

LOS ANGELES QUEER RESISTANCE ISSUE NO. 1



L A Q R

We invite you to help us:



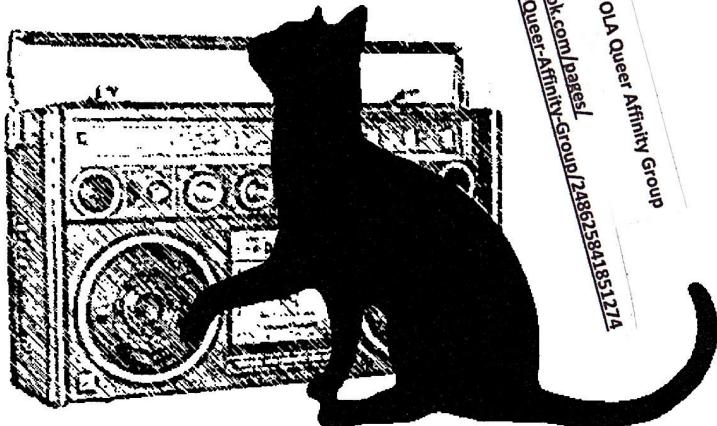
We are a Los Angeles based collective of activists, glamarchists, anarqueers, and whatever-the-fuck-we-feel-like-that-days seeking kindred spirits to build queer resistance! **Join us!** Calling for all visual art, scribbles, rants, poems, essays, and whatever else you got!

www.facebook.com/LAQRzine

All through the night

Stray cat is crying

So stray cat sings back



More good shit via the OLA Queer Affinity Group
on facebook at:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Occupy-Los-Angeles-Queer-Affinity-Group/124862584185124>

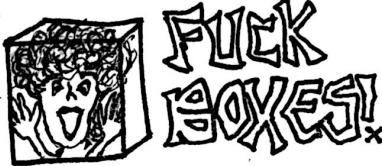
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GAY

STRAIGHT

BI



We, as a culture, are addicted to labels. Most labels are absolutist and rigid, confining identities and experiences into a ready-made box. (Of course to say that ALL labels are absolutist would be in it of itself absolutist – and I firmly believe that are

no absolutes.) Our capitalist society utilizes labels to create the framework in which the contradictory system can be understood and subsequently garner complicity. There is no logical reasoning for men and women to fulfill certain roles. There is no logical reasoning for marriage to exist, and to be confined to a union between one man and one woman. There is no logical reasoning for a girl to grow up thinking that she is inferior to the boys. There are no logical explanations for many of the social constructs which surround us. Yet many of us do not question why they exist. On how many forms have you checked either the male or female box when asked to pick a gender? What is this asking other than whether you have a vagina or a penis, ignoring those who's body parts are different? Why are we so fascinated with our genitalia? Also why are we so concerned about the gender roles we must play in society? Who has any right to tell us how to live other than us? Who came up with the idea that women must be the ones to make dinner and that if a man cries he is a pussy?

A month ago, I, as someone who society labeled a woman, chose to shave my hair. Within my radically accepting community, the

change was accepted without much surprise. However within our capitalistic dominant culture, a woman shaving her hair, to resemble the dominant stereotype of a man shocks and surprises. Upon my first visit to the suburban fields of Granada Hills, I was mistaken for a boy at the park. The appearances attached to our pre-determined roles are fairly set in stone. Women are supposed to have long hair, men are supposed to have short hair. There is no logical explanation for this. Women are the beautiful, fair sex; long hair is beautiful, therefore women must have long hair. From birth, most parents will cut a boy's hair, but not a girl's. We follow these pre-set norms like robots. It is difficult to stray away from norms because it makes others uncomfortable. Some men are clearly uncomfortable when they realize that my hair is shorter than theirs. Whenever we chose to step outside of our cultural norms, we are faced with a layer of discomfort from our fellow community members. Our communities are trained to think in labels; if we do not fit a label, our brains immediately skip to "do not compute."

