Wetlands Magazine, Issue 6

Gender and Queer Studies Program, University of Puget Sound

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This semester in Wetlands Magazine was my first semester as the Editor-in-Chief, and I wasn’t sure exactly what to expect. My thought now, as I write this, is that I am incred-ibly blown away by the devotion each staff member has exhibited in compiling this publication. I’m equally amazed by the remarkable quality of submissions we received. Of course I am aware that Puget Sound has great writers, but this semester strikes me as our most personal publication yet.

People took their writing and art to a deeply personal place, with many pieces dealing with some of the most traumatic experiences a person can have. You’ll notice in the center of this publication we have grouped together pieces dealing with sexual violence – this is intentional. We want to highlight the similarities of these experiences, because while each survivor has their own unique narrative, sexual violence is not unique. We live in a society that encourages violence, especially violence directed towards marginalized peoples. These stories are hard to read, but I assure you those memories are even more difficult for the artists to confront.

Beyond the many pieces dealing with sexual violence, we had pieces dealing with various repercussions of violence. We received pieces about silencing queer voices, about racism, about the violence that our society – including our university – has in-flicted upon trans* and gender non-binary individuals in eliminating gender-neutral bathrooms. Every single piece is deeply personal, but I ask that you also consider these pieces in terms of deeper systemic problems. How do we all actively or passively maintain systems of oppression? What does it mean when we laugh at “rape jokes” or allow trans* individuals to be turned into a joke? What does it mean when we refuse to critique institutions we hold dear to our hearts at the expense of silencing those who have been detrimentally affected by those same institutions? How do we, individually, work to either maintain or dismantle oppressive institutions?

While reading this semester’s publication, keep these questions in mind. Of course, there are pieces that are celebratory, and let us celebrate with the authors when this is appropriate. Let us also acknowledge the incredible bravery it has taken our peers to publicly write about their experiences with violence. Let us applaud them for their strength and courage while also considering why these narratives exist in the first place and what we have to do to prevent more of these narratives.

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Editor-in-Chief
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Generous

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Five days before the start of summer,
I left myself in a heap on your bedroom floor,
becoming a scattered mess of shit for you to clean up,
thinking that if I lingered there
long after I had walked out for the last time,
you’d finally notice.

On your desk, I left the color of my cheeks,
blushing like a fool.
I thought the pink would look pretty in the mornings,
when the sun would peek through your window’s broken blinds.

On the edge of your bedframe,
I left my smile hanging like an old sweater.
There were a few to choose from,
but I chose a smile you hadn’t seen before,
the quiet one I couldn’t stop
when I woke up to your snoring beside me in the middle of the night.

Scattered all over your body,
I left my freckles,
even the two spotted imperfections
on my right hand.
I’d always loved those two, but I wanted you to have them.
I couldn’t help but think they’d fit well with the birthmark on your thigh.

Under your bed sheets,
I left my voice,
the high pitched breaks and messy whispers,
the screams and quiet whimpers,
“I love it when you do that”
you had said
so I left it all there
for you to hear
over and over and OVER again
until you’d finally listen.
Unwelcome
C.J. QUEIROLO

I: The General Situation

I have identified in print before as cisgender. To clear things up right away: I am not cis. I have stated elsewhere I am, not in enunciations of honesty or authenticity, but because of the fear of stating publicly that which is felt as incorrigible where this incorrigibility is one that I know you will not accept because it is already construed as “impossible” but which insists on articulation, even through syntactical structures designed to render this very enunciation meaningless. Meaningless to you and your own. Them and theirs’. Incorrigibility nonetheless insists.

I am writing to every cis, white, and heterosexual student and administrator on this campus, whose embodiment is unproblematic from the point of view of policy and whose articulations of distress are ones amenable to redress through “dialogue”:

I am the child who didn’t know what bathroom to use, I am the body that you don’t know what to do with, I am the gener queer transfeminine faggot you spit on flaming beyond the bounds of acceptability I talk too much or too loudly or at the wrong time or to the wrong person raising disputes in a fashion that you won’t ever consider respectable because my body is queerly out of place in relation to

some grave you’d rather keep us in, alongside all the others.

The hetero-patriarchal gender binary is not merely heterosexist and misogynist. It is racist, capitalist, ableist and cis-supremacist as well. It is a product of European tendencies, violently radicalized in the experience of colonization of black and brown people and countries, racialized to tether sex to some notion of a “species” whose prolongation is “desirable” and whose anatomy must be “normal(ized),” to be mobilized in service of a division of labor ensuring nothing but the extraction of goods from those rendered vulnerable by this very matrix. The hetero-patriarchal binary of “man” and “woman” is productive of a naturalization of both sex and gender as “inevitable” and “unproblematic,” assuming that one’s gender proceeds naturally from one’s sex or that one’s sex can be inferred from the perception of one’s gender. It therefore propels itself into history, enchanting some bodies with privilege and authority, leaving other abandoned bodies to contort impossibly, torquing unbearably, to assert our viability.

Your embodiment, the mannerisms of your body, its gestures, enunciations, and articulations are unproblematic because they do not insist on the reality of a problem: Your articulations of distress are those policy has taken into consideration, are enunciations that syntax is able to accommodate through normal means, procedures already in place. They are amenable to redress because they are those that could possibly be redressed by allowing for this syntax to follow its typical course. Your embodiment does not require the uprooting of this syntax, does not necessitate the eradication of a structure of domination that works to impress upon your body and your mind the ontological reality of your social inferiority. This is the reality of your privilege: it transmits ontological as well as social authority to you, which is to say: your privilege plays out both in how you experience being as well as how you live your life. If this does not describe your experience of being, consider this: The hetero-patriarchal gender binary is racist, ableist, capitalist and colonialist. Perhaps it has done violence to you also, and perhaps you should join our resistance to it?

II: The Student Body: One? of a Kind?

I cannot begin to describe how unutterably unwelcome this university has caused me to feel. I am attempting to describe an alienation that operates through but which precedes language, a foreclosure enforced on the very substance of my being. So I guess to bring this piece down from theory and back to campus:

University of Puget Sound: WHY DO YOU MAKE TRANS AND QUEER PEOPLE UNWELCOME?

The answer to this is quite simple. You have chosen to make us unwelcome. Not to “feel” unwelcome, but to actually make us un-welcome. “One of a kind” has always been a terrible marketing strategy, but true in one regard: in no other space have I been so assured by written policy that I am safe, and yet so physically aware that I am not.

But this vulnerability that follows from the incorrigibility of difference is not a vulnerability that can be easily calculated. This vulnerability is discursively and institutionally disappeared through the workings of university policies that attend to “the student body” as a cohesive signifier/group in whose “interests” (educational/economic or social) the university operates. But the cohesiveness of this group is assured through the elimination of particular students’ bodies who are not agreeable to the student body. Not part of this “student body.”

For example: this university has progressively been expanding the number of years students are required to live on campus under the assumption that campus is a safe and inclusive space students want to be living on and where being physically present on campus is construed to mean “living.” But trans and queer students often don’t live on campus, many merely survive. Most buildings on campus do not have all-gender bathrooms, cis-hetero-sexist bathrooms are unsafe spaces for trans and queer students and many trans students might feel safer elsewhere than on this campus; certainly, they may feel more alive and could perhaps begin the work of living if they could be assured that in their daily life they need not encounter cis-sexism in their dorms, or fear assault and harassment. Certainly elsewhere we might construct a safer space.

In other words: to require trans and queer students to live on this campus in these circumstances of basic inequality is unreasonable. Treating trans and queer people reasonably never got the Trustees any money, though, and so in the interest of profit (or “institutional growth”) the lives and bodies of trans and queer students must be either culled through attrition (dereliction) or written out of policy and socially constructed right off the university campus.
Perhaps such dereliction would explain why Commencement Hall was not built with an all-gender or gender-neutral bathroom. Perhaps such dereliction is elucidated by Dean Segawa’s failure to respond within two months to emails requesting such bathrooms be put in place.

The construction of the student body, then, must be considered as an operation of neoliberal and cis-hetero-supremacist violence until it will have been rethought through these students’ bodies and thoroughly dismantled. We are not “Loggers,” together “one of a kind”, living in a “home,” equally adoring President Thomas’ insistent disregard of our discontent. Why would we identify with the hyper-masculinity of colonialist environmental annihilation when such an #imago is of a free-floating neoliberal agenda, conceptually and contractually detached from students’ pain as the apparent precondition of its operations?

**III: Middle School All Over Again**

Cisgender students at this university largely think there is no problem with misgendering trans peers; when gender-queer students ask to be called “they” by their professors, those professors will sometimes #openly refuse the requests; trans students are belittled in conduct and administrative proceedings, referred to as “Mr.” or “Ms.” as recorded on legal or academic records that may not reflect actual gender identity, guaranteeing that no conduct proceeding is ever really “neutral” and certainly never “fair” for us; individuals will target trans students on social media and gossip about their transition—in other words, harass us, threaten violence, definitively subject us to their inspection—and never realize how grossly cis-supremacist this is. How gross they are when they do this.

