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Abstract—Thinking a lot about Death this year. This month. I'm fragile, after all, and my bones and my organs are lonely. And its been too long since I've been painfully lonely but it's good for my organs. And my brain is chicken noodle soup, carrots and onions and bone juice. And the Moon is an organ in the sky and She beats, and the tides beat, even on the loneliest shores. And my Heart is an organ and She beats and my blood beats through my veins like the tides.

Index Terms—i, d, e, n, t, i, t, y

COLLAPSE (HAPPY NEW YEAR)

There's a cavity in my chest and it actually echos. This isn't a metaphor but I guess it could be. When my lung collapsed, the new space of air resonated and each
beat beat, beat beat, beat beat
was thunder, pure thundering flesh and bone. And I *know* that it was this new pocket of unwanted air that caused the booming because it only thumped when I was done exhaling, and my lungs sagged and the gap was large enough to resonate. And when I breathed in,
re-inflate, growth, the gap is gone
the sound stopped and I was silent again. Not like, *I was silent again* but I was silent again, physically.

LIMINAL SPACE

Throwing coats onto the bed when we had guests over.

CONTINUED EFFORTS

I think it's really stupid. Honestly, very silly. That last night, I had a dream that you wrote me a letter. I think it's hilarious, really. Because, you know, I talk about you in the past tense now. And I'm starting to think that it's about time that I keep you there. It's all so silly, after all, how I go on and on without you. And so now I must go on, and on, and on, without you. Just like before, but this time without looking back.

I. PHD DISSERTATION DEFENSE TOPIC: **LIGHT IS NON-BINARY**

A. *Abstract*

In this defense, I will explore the concept of particle/wave duality as a metaphor for gender identity and expression. Light is one of the most beautiful of all natural phenomena. The behavior and fundamental nature of light can be described in either the particle or wave model. Scientists typically use whichever model is convenient for describing certain phenomena. Einstein showed us the power of the particle model when describing the photoelectric effect, and Young showed how light can be described adequately as a wave with the double slit experiment. So, it is apparent that light can be BOTH a particle and a wave. In my experience, this is a beautiful metaphor for gender identity and expression. Something, or someone, need not be one thing or the other and can very easily exist in the

regime between the two, or, without either. Though, despite everyone's agreement that light (an entity) can have multiple forms of expression and identity (particle/wave) there is still confusion about how a person (a complex, thinking entity with a mind that participates in a complicated societal structure) can exist without conforming to a gender-binary (man/woman). When light is *observed* it is categorized. It's convenient for *description* but it does not need to endure a category in the absence of observation. Identity is at the root of the psyche, which can manifest itself in many ways, but does not need to be categorized except for the convenience of description.

II. CARRIAGE RETURN!

Okay, okay *okaayyyyyy*. Yes. Feeling some feelings recently. And of course, most of these feelings have to do with my journey with identity, gender, perception, etc... all the good, sweet-but-sticky stuff that clings onto me. Like one of those exercise machines and adds resistance the more you push, I'm certainly *feeling the push*. And I'm SWEATING. I'll tell ya. Sweat. Ing. I'd call it a crisis but that feels too dramatic.

A. *insecure rant (a prelude)*

So, I shared an Instagram post recently which included the above passage about a metaphor I've been thinking about between light and gender. And, half jokingly, I included that this was my PhD dissertation defense topic. This: Light is Non-binary. And it's not really a joke, nay, it's quite serious how much I think about this, but what was once lighthearted has now been weighing on my mind. Some people took this seriously, which I think is fantastic, because I think I'd really enjoy the chance to write a dissertation about this. And, I don't mind people thinking that this is what I actually study. Though, I feel bad about being misleading. It wasn't my intention to mislead people, but alas. The solace here is that nobody is really hurt by this slightly misleading title. And in the case where people did take it seriously: that's great. I'm happy to exist in their minds as someone who is studying gender and light. I didn't wake up that morning with the intention of sharing a technical metaphor about my experiences with gender to a large internet community, but hey. It happened and now I'm here. What has been really empowering, though, is that people *actually* took it seriously. And it has really motivated me to keep going with it. The only danger I see is that metaphors and analogies can only go *so far*. And sometimes, if you force reality into a metaphor for convenience, it becomes your reality. But by treading carefully, I think I can make it happen. There's just so much to unpack that it's both exciting and intimidating. I did include a small addendum at the end of the post to clarify that this *wasn't* my actual dissertation because I felt bad about misleading people. But maybe I could have done without that. And maybe that's just me being insecure. Do I really care about what people think I'm doing or not doing?