I dislike my pre-determined label of woman. The label comes with a ready package of pre-determined appearances and behaviors. Because I am a woman, I must dress and act a certain way. Fuck that. Proclaiming that I am queer liberates me from choosing a label. For me to say I am queer means I do not see myself as a woman. For me, queer is not a label. It is an idea. It is the idea that we must question all pre-conceived notions. It is an idea which celebrates me not fitting in. To be male or female is to fit in the capitalist community means you are a willing slave to a system of oppression and exploitation which is responsible for deaths every day. To be queer is to resist this system.



I'm running , but I don't know where I'm running to. My heart is beating, so hard and fast, it feels like it is going to come out through my chest and fall to the ground. My breath is heavy, and then I notice that I'm running in place and not going anywhere. I try running harder, but I'm still in the same spot. In my mind I feel like I'm going forward at breakneck speed, but I'm just running in place.

Out of the corner of my eyes I see her walking toward me. Slowly she walks toward me, as I try to keep running. I want to stop running – but I'm running faster than any other human being ever has before, and yet – I'm in the same spot.

She stops and smiles, and she holds her hand out toward me. I want to reach out and hold her hand with everything inside of me.

But I have got to win this race, and I have no time.

She undresses in front of me, and I stop running. As soon as I stop, two men and two women run past me. I can't lose this race, so I start running again. But I'm not moving, and she comes closer to me and puts her hand on my chest.

I started dreaming of moments we share, and then I realize that she is not really there. I want to quite running and fall to my knees, and to let out the loudest scream ever – but I don't. I keep running. And even though I know it's a fantasy, and that I'm just running in place, I keep telling myself that I've got to win this race. I don't even know who I'm racing against, but I'll die before I stop running.

She leans in close and whispers in my ear, "I'm right here!" And that is exactly where I want her to be. Next to me.

....But I've run this far, and I can't stop now.

The End: Walton Jordon
June 2012

Queer as

Spec. Ed. Vol.

17

The Etymology of Queer

The OED's base definition of queer

Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, or negative; also used, esp. in Ireland, with other connotations.

I **wanne**

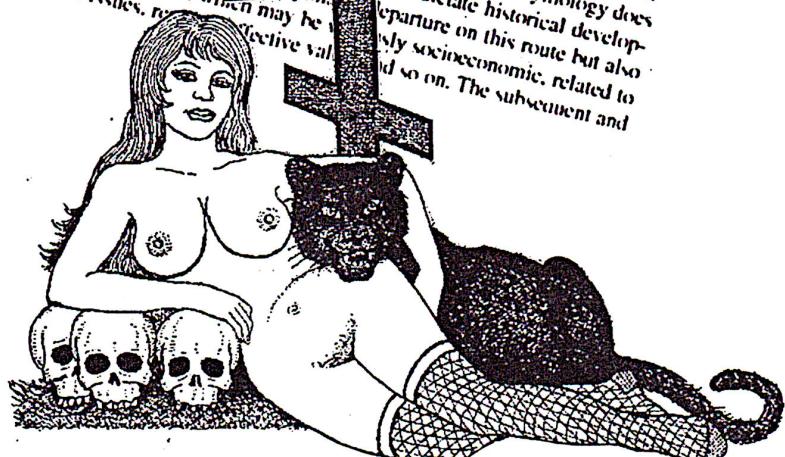
The first attested use of the word "wanne" appears to be in Dunbar's "Cler."

...the early fourteenth century, according to Kennedy, "v. cler," a gloss translation of the first Calland the colgear ane, etymology, the dictionary

Or doubtful origin. Commonly, oblique, squint, perverse, appears in Sc. is against this, and the prominent sense does not precisely respond to any of the uses of G. quer. There are few examples n.

Eric Partridge has a rather fuller explanation of this use, or further speculation, not, or can determine future, manipulation does offer no, in first conditions, when may be, judgemental issues, re

A Dictionary of the English Language (1947) that often no earlier than the eighteenth century. Eymology does not dictate historical development on this route but also socioeconomics, related to and so on. The subsequent and



LIBERATION VERSUS ASSIMILATION, A PERSPECTIVE...



Instead of wanting RIGHTS, I prefer to be LIBERATED!!

