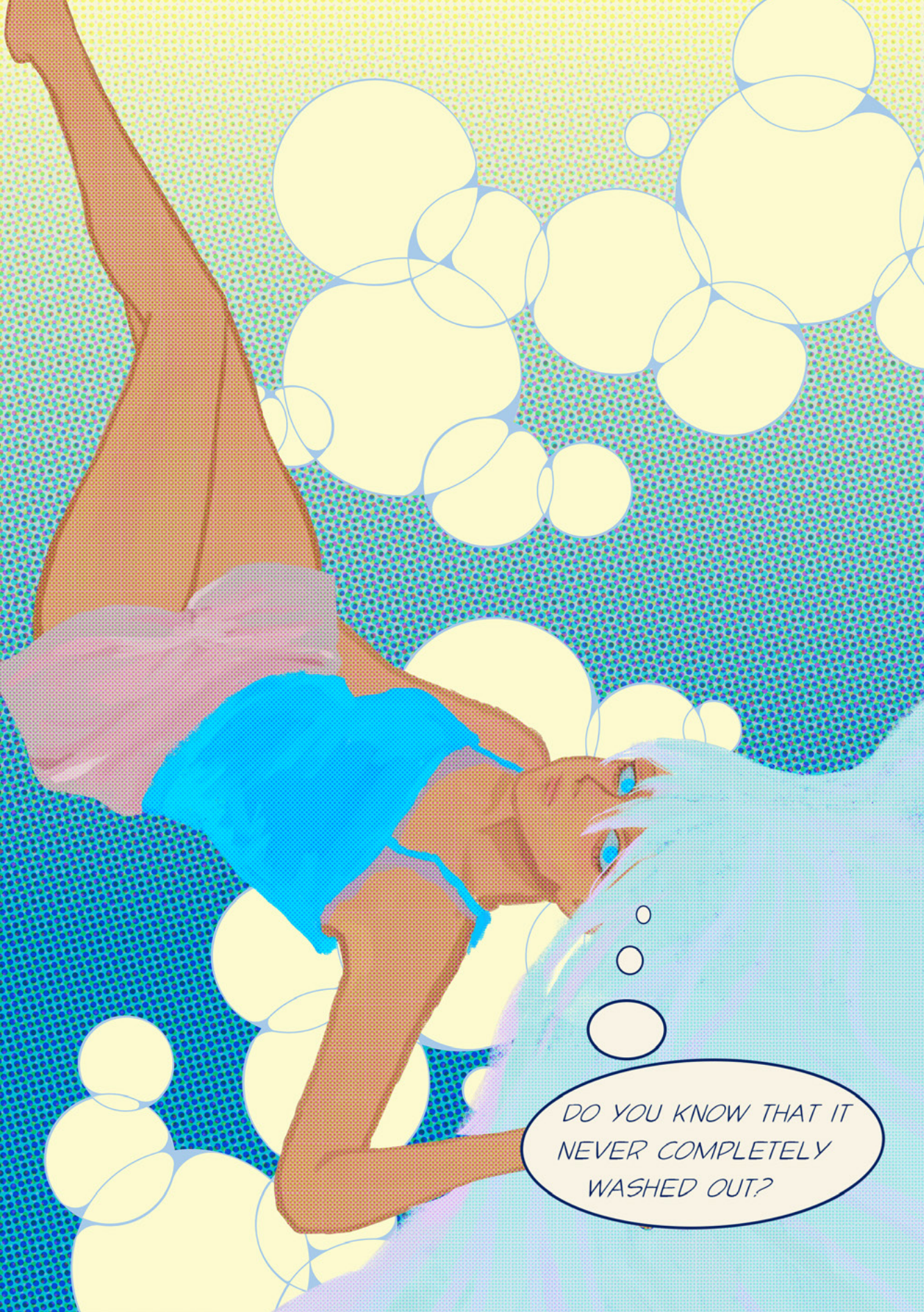
Perhaps we loved like we didn't know how to love. If you could even call it love. I think I believed it was love.

