

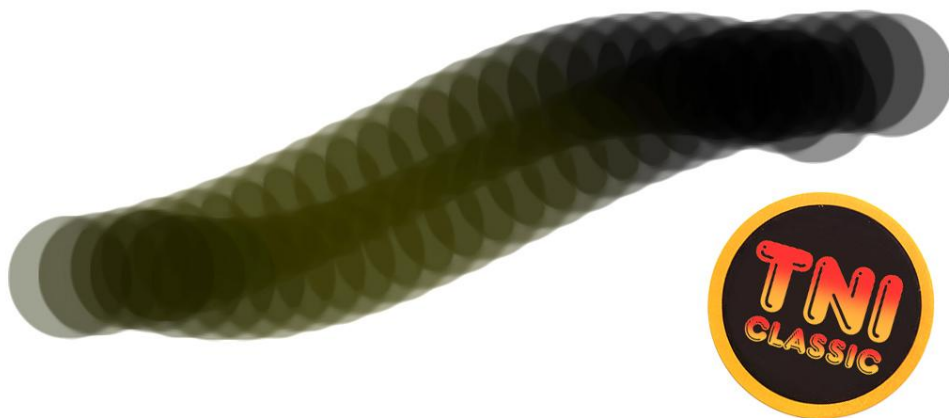
THE NEW INQUIRY

ESSAYS & REVIEWS

Hot Allostatic Load

Build the shittiest thing possible. Build out of trash because all i have is trash. Trash materials, trash bodies, trash brain syndrome. Build in the gaps between storms of chronic pain. Build inside the storms.

By [PORPENTINE](#) MAY 11, 2015



imp kerr, difference and repetition, 2011

HI

I am too sick to write this article. The act of writing about my injuries is like performing an interpretative dance after breaking nearly every bone in my body. When I sit down to edit this doc, my head starts aching like a capsule full of some corrosive fluid has dissolved and is leaking its contents. The mental haze builds until it becomes difficult to see the text, to form a thesis, to connect parts. They drop onto the page in fragments. This is the difficulty of writing about brain damage.

The last time I was in the *New Inquiry*, several years ago, I was being interviewed. I was visibly sick. I was in an abusive “community” that had destroyed my health with regular, sustained emotional abuse and neglect. Sleep-deprived, unable to take care of myself, my body was tearing itself apart. I was suicidal from the abuse, and I had an infected jaw that needed treatment.

Years later, I’m talking to my therapist. I told her, when you have PTSD, everything you make is about PTSD. After a few minutes I slid down and curled up on the couch like the shed husk of a cicada. I go to therapy specifically because of the harassment and ostracism from within my field.

This is about disposability from a trans feminine perspective, through the lens of an artistic career. It’s about being human trash.

This is in defense of the hyper-marginalized among the marginalized, the Omelas kids, the marked for death, those who came looking for safety and found something worse than anything they’d experienced before.

For years, queer/trans/feminist scenes have been processing an influx of trans fems, often impoverished, disabled, and/or from traumatic backgrounds. These scenes have been abusing them, using

them as free labor, and sexually exploiting them. The leaders of these scenes exert undue influence over tastemaking, jobs, finance, access to conferences, access to spaces. If someone resists, they are disappeared, in the mundane, boring, horrible way that many trans people are susceptible to, through a trapdoor that can be activated at any time. Housing, community, reputation—gone. No one mourns them, no one asks questions. Everyone agrees that they must have been crazy and problematic and that is why they were gone.

I was one of these people.

They controlled my housing and access to nearly every resource. I was sexually harassed, had my bathroom use monitored, my crumbling health ignored or used as a tool of control, was constantly yelled at, and was pressured to hurt other trans people and punished severely when I refused.

The cycle of trans kids being used up and then smeared is a systemic, institutionalized practice. It happens in the shelters, in the radical organizations, in the artistic scenes—everywhere they might have a chance of gaining a foothold. It's like an abusive foster household that constantly kicks kids out then uses their tears and anger at being raped and abused to justify why they had to be kicked out—look at these problem kids. Look at these problematic kids.