I want to write about what Queer Resistance means to me and why I continue to fight for liberation in the historic traditions of the original Gay Liberation Front and Gay Liberation Movement. It is why I choose to focus my efforts and involvement with Occupy as opposed to working within the “Gay Rights Movement”. While these are my personal perspectives, I believe that they are rooted in the history of Queer peoples’ struggle and that this motivation or orientation has not been lost. While it would appear that there is only a monolithic, mainstream LGBT movement, there is indeed still an active, and very much alive, underground of resistance and alternative perspective to the current framework of merely fighting for “Equality”. There have always been and continue to be radicals and revolutionaries and wonderfully queer and transgressive individuals and groups that have framed an alternative dialogue and perspective on the goal of “simple acceptance.” I consider myself to be one such queer individual!

So let me start my rant, my discussion on my own personal Queer Perspective, by stating a caveat: I will always, in my own way, and with my own rhetoric, support efforts to win legislative protection for LGBTQ individuals – nothing wrong with demanding workplace protections, protections against housing discrimination, etc. No problem with using the modest tools that exist within our current system to pursue protections against discrimination. Nonetheless, I would emphatically argue that anyone who thinks that we can legislate away the deep homophobia and queer hating at the root of our patriarchal culture is sadly deluded. Take anti-bullying legislation, for instance. While that might indeed be an interesting tool to increase awareness of the danger and misery non-gender conforming (or non-conforming in any of the traditional senses, for that matter) individuals face as a day-to-day reality, you cannot legislate away bullying from a system whose very nature and functioning is based on repression,

privilege and a culture of conformity. Until you address the root of the problem, such legislation, while important, is in many ways merely window dressing, and is certainly limited to addressing an ‘after the fact’ situation rather than creating systemic change.

Furthermore, a legislative agenda focused on achieving “parity or equality” with the norm leads to the kind of, what I consider, unhealthy and misconstrued path of focusing our energy and demands on things like elimination of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and Marriage Equality. Well, you might ask, what’s wrong with that? And isn’t the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell a great victory for our people and won’t we be fully equal when we can finally get married? What’s the matter with you? Aren’t you perhaps being anti-gay, a spoiler, even?

TO WHAT END? THE PROBLEMATICS of DADT’S REPEAL and MARRIAGE EQUALITY

First off, I was incredibly repelled by, and hopelessly conflicted on, the whole Repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell movement. Certainly I understand the immediate needs of individuals who have found themselves in military service to not face the kind of blatant discrimination, hostility, insecurity and pain/contradiction of having to live in the closet in that manner – absolutely brutal and unconscionable. Nonetheless, pursuing this particular agenda put us in the position of ultimately legitimizing the whole military/industrial complex and we are now welcoming military recruiters into our communities and holding “Pride” celebrations on battleships. WTF! I remember when the Gay Liberation Front aligned itself with the anti-war movement and celebrated draft-dodgers and proudly proclaimed that our queer perspective would, indeed, make us unwilling and even unsuitable for fighting wars and participating in the military machine. And now, instead, we celebrate our participation within the American Imperialist machine – I remember a time when we were proudly anti-



imperialist! Well, some of us still are, and I for one, find it difficult to celebrate “our victory” of achieving the right to participate in the war machine. I certainly recognize, and greatly respect, and even admire, the actions of some of my friends in taking militant action (including chaining themselves to the White House fence and being arrested) to fight DADT – but, I must ask to what end were these sacrifices made? And how have we hurt our own identities and the “soul” of queerness by seeking to legitimize serving in the planet’s most

brutal and destructive war machine. Great, we can now proudly and openly go to Afghanistan and kill women and children, be killed and see beautiful young lives brutally maimed or killed, in the name of protecting liberty and freedom for the oil corporations and Halibruton, etc. Oh sigh, oh my. And how do I march proudly as a Queer Man in an anti-war demonstration, knowing that my own movement has fought hard to participate in the very institution that I am protesting... While it is necessary to fight discrimination and homophobia, I think we need to give more thought on how we choose to frame our message and targets.