The recognition of trans people’s genders is not a matter of “opinion” about which one can reasonably have a debate because the stake of these “debates” is actually the personhood of trans students, not the merits of an abstract proposition. To act as if trans students are some great strain on the university is to ignore that the University of Puget Sound, actually, actively, tries to do nothing but the bare minimum to welcome trans students. These #de minimis efforts are misconstrued by apathetic cishet (and most often, white) students, for whom anything but erasure of trans life is “too much” liberal arts “accommodation bullshit.”

So, the university is not all that different from middle school in this regard. A core group of faculty defend and affirm marginalized students, while bigots (whether tenured, adjunct, or undergraduate) hiding behind veneers of reputability (or tenure) overwhelm any efforts toward structural resolution of such antagonisms. While the university does not act in loco parentis it nonetheless invokes a mythology of “home” to legitimize a project of community-building. But the foundation of this house is structurally unsound and this community seems constitutionally unsafe.

These exclusionary tendencies can #literally be charted by review of the university’s topology, the distribution of bathrooms and sex-specific dormitory floors, the geography by which cis-sexism calculates a casual elimination of trans vitality through the rarefication of spaces of safety, like a bathroom where you know you won’t be clocked by a cis or straight person. Or a residence where you, as a trans or queer person, could be afforded safety. Or a university space where you, as a marginalized student, could expect good faith engagement from your peers.

**IV: Loose Ends**

The underlying logic of the university is an economy of vulnerability where the liberal arts are preciously calculated by a faculty in coordination with administrative realities to produce something called a “curriculum” guaranteed across a campus. But when our lives are still subject to debate and when trans existence is something students may “reasonably” disagree about, what sort of education are trans students guaranteed at this university?

The dereliction to which the university recourses in its handling of trans and queer students makes obvious that the mere introduction of “trans content” into course material will not undermine the underlying social antagonisms that necessitate this very dereliction in the first place. Rather, we need a politicization of trans and queer life on this campus coming from trans and queer people themselves, but more immediately we #need cis and het people who will no longer tolerate this dereliction by the university in general. In other words: we need a university that will not abandon trans and queer people.

Because you will never know how many queer people there are, how many people are trans, how many people are in the closet, haven’t come out, won’t come out, don’t want to come out, or who don’t conceive of their identities as “in” or “out” or next to anything at all.

So it doesn’t make sense to argue that trans people are “too small” a population on campus to build bathrooms for; and it also doesn’t make sense to say that some trans or queer people can find positions of leadership or acceptance on campus; and it didn’t ever make sense to give this university a ‘Top 20’ rating for LGBT students, and I don’t know what Campus Pride was thinking when they ranked us at 4.5/5 on their index because who are we kidding at this point?

There was a queerbashing two years ago. We didn’t have gender-neutral bathrooms until this year. The university’s health plan barely covers trans health care. Discussions of sexual assault in The Trail, ASUPS forums, and administration reports don’t even begin to describe the gratuitous violence projected onto trans people, especially trans women of color. And if this is our home it is not one that is safe. If you are an ally do something to make it safer; If you are an administrator stop administering violence and consider aspiring toward justice. Sylvia Rivera is my sister and I might not be a STAR yet but I don’t think this university’s treatment of trans and queer people is excusable just because it lets us put on one drag show a year and sometimes offers a class called Queer Cultures. All nominal efforts toward inclusivity need be rethought through the perspectives of trans students and the full range of our beautiful experiences, including those of genderqueer, non-binary, gender-variant, agender and transfeminine people, and especially trans and queer people of color. If this proves impossible, then what sort of “inclusivity” was this university ever aspiring toward in the first place?
Elle
NATALIE SCOOGINS

I want to be a monster
scary and quite beautiful.
with my own story

a subterranean
mass of lace and tulle

Mmm, yeah, sex and death.
shrinking violets seduce terrible things
I was walking to fourth period in high school when I said hello to a friend of mine. He waved but didn’t say anything. He just pointed to a card taped onto his chest with a proud grin on his face. As we walked, his gait made reading the card difficult. I began to understand the purpose of the card as certain words jumped out at me:

Day of Silence – bringing attention -- deliberate silence – anti-LGBT bullying – first step – building awareness

I couldn’t stop thinking about deliberate silence. In the rain-
obow shadows cast by that acronym, I always associated si-
I omit the Q on purpose here as I don’t feel DoS is particularly helpful to people who identify as queer, eitherR

From the author: Day of Silence (DoS) is a national movement that calls attention to anti-LGBT harassment committed in public schools. For this movement, students, regardless of sexual orientation, are silent for a day as a gesture of solidarity with LGBTQ students who feel they cannot speak out for themselves. To address questions of why they are silent, students will often use a “talking card” worn on their chest explaining what DoS is and what it aims to accomplish.

Silence is also complicated. For many, it’s not a luxury of staying quiet because there’s the chance to speak on other days, but rather because there is no other option. Yet, this option comes with a high price. As someone who still clings to silence more often than I’d like to admit, I can tell you that it may take its toll in the form of internalized queerphobia, self-loathing, and shame. I can also tell you that paying this toll is on-going and while I’ve made progress, there is still a far way to go.

However, I don’t want to dismiss some of the benefits of Day of Silence. For some, like my friend in high school, it can be an incredibly empowering first step towards visibility and feeling a sense of connection with other people who wear the cards on their chest as a part of the movement. Some students may even read the cards and buttons, realize the violence of what they choose to say, and change their minds accordingly. And yes, it can be exciting to see others participate that were previously unknown to be allies.

But that’s when things get more complicated. Because when allies do Day of Silence – the same allies that tell me that they stand with me in solidarity – that’s when I get pissed. Adopting a silence and then telling me that the act of saying nothing imparts an understanding of what it’s like to be silenced, is frankly insulting. It feels like how I imagine it would stand in line at a soup kitchen next to a business executive in a silk shirt and tailored Armani slacks proclaiming that they’re just like everyone else in the room.

No, they’re not.

But perhaps that’s not necessarily the problem, because it means there’s the power to change something. It means someone has the potential to speak and hold others ac-

Before I go further, I want to make something clear and affirm the fact that silence is many things and has different values for everyone who chooses or chooses not to adopt it. Often, silence is survival. It can mean that there is a place set for you at the dinner table every night. It can keep a roof over your head and clothes on your back. Silence can mean tuition. And it’s so often the difference between job security, and the icy panic of being told: “It is with great regret that we inform you that your services are no longer needed.”
countable who don’t identify as queer. It means the terrified high schooler in the back of the room sees someone else calling out others and using their privilege in a way that says you’re not alone.

I want to know that I am not alone. I want to hear someone else’s voice because I was that terrified high schooler. In many respects, I still am. I am afraid to write this piece and hear that I am not queer enough, something that I worry about already as a bisexual woman as a target of bisexual erasure both in the queer community and beyond. I am afraid that I will be called out as someone who does not care about the queer community because I do not support Day of Silence. But I want to be done being afraid, and move through that fear of my words not being heard or welcomed. Because I am tired, so fucking tired, of being afraid.

I will conclude by saying that it’s better for me to speak. I want to break that silence and tell someone to shut the fuck up and quit making transphobic jokes because it’s oppressive and lazy so please put that $57,000-a-year education to use and come up with a different fucking joke. I want to speak past that terrified silence that numbed my tongue in high school and still numbs it today. I want to remember that I am meant to find joy in this world and I have a right to do so, especially if finding that joy is in something quotidian like feeling the pulse in my girlfriend’s wrist beating against my own as I hold her hand without fear.