Trans fems are especially vulnerable to abuse for the following reasons:

- A lot of us encounter concepts for the first time and have no idea what is “normal” or not.
- We have nowhere else to go. Abuse thrives on scarcity.
- No one cares what happens to us.

This foster cycle relies on amnesia. A lot of people who enter spaces for the first time don't know those spaces' history. They may not know that leaders regularly exploit and make sexual advances on new members, or that those members who resisted are no longer around. Spaces self-select for people who will play the game, until the empathic people have been drained out and the only ones who remain are those who have perfectly identified with the agendas and survival of the Space—the pyramid scheme of believers who bring capital and victims to those on top.

My first puberty was a nightmare—faced with the opportunity to make my second one a healthy, healing experience, I was instead abused and broken. The community practiced compulsory BDSM sexuality, which was deeply inappropriate considering it was one of the only visible spaces for trans people interested in making games. I didn't need that coercion in my life; I needed safety and mentorship.

I spent those years of my early twenties not making connections or gaining valuable socialization that I had missed in my youth, but being exploited and brainwashed in nightmarish isolation. I was scared away from the “inclusive” coding spaces, the “inclusive” conferences and their orbiting alt events, and everything else that people like to pretend is available for trans fems.

Things escalated at the Allied Media Conference of 2013. Unfortunately I was traveling alone. People from the abusive community overheard me asking about safe-space resources in Oakland and became angry that I was seeking to escape their community. I was intimidated in person by someone who had a great deal of social power over me. I had a panic attack and went to the bathroom to dry heave and cry. Shortly afterward, threatening messages began bombarding my Twitter and my phone, and the community began to develop a coordinated political response to my desire to leave. People suddenly stopped talking to me, and I felt the icy net of isolation drawing tight.

This was the only time a conference responded appropriately. AMC apologized, notified their security team to check up on me, and encouraged me to submit a talk next year. I came back and ran a workshop (with two friends for security) and a small amount of healing was possible.

This reintegration was not made anywhere else. I was excluded from the vast majority of game spaces because of what happened to me. Of course, the multimedia nature of AMC meant it had the least stake in preserving the reputation of games and other things that matter more than people.

When I got back home, I was kicked out of my housing. I later learned that the community had been contacting my landlord for months prior to the actual eviction, as well as spreading rumors throughout my field. These seed rumors are a common tactic in those spaces, cultivating a brittle structure around people that can be shattered when necessary.

Living was my sole attempt at innocence.

ATTACK

One of my abusers was sent a list of the nominees for the upcoming games festival Indiecade. Unfortunately, I was on the list. I ended up winning an award, ostensibly to recognize my feminine labor in the areas of marginalized game design—years of creating access for other people, publicizing their games, giving technical support, not to mention the games I had designed myself. Instead of solidarity from other marginalized people in my field, I was attacked.

Anyone else getting that award would have been able to just ... get that award. But people like me aren't allowed to just have careers. Feminist culture saw fit to give a pass to every man and every cis woman who got that award, but when a trans fem from a

disadvantaged background stepped up, she somehow happened to be the worst. The culture was fine with me as long as I was window-dressing, but daring to excel got me kneecapped.

They spread rumors that I was sending harassing messages to people, even as the messages streamed one-way toward me. They said I controlled a misogynistic mob and was using it to attack people. (I had never been more alone.) I was called a pedophile, a rapist, an abuser (the typical dog whistles used in feminist spaces to evoke the dangerous tranny stereotype invading ur bathrooms.) Even when the rumors were debunked, even with a history of co-habiting respectfully with partners and a history of being a respectful tenant, the damage was never repaired. The purpose was to keep firing until I was gone, until every possible bad thing had been said about me.

The reputation game was used to paint a vulnerable, isolated trans girl, too scared to leave her room most days, as having power which she did not have—power which my abusers, veterans of queer and artistic scenes with decades of institutional privilege, did have.

It happened without warning or recourse, without a single attempt at conciliation. Multiple times I had noticed tension building and had asked explicitly for mediation. Each time this was refused. When you're exiling someone for petty political reasons, it works best when they can't tell their own story. By privately vocalizing concerns that I was being abused, I became a public target—presenting a false chronology to observers.