And after that rant... let's move right into the subject of Marriage Equality. Again, I can make no arguments against the need/desire to extend the legal benefits of healthcare, tax relief, survivor and medical decision making rights to same-sex partnered individuals, and certainly any same-sex couples raising children are enormously benefited – how could I be against that? Well, I'm not per se. Nonetheless (yes, there's always one of those in my writings), I am deeply disturbed

that the fight for Marriage Equality has now become the be-all and end-all of our movement – it's where ALL the resources and activity is going. I certainly don't think it's worthy of



that level of attention/action and it leaves all of us who are un-partnered and facing a whole range of other issues completely ignored. Furthermore, this focus and single issue demand, once again totally erases our movement's history of personal and sexual liberation. I actually find the "institution of marriage" to be the height of conservatism and a buy into the patriarchal culture that oppresses women and children. The institution of marriage ultimately reduces love between two individuals into a legal and property relationship and dictates that the nuclear family is the form of relationship that we must all aspire to and celebrate.

Perhaps then, instead of focusing all of our energy on pursuing Marriage Equality might it not be a more queer thing to celebrate the wonderful diversity of all forms of relationship and demand that the "benefits" of marriage be extended to all individuals. Lets fight for universal health care for all, universal child care, an end to poverty and homelessness, economic equality ... I can think of a whole list of issues that resonate more fully with me. The institution of marriage strikes me as a very hetero-normative way to define the legitimacy of our relationships -I prefer to be liberated from those constraints (instead, possibly be put into a few ;). Liberation, to me, is about moving away from a 'one size fits all' view of the world.

ASSIMILATION and CONFORMITY

One of major results of focusing our entire movement on the achievement of legislative victories is that it increasingly forces us into conformity to, and assimilation within, the narrow boxes of our existing dysfunctional culture. Instead of fighting to liberate ourselves, and our heterosexual sisters and brothers, from the oppressive culture of sexism, consumerism, objectification of sexuality, rape, child abuse, poverty, war (and so on) we are simply demanding equal participation in these dysfunctions. In my view then, the legislative agenda might indeed win us some important victories, but it can never solve

the problem of homophobia...repression...a culture of self hate and exclusion. Indeed, the legislative agenda forces us to be bedfellows with the existing power structure and marginalizes those individuals in our community that might not fit into, or even worse, be an embarrassment to that agenda. Haven't we all felt the subtle messaging that Transgender individuals, or those of us not adhering to normalized gender roles, those of us who celebrate in our sexuality, might be setting back our cause or be harmful to us being embraced by middle America? There's a subtle (and many times not so subtle pressure) for us to conform to what is considered "normalcy" within our culture if we want to be "granted" equal rights... Clean up your act, and leave the setting of our agenda to the 'professionals' in our DC based organizations who know how to lobby.

For a most interesting, and carefully articulated discussion of this tension within our movement, I highly recommend "The Queer/Gay Assimilationist Split: The Suits vs. The Sluts" by Benjamin H. Shepard. Shepard summarizes the perspective of the early Gay Liberation Front as follows and then very clearly outlines how the early movement split apart around the tensions between liberation and reform:

Gay Liberationists worked from the vantage point that all oppression—from sexism, to racism, to the Vietnam War—originated from a single source: a white, heterosexist, male dominated capitalist society. An editorial in the San Francisco Free Press outlines the approach: 'The same oppressive government and society that massacres Vietnamese and victimizes American servicemen conscripted to fight an unjust and imperialistic war oppresses and alienates all of us who fail or refuse to comply with its concept of accepted behavior.' As much as anything, GLF targeted an oppressive social structure.

QUEER RESISTANCE then finds us in the uncomfortable position visa-vi the current LGBT movement. We are its critics,

the voice that's crying out for LIBERATION as something more than, and better than, mere equality.

I want a movement that discusses and takes on the larger structural problems in our society as opposed to fighting for piecemeal legislative solutions. I'd like to challenge the whole notion of the "we're born gay, and therefore can't help it, and therefore deserve equal rights" rhetoric. How apologetic, and how limiting to enshrine sexuality into a fixed Identity! It's difficult to tease out the limitations in such a perspective/strategy since it presents such a powerful argument for LGBT rights and has become so framed as an objective, scientific statement that's it's hard to challenge. To question this perspective is also politically difficult (and even dangerous) since it's an argument that the religious right has used to justify the horrors of conversion therapies.

SO THEN, WHAT MIGHT QUEER LIBERATION LOOK LIKE and WHAT MIGHT ALL THIS RESISTANCE ACCOMPLISH?