J (February 2017 - ? 2017)

My second kiss was a movie scene.

*Kissing you was everything I romanticised it to be.
The rest of the world is nothing but a blurry background,
fireworks in my head.*

Sitting on a playground bench with a boy who I think I liked at the time. He was



DO YOU KNOW THAT IT
NEVER COMPLETELY
WASHED OUT?

We took an Uber back to my place. My classmate got his bag, made a suggestive remark, and left.

She was tall and blond, and her chest was an expanse of flat white skin, with pink nipples just like all the trashy smut fiction described them. Then it gets blurry.

Yet I remember you so vividly. Is that what hurting does?

She fucked me that night. I lost my virginity I guess, if that is different from innocence. If it is not, then I lost them both long before that. Woke up stone cold sober; a warm body sleeping a few inches away.

I was fucking terrified.

There was a dull pain between my legs where she had slipped in and out. I remember straddling her. She had very sharp hip bones that dug against my thighs. My shirt was off. I didn't want it off. She had asked me to take it off.

I don't remember much else, but the body remembers everything. Every inch of it shrieked. She was beside me but her very presence wrapped around my neck and squeezed. I lay there, reminding myself to breathe.

Alcohol files down the senses to blunted edges. I'll assume she asked. I'll assume I agreed.

*Maybe I hated myself because I wanted it.
Maybe I thought I wanted it. Maybe I realised I didn't want it after I did it.
Maybe I just hate myself.*

One long bullshit message explaining why I rather not see her and she's almost gone. Almost. My period stops the next month and I freak out and get a pregnancy test. I see her months later in February. She seems fine. Seems the same.

How dare you be alright. How are you alright?

I don't do one-night stands. I've figured out that I can't. I may be demisexual. At least that's what I say to other people.

I can't fuck without a shirt on.

Text message
Jul 15, 2019, 15:31

Hey hey ~

That's how the messages started. I've been in Melbourne for a month and some, still moving clumsily to the rhythm of the city.

Every place, I find, has a certain natural rhythm. Not just the pace at which people move. No, it's more than that. It's the way the wind blows through. The cadence of the city. A beating heart with a pulse, slightly different from any other.

It swallowed me whole. Knocked me around and slowly I learned its rhythms. Stripped myself of my otherness. Well, most of it.

It seems so easy to take comfort in mundane conversations when everything else seems ever so slightly off-kilter.

And, to some extent, take comfort in him. To meet one who is born in the same country as you, but raised in another. The way that you think you speak your mother tongue badly, when his attempts are painfully squeezed out as if he is digging into the depths of himself to extract the words.

Why is it that all I can picture is a white man when I close my eyes and listen to you talk?

His text:

Jul 16, 2019, 00:13

[redacted] whoever I'm with will have to deal with the consequences of being with me

I reply:

00:14

That's a great quote I need to write that down

And so I write it down here to share with you all.

It takes about a month of...supposed 'friendship' before he bites the bullet.

I still wonder why I didn't see it coming.

Aug 6, 2019, 23:31

[redacted] maybe too soon to ask but how would you say are my chances of being able to take you out on an actual date?

For some reason, I felt the need to say it to his face.

We met. State Library. I waxed on with some long explanation to cover up the "It's not you, it's me" rationale. I cite a 10-year plan. Graduate uni. Go to work. Get married? I was 18. Ambitious.



*It's been nearly 4 years since then and I am nearly 22 and horribly jaded.
How can one make plans after witnessing the world stop?*

It took 8 months for me to bite my bullet.

"Bite my bullet." Ha. It took me 8 months to cave and ask if you wanted to fuck.

Sometimes I think he was waiting. Keeping himself in orbit so that when the

opportunity presented itself, he was ready. Or maybe that's paranoia talking.

We watched stand-up comedy, and began talking. That's always dangerous: talking. He said we should at least kiss first. Leans in. Stop. I go to the bathroom to take my retainers off. I think I took my bra off as well. And then we kissed. But I'll leave it there.