The word race today, all I know, got some negative vibes to it
There are identities and characteristics that only certain race benefits
Hard to say when I came to a country with a history of abusing it
Not here talking smack about where I’m living, I’m just trying to vent about it
Some historical figures I learned in school also are guilty of it
But doesn’t mean we’re off the hook about us being able to ignore it.
Before I even continue, need to let y’all know something I have to admit
I am actually not even a citizen here. I was born in Japan, yeah, I’m an immigrant
But I’m not here complaining, bringing up the past, cuz we shouldn’t
Allow me to repeat myself that it doesn’t mean we’re off the hook to be able to ignore it.
Let me start off from quoting someone that’s been created by Shakespeare in the 1590s
His name is Romeo and I just want you to ponder of what you’re about to be reading
“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”
Romeo suggests that names shouldn’t matter; they are just words, his reasonings to be with Juliet, to make him “complete”
Funny how race doesn’t work like that so easily
What’s in a race? That which we call an Asian by any other race would solve it quickly
Me personally I’m guilty, hearing a specific race, I have assumptions already,
When I call them by their race, it’s considered rude, when government have to label them in the same terms we use, “identities”
Talking with correct grammar and articulating words properly
people start identifying yourself as white when you’re a minority.
When you’re Asian and studied your butt off for an exam for the past few days
your friends don’t give props to you when getting your test you aced with a smiley face
Now talking with incorrect grammar and articulate words incorrectly
people start identifying yourself as black when you’re even not
Instead of categorizing and seeing them with just their race, maybe we should realize, it’s who they are
It’s the names that’s given that people call him/her that defines who they are.
It’s in that name which we call a rose that brings out the within
it may be just a word, but that rose you’re seeing can be holding the difference from the characteristics of that rose
do we call this a rose if it does not fit the criteria or what we call stereotypes?
It is a rose, not going against Romeo, but it’s a rose that we should see all other types, of roses.
People do have similar characteristics, coincidentally in one factor, their culture and their background.
Cliché for me to say, but doesn’t mean we should assume from things said in society that’s thrown around.
I know it’s difficult to execute
But we have to make a movement to stop ignoring these prejudice and discrimination because we all have the same root.
From just a single letter, how do you know who I am
How do I know? Well, better me than you
That I know the way my skin fits isn’t the way that society says
And my name isn’t what you wrote down on paper way back when
My name is who I became
Shaped my thoughts and hopes and then
Calculating the probable risk of being thrown out on my ass
I told the world, this is who I am
And how do I know?
How do you?
I knew because, when the blade drew blood across my skin
I wanted to cut away the diagnosis my doctor gave me at birth
Female
And though I live out and proud every single day as a transmale
Girls still run the other way when I hold out my heart
Struggling to beat but beating the odds and bursting with nothing but love to give
and only if they could hear
My whispers and wishes that maybe in a year
I could be undetectable, invisible, not a loud screaming voice
Damn, sometimes I wish
I wasn’t so queer.
yet, it’s all I know
To be out and loud and
unapologetic
for the things I will not, the things I cannot
change
And no matter how many mobs come for me
I will hold out my hand
To shake theirs
and they will be confused
and I will smile
If they kill me with words or with their hands
I will die proud and open
they will live bitter and closed
And on this day, I will have won
From the artist: Footprints lead to a blank wall, where you can barely see the outline of the door that was once there. Erasing the door has erased the identities of the people who needed that door. Moving them to the end of a long hallway one story down is not enough - it doesn’t explain why the other two doors just got bigger. The concept of this artwork is to show how the absence and the erasure of gender neutral restrooms is harmful to trans and queer students. In removing the places where those students feel safe, the school has removed those students from this hallway altogether.
On my chest binder

MEL YOURD

“Nice tits.”
That’s my best friend in middle school,
his mouth and his fists stuffed with popcorn
as he gestures to the cartoon girl on the screen.
She’s dangling screaming from a skyscraper
with those cosmic balloons of flesh swinging in the air:
one, then the other,
denying all apparent laws of physics.
The villain cackles as he jerks her from side
to side, making her boobs jiggle and float
just so.

I glance down at the two small mounds
that have attached themselves to my body,
that have already swelled too large for my own comfort.
Suddenly aware of the way they wobble with each movement,
suddenly aware that I can’t swing from a skyscraper
like Spiderman, his body lean and powerful as he
smashes through the cartoon window,
and saves the cartoon girl
with her cartoon breasts.
I think with this body, I’m more likely
to dangle helplessly from a man’s cackling whim,
only to be rescued for my soft rippling skin.

I was twelve then,
but the thing is, I never grew into this body.
Too full in front, too much flesh to fill,
too much skin to fit inside.
My sister called the other day to tell me about a stranger’s hands
shoving into her chest as she stepped onto the subway,
like he saw her shape and knew, here was something weak,
something free to touch,
and she scrubbed and scrubbed when she got home
but his hands never left her skin.
These breasts mark us like a highlighter on a page:
Here’s what’s important, here’s where to look,
here’s where to touch,
why read the whole book?

I want so badly to love this body. It keeps me alive.
It lets me speak, and run, and work, and laugh,
pet fluffy dogs, throw snowballs, fall on my ass,
but some days my insides turn on me,
rebelling against the shape they’ve been forced to take.
These palms sweat too much to grasp a cell phone in one hand,
this mouth locks itself shut from lips to throat,
this skin shifts like at any second it’s prepared to crawl away,
to hide itself from prying eyes and slurring words.
“Nice tits,” someone murmurs through a cigarette as I pass,
and I suddenly want to claw every bit of femininity from my body:
the eyeliner,
the black and white dress I love so much,
the smoothness of my face,
everything down to the curves along the edges of my skin.
Nice tits, he said. I might have nice tits but
my heart is racing so fast under them, like it’s hoping it can escape,
escape these lake-soft globes that I can’t hide behind.
I love my breasts, but some days they aren’t mine.

I told my mom I bought this chest binder for ComicCon.
I can’t be the Flash with these 34D’s hanging off my chest, I say,
it’s part of my costume.
But after it comes in the mail, there are days when I slip it on
and it’s not a costume, it’s a refuge,
a safe cave.
It wraps itself around me
and steadies my heartbeat underneath,
it’s a second skin—one that doesn’t crawl.

70% nylon, 30% spandex,
100% power.
Putting it on is like slipping from
the loose-fitting office clothes of Clark Kent
to the skintight outfit of Superman:
I can leap tall buildings in a single bound,
maneuver my way through a large crowd,
run faster than a speeding bullet,
ask questions in class!

I love this thing so much,
but some days I look around and wonder
why my courage has to live this way,
existing between the layers of spandex
where my body changes shape and my breasts disappear.
As if they’re inherently feminine, inherently shameful…
but I know that femininity does not live in fear.
I see girls with battered shoes who have conquered the world,
girls with blood red lipstick and shiny nails
that could kill a man.
From the inside out, their bravery grows.
This binder doesn’t make me a hero:
power lives in all bodies,
all genders,
all clothes.

I am done with fear.
With my breasts bound or not, I will let myself show.
I resent the part of me that gets afraid.
But more than that, I resent whatever taught me
that you can’t have boobs
and also be brave.
you are cracked open onto a skillet, an egg’s yolk splitting and bleeding yellow onto white.
they name you Mei Li, beautiful forest, a combination of your Popo’s and mother’s name, and
Zahava, golden, your Jewish name picked by your Bubbe and another name in German or
Italian or something that never mattered.

you, a little egg girl, confuse them. even when you’re young you’re too tricky for them. white or yellow? white or yellow?

and when you grow up and realize you’re not a little egg girl but an egg person, you con-
tinue to confuse.

sometimes they use your identities as insults. your body being used as fodder to take others
down, peppering you with words like “queer” and “chink” and “freak” and

you don’t want to be a confusing egg girl/person/freak/monster. not if it means always be-
ing pushed and prodded, trying to squeeze yourself into a space that does not and will not fit. they want you to just be white. just be chinese. just be trans. just be queer. they want so
desperately for you to fit into boxes that are so easy for everyone else to fit into.

it seems too much. too much to be chinese and white and queer and trans and presenting in
a multitude of ways. your yellow spills into your white and colors your queerness.

you resent it but, but

you aren’t just a banana or a twinkie or an egg

you aren’t something to be processed and devoured

you are the sun and moon. you are radiant and shining,

pulling in the tides and helping to coax seedlings out of the ground. you give light and warmth, energy and vitality.

you are ever-growing, ever-expanding; you are everything and you are nothing.

you are an egg cracked on a skillet, your yoke bleeding yellow onto white. you were named Mei Li and Zahava and your Gogo and Popo mistook your new name for warrior.

you were always more than that egg girl.
From the author: Skin color is relative to lighting, and how clothed someone is. This is the same model photographed eight different times. How you interpret someone’s race and skin color is subjective.

**Interracial Relations**

KAILEE FABER

you treat me like land to colonize,
a body to conquer,
a new thing to spice up your life.
i am not a sad, savage soul
that needs to be saved.
The following pages may be found triggering for survivors of sexual assault. Please practice radical self love when reading, and skip the pages marked with purple at your own discretion.

I was in a not a safe space because of my sexuality and gender. I experienced forms of harassment and assault and had power taken away from me because racism is abundant. I feel the lingering effects of objectification everyday but I am in the process of healing. I am borrowing words because I don’t have my own just yet. This is a process and I am becoming a survivor.