Well, for me, Liberation is about envisioning a new world, a new culture and new ways for us to be with, and relate to each other and to ourselves. There are so many angles and ways to approach such a reenvisioning of society. Liberation, to me, is indeed revolutionary, since I cannot envision liberation being accomplished through reforming our existing system.

Let us challenge the biologically determinist perspective that sexual orientation and gender are predetermined, fixed "things". Sexual desire and fulfillment is a complex and multi-faceted experience, and is as much influence by our culture and its

(continued on page 17)



WTF is QuEEr??

What do you mean, QuEEr??

QuEEr means

DON'T lay YouR assumptions down on me...

I might just not fit YouR BINARY definitions

...that game of EITHER/OR

Those pigeon holes You want to place me in

Who knows, or even cares

I might just be Gay & Straight & Bi &
and just WHY do I have to say or choose

just to make YOU comfortable with a

DEFINED IDENTITY??



And, maybe, I don't want to be
with just ONE person at a time
Or even anyone at all... or Both... or Neither

Or just, perhaps & possibly

ALL of the ABOVE

Must we have a GendeR?
can't I be a little bit of both AND neither
Wouldn't it be fun, and possibly, oh so freeing
to be a little bit of EITHER?

and think of myself as Ze or Zir or Ve or They
instead of HE or SHE (but never IT)

I think it might be fun to take a break out on
the playground of IDENTITY

break some rules and have the chance
to play some new games that don't involve
the (rules) of HE or SHE and try
a new way to be REALLY free

I so very much like the idea of.... ALL of the ABOVE and
NONE of the ABOVE and
BOTH and NEITHER

So WTF does QuEEr mean to me?

I'd like to try and live, and think, on a continuum
OUTSIDE the BOX society Inset I make my home

I'd like to think that I can change from day-to-day
maybe even minute-to-minute
approach my life as PLAY and have the chance
to try on many outfits, many ways

To love a Lot

To Play

a Lot just to fully
flesh out what it is
to just be ME

without the need to wiggle to
or be BROKEN by the rules
society would place on me

in all of that, in all of the Above &
NONE of the Above, and
EITHER, BOTH or NEITHER

the single Rule I choose to Live By is
is simply stated... JUST DON'T BE MEAN

So... that's my story,

that's my guide

That's how I define as QuEEr

So then, a Very QuEEr day to you, too, Zir
Viva la QuEEr Résistance!

(continued from page 14)

rules and portrayals as by any biological imperative. Certainly sex is a biological act, but for human beings, it is also a cultural act and both facilitated, manifested and constrained by our minds, emotions and understanding of the rules of the dominant society we have been ‘civilized’ within. Our puritanical culture, which both forbids and taboos sexuality is also subsequently imbued with an unhealthy fixation on it. Capitalism has further complicated our relationship with our own bodies by commodifying sexuality and body image as a marketing tool. Furthermore, our patriarchal culture has defined everything in terms of binaries, of either/ors. You are female or male, heterosexual or homosexual, a virgin or a slut, good or bad, ... a truly reductionist understanding of human nature. It’s why bi-sexuality has never been fully embraced by the LGBT movement and is always viewed with suspicion and negativity, and with an attitude that bi-sexuality is merely a different way about being closeted about what your ‘real’ fixed sexual orientation ‘really is’.

It is important to acknowledge the “performance of gender” as a social/cultural construct. And by that, I don’t mean the physical or chromosomal aspects of gender (and even that’s considerably more complicated than our reductionist, binary ‘scientific’ approach might indicate – read Ann Fausto’s *Sexing the Body* if you’d like a good perspective on how complicated and multifaceted the biology of gender really is!), but rather the way that gender is attributed in our culture via traits, behaviors, looks, and things as simple and complex as clothes and interests. (Trucks are for boys and dolls are for girls – really?!?) So perhaps the most radical members of our community are our Transgender and Genderqueer sisters and brothers and others who bring into question the very bedrock foundations of our binary, patriarchal culture. Is there anything more radical than questioning, challenging and redefining the way we think about and ‘perform’ our genders?