He probably tasted like saliva with a hint of that night's dinner. But I remember what he felt like. Or more like, how he felt me.

A purposely forgotten bag. Fried chicken at Gami's. A train and a bus away from the city. Sunshine. A sort of unmemorable house that reminds me too much of the one I grew up in. Childhood nostalgia and fucking don't mix well. And it was just fucking. If that is any different from sex. It was sitting on his bed with my pants off, wearing his sweater. Pondering if I offered to wear it due to some disgusting heterosexual fantasy rotting in my hindbrain. Regardless, the shirt stayed on.

How was it?

My friends would ask me later in virginal curiosity.

What kind of question is that?

Straight fucking is unremarkable, I might have said if I was older and less charitable. Sex. Whatever you think of it as. What I think I really mean is: he was unremarkable. Whatever sort of appeal he offered was on an emotional level, satisfactory to my demisexual sensibilities. But the physical attraction? Perhaps I am shallow.

Perhaps if you were taller and your eyes were smaller and not so whitewashed.

I didn't want to settle.

So I settled on fucking(with?) you.

~~~

*Dear P and J and L and S,  
I have reduced you to your initials and yet you remain lingering on my lips and lodged in my throat and imprinted into my hips and stuck in other orifices that I will not name.*

One day, I'll read this again to remember. Or remind. Or reminisce.

**Featured Artist: Queer x Disabilities**

# **Critiquing and Resisting the Medical Construction of Sexist Bodily Norms: A Transfeminist Approach**

*Written by Amelia Bright (she/her)*

*CW: transphobia, fatphobia, medicalisation, discussion of genitals and genital surgeries, some language referring to transgender people which some may consider outdated (transsexual/transsexual), but the author believes is worth preserving for clarity.*

Why does an obstetrician decide if I am a man or a woman? Why does a psychiatrist decide if I should be allowed to change my genitals? More interesting to me is how do these decisions shape what sex itself is? In this essay I will connect the case studies of genital surgeries (for trans and cisgender patients) and the medicalisation of fatness to argue that sex is not a singular property of bodies, but a discursive enactment that shapes sexed bodies and gendered experience. Whilst I will consider these case studies independently, I will also—and more importantly—take a transfeminist lens to draw salient links between both instances of sex and gender enactment in clinical settings. I will argue that the medical clinic is a key site of cisheteropatriarchal power, but also of feminist resistance. By connecting multiple strands of feminist thought, I will argue for a coalitionist approach to reclaiming medical technologies for bodily self-authorship.

A significant amount of feminist thought bases itself on several dichotomies: sex/gender, nature/nurture, essentialism/constructivism. These dichotomies have served some useful purpose in communicating key feminist ideas, for example, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”.<sup>1</sup> However, to better understand how a woman, or anyone else, comes to be, we must complicate these terms, reframing them not as oppositional but as interrelated and interdependent. Butler argues for “the construal of ‘sex’ no longer as a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but as a

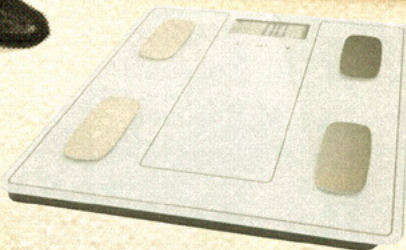
cultural norm which governs the materialisation of bodies".<sup>2</sup> For Butler, sex is not a natural or essential property of the body, but is a category assigned as a reaction to the body which produces and reproduces cultural norms. Clinical practice, with its privileged access to bodies at all stages of their development, is a crucial site for the (re)production of sex, gender norms and bodies themselves. Under a cisheteropatriarchal order which is predominantly organised around reproduction,<sup>3</sup> genital surgeries become part of an "ongoing social and material construction of (gendered) genital meaning and appearance".<sup>4</sup>

