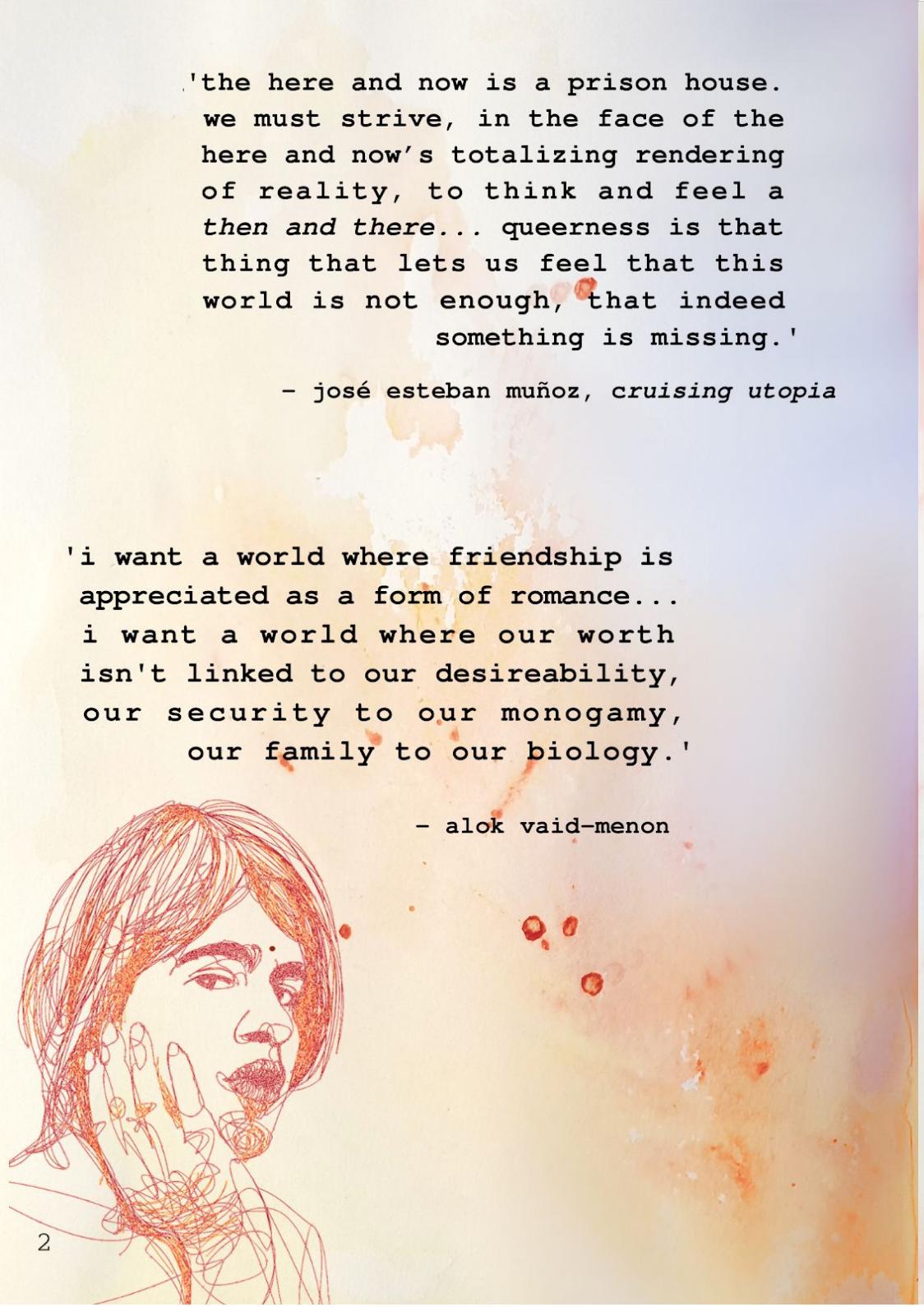


an aromantic manifesto

by yingchen
& yingtong

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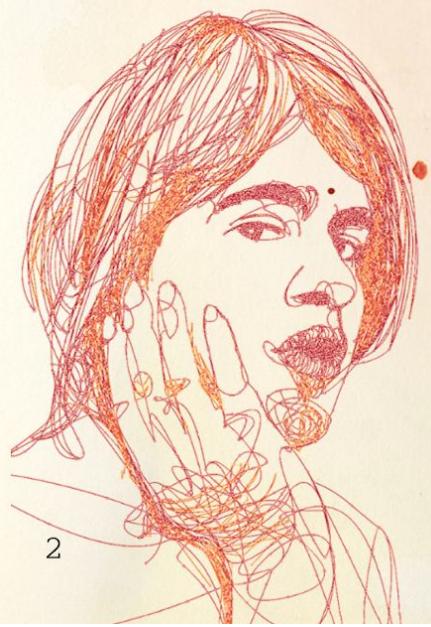


'the here and now is a prison house.
we must strive, in the face of the
here and now's totalizing rendering
of reality, to think and feel a
then and there... queerness is that
thing that lets us feel that this
world is not enough, that indeed
something is missing.'