It was not about my clothes.
Penitent Palms  L.P

I did not ask for this.
Mud and dirt
Against our backs
And your unwanted hands, searching for things
That don’t belong to you
Things that are wholly
Mine
But feel so foreign, and oddly spacious
I traded limbs and lips
For your promises of light
Fun
And now
It’s dark and cold
And this feeling of obligation is overpowering
Like your cologne and breath
Against my skin
Is poison
Your hands demanding and rude
Like an ungrateful customer
(I hope the waitress spits in your salad)
My mind follows the sounds
Of spiraling delights
Of friends enjoying this summer night,
Unnoticed and forgotten I am lost under you
And now your fingers
Are pulling at my waistband
And moving so far
Inside
And instead of stopping you
I melt and disappear into thoughtlessness
I feel the dirt and grass and earth
And become a worm, lost in lonely puddles of mud
So far from here
When I return to my body
You’re done
And I don’t know why but I sit with you and give you my
phone
And stare intently at the blackened sky
As you call your
Mom
And ask for a ride
Home
I don’t know what consent is

SHANNA WILLIAMS

last year:
i was on top of you cumming
when you started slapping me
you flipped me over
got on top
and spat in my face
like i was dirt
i felt like dirt
this was the second night you told me you loved me

this year:
you came over, got naked, sat on my stomach
and jacked off on my tits
i stared at the ceiling waiting for you to be done
so i could clean up and shower and feel okay

i was never screaming no or moaning yes
it was like you cut out my tongue
there were no words burning in my throat
to say when i was biting my lip
so hard i thought my teeth would break
i don’t know what consent is

my period blood is on your sheets
you can’t miss that every night before you go to fucking sleep.

My Rapist

ANONYMOUS

Often it is the wake of insomnia that allows for humanity.
Often it is the wake of insomnia that allows for the monster.
Often, I find myself awake.
Often, I find myself becoming sick at the thought of sleep.
I don’t know if you caused this.
I don’t know if I care.
I know in the wakefulness of the night you came to me.
No, you came onto me.
Into me.
I wrote you a letter.
I wanted you to feel as I did,
as I do.
Often, I relive the moment I burned that letter,
and you.
One time you wrote me a letter,
with your misogynistic tongue.
When I opened it,
I felt fire, not the same fire,
but fire. I was humiliated.
When I burned your tongue I knew I was free.
I was climbing a mountain
of unexplainable endings when we met.
The zipper to my dress was busted
and my hair hanging about me
like a make-shift halo of bonfire and star light.
At least that is what you thought when you saw me—
An angel born from the very sunlight that kissed the mountains farewell that evening,
wrapped its arms around the full moon,
and lifted her into the star streaked sky.
You probably thought I could fly up to the peaks that we walked under all summer.
You probably thought I could be as thin and light as a bird’s wing on the alpine air—
As free as one too when paired with your thundering heart.
And when you grabbed me,
Grabbed my waist, my arms, my neck, my thighs,
I know you thought we were freeing me.
You ripped off my dress—
down to every last thread.
You pulled it away
expecting someone with a swirl of leaves instead of a heart
and skin as smooth as the moonlight on the river.
But the dress fell away
and all there was were the ends of threads
reaching into the night
attempting to hold together what they no longer could.
"It will take 3 to 5 days to process this report. Here's a list of people you can talk to."

she does not walk past his house
she does not go out to eat alone
tell her why campus housing doesn’t feel so safe
when she can’t fall asleep cause she’s too busy
double-checking the locks
eyes on the dead bolt
she avoids eye contact
and he still walks around chanting “SIGMA CHI”
tell her why people idolize the old white guy
who represents the school
rehearsed, scripted, he knows nothing about nothing
he’s as useless as watering grass when it rains
she still holds his name in the back of her throat
in her fist
he is unaffected
tell her why the process of conduct is more like a drawn out procedure of cutting open an old wound with rusty, broken scissors slicing aimlessly until she is bloody all over again
Did you know that I actively hate you?
I don’t even know you
You thief
Did you know that I actively hurt?
You coward
You made this
This sickening mess
Monster(s)
Live under my bed
I sleep with my ghosts
Have tea with my ghosts
Take walks—with my ghosts
Write poems—
To my ghosts
Did you know that you stole my voice that night?
That sometimes the tremors never stop
But most often
I lose my cool
Cool—it was cold—it was frigid that night
As I tried to scream
 Tried to push you away
Wanted to die
Were you following me or did you just find me?
Small on the street
Already sad enough
Already
Wanting to die
Did you think about it
Or did you let your dark and
Twisted
Instincts take control
Push me to the ground
Put your rough hands
Around my neck
Did you know that I wanted to die?
So badly
All day
All year
Right up to
The very moment
I thought you were going to kill me
My instincts of self-preservation
That have always been strong
And true
Bit down on the only thing
They could find
And suddenly
My dark and twisted side came out
I
Wanted you
To die
Moments

OLIVIA KEENE

11:30pm: I feel hot and his muscles ripple under his tattooed chest. He keeps coming back around the fire to talk to me. He can’t keep his eyes off me.

12:30am: He tells me I’m “fucking gorgeous” and that he liked checking out my ass as I climbed onto the roof. At least he is honest.

1:00am: We walk down to the river and he laughs at my bare feet. I am an adventure. I am wild beauty. He likes me. I tell him we aren’t going to have sex. He respects that but once again, is brutally honest and tells me he wants to “fuck the shit” out of me.

1:10am: I tell him that guys rarely get me off. I see him take it as a challenge. I didn’t mean it that way. I wish I hadn’t said that.

1:30am: He convinces me to give him a try. We fuck right there on the riverbank. He rips off my dress and fucks me so hard it hurts. He acted like he knew my body better than me. I hated it. I liked that dress.

1:35am: I tell him to stop. He stops. Embarrassed. I am too. I begin to cry and tell him it didn’t feel right. I had said no before and I was mad at myself. He slapped my ass during it too. I wanted to scream.

1:50am: We fall asleep in his car and he tells me “Good night, Gorgeous.” He compliments me too much. Why did I stay there?

3:00pm: My muscles ache. I am wet with sweat and rain. My heart is racing—one slip and I am lost forever and I love it. I love the world. I love myself for making me do this. I love the mountains. I love this solitude.

3:30pm: I drop my phone in a stream. Dead.

3:45pm: Almost to the top in the Alpine Garden, I turn as the sun shines from between the clouds. The rain lets up. A rainbow sprouts from the forest up over Nelson Crag and into the Great Gulf Wilderness—my final destination. I fall to my knees and weep. I cry as Mother Nature has been for me all afternoon. My tears run into the rivers. The jagged rocks dig into my knees. I sink all the way to the earth, letting her wash my mind clean of darkness.

4:35pm: Almost to the Great Gulf Headwall—two figures saunter towards me on the ridgeline. They look too familiar. It’s him and his friend. I’m nervous and happy (why am I happy?) to see him—shirtless and glistening with sweat. He tries to convince me come down and spend another night with him. I look at his bulging muscles. I’ve never been with anyone with as good a body as him. I want to go fuck him in his tent back at Camp or him to come with me. I want to try again. Thunder—fear. I remember how he scared me. I say no—I stick to it.

4:50pm: The Great Gulf Headwall barely has a trail. It is thundering and lightening. Raining too. Everything is fine. I hit tree-line. Where is the trail? Hail, the storm is closer. I count three second before thunder shatters the mountainside. I follow to river. Every river flows to the ocean, right? To Spaulding Lake? I slip—my shoes are soaked. I’m cold. I’m scared. I want out. I want my mom or Caitlin or someone. I want love. Mother Nature loved me so much earlier with her rainbow leading me here. What is she telling me now? That the right path isn’t always the easy one?

5:20pm: I want out! No. I want in. I want in. Please, let me in.

5:30pm: I can’t feel my toes. I feel hypothermia setting in. I look for somewhere to camp but the slope is too steep and rocky. I know I can’t stop. I know I can’t get help. I have no way to call for help. I try not to panic. I follow the river.

6:00pm: The river turns back into a trail. I wasn’t lost. It stops raining. I am in the wilderness now. I am wild. I scare me. I’m cold. I run. Spaulding Lake. I’m here! I scream. “Fuck you, Spaulding Lake,” is what I am thinking but my words come out inhuman. I scream more. I feel wild.

6:05pm: I find a clearing. I need to be warm—nothing else matters. I set up my tent with shaking hands. Everything is wet. I strip off my cold clothes. For the second time that day I found myself wet and naked on a riverbank. I found comfort knowing my own two hands had undone me this time. I climb into my sleeping bag. Warmth. I am safe yet still I cry and cry. But I’m miles and miles from anyone and I am here. I am here.

6:30pm: Sleep. I shift all night. But with every turn, I feel security seep in with the warmth of my body. La Casa del Viento is my home. I am home right now. I am ok. I made it through to the wild. I made my own path.

7:00am: Morning. I don’t want to get out of my tent. It is safe in here. I feel like a caterpillar in a chrysalis. I’m not ready. An hour slips by. I see sunlight on my fly. I can hear water trickling in the river just a few feet away. I remember the beauty of yesterday.

8:00am: I slowly emerge. The world is bright and washed clean. I walk to the lake. Morning fog, like fairies, dances across it—the headwall reflected in its waters. I feel at peace.