B. (and the rest)

I've been thinking more about what it means to be a man or a woman. And the more I think about the gender binary the more I inevitably reinforce it. This is a paradox to me still. If I say to myself "Am I a man?" or "Am I a woman?" what does that mean? I feel like I'm trying on different hats but none of them fit quite right. Life as a man or life as a woman are two totally valid and awesome paths, and it's not my objective to destroy the gender binary as it currently is because it's not my place to tell people how to live their lives. If someone is very happy being a man, that's fantastic. And if someone finds purpose and love and community by being a woman, that's also great. The fact of the matter is that we live in a gender-binary society. But, BUT, what does that mean for me? If I don't feel like a man *or* a woman, where does that put me? I've been thinking more about the *why* behind it all. I've been forced to, sort of. It's a pretty common response to telling people that I'm non-binary. *But why?* they might ask. But I've learned that this is mostly a totally unproductive question. Identity should be its own justification. Though, I understand that if people are confused they want answers they can understand. And so I've been propelled into taking a nautical dive into my own psyche to try to find answers to something that should need no justification beyond a simple the answer of: *because I am*.

I do want to be cautious of myself, though. I read a very interesting snippet recently that was discussing how people, especially people from privileged demographics, accept certain identities in order to feel oppressed to garner sympathy for themselves. That by taking on an identity that has a potential victim-status, they can justify their privilege. I think this is a very, very interesting perspective, and I wanted to do some introspection to see if this was my reason for journeying down the path of being non-binary. What I've settled on is no, and here's why. Simply: I decided to start identifying as being non-binary because it felt beautiful. Because *I* felt beautiful in that identity. I didn't see it as a victim-identity, I saw it as a place I could thrive as a human. Though, it has had some social/personal consequences that have been challenging to deal with, but this was simply a byproduct of my initial decisions and I've grown so much from those instances. If I bleed from thorns on the trail I chose to tread, I will still walk that trail. I didn't embark down that path for the thorns, I set off for the beauty that I knew it held. (for the beauty that I knew *I* held.)

What does it mean to be masculine or feminine? And is being non-binary just a composite of those two? Why can't you just be a man that likes to do "feminine things?" (going to start collecting questions)

If I *had* to pick, I would say that my spirit is more feminine than masculine, whatever that means. I considered: what is strength? And femininity came to mind. The feminine spirit is one that I feel like I can see and learn from and look up to. And then I considered: what is masculinity? And despite being a boy (or, a man) for most of my life I couldn't really come up with a solid idea of what it means to be a man. And then I start unravelling the traits from the genders and things fall

into this soup and we get back to the conundrum of gender all over again. So, instead of melting into this dissociative soup of a hypothetical genderless society (which doesn't exist that I know of) I thought that maybe I'd start to learn from others about what it means to be a man or a woman. [todo: write about conversation with Mom.]

Then there's the topic of perception and how my identity is shaped by the way others perceive me. I think that the intersection of community and gender identity is a profound one. We are social creatures. I don't think that I'm immune to the things that happen around me, for better or for worse. Identity is a precious, personal phenomenon. But, isn't the Ocean still swayed by the Moon? What I'm trying to say here is that I don't think identity can exist in a vacuum. This is kind of ironic, because a large portion of my contemplation about gender happened when I was in isolation during the pandemic. And in that isolation I discovered that I had a non-binary identity and it felt pretty great. But then, the re-emergence back into society required me to start asking the questions like *well, now what does this mean for how I want to be seen?* Because validation can be a powerful force for good. Was validation from others something I needed/wanted? After all, I had already landed on something that felt really right for *me*, what did I care what others thought? Did I care what pronouns people used for me?

I want my identity to come through in the person I am and in the things that I do and say and not in the way I ask people to refer to me as. Sure, yes, absolutely I really enjoy the validation of being recognized as the identity that I hold close to my heart. But what I've experienced is that in many cases, *most people really don't care about which gender you identify as*. Like, it's just not that important to them. And, what's more often the case, many people simply aren't familiar with the concept of a non-binary identity. So, oftentimes I'm just a "really considerate, sweet, slightly effeminate dude" to most people, which is fine by me. I don't think it's in my agenda at this point in my life to go around being a non-binary vigilante. I just want to spread love and feel loved.

Gender isn't something to sit and think about for hours on end for most people. This is simultaneously a huge relief and bit of a bummer. It's a relief because indifference is better than hostility, and a bummer because, well ... I guess validation *would* be nice. And to know that people see you as the person you are would be cool. But alas! It isn't that way and I don't see it ever being that way, so inward we go.

!!

(returning ,, re-heating the soup ... DING!)

So, returning to what I am starting to acknowledge as "non-binary theory" to answer the unanswerable question of *why*. Because identity can be a powerful force for good, right? Yes, yes yes. So, extending the self into society and being met with the joys and the consequences. So, I think that the gender binary is a reductionist's agenda. And one of the manifestations of my non-binary identity is to always ask: how does the prevailing binary agenda affect the way I live my life and the way others are living their lives? But, it's not really

my business how others are living their lives, truth be told.
And so it's more of a personal mission.
(more, later)