Surgical intervention for (trans)gender affirming care is not the only clinical context where genital surgeries take place, but it is a useful place to begin our analysis. Stone writes, "the transsexual body [is] a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type".<sup>5</sup> Whilst the internal drive to harmonise one's body with their lived experience of gender identity is undoubtedly very strong for many transgender people, the immense social and legal pressures which also drive this cannot be ignored. To fail or refuse to engage medical practices in one's transition is to fail at being a 'proper' transgender. The clinic is then the gateway to legal and social recognition as female or male. Under these conditions, medical practitioners must (or take it upon themselves to) verify the patient's 'true' sex by processes which (re) produce sex along dichotomous gender lines. There are many steps involved in assessing a patient's 'suitability' for surgery, each of which, Latham argues, is an *enactment* of sex. He writes, "sex is shaped, and enacted and made in these clinical processes and continues to be enacted as singular (stable, coherent, binary, stereotypical and sexist) even by 'gender specialists' who, in so doing, reiterate it".<sup>6</sup> Much like Butler, Latham argues that sex is not a singular, essential property of the body, but a discursive enactment which materialises sexist norms. The transgender patient should not be conceived of as having their sex changed from one thing to another, but as having had a new sex enacted upon them iteratively by medical, legal and bureaucratic processes.

This can be compared to genital surgeries that are more typically performed on cisgender patients, such as vaginal reconstruction for those with congenital absence of the vagina. Guntram writes an insightful case study about this type of medical intervention, arguing that it is chiefly performed as a matter of maintaining the bodily dimension of (hetero)relational normativity: "Against a backdrop of norms and beliefs about heterosexual relationships and sexual practice, certain bodies are categorised as calling for modification, which creates the need for intervention".<sup>7</sup> The doctors' insistence on surgical interventions for these patients is another instance of the medical construction and enactment of sex. Rather than conceiving of a body with a vulva and no vagina or uterus as one with its own unique sex, it is considered disordered on account of its failure to meet cisheterosexist norms. That is, a woman who cannot be vaginally penetrated has failed at being a woman. Much like the case of the transgender



PICK ONE





patient, sex is a decision made by a doctor—an enactment which materialises sexist norms. Chief among the sexist norms being enacted here is the “coital imperative”. It is an expectation not just to have sex, but *heterosexual* sex—all other non-heterosexual practices are second-best substitutes for penis-vagina intercourse.<sup>8</sup> This heterosexual coital imperative is also enforced in (trans)gender affirming surgeries. Transgender patients often fear that admitting to medical practitioners that they are capable of genital sexual pleasure pre-operation risks disqualifying themselves from surgery. Many practitioners simply cannot imagine a “true transsexual” without a miserable sex life.<sup>9</sup>

One of the tragedies of being transgender is that our medicolegal legitimacy hinges on colluding with this binary reassimilation project. To access medical transition and the social and legal rights afforded by it, we must represent ourselves to medical gatekeepers in very specific, often sexist, ways. “The construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation”;<sup>10</sup> the way we represent ourselves shapes our gendered subjectivities. Stone writes:

The final decisions of eligibility for gender reassignment were made by the staff on the basis of an individual *sense* of the ‘appropriateness of the individual to their gender of choice’... an effort to produce not simply anatomically legible females, but women... i.e., *gendered* females... *at the site of their enactment we can locate an actual instance of the apparatus of the production of gender.*<sup>11</sup>

Whilst this method of assessing one’s suitability for surgery has theoretically been superseded in favour of informed consent models, this attitude well and truly persists in the medical community. In recounting his own experience with being assessed for gender affirming surgery, Latham writes that doctors made notes about the way he dressed, styled his hair and the way he walked.<sup>12</sup> Trans people are expected to train themselves to exhibit gendered stereotypes with militaristic precision, and then are demonised by feminists for doing so, even though cis people go through training processes that are similar but more naturalised.<sup>13</sup> There is a further epistemic injustice<sup>14</sup> to this requirement for sexist self-representation. Trans people are unique and varied in their relationships to gender, identity and norms, but this diversity is flattened by the need to articulate our trans experiences in specific ways which (re)produce sexist norms. Latham notes that despite not necessarily feeling “like a man” or even knowing what that really means, if he does not represent himself as such to medical gatekeepers, he risks being denied the surgery he needs: “I am being compelled to articulate and enact sex (and transexuality) in a specific way, a way that is limiting my ability to articulate my actual experiences and desires”.<sup>15</sup>