8:30am: My toes are cold again and nothing is solved. But I have another adventure to have. The sun’s rays are creeping down the mountainside and I must journey on.
Early in my forays into internet communities, I came across the body positivity movement, a movement that seemed to be primarily focused on improving the self-esteem of young women. At the time, I was an obese 15 year old girl living in a world that constantly told me how unacceptable I was. From 7th grade onward, I had repeatedly told myself that I would lose a lot of weight over the summer, that all of the boys would fall in love with me, and that life would be great or something. Losing weight hadn’t happened by the time I became involved with the internet in 10th grade. To the contrary, my weight had increased and so had my self-hatred. I began following blogs that were full of posts about how all bodies are beautiful and reminders that everyone looked cute today. Even though I didn’t quite believe those sentiments in reference to myself, on some level they made it easier to tolerate myself.

I lost weight eventually - more than 80 pounds of it between senior year of high school and the present. After the first 50 pounds, I started noticing that people were significantly nicer to me. People stopped giving me judgmental looks when I was eating in public, I stopped getting backhanded compliments about what a pretty face I have, and I stopped being subject to all of the bullshit microaggressions that fat people have to deal with every day. The body positivity movement had helped me see fatness as a physical trait akin to curly hair or freckles instead of a signifier of moral or intellectual failing, and the change in how I was treated made it clear to me that many people assign worth to a person based on how they look, and then treat them accordingly. My feelings about this shift were muddled because I like when people are nice to me, but I want people to be nice to me because people are inherently valuable - not because I fit their definition of acceptable. This shift made me more questioning of why people like me and more frustrated with how the world works. Ultimately it made me angry. It continues to make me angry.

Around the end of my freshman year of college, at the same time as I was noticing the change in how I was treated, I started noticing a shift in the discourse surrounding body positivity. It seemed to transform from a focus on all bodies being beautiful to one that attempts to deconstruct beauty as a value we should all be striving for. This focus is instead on the function of the body. There are more and more posts and articles about how you should love your body for what it can do for you. These posts suggest things like dancing, hiking, and swimming. Although I feel that a shift away from beauty-based worth is good, basing worth instead on functionality is also a problematic way to encourage people to love themselves. Focusing on functionality actively excludes people who aren’t able-bodied.

Close to the same time that I noticed the beginnings of a shift in body positivity discourse, I went to the doctor because I was having recurring stabbing hip pain. My body had been doing a lot of weird painful things for some time up to that visit, which I had been ignoring. After some discussion with the doctor, it was established that my entire body wasn’t supposed to ache constantly and that most 18 year olds didn’t have days where anything that touched their skin caused pain. I was a biochem major at the time and, having a lot of faith in science and medicine, was hopeful that blood tests would tell my doctor exactly what was wrong with me so that I could be treated. That’s not what happened; my first doctor couldn’t diagnose me. The 9 other doctors that I’ve seen since then have taken more of my blood and biopsied my organs but none of them have been able to give me a diagnosis either. Sometimes medical conditions are straightforward, but apparently mine is not one of them. It doesn’t seem like there will be an answer any time soon.

It’s frustrating that my body aches constantly and that I don’t know why. Sometimes it’s just as frustrating that there are very few people in my life who understand what it’s like to be 20 and chronically ill. I’ve increasingly turned to internet communities for understanding and solidarity. Being sick is something that I tell a thousand people about on tumblr on a daily basis, but it’s something that I have a hard time talking about in my day-to-day interactions. I don’t think that people who aren’t chronically ill can ever understand what it’s like to be chronically ill, and maybe that’s why I feel such overwhelming pressure to either be a fighter or to suffer in silence. Despite my body clearly telling me it’s under attack, I don’t know what I’m fighting, so I try to pretend that I am not sick. Sometimes it’s relatively easy to pretend; often pretending is frustrating and awful.

I’m never sure how to navigate being sick and living my life to the fullest. The wikiHow article on being a chronically ill
college student is non-existent. Probably because we’re all too tired to write them. So I try to focus on what is important to me. I try to put more love into the universe, and I firmly believe that loving myself will ultimately lead to a deeper love for the world. But the wikiHow article on loving yourself is 21 steps long and there are no tips for how to do that when you have a chronic pain condition. Loving my body often doesn’t seem feasible. Sick bodies aren’t valued and fat bodies aren’t valued. The message that is being sent from dominant discourses has always been that I shouldn’t love my body because of the way it looks and the message that I’m being sent from the bulk of body positive discourse is that I should love my body for what it can do. I appreciate that most of the time I can dance, hike, and do physical activities. But when I have to push through constant aching and frequent spikes of pain to do them, it is hard not to hate my body. I can’t remember what it feels like not to be tired or to not be in pain, and it’s a very real possibility that in the near future I won’t be able to dance or go on long hikes because I will be in too much pain. That’s a possibility that I don’t like to think about, but one that I’m forced to think about on a daily basis.

I don’t always love the way I look, I don’t always love the way my body moves, and I sure as hell don’t love the way my body feels. In my search to try to figure out how I can love this part of who I am, I’ve read a lot of things from the disabled community about why they love their bodies and the ways that they create their own body positivity outside of the ableist suggestions that have been dominating body positive discourses lately. Social movements should be more inclusive than they are. Self-love should be more prevalent than it is. A lot of things should improve, and I’m trying to understand where I fit into that. I’m trying to understand what I contribute and what I take away from the discourses on body positivity. Maybe what I contribute is another way of knowing. Perhaps that’s what everyone contributes to conversations about bodies and self-love. We all exist in our bodies differently. It’s important to remember that experiences are subjective, and experiences are valid. They should be felt and heard and analyzed and accepted.

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I-doll-atry

SIMONE QUINANOLA

In the Valley of the Dolls, I am neither Barbie nor an American Girl; I am Raggedy-Ann.
My fabric skin is not reflective or radiant like their plastic or porcelain; it conceals the fluff that bodies like theirs do not carry.
My button eyes and linear-stitched smile pale in comparison to their bright pupils and plump lips, their sleek hair is nothing like the yarn on my head.
But piece together the fabric, stuff it with fluff, sew on my smile, button my eyes, and knit the yarn;
what you have is a doll, just as unique as every other Barbie or American Girl.
The Mary Janes and striped stockings are my quirks, and though they are not stilettos or paired with lace-trim socks, I am just as elegant;
I am still a doll.
I said, “I want to get a giant tattoo on my belly,” and he said, “what if you get pregnant?”

Good. Fucking. Question.

What if I choose to spend nine out of the twelve hundred months of my life feeding my body to someone else, who, upon exiting my swollen, bloody vagina, leaves behind a puddle of wrinkled, inked skin.

What if I regret my ink because it no longer looks perfectly flat and shiny on my stretched, speckled skin and I feel like a fool for not considering how fucking ugly the ink would look after nine months of feeding myself to an expensive investment. What if I am ashamed to show my body to anyone and I only peek at the wrinkled mess when I am alone in my bedroom in front of a mirror with no one to hear me cry for my lost youth, my lost pride, my lost skin. What if I get pregnant. It’s a good question. I appreciate your concern for the youth and vitality of my belly skin, but I don’t think you need to worry about it, my friend.

If I get pregnant - and if I choose to follow through with the pregnancy - my tattoo might grow and stretch into an entirely different piece of art. I might be able to trace it as it flows across my abdomen while I search for kicks. I might press the hands of friends and family against my stomach and have them feel for those same kicks, while navigating questions like, “Have you thought of a name?” or, “Are you eating well and getting plenty of rest?” or, “Why did you get a fucking tattoo if you knew you were going to get pregnant?” If I get pregnant, my ink will take on new life, and when I push the little fucker out of my bloody vagina, my ink will bear the marks of that life just as the wrinkles on my skin will bear the marks of my child. And, just as my body will only last a hundred years, so will the ink. Impermanent. Inconsequential.

If I get pregnant, my ink will become pregnant, too. Your question, my friend, shows a deep concern for my well-being, but I must ask you not to worry about me and my belly. We’ll be just fine.