- josé esteban muñoz, *cruising utopia*

'i want a world where friendship is
appreciated as a form of romance...
i want a world where our worth
isn't linked to our desireability,
our security to our monogamy,
our family to our biology.'

- alok vaid-menon



manifesto

romance is inherently queerphobic

the organisation of queerness
around the pursuit of romantic
desires and pleasures
reinforces queer oppression

queer liberation must abolish
romance as its long-term goal

the freedom to love

a recent study of dating preferences of 960 people (942 cis) found that:

- 88% of respondents refused to date trans people
- 89% of gay men refused to date trans men
- 82% of gay women refused to date trans women
- 63% of bisexual/queer people refused to date trans women; 51% refused to date trans men

despite the queer celebration of the 'freedom to love', most trans people are excluded from romance based on their gender even within the queer community, before other forms of marginalisation like race, class, and ability have been considered – let alone the cis-het notion of romantic fit in terms of 'personality'.

only two respondents indicated a lack of interest in romance.

most queer people want to date.

queerness itself, we assume, wants to date.

for many queer people, same-gender intimacies are queer because they are unabashedly romantic in a world that insists on keeping romance between a cis-man and cis-woman.

the modern queer movement has organised itself around the rhetoric of 'freedom to love': particularly the recognition of gay marriage and other queer romances.

but 'freedom to love' within a hierarchical structure of desire replicates that very hierarchy. many are loved only violently, fetishised as objects without complex needs of their own, and many remain unloved and unwanted.

stauchly defending the idea that people 'can't help who they love' (or not), the queer movement has often inhibited an interrogation of the heteronormative power structures governing all desire.

if straight people can't help who they love, then neither can gay people. nor, one might suppose, racists and transphobes, and people who find disability and fatness unattractive.

queer oppression is not just the experience of prohibited desire. it is also the experience of hierarchical and violent desire.

it is also the experience of undesirability.

the privatisation of love

although often constructed otherwise, romance is not a 'natural' feeling people have for each other.

it is first and foremost a political system:

romance only gains intelligibility within the (neo)liberal dichotomisation between public and private life.

public life concerns the interests of people as citizens and is regarded as a legitimate sphere of social intervention.

private life concerns the interests of people as consumers/individuals and is nobody's business but those privately involved.

while the domestic sphere fashioned by heterosexual kinship relations has been historically designated as private, queer intimacies have been regarded as a matter of public concern due to moral panics associating them with predation and perversion throughout history.

in response, the queer movement has fought to privatise queer intimacies through the normalisation of queer romance.

but privatisation in our political system doesn't mean something is no longer an object of public intervention.

romance has an undeniably public character:

it wouldn't be half as exciting if we weren't constantly bombarded with romantic messaging by mass media.

yet, romance is privatised insofar as nobody should intervene in who others choose as romantic partners, even if these choices betray a pattern of systemic inequality.

the first big ruse of romance is that it is ubiquitous because it is natural, and it is natural because it is ubiquitous.

romance appears both ubiquitous and natural because of cis-heteronormative power. within cis-heteronormative society, romance is publically constructed as a private cure to any deep unhappiness we may feel:

no matter what obstacles we face, the power of love will make life bearable again.

we in turn desire to privately own this public fantasy for ourselves.

this promise of happiness is NOT privately generated by the romantic parties involved.

rather, it arises from their ability to approximate the public fantasy of romance.

that's why people often feel 'romanticised' by their partners, with the effect of obscuring who they really are.

the romanticisation of women is especially violent, because the cis-heterosexual female romantic ideal is expected to put the man's emotional and sexual needs above her own.

the hierarchisation of love

the second big ruse of romance is that it is primarily about compatibility.

from the rhetoric that cis-men and cis-women 'complete' each other to the saying that everyone will find the right person for them some day, romance hides its hierarchical function under the guise that nobody is undesirable but merely incompatible.