What could it possibly mean to the relationship between the sexes if we didn't think of gender and gender traits in an exclusively binary way. How would the oppression of women be affected if we continued to expand our thinking about gender in a non-binary manner? I don't have answers on a lot of these questions or issues and find myself personally identified in a primarily cisgendered (if you don't know, google it!) male manner, but I find thinking about and exploring these

issues incredibly interesting and liberating. The continued exploration of different ideas and perspectives around the issues of sexuality and gender have considerably enhanced the way I think about myself and the people I encounter and interact with. I find it very revolutionary to challenge my own assumptions and continually explore thinking about the world in new ways. I find it even more liberating when I put some of this thinking and exploration into new actions ... like actually taking the time to meet, interact with and be a part of the Transgender community, for instance – a very different experience than just reading about it.

So my thinking about Queer Resistance is to explore really liberating ourselves from all these constraints and fixed identities... Really, how interesting, what if we truly had the freedom to consider both sexuality and gender as just a choice and were free to act on a whole continuum of options, try things out, change, explore, have fun, even freak ourselves out

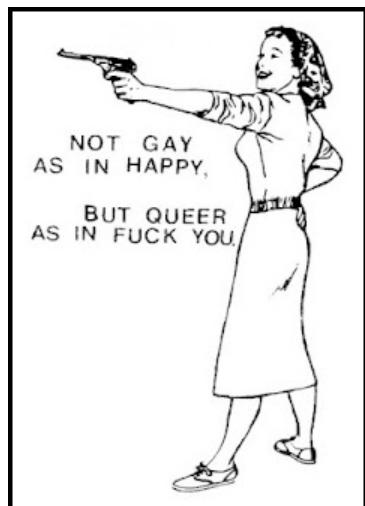


a bit. Dangerous territory this, since there are really no rules or guidelines on how to do it, but what a wonderfully liberating idea.

THE RADICAL IMPLICATION OF CHOICE

So if we eliminate, or at least question, the idea of biological destiny, disengage from the “born that way” rhetoric, we have the opportunity to explore the idea that identity might actually be open to CHOICE. I believe that it’s a very QUEER idea to consider that we are not really free, or liberated, until we have the RIGHT to choose our sexuality, to choose how we wish to navigate the wonderfully varied, complex and non-binary world of sex and relationships. I’d like to actually consider eliminating the categories of HOMOSEXUAL and HETEROSEXUAL altogether! I’ve had a bit of personal experience with that so I find that personally easy to comprehend and integrate into my world view.

The idea of choice in the realm of gender is a little more complicated for me personally. I have a long life history of having experienced the challenges and social feedback of being gender ‘inappropriate’ (having been socially identified throughout my life as being ‘sissy’ or ‘faggotty’ or ‘feminine’). These were not pleasant experiences for me and often resulted in a lot of name calling and physical violence. I remember growing up and being continually confronted with the question, “are you a boy or a girl” and that’s not a pleasant place for a male child to be. I therefore grew up feeling self conscious about and ashamed of my non-normative gender traits, and made efforts to minimize or conceal them. And although the





theoretical idea of gender fluidity is very attractive to me, I still have a lot of fear, insecurity and self-hatred around these issues. And regardless of my theoretical desires and perspectives, being gender variant and male, is still a very UNSAFE thing to be in our society. That pisses me off and also inhibits me. Throughout my early life, I worked very hard on establishing a ‘male identity’ for myself – it therefore came as a lovely revelation that people were exploring and experimenting with gender queer identities, yet playing around with those ideas on a personal level continues to generate unpleasant feelings of insecurity, fear and inhibition. PISSES ME OFF. It pisses me off that I carry around so many internalized scars and insecurities about gender identity and that they inhibit my ability to truly experience and be myself.

COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE and TRANSGRESSION

So, to me, QUEER RESISTANCE requires an analysis of gender roles and gender conformity and an active fight against the narrow little boxes this society places us all and the culture of punitive enforcement of those norms. The Queer Resistance slogans to FIGHT BACK, BASH BACK call to me in very powerful ways – but one can only fight back within the safety of community and mutual support. So again, to me, QUEER

RESISTANCE is about us coming together, exposing the straight jacket of normalcy the mainstream culture that forces us to maim, and hide and be ashamed of our natural selves and tendencies to fit some socially acceptable and socially dictated standard. **FUCK ASSIMILATION! CELEBRATE TRANSGRESSION AND LIBERATION!** That's my perspective on QUEER RESISTANCE.