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This Is Not A Love Poem

I could kiss the way you say my name when it is late at night ( or maybe it is early in the morning ) when my mind is clouded with dust gray hues and I am just beginning to shape /my/ self to /your/ self ; twisting down a highway of peach skin and hair while your arm drapes over me and your breath is as deep as my heart is open. my burgeoning love, fluttering with each sleep-drunk cattleya locution dripping from your lips sweet and slow and soft like milk and honey. I lose myself in you 13 times a day but I can’t complain for being lost in a place so familiar and to me you are so opulent and I find myself again when the moon slinks through your window panes to illuminate the contours of your body and remind me that I am home.
Was it just me
Or when we hugged did you hold me too tightly
Press your chest into mine as if this were
Intimacy
Am I imagining things? I wish I was
Because last night your fingers tried to lay claims to the intricacies of my body
Placing your hand on my ass you said
We should fuck
Trying to coax me on the walk home to end up in your bed
Your palms trickled up and down my thighs like unwanted leaks
In ancient homes
That are old and breaking
Is it because I’m the queer friend that you assume
My body is your playground
Dirt to plant your seed in any season
Not caring about torrential rains or thunder
Baby, you don’t grow corn in December
And my skin is not a billboard
So stop writing your demands up and down my backside
I know you want attention
But you no mastery over my body
So stop saying that you’ll make me cum like lightning hits dirt
You throw words out like stones into ponds
Not stopping to think before they connect and sink
Into seaweed and dew
I don’t want you and I never have
So quit pretending like we love each other
When we no longer know even the most superficial layer of our sediments
So today when I saw you
And we hugged
And you drew lines with tight hands on my unwelcoming body
Was it just me or did you hold me too tightly
And glint presumption in your empty eyes
Keep your hands in the cotton of your pockets
Because
I don’t want you and
I never will
Riverbed Lips
GRACE PICCARD

don’t fall in love with sad boys in bands
    says my sister, painting her toenails on the bathroom counter

why not
    i ask, looking at myself in the clouded mirror
    red lipstick staining dark my virgin lips

because they’ll break your heart
    she tells me

she doesn’t say anything about girls with riverbed lips and dusty suburban eyes
with tambourine fingers and cheap pretty words
who make my heart kick-drum beat faster

sad boys in bands won’t love you enough
    she says as she puts on clear polish
    and i suppose that there are some things she just knows
    like the tampons she keeps under the sink
    or the soft silk nest of bras in her dresser drawer

okay
    i say because there is nothing else to say
    because i am young and sad and will love girls with riverbed lips
    anyway
Bisexuality and Straight Privilege
LINDSEY CONRAD

Note from the author: bisexuality/bi* are both used as an umbrella term for all nonmonosexual identities; such as bisexuality, pansexuality and other fluid sexualities.

The idea that bi* people benefit from straight privilege is a common narrative throughout the queer community, as well as in the non-queer community. It stems from the idea that bisexuals, having relationships with the same and other genders, can tap into heterosexual privilege when they are in a different-sex relationship that might outwardly appear to be a heterosexual relationship. This is a false assumption to make. Bisexuals are never in heterosexual relationship by nature of them being queer. Their relationships are inherently queer, never straight. The gender identity of their partner/s is irrelevant.

Within the context of the homosexual/heterosexual binary, assuming that bi* individuals are less queer than monosexual queers positions them within a false middle category. The idea is that bisexuality exists in a space between homosexuality and heterosexuality, when instead bi* identities completely subvert the homo/hetero binary by proving their ineffectiveness at the categorization of human sexuality. Claiming the existence of a middle space between homosexuality and heterosexuality within the binary disallows for the existence of fluid sexualities because it positions bisexuality as partly heterosexual and partly homosexual, when bisexuality does not exist within the homo/hetero binary at all. The idea of bi* people having straight privilege also becomes problematic when the realities of oppression and privilege become involved. Bi* individuals do not exist in a semi-oppressed state, nor do they exist in a stable and defined “middle” space between the homo/hetero binary, they exist in an oppressed state outside of the sexuality binary.

It’s a common misconception that that bi* individuals benefit from heterosexual privilege. The idea of bi* individuals benefiting from heterosexual privilege is a reductive, simplistic and false assumption based on the idea that bi* individuals are partly heterosexual. Oppression manifests in various ways that are not clear-cut, nor are they simple to categorize and explain. While bi* individuals might pass for being heterosexual in some instances, they most certainly do not benefit from straight-privilege in a meaningful way because they are not heterosexual; thus are subject to discrimination and institutional exclusion because of their bisexuality.

Assuming bi* people benefit from straight privilege is problematic for two main reasons. First, passing or covering is not the same as having privilege because the very concept of passing or covering originates out of the idea that heterosexuality is the privileged norm, and having to pass or cover is recognizing a deviation from that norm. It is also recognition of the oppression that occurs from not being heterosexual. Secondly, bi* people simply do not exist in a society that “half-oppresses” people. They face the same threat of discrimination that other queers do. If a bi* person is discovered to be queer by their homophobic boss, they will not get “half-fired,” they will just be fired. Bi* people experiencing housing discrimination do not get leased half of an apartment; they do not get that apartment. There is no such thing as “half-privilege” or “bi* privilege.”

Assuming bi* people benefit from straight privilege also erases the diversity of gender presentations that a person may have. Not all bi* people present in a way that can be read as heterosexual; and even if they do, they still do not benefit. Along the same lines is the assumption that femmes benefit from heterosexual privilege, when in reality it is a form of patriarchal oppression that works to erase their queer identity. Just because a queer woman presents as feminine does not mean she is heterosexual, and assuming such positions femininity as sometime to be consumed by men, thus prohibiting the idea that queer women can also be attracted to femininity. Femme identities are inherently queer in their rejection of heterosexuality, and this holds true if the femme identifies as lesbian or bi*.
Underneath it all

GISELLE MORGAN

From the artist: “Underneath It All” derails the traditional roles of gender and outdated conventions of identity reliant upon biological sexuality. The collection highlights the relationship between gender identity and underwear while demonstrating that gender can be misconstrued by appearance. These pictures reveal that there is more to undergarments than Victoria’s Secret and Hanes – that in fact, underwear can be used to showcase gender as a spectrum by featuring people who identify outside the heterosexual male-female binary. I want to pose a realistic and empowering alternative to the troubling elements of heteronormativity, hypersexuality, and body shaming in popular media’s representations of undergarments.
As the pessimistic queer quite possibly knows, there is nothing resembling a future allowed the subhuman. The madling is the reflection of the terror of the human mind in disorder, of the conceivable shattering of all that is known and perceived. Madling, dear, you are everything that the society of humans fears. They will never let you into their precious functionality club, though you will be informed that the only acceptable course of action is to try to get in. What you see is a cycle: the assurance that you will be left in if only you can comply with the dress code, the door slammed in your face when you try, the admonishment that you have simply not tried hard enough… it goes.

Even your fellow madlings may turn on you, in time. Even if the doctors gave you the same nametag, your madnesses are different madnesses. There is no point of reference; you are trapped inside. Despite or because of the cage here employed, every structure is cyclically referential to another structure. You want an origin? Dig, dig; the dirt is insubstantial. You want an adequate representation of a stopping or resting point? Dig, dig; the dirt is insubstantial. You will find your corpse no matter where you dig.

Why, then, seek the structure? Why seek any structure?
1. I need the structure to help me function.
2. My structure is more useful than/generally opposed to the official structure.
3. The structure allows for collaboration and discourse in an orderly and productive fashion.

This article will not count views such as “the structure is inherently good” because I do not consider good/bad value aesthetics to be a reasonable motivating ground. I do not find it cute.

Collaboration and discourse in an orderly and productive manner is the methodology that landed the mad person in a cage to begin with. Who does your discourse include, and who does it exclude? Who is forgotten? What does the ideological framework of your structure contribute to the accessibility of discourse—who gets to speak, which positions are “correct”? Is the framework itself truly necessary, or is it simply parasitic on discourse as such? Which parts of the discourse (and structure) mirror or mimic the structure of existing structures and discourses? Why were these elements retained? Why were others dropped? Were additions or deletions or mimics consciously enacted or habitually adopted? Who is judged worthy or productive, and how are worth and productivity valued and evaluated? Within your structure, what is the position of the antihuman whose being is an alternately coiled and erupting scream, who lives to die and dies to live? Discourse can be horrendously dangerous when left in the hands of the privileged. Have care.

If your structure is an alternative structure, built by a community of fellow non-humans and informed by their needs and experiences, then it is certainly likely that your structure is inherently more useful to you. Your structure even critiques the mainstream; you have much to be proud of. When imagining practical reality, this may be the only realistically liveable option. Do you wish your structure was the mainstream? Do you pine for its acceptance and general practice? Have you even gotten laws or linguistic conventions passed? Perhaps you are the only honorable type of human left. I have infinite admiration for your resolve. The task you have undertaken is truly Sisyphean. You may even get something done for which your peers and posterity will be infinitely grateful. I cannot say that I am such a noble subhuman. I will not say “WE THE SUBPEOPLE”; I will not gladly make for myself a space in the land of Humanity. I truly detest human society; I would prefer to tear it down. What have humans done with my so-called madness, my double-edged sword, my accrued gift? They have blamed me for it, exacerbated it, coddled it and begged it to turn in on itself, devouring any chance of self-acceptance. If not for the structures of Reason, I very well may have been a person they would have considered functional. Under the laws of functionality as such, I never stood a chance. Such is the irony of constraint. I renounce my humanity freely, and mourn the taint of which I shall never rid myself.