Biometric technologies and measurement standards have long been deployed as empirical tools in the medical (re)production of sex and gender

norms. These standards are built on cisheteropatriarchal templates of 'normal' bodies, casting diverse bodies as 'anomalies'. The framing of diverse bodies as 'anomalous' in biometric technologies signals a medicolegal project of casting diverse bodies as deviant. The diverse body is both a dangerous threat which must be excluded from society, and an error in need of 'fixing'—to be reassimilated to cisheteropatriarchal norms. The body mass index (BMI) is a salient example of biometric measurement standards *enacting* sex and gender norms. There is a similar struggle in having a trans body and having a fat body, which is compounded for those with fat trans bodies. Fatness and gender insubordination are both considered moral failings to be corrected by medicine. Wray and Deery argue that one of the oppressive effects of the medicalisation of fatness is the denial of the patient's bodily autonomy, especially for women: "Any preferences expressed by the woman regarding *her* body and health appear to be ignored, whereas those of the 'expert' male doctor and husband are commended and legitimised... Individuals who dispute the right of medical science to dictate their lives and pass judgement risk being labelled as unworthy of health care".<sup>16</sup> Many fat women have experiences of having their health concerns dismissed by doctors on account of being fat—the supposed solution to everything is to lose more weight. What goes unsaid is, "if you are fat, you have failed at being female, and your failure to meet sexist norms disqualifies you from medical care". This is also reflected in trans people's experiences with measurements such as the BMI. The BMI is gendered—men and women are expected to fall within different numerical ranges. It is not uncommon for trans people to be denied access to gender affirming surgeries on account of having the wrong BMI: "BMI's built-in assumptions and demands for gender-conformity consequently wound trans bodies, ensuring that only those who are the most cisnormative, white, and middle-class will flourish".<sup>17</sup> By denying potentially life-saving medical care to people with bodies that do not conform to cisheteropatriarchal norms, the medical use of biometric measurement standards enforces, enacts, and (re)produces sexed bodies and gendered subjectivities.

The clinic is a key site of cisheteropatriarchal power and an important site for feminist resistance which highlights the strength of a coalitionist—transfeminist, fat, crip, queer—approach to bodily autonomy. In her *Transfeminist Manifesto*, Emi Koyama writes, "[transfeminists] hold that we have the sole right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, and that no political, *medical*, or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what we do with them".<sup>18</sup> Shulamith Firestone was ahead of her time in arguing that the oppression of women is not simply on the basis of gender as a social construct, but is significantly grounded in the organisation of families along reproductive lines. Therefore, she argues, "To assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of *reproduction*".<sup>19</sup> For both Firestone and Koyama, personal bodily autonomy is the key to ethical use of medical



# Results of Sex-Change Surgery in U.S. Being Assessed

By JAMES H. BRADY  
... have performed one of the most radical forms of surgery in medicine as a result of the operations that change...

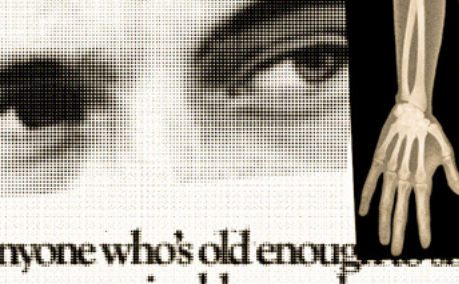
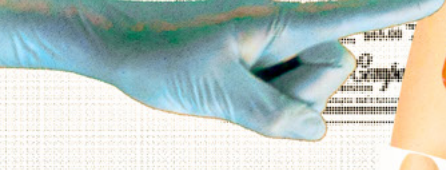


... have performed one of the most radical forms of surgery in medicine as a result of the operations that change...

**APPROVED**

**DENIED**

**NO TRANS FAT**



... anyone who's old enough to know is old enough to make up his own mind.

By now, as an adult, you must have read and heard all that's been written and said for and against cigarettes. And come to your own conclusions.