Frankly, I don't know what 'healthy' or completely fulfilling sexuality or identity might be.... I don't think we've really had the opportunity to fully explore what being human could really be... I'd like us as a community, as a movement, to fully explore new ideas and new ways of being. In my view, anyone not willing to settle for assimilation or the straight jacket of social norms is QUEER and welcome in the QUEER community – whether you are straight, gay, lesbian, male, female BOTH or NEITHER.

I'M NOT SAYING I'M RIGHT ABOUT ANY OF THIS OR THAT I HAVE 'THE' ANSWER (because 'THE' is just another binary trap, and there's probably lots more answers and perspectives beyond my own!), BUT I HOPE THIS PIECE WILL GENERATE SOME THINKING AND DISCUSSION...these are some of my ideas, my points of view – I lay them out here for your consideration and hopefully your feedback and perspective. I hope our Zine can be a place where a thousand different ideas and perspectives can bloom and manifest themselves.



-Jonh W.

AttentionDeficitInfallibility

by Edd

I am not happy, I am not content with my face.
My face is melting,
it's sliding right off my head.

You can not hear me,
you can not see me,
shhh...don't say my name.

The lollipop of happy has fallen in dirt.
It's just a bit dirty,
yeah, it's still good.

My whole being is melting.
The acid is finally getting to me-
as it should.
Acid is just another word I use for pressure.
Society's acid has worked diligently
in keeping me down,
in keeping life tip top and resplendently, accordingly,
disturbing.

I may be corrupt and
I may be interrupted,
but I'm lacking in evil.
This is how it should-
be it my life or be it my song,
surprise has been faded 'cause I've waited too long.

It's how everything would-
have you ever seen or heard such shaded means.
Together in theory could-
We have something in common we're both interpolated
beings.
This celebration of discontent is a tad belated.
I'm just a bit jaded,
but I'm still good.

On Poetry

by Geo

Like all forms of art, poetry a stark and profound reflection of the authors emotions, desires, contemplations, beliefs etc... And of course, in the confines of our high school English classroom walls, our heads are jammed with the poetry of the greats: Shakespeare, Eliot, Dickinson, Whitman, Baudelaire, Dante, the list rolls on the floor and goes on.

Walt Whitman (American, 1819-1892)

TO A STRANGER

Passing stranger! you do not know
How longingly I look upon you,
You must be he I was seeking,
Or she I was seeking
(It comes to me as a dream)

I have somewhere surely
Lived a life of joy with you,
All is recall'd as we flit by each other,
Fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured,

You grew up with me,
Were a boy with me or a girl with me,
I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become
not yours only nor left my body mine only,

You give me the pleasure of your eyes,
face, flesh as we pass,
You take of my beard, breast, hands,
in return,

I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you
when I sit alone or wake at night, alone
I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.



In the context of love and desire, however, the poems and poets that have been given to us from the canon of the greats filtered through the curriculum of our patriarchal culture ultimately give us only a male-centric, women-wanting, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” viewpoint. To put it bluntly, all these love poems are about how this one dude longs to fuck this one girl who seemingly always evades him. Fuck. Hey, nothing wrong with that, but that begs the question: QUEER POETS!? WHERE Y’ALL AT!?

C. P. Cavafy (Greek, 1863-1933)



TO REMAIN

It must have been one o'clock in the morning,
or half past one.

In a corner of the tavern;
behind the wooden partition.

Aside from the two of us the shop was completely deserted.
A kerosene lamp scarcely lighted it.
Dozing, at the doorway, the waiter dead for sleep.

No one would have seen us. But already
we had excited ourselves so much,
that we became unfit for precautions.

Our clothes were half opened—they were not many
for a divine month of July was scorching hot.

Enjoyment of the flesh between
our half-opened clothes;
quick baring of the flesh—the vision of what
occurred twenty-six years ago; and has now come
to remain among these verses.