To function is to go along with all those things that one is evidently supposed to be doing in order to fit the mould of contributing to, complying with, or even just surviving the society whose most fervent wish is that you be erased, disappear. Why this insistence on gratifying the devouring beast that wants your head for its exemplary spikes? You would really take the neuroleptics and suffer the extrapyramidals or the metabolic mayhem? You would let them mark you that way, you would let them mark you eternally, just because you don’t want to die? You were born to die; you were born into a species that was born to kill you. Humans will mark you even if you do not comply; would you pre-empt your dismemberment and erasure by begging for it? To comply is to encourage your murderers, to tell them that you agree that you should be killed. To comply is to survive by begging for your execution. Nothing is stopping you from loving such a fate, but I like better to spit in their faces, even if I’m decapitated on the spot. I’ll die regardless.

I am, at present, in a room in which a cat is giving birth. Two of the kittens were born dead. One survived. I don’t know which one(s) I am happier for.

To approach the nihil of madness, all one need do is devote one’s discourse to the destruction of the given order and the constant critique and re-evaluation of the new orders that spring from its death spasms and agonies. Fear not the preacher of Death, if Death is your calling; fear not the spiral of unreason, if you are unreasonable. Instead, let them taste the stench of your Unholiness, let them shrink away from your pestilence; let it rot them, as they have left you to rot in cell of subhumanity. Become the Beast they’ve made you. From your Soul, birth Ab[...]m(e) nations.
Grotesque

ANONYMOUS

From the artist: People can’t see my disability, it’s easy to cover up. I always have bruises from my injections— I can’t take a break from my medication, so I always have bruises—but they’re in fairly intimate places. People don’t find out that I’m ill until I tell them. In one way, there’s a sense of agency in controlling who knows about my disability and who doesn’t that can make me feel powerful. But more often people make assumptions about my behavior that reflect negatively on me. That I’m disabled doesn’t top the list of possible excuses, and I’m forced to expose myself or face consequences for circumstances I can’t control. No matter what I do, my body is stolen from me. When people do find out that I’m sick, they usually say “I’m sorry” as if they had a personal hand in destroying my life. (They’re only sorry for the idea though; they never seem to care enough about the difficulty of the situation to accommodate though). My bruises and pains make me an object of pity, I’m ugly, I’m sad. But I want to scare other people, so they can know how I feel every day.

Stretch Marks

NATALIE SCOGGINS

pink lines run
across shoulders:
ridges where skin is stretching,
pulling apart like the ocean floor
fresh basalt seeping from the cracks,
spilling like rivers: down
the tops of breasts,
too strong to be dammed,
tributaries trickling south,
fading out
then curiously, they move up:
streaking from thighs
to hips and belly,
silvery tongues licking up sides
like flame:
hungry, wild,
mesmerizing.
1. what
you said you fucked 32 girls and I felt like screaming but it only took two days and nonstop whispering until three A.M. before I said okay and made you pinky promise I would be the only one for the next 25 hours

2. why
you’ve got that grimy reputation I ruin with bites up and down your neck so people know you’re enjoying yourself your beard smells like pizza and pussy and your body gives me déjà vu

3. when
no such thing as sloppy drunk sex when you have X’s marked on the backs of your hands and I remember that you’re sober while I’m wasted so I’m checking my phone every tuesday night instead of friday and this makes me feel more adult

4. where
you said the stains on my sheets were sunscreen and I let you sleep in, wake up, and shower my room, reeking of you my bed, a folded mess of gross & sad

5. who
you make me feel special and I have to remember that you know how to spin girls around your finger like spiderwebs, and they all touch your stained skin and ask you “what does this one mean?” you show up at my house late those nights, smelling like them

6. how
I deleted your number from my phone but I wrote it down on the inside of my thigh with a permanent marker you don’t get to call me baby in bed if you don’t call me at all before midnight, but I can’t sleep without your body pressed on my body
From the artists: we wanted to represent bodies in an abstract and real way, we asked people what part of their bodies they were self-conscious of or hyper aware of and photographed those, we tried to portray the movement of bodies, often you see the bodies of models as stagnant and ‘perfect’, these bodies are in motion, showing, scars, cellulite, rolling hills of skin, stretch marks and veins. None of these photos were photoshopped or altered.

An interesting aspect of this process was the difference of exposure between genders, the people who identified as women we asked to participate were very willing to show incredibly intimate parts of their bodies, often having a multitude of aspects of self that they were hyper aware of. the people who identified as men were less vulnerable, mainly showing ears, backs, faces, things that are seen by everyone or often exposed. Individuals who identified as female showed us breasts, butts, hips, thighs, stomachs, backs, almost every part of the female body was portrayed and with little hesitation.

This brought up the question for us, “Why is it that women are more open to showing their vulnerabilities and insecurities than men when we live in a society that tends to objectify women in a way that one would assume would make them the most insecure about exposing themselves if they don’t feel adequate? Does this reflect cultural expectations in more than one way?”

Editors note: the included images come from a much larger body of submitted images.
I want lots of hair on my armpits because it makes you uncomfortable. Solely because that discomfort you feel is irrational and built on a constructed expectation for lust over a woman’s smooth, clean-shaven skin.

I’ve almost given in multiple times since I’ve shaved last but refuse to enable and perpetuate the belief that eroticism must stem from the aesthetic, entirely visual stimuli women are told they need to uphold.

I want it instead to bloom from how it feels when my divine world sinks into yours and arches back for a quick sip of air.

When you remove my top, I hope your excitement bursts not because your eyes get to hold my breasts, but instead because you’ve shed a cotton barrier that had prevented my energy mazes from intertwining with yours.

So it shouldn’t make you cringe if under my arms is a patch of what naturally grows there. My organic body is allowed to fully be without feeling like I ought to make a blade remove its perfectly magical manifestation.

If anything, it’s ultimately an expression of being more entirely myself - something you claim to adore.
God Likes To Fuck

DANIEL/ALICE HUDSON

Author’s Note: This is a very pointed piece, taking aim at the strong conservatism and sexual repression I saw in America. Despite using “sexuality” as a marketing tool, we’re still a nation slowly distancing ourselves from Puritan values. We’ve come far, but nowhere near far enough. This monologue in no way posits that asexuality is wrong or socially regressive.

God likes to fuck. You can’t imagine the weird shit He gets up to. Blowing guys in a dog costume; tied up like a sack of potatoes and vigorously beaten off by some gimpsuited angel; banged from behind by some hero of the beach type. Sure, He likes vanilla sex too, but where’s the adventure in that? Does my assessment offend your delicate sensibilities? Does the thought of the Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, having sexual intercourse bother you? Does it make you ill, thinking of the Father suckling nipples and scrotums alike with equal relish? Of course it does. But here’s where it gets interesting: put yourself in God’s shoes. Does it horrify you, performing all of these sexual acts? Of course it does. That’s because God made man in His image. And if God is everything, the Alpha and the Omega, then all that we are, all we do, is modeled after Him. God got drunk and sprawled His naked infinity all over a metaphorical copy machine. Musta passed out, because there’s a ton of us little bastards running around. You say God is in the prayers you speak; in the hallowed halls of the cathedrals; in the sun and the Bible and the smiles of innocent children. He is. But He’s also in a discarded nippletassel. He’s in the droplets of sweat from the brow of two lovers, their bodies a tapestraic knot of pink flesh. He’s in every imitation penis in every puckered orifice in every building in every town. What you call “perversion,” “filth,” and “lust” is merely an aspect of God. So is your blind revilement and fear of sexuality. It’s all an aspect of God. Yet on the whole, God really, really loves to fuck.
Author's Note: This scene takes place early on in the second chapter of Quantum Cynic. Our “protagonist,” Milo, is a white-collar misogynist thrust into a situation straight out of a science-fiction film. He uses this opportunity to try to get easy sex from an old flame. This scene is a criticism of the trope in action movies where the male heterosexual protagonist uses the extraordinary situation he is in to elicit sex from an ex-girlfriend he treated like garbage. (SFX is the scripting term for sound effects.)

[Cut to a small, comfy little apartment in the city. Nothing remarkable, but still a fairly comfortable and pleasant abode.]

[Inside, focus on Sophia Connor, a content journalist about the same age as Milo. She types away at a laptop, a mug of steaming tea right beside her. Inside her house is fashionable yet not outlandish; a poster for The Smiths here, a picture of the Eiffel Tower, Van Gogh’s Starry Night, etc. The furniture is much the same way: stylish, yet not brash and noisy about it.]

SFX: Knock knock.
SOPHIA: Mm?
[A sudden knock on the door causes Sophia to look up from her work and towards the door.]

SFX: Knock knock knock!
SOPHIA: Sigh…

SFX: Knock knock dingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingding--!

SOPHIA: Hi, I’m kinda busy right now— [Sophia opens up the front door.]

SOPHIA: Oh hell.
MILO: Hey, Suzie, long time no see.

SOPHIA: And I thought the worst case scenario was Jehova’s Witness….

MILO: Can I come in?
[Milo gives her a smile to try to charm his way in.]

SOPHIA: You can’t even remember my name and you want in to my home…?
MILO: Please, it’s kinda important--

SOPHIA: You are such an asshole...