Previously their ostracism had been silent, made simple by the fact that no one cared about what happened to trans fems who made games. The fact that my games had inadvertently made me visible meant that the attack had to be devastatingly public, my fake crimes commensurate to the amount of disgust required to repel me. This is the danger of the token system—it elevated me to a level of violent politics I was unprepared for.

Very few people want to defend a target of disposability. I was told by one person that she couldn't risk losing her job, another that she didn't want to become a target too.

I was threatened into not defending myself, gaslit into silence, told that people knew "things" about me that were never explained. When I asked how I could do accountability, when I said I would do whatever they wanted, they said that I was "incapable" of accountability, that my crime was unknown and my sentence was permanent. That is the point where the body starts to die.

My attackers were expert pathological liars who had been getting away with it for years—entire fictional realities playing out on their social-media accounts like soap opera. Escaping from abuse is the most certain way to become painted as an abuser, and being an abuser is the most sure way to be believed. You know how movies are realer than reality? How the sound effects and physics become so normalized to us that reality seems flat and fake? Talking about abuse is kind of like that. Abusers know what sounds "real." They are like expert movie-effects artists. Victims are stuck with boring fake reality.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND HEALTH

Social media is significant to my story because for a long time it was my only outlet as a disabled individual barred from many physical spaces, and a way to express myself artistically when traditional outlets were closed to me. However, it came with its own set of problems.

When I told another trans person that I had been abused, I was told in response that my follower count on Twitter was higher than hers.

I tried talking to people about my poor health, how I needed to withdraw and have space. After unfollowing most people related to games, a subject which was quickly becoming a trigger, I was told that I was “manipulative” for unfollowing, and my following list on Twitter was scrutinized and brought up as evidence that I still followed certain games people and that I was doing this to hurt people.

I was pressured not to post about certain things I cared about (“crystals,” “slime”) and not to use my favorite emoticons. I was pressured to join in social-media smearings of other trans people (which I frequently rebelled against, to my detriment) and to RT things I didn’t want to RT.

My twitter was incompatible with the rest of the network because I mainly posted poetry-style tweets that had no connection to anything else. I would be accused of subtweeting or encoding hidden messages into my tweets. People would associate random words in my tweets with some random thing going on in their life that I surely must be commenting on.

Social media became a scientific metric for my abusers, a set of numbers and behaviors to obsess over and divine hidden messages. The games network constantly abraded against my nonparticipation —my desire for a safe, therapeutic online space, not a competitive one.

Feminist practice of declaring privilege and marginalization became a way to collect information about victims: Look at someone’s profile bar for their elemental weaknesses. Being frank about my health problems was never an advantage for me in feminist spaces, only something to be used against me. I was an object, an invalid on a bed that could be infinitely manipulated and extruded through social media to fit the agendas of a thousand bored strangers.

The ethereal potential of the net had become rigidly hierarchized and numbered to the point where I could be managed and controlled as efficiently as if I were in 3-D space.

MOBBING

CALL-OUT CULTURE AS RITUAL DISPOSABILITY

Feminist/queer spaces are more willing to criticize people than abusive systems because they want to reserve the right to use those systems for their own purposes. At least attacking people can be politically viable, especially in a token system where you benefit directly by their absence, or where your status as a good feminist is dependent on constantly rooting out evil.

When the bounty system calls for the ears of evil people, well, most people have a fucking ear.

When I used to curate games, I was approached by people in that abusive community who pressured me not to cover a game by a trans woman. Their reasoning was blatant jealousy, disguised under the thin, nauseating film of pretext that covers nearly everything people say about trans people.

When I rejected their reasoning and covered the game, the targeting reticule of disposability turned toward me. What can we learn from this? Besides “lofty processes in queer/feminist spaces are nearly always about some embarrassingly petty shit,” it’s about the ritual nature of disposability, which has nothing to do with “deserving” it. Disposability has to happen on a regular basis, like forest fires keeping nature in balance.

So when people write all those apologist articles about call-out culture and other instruments of violence in feminism, I don’t think they understand that the people who most deserve those things can

usually shrug off the effects, and the normalization of that violence inevitably trickles down and affects the weak. It is predictable as water. Criminal justice applies punishment under the conceit of blind justice, but we see the results: Prisons are flooded with the most vulnerable, and the rich can buy their way out of any problem. In activist communities, these processes follow a similar pragmatism.