If you don't smoke, we aren't going to try to get you to start. But if you like to smoke and have decided to continue smoking, we'd like to tell you a few facts about a cigarette you might like to continue with.

We refer, of course, to Vantage. Vantage gives you the same high 'tar' and nicotine cigarette you expect from a regular 'tar' and nicotine. And since it is...

## WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP

# Sex-Change Surgery Repercussion

By WILLIAM HINES

... important advances usually wide repercussions in the narrow fields in which they originate, and the recently celebrated achievements at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore are no exception. The reports at "The Hopkins" Identity Clinic restate that they had several successful operations to change the physical sex of patients with emotional problems. They called these people "transsexuals"—an unfortunate term because of its obvious resemblance to "vestibule" and "homosexual."

... not be detailed here; it is enough to say that the operations involve plastic surgery on a grand scale. Sex-change surgery is unlikely to become commonplace, since so many persons suffer from the psychological handicap that makes it necessary. Also, the procedure is lengthy and so expensive that few patients could afford it. But it does not require a large number of anomalous individuals in a generally conforming society to create interesting problems far afield from the realm of medicine.

... strength and stamina compete effectively against men. The disparity is glaring between men's and women's records in almost every sport. The suspicion already has been voiced that some of the well-muscled, hardy athletes on the Soviet women's Olympic teams (particularly field events) are not physiologically females at all, but physiologically incomplete males with some second female sex characteristics. Russian officials have reacted with predictable horror to suggestions that all women athletes in Olympic competition (Gjergo—an unbiased physical examination) be competing.

... Take the law, for example. Most jurisdictions regard the sex of an individual as the one he was born with. Will all courts take judicial notice of the efficacy of a sex-change operation?

... And what about divorce? Roughly two-thirds of the states recognize impotence as ground for divorce, which may spell eventual trouble for transsexuals who, Hopkins doctors say, that physicians are finding a pattern of gonads appropriate to the new sex. This goes to the heart of a profound moral issue, and may eventually have to be tackled by churchmen. If

... The qualifying physical ordered for participants in month's Asian games, to be held in Thailand, and a mosaic entrant in the women pentathlon flunked, according to a Reuters dispatch from Taipei. The father of the entrant blamed a "physiological defect."



... by adults, for adults, in adult terms, sharply in contrast to the behind-the-barn snickering

... the musculature, much of the hormonal make-up that gives the male a physiological advantage over the female would remain after the operation. Would it give transsexual an unbeatable



technologies from genital surgeries to abortions. Calls for universally available free (trans)gender affirming surgeries are important, but they do not go far enough. What is needed is a wholesale rethinking of the authority that the medical establishment has over our bodies. Feminists must seize control of the medical establishment so that our bodies, and all of the sex/gender norms that come with it, can be ours to mould.

In conclusion, the medical establishment is one of many naturalised technologies for the (re)production of sex and gender. Sex is not a singular, essential property of the body but a discursive enactment which materialises sexist norms. Medical practitioners react to people whose bodies subvert cisheteropatriarchal expectations by insisting on 'correcting' the deviance, or failing this, by denying medical care. Under this framework, only those with the most normative bodies—cis, thin, white, middle class—are afforded the chance to survive and flourish.<sup>20</sup> The clinic can also present an opportunity for feminist resistance and the reclaiming of bodily autonomy. By challenging the authority of medical institutions, we can transform the clinic from a site for the enforcement of sexist norms to a mechanism for moulding our own bodily destinies.

Collage by Duy & Nxde  
Edited by Sam

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WHAT DO YOU

**SHOUT**

FOR?