[She lets him in with resignation. Milo strolls down the hall like he’s in his own home.]

SOPHIA: It’s been about twenty years, Milo.

MILO: So?

SOPHIA: So what brings you here after all this time?

MILO: Some weird shit has gone down lately, and I wanted to make sure you were safe.

SOPHIA: What?

MILO: Like, I went in to work today--

SOPHIA: No, since when do you give a damn about me? We dated twenty years ago, and I haven’t heard a word from you since the day we broke up. I meant nothing to you when you left me all those years ago, why would I mean something now--

[Milo kisses her suddenly, and lustfully.]

SOPHIA: What the fuck?!

[Sophia shoves Milo to the ground.]

SFX: Knock knock dingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingdingding--!

SOPHIA: Get out of my house.

MILO: Just listen--

SOPHIA: No, you listen, asshole. You come back into my life after twenty years just to try to fuck me?

MILO: Didn’t you miss me?

SOPHIA: Miss you? We dated for a few months, had some really shitty sex, and then you fucked some woman neither of us can remember the face of. All of which, you can’t seem to recall, was twenty goddamn years ago! You think I just sat here all this time, eating ice cream and crying over you? No, I got over it and moved on! You’re just the exceptionally rare acid-reflux in the scope of my life. I’m happy, and you just came here to fuck with it for your own sexual gratification. Get out of my house. I didn’t want or need anything to do with you for twenty years, and I sure as hell don’t want you now.

MILO: But I love you.

SOPHIA: Don’t you dare try to play me like a fool. Don’t you dare try to slip your dick in me by playing the love-card. That’s one of the shittiest things you can do to a person.

SOPHIA: Get out of my home, now, or I will call the police.
[Sophia picks her cell phone off the counter and flips it open.]

[Sunned, Milo sits there in silence. He can’t comprehend this situation.]

[Sophia glares at him, running her finger over the buttons, ready to dial.]

[Resigned to shocked defeat, Milo leaves.]
An Autologue  

BAEDE CASSANDRA

Come in, please. You may enter. I have something to show you. No, come closer; I don’t have the time or the energy to repeat myself.

Good, that’s close enough. Face the mirror; look into it. You only see obsidian now, meager traces of light in the black-hole of the glass, not even enough to grasp a clear image of your own reflection. A pool that cannot reflect is worthless. My mirror, for now, has no more value than does scrap metal and shattered glass lying in a heap, reflecting meaningless traces of luminance at random angles. Do not despair that this is all I mean for you to see. I shall open a gate.

I cloud the surface of the glass, and clear it again. In the clearing, a room is visible to you. I see only darkness in the mirror; I need not see, only show the contents of my viscera. The dismal room you see before you is a dungeon of sorts, a torture chamber laid deep into the flesh of the earth. See how the grey of the stones reflects her body, and the frigid condensation upon the walls transubstantiates into her blood. This chamber is a sacrament, an Eucharist; here is one ever in communion.

The scene clarifies further. A figure enters. Do you comprehend the grace with which it glides across the grating of the floor? Is not its beauty striking as it lays itself upon the table and restrains its own ankles, as well as one of its wrists? Indeed, it is so gracious as to refrain from expressing frustration at its incapacity to fasten its final wrist restraint. It appears composed and at ease as it lays back, shuts its eyes, and summons from deep within its body another figure, being its own shadow as composed of glimmering, inconstant light. The light fastens the final restraint, and caresses the cheek of the immobilized figure. Its touch is loving as it forms its appendage into a scalpel, and slits the soft, naked flesh of the figure’s stomach. The rictus adopted by the figure as its bright shadow begins to draw out loops of the small intestine through the slit resembles the throes of Teresa, the sublimity of Sebastian, the inversion and distortion of Peter and Andrew. See, it withers! Oh, the ecstasy upon that face, and the tenderness of the surgeon! This is Love, this is Orgasm; this is the way in which humans express their deepest sense of caring. This, I cannot tell you about. I can only show you.

Indeed, it is all I have ever been able to show. Every piece of communication or pornography I have produced has been expressly in the spirit of this theme. This is as far as I have ever gotten. But there is more. Let me try. Let the mirror cloud and clear it once more.

You see, now, before you, the gaping maw that is the true but infrequently suspected center of the universe. The claim has been made that the universe expands ever outward. Don’t believe it for a second. The universe is shrinking all of the time. This is why one must see a shrink to get one’s head set straight. The universe is shrinking all of the time. This is why one must see a shrink to get one’s head set straight.

As the maw does nothing but devour existence very slowly, it would serve little purpose to remain here long. It only has the one means of recourse. Peer deeply; I need for you to peer so deeply into the depths of the obsidian that all of your senses are immediately taken over by the experience. Give yourself up to me, if you want to know; you can only know by being me, not you.

A figure marches through the snow. You hear and feel the crunch of ice crystals beneath your boots; you see the glare off of the frozen water, blinding you slightly. You can taste the bitter residues of coffee and cigarettes in the back of your throat; you can smell the smoke still wafting about your head, in your hair. You can feel the acid eating away at your stomach, the wheezing in your mucus-filled lungs. You have the vague impression of another figure walking beside you; but then again, it may only be your shadow. The impression gives you a feeling that can only be described in terms of gravity, or of noticing a cliff’s edge and acknowledging the necessity of falling. You’ve never been quite sure what this feeling signifies. The pleasure it gives you is roughly equivalent to the pleasure you feel when imagining blood coming up with the phlegm of your hacking cough.

Though you cannot sense any other presence in your vicinity, you feel the need to progress as quietly through the ice as you can. Perhaps you are not intended to walk here, or perhaps your existence is a cosmic crime. No matter. Regardless, you do not wish to be noticed and thereby confronted. You continue in this way, as silently as you can, for several centuries, ever with the dim awareness of another figure, or perhaps a razor blade, walking along beside you. You avoid detection for fear of being killed or confined. And yet, it will take you several lifetimes more to find a bank of snow deep enough in which to bury yourself, which was your intent from the outset of your journey, begun in whatever warm and foetid hole you crawled out of. The end, I cannot show to you. Feel, for now, the tension of the trudge. I can give you no relief.

Come, come. You may back away from the mirror now—you’ve fogged it all up with your breath. As the surface of the glass fades to placid clearness, you are faced yet again with the bleak, black, glimmering surface. This is all I can ever see in the mirror; this is what I long to show you. All else was there merely as a contrast. None of it mattered, and, of course, none of it was Real. The images fade from your mind already; I know that they do, for I put them there, and now I reclaim them for myself. Look into the cave-dark depths of the shew stone. This is all that there is to show.
Raggedy Ann Running

KIERAN O’NEIL

I see you
Seeing me
Licking me up and down with your eyeballs
Spinning me around
Sliding into the smallest pouches of my body like a pick-pocket
Like you belong there
Tugging at my hair as you would a raggedy ann doll - something pitiful to be played with.

You have nice hair, hun. You should let me pull it sometime.

I see your gluttonous grin split
As you unwrap me
Gobble me
Chew me
Digest me
A snack on the go for your ego
A steak on the grill to serve your status
A chunk of steamed flesh sizzling on a platter
To satiate your voracious appetite
For self-esteem -
I feed you.
Mmmm miss I wouldn’t mind having YOU for lunch…

I see your bobble-head nod
Your thick thumb assaulting the sky
As your elbow knocks against the one
Next to you
Inciting a cacophony of approval
A chorus of yeah girl and hey how’s it going and I found what you’re looking for
Like I’m searching for something
Like I need your acknowledgement
Your sanctimonious blessing
To be seen -
To exist.

Dayum girl. You lookin’ fine.

I see you twisting my limbs
Into monstrous misalignment
Articulating my bones at anatomically-defying angles
Until you find a position you prefer
And hold me there -
A mutilated mannequin.

Why don’t you ditch that bike and let me ride you instead?

I see all of this
And I do nothing
I see all of this
And I pass quietly by, away
Because all I can do is turn up my music
And keep running.
Remember This
NICOLE CAHLANDER

they say that
you are an effervescent cloudburst,
a handful of exploded stars,
a slow rebirth and decay
of all that has come
before you.

but remember this:
you are ripped flesh and
you are broken fingers and
it is not a blooming sunrise,
nor a rose in your cheeks,
but the blood that courses
through your bone-lined body.

you are a sore neck and
you are toes curled in
endless grains of sand and
you are the clench of your teeth and
you are the ache in the crooks of your
arms from holding up what wants to
fall down.

remember that you are solid;
your feet do not leave
trails of dust upon the floor
to be swept away by gentle winds, but
instead produce vibrations
that can be heard in the air,
can be felt in the quiver of the mighty earth.
you are not just a creation;
you create.

you are not star stuff.
you are not a drop of dew
on a drooping flower illuminated in
gold by the morning sun.
you are not a goddamn metaphor.

remember this.
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