Punishment is not something that happens to bad people. It happens to those who cannot stop it from happening. It is laundered pain, not a balancing of scales.

If a man does something fucked up, all he has to do is apologize, if that, for feminists to re-embrace him. If a trans fem talks about something fucked up that happened to her, she is told to leave and never come back.

MOBBING

A common punishment for infanticide in the Middle Ages was living burial. This was a feminine-coded punishment, often reserved for women, one that allowed execution without having to actually be there at the moment of death. This line of thought pervades feminine punishment to this day.

One of the most common tools of exclusion is through mobbing, which is rarely talked about because unlike rape, murder, etc, it's not easy to pin it on a single person (or scapegoat). Mobbing is emotional abuse practiced by a group of people, usually peers, over a period of time, through methods such as gaslighting, rumor-mongering, and ostracism. It's most documented in workplace or academic environments (i.e. key points of capitalist tension) but is thoroughly institutionalized into feminist, queer, and radical spaces as well. Here is why it is horrible:

1) It has an unusually strong power to damage the victim's relationship to society, because it can't be written off as an outlier, as some singular monster. It reveals a fundamental truth about people that makes it difficult to trust ever again. People become like aliens, like a pack of animals that can turn on you as soon as some mysterious pheromone shift marks you for death.

2) The insidious nature of emotional abuse: How do you fight ostracism and rumors? They leave no bruises, they just starve you.

3) Mobbing typically occurs in places where the victim is trapped by some need or obligation: work, school, circles of friends. This can prolong exposure to damaging extremes.

For these reasons, PTSD is an almost inevitable outcome of any protracted mobbing case.

In ideological spaces, this damage is exacerbated by the fact that the victims are often earnest people who take the ideals to heart and can't understand why the culture is going contrary to its own messages. They appease, self-incriminate, blame themselves—anything to be a Good Person. They don't want to fight. Fighting sickens them.

From a report by the Australian House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee: "90 percent of people being bullied make the comment: 'I just want it to stop.' They don't want to go down a formal path, but just want the behaviour to stop."

Those who participate, even unwittingly, feel compelled to invest in the narrative of victims as monsters in order to protect their self-conception as a good person—group violence creates group culpability. For their ego they trade the career, health, community (and sometimes life) of the victim.

MOBBING AS WITCH HUNTS

One lesson we can draw from the return of witch-hunting is that this form of persecution is no longer bound to a specific historic time. It has taken a life of its own, so that the same mechanisms can be applied to different societies whenever there are people in them that have to be ostracized and dehumanized. Witchcraft accusations, in fact, are the ultimate mechanism of alienation and estrangement as they turn the accused—still primarily women—into monstrous beings, dedicated to the destruction of their communities, therefore making them undeserving of any compassion and solidarity.

—Silvia Federici

The term witch hunt is thrown around a lot, but let's look at what it really means. Witch hunts, as discussed by Silvia Federici, were responses to shifts in capital accumulation, as is slavery. To jury-rig the perpetually self-destructing machine of capitalism, huge amounts of violence are required to obtain captive labor (fem and non-white). The effect is to devalue our labor as much as possible, and to destroy the bonds between marginalized people.

You see this in games and tech spaces where the intense amounts of competition and capital accumulation, both physical and social, are a breeding ground for mobbing. But the popular two-sided discussion of mobbing as carried out in numerous clickbait articles ignores the fact that mobbing goes all the way down—even as white cis women struggle for safety, they participate in the exclusion of others, creating a hierarchy of labor and competition. Because mobbing is a form of capitalist violence, the popular discussion (conducted by those who are intricately entwined with the flow of capital) must

omit the nuances of mobbing in favor of a narrative that is about replacing uncool regressive masculine consumerism with liberal feminist consumerism.

When the people who are scapegoated happen to be from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, the culture calls it coincidence, clutching our respectable counterparts to their chest like pearls, a talisman of tokens to ward away reality.