THE GENDER MATRIX

by a Cyborg Feminist



THE GENDER MATRIX is all around us. From the determination and assignment of biological sex by medical professionals at birth (or in the womb), to the cultural roles

prescribed by the norms of the family, to the encounters with the larger communities and social institutions that dominate a person's life, all interactions are encoding and transcribing identities, roles, modes of thinking and self-policing.

If you happen to fall within a socially acceptable combination of body parts and desires, you might not notice it. For the privilege of comfort with conformity, you are spared anxiety at the gender binary posed at the restroom, you can chuckle along with sexist jokes, and uncritically participate in the hazing of those who don't fall into line. But sexual dimorphism across humanity doesn't stabilize into two separate neat categories, and the relationship between culturally defined roles and the biological make-up of bodies is one that is socially constructed. Cultural biases creep into academic research and the production of authoritative scientific knowledge.

The seemingly stable material reality we inhabit is perpetuated by ideologies that inform modes of organization and define the institutions and relationships that comprise culture and society. Language informs ideas about bodies that make up categories of identity. Regimes of control enforce normative behavior governed by codified rules, customs, and law. Amongst designations of race, class, and sex, gender norms are especially insidious in their claim to legitimacy derived from mere consequence of biology, supposedly inherit in our "nature."

If the rules that define prescribed roles can be thought of as “code” rooted in a gender “binary,” then the social institutions built on this code are the “programs” that run within our cultural “operating system.” The gender matrix is a low level architecture upon which are constructed the assumptions about human beings that legitimize the status quo. Challenging these assumptions becomes a liberatory struggle. Gender non-conformists are like the “hackers” looking to exploit vulnerabilities in the code that makes up the oppressive hierarchical order of society.

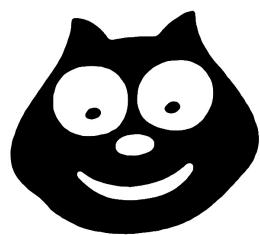
Even within groups whose stated purpose is to unite against the injustices of dominant culture, the insidiousness of the gender matrix and its deep level of programming in our social structures makes it difficult to come together without replicating the same oppressive hierarchies we seek to undo. Even activist spaces tend to be male dominated, heteronormative, and primarily cisgendered. Confronting these realities is necessary to establish safe spaces that are supportive of women, queer identified persons and gender non-conformity. Activist groups who push this issue to the side in the name of focusing on the supposedly “bigger problems” of capitalism or colonialism ignore that these systems of oppression intersect with the gender matrix to reinforce each other. There can be no hierarchy of oppressions for they cannot be dismantled individually. The struggle for liberation means liberation for all.

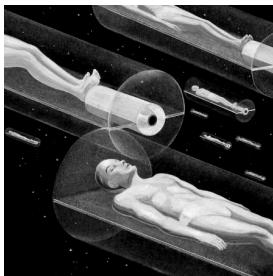
To counter hegemonic power requires solidarities established across traditional identity groups. A politics of affinity between various fluid positions whose outlines are constantly in flux becomes the firm ground from which we derive leverage. When we come together to create shared safe spaces to deconstruct the codes of conformity, we create the fertile ground necessary to support and include the greatest number of allies possible, and the most radical voices which are desperately needed.

While an ongoing seeming democratization of media technology shifts the landscape of power dynamics at play - every cameraphone a potential Rodney King video, every message can be cheaply disseminated globally - the fundamental assumptions at work behind the drivers of technological progress remain capitalistic and largely male dominated. The march of civilization threatens ecological destruction, and visions of abundance down some long tunnel of progress rarely seem to include any kind of notions of social justice along the way. As technoculture becomes increasingly prevalent in the 21st century, confronting the dominant patriarchal imperialistic capitalist biases in society as a whole and within science and technology in particular becomes ever more critical.

If there are liberatory possibilities to be found within technology, they will be discovered not just in hackerspaces where we are free to tinker with the software and

hardware that drives more and more of our modern societies, but in spaces where we can safely encourage the “hacking” of the very programming that structures our social relations. The gender matrix is all around us. Perhaps you’ve felt something is wrong with this, maybe you’ve known so your whole life. Find the others, build affinities, and move toward a world of greater possibilities for all to thrive in dignity. Dismantle the empire! Deconstruct the binary! Hack the matrix!





So what
does
it
all



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