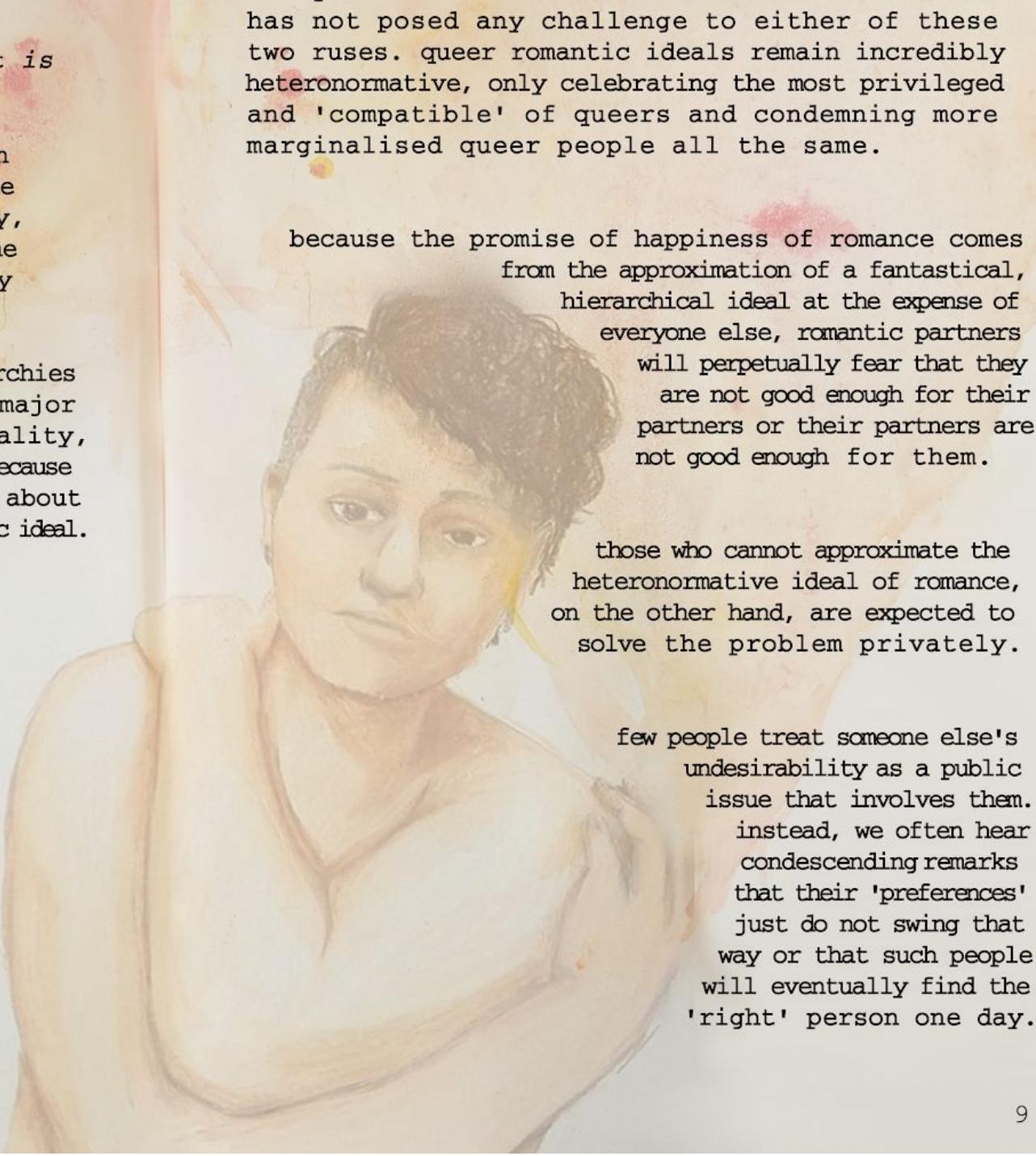
but this cannot explain why clear hierarchies of desirability emerge across every major axis of difference that matters (sexuality, gender, race, class, ability etc.). this is because because romance is not fundamentally about 'compatibility' but the approximation of a public ideal.

romance does not promise happiness with just anyone, but only those who approximate its ideal enough to sustain the illusion of privately owning the fantasy.

romantically attractive people are invariably upward-mobile, white-proximate, gender-appropriate, able-bodied, slender/muscular etc.

often, calling romantic partners 'compatible' just means their placement on the romantic hierarchy is relatively equal in its privilege. calling romantically unattractive people 'compatible' with each other, on the other hand, sounds condescending.

the queer movement's rhetoric of 'freedom to love' has not posed any challenge to either of these two ruses. queer romantic ideals remain incredibly heteronormative, only celebrating the most privileged and 'compatible' of queers and condemning more marginalised queer people all the same.



because the promise of happiness of romance comes from the approximation of a fantastical, hierarchical ideal at the expense of everyone else, romantic partners will perpetually fear that they are not good enough for their partners or their partners are not good enough for them.

those who cannot approximate the heteronormative ideal of romance, on the other hand, are expected to solve the problem privately.

few people treat someone else's undesirability as a public issue that involves them. instead, we often hear condescending remarks that their 'preferences' just do not swing that way or that such people will eventually find the 'right' person one day.

turning inwards

the third big ruse of romance is that it can be privately reformed.

that no matter how violent the public ideal of romance is, feminists and queer people can aspire to create their own nonviolent private romances with the right partners.

yet, by wanting to own the fantasy of romance for oneself, the violence has already been done.

romance is one of the most powerful disciplining mechanisms in our society, because it does not just prohibit desire but also structures it.

our fervent wish to experience its fantastical promise of happiness, our overwhelming fear of being denied it, constantly pushes our desires back towards conservative and queerphobic norms.

queer romance does not resist heteronormativity as much as it assimilates queer desire, making us hold on tightly to whichever relative privileges we have and hate ourselves for whichever we don't.



let us not pretend romance can be salvaged, like we are living the underdog fantasy of some cinderella-esque movie.

romance's promise of private reformation is the most dangerous one of all, giving it a false sense of inclusivity.

by peddling the illusion that romance can be made queer, heteronormative capitalism forces queer people to try solve their problems of undesirability and unhappiness privately by finding the 'right' partner, rather than directing their anger towards public action.

it is often the most marginalised groups that need the romantic underdog fantasy the most.

queer people are desperate to feel some semblance of romantic desirability, some semblance of romance's promise of fantastical happiness, to get by in a queerphobic world.

but this assimilationist fantasy ultimately hurts and inhibits queer liberation.

what queerness needs is a liberationist publics, not a private promise of liberation serving as a distraction from public queerphobia, structured around the violent fantasy of romance.

aromanticism as queer counterpublic

nobody has the responsibility to date someone they do not desire.
that is also a private solution to a public problem.

the public solution is to abolish romance altogether.

aromanticism is a counterpublic that responds to queerphobic violence by mobilising public resistance instead of escaping inwards.

aromanticism is a principled commitment to finding radically nonviolent ways of relating to others.

aromantics aspire to:

- view queer intimacies as web-like counter-publics that reinforce rather than compete with and enervate each other.
- deny hierarchical exclusivity and romantic privilege any power over happiness.
- reject the monopoly romance has over physical and emotional intimacy.
- reject practices of nepotism like marriage that concentrate wealth and perpetuate inequality.
- transform queer intimacy into political solidarity and action.
- create new nonviolent pleasures and desires that do not yet exist.

if you already have a romantic partner, we are not asking you to 'leave' them, but to aspire to love them in a different, queerer way.

we suggest aromanticism can enhance one's experience of intimacy in the following ways:

- not having to feel one person must be right for you in every way (and not forcing them to try to be); different people can complete different parts of you and that's ok.
- eliminates a constant fear of inadequacy from falling short of the romantic ideal and being replaced by someone else.
- enables intimates to be viewed for who they are, not how well they approximate the romantic ideal.
- enables better negotiations of consent through self-defined intimacy, unaffected by romantic expectations of (in)appropriate behaviour.
- strengthens one's trust for intimates based on the principle that love is non-competitive, such that 'infidelity' does not automatically generate anxiety.
- sustains intimacies over longer periods of time, even across long distances and absences, due to a lack of insecurity of being replaced; each new person your intimates bond with is a potential connection for you as well!

q: how does aromanticism relate to sex?

a: it's up to you to define that relationship!
just be aware that similar hierarchies of desirability exist in sex as in romance.

vision of a different future

aromanticism is difficult to imagine in our society, but this is not a reason to dismiss it.

pooled insurance based on communal care
not profit-motivated corporate schemes

queerness has never been about the convenience of normality.

a capitalist model of society based on hetero-nuclear family results in a competitive world, where it is every family (whether biological, organisational, or national) for themselves.

what if we instead designed our infrastructure around an aromantic vision of society?

the point of aromanticism is that it cannot be done alone.

it must be a social movement, in a way romance could never be.

communal activities like urban farming, sex-positive education
shared care for children, the elderly, and the less-abled by the immediate community
long-term reciprocity, not one-off transactions
sharing economy based on

communal housing, spaces, and facilities

we don't have all the answers, but we hope to explore them with you.