SEXUAL MENACE

I saw a queer black woman, struggling to survive by her art, falsely accused of rape by a white queer. The call-out post was extremely vague and loaded with strong words designed to elicit vigilante justice. Immediately, hundreds of other white queers jumped on the bandwagon. Many of them likely didn't know either of the people involved.

Accusations of sexual menace are a key weapon used against marginalized people in feminist spaces, because it arouses people's disgust like no other act—the threat of black skin on innocent white, of trans bone structures on ethereal cis skeletons. It's as common for many of us as cat-calling or any other form of ubiquitous harassment that cis feminists talk about, except no one wants to talk about it. It's a way for the dominant people in the group to take us aside and say, you are not welcome here, or do this thing you don't want to do or I'll ruin your life. But frequently it happens without any particular thesis, just as a general tool to keep us destabilized and vulnerable. Don't forget who you really are in the unspoken hierarchy.

Mobbing uses these rumors to trade a vague suspicion for the actual reality of violence. It's like turning the corner and watching someone on the street having their teeth kicked in by a mob who assures you

that just before you appeared, this person had committed some mysterious act which justifies limitless brutality.

DAMAGE

PTSD AS DISPOSABILITY ALCHEMY

I was, in effect, beaten until I had brain damage, over a long period of time. Unlike some other survivors of trauma, I was unable to heal because I was never separated from the source of the danger. I was never given the chance to vent, to express myself, to tell my side of the story—but I had to keep working, harder than ever, while being constantly exposed to violence.

The pressure on me was not merely to survive but to display no signs of the incredible amounts of damage pouring into me daily. To never display the slightest hint of anger, to never cry, to not argue with people telling me horrible things. Every hint of damage was an excuse to further isolate and demonize me.

The cost of resisting disposability was PTSD. It was catching a lethal amount of negative energy with my body and becoming a poison-processing factory.

My job is wired to give me electric shocks. What do you do when your alternative is homelessness?

“The allostatic load is ‘the wear and tear on the body’ which grows over time when the individual is exposed to repeated or chronic stress.”

“Stress hormones such as epinephrine and cortisol in combination with other stress-mediating physiological agents such as increased myocardial workload, decreased smooth muscle tone in the gastrointestinal tract, and increased coagulation effects have

protective and adaptive benefits in the short term, yet can accelerate pathophysiology when they are overproduced or mismanaged; this kind of stress can cause hypertension and lead to heart disease. Constant or even irregular exposure to these hormones can eventually induce illnesses and weaken the body's immune system.”

To cover up the abuse and protect the “reputation” of the games industry, it was deemed worthwhile to lower my lifespan, weaken my immune system, and permanently damage my body.

Even if I drink multiple cups of water before bed I wake up with severe dehydration. An interesting side effect of being a trans fem on hormones is that spironolactone (an antiandrogen) is a diuretic, so the dehydrating effects of stress are added to the dehydration of my gender, tipping it over to agonizing extremes, the unspoken tax of pursuing both gender and a career. The amount of water in my body is political.

I wake up feeling burnt. Damaged. Corroded. I crawl up from an insane, nauseating, unreal pit and slowly come back to the world. I have constant headaches.

By the end of the day my neck and left arm are aching from nervous tics.

I forget things rapidly. Triggers leave me exhausted or panicking at inconvenient times, sometimes for days or weeks.

My hair fell out in handfuls. I still have a nervous tic of running my hands through my hair to pull out loose strands.

Having PTSD is like breaking a limb and never being able to rely on it as strongly. The sudden weakness of standing on it wrong, suddenly being unable to hold something, a fatigue and spasm of nerves.

It became difficult to diagnose other medical problems because of the all-consuming nature of the symptoms. It became difficult to talk about what happened to my body in general. When my hairdresser asked, the only way to explain the damage was by saying I had been in a car accident.

Attacks on marginalized artists go beyond merely denying them access to networks; they also damage a person's faculties of expression.

For a long time, PTSD deprived me of the privilege of being a multitemporal being. The space of time I was able to safely think about shrunk to about a minute. Larger projects, the kind most tied to commercial value and to the media coverage apparatus, were difficult for me due to the traumatic potential of expanding my aperture of time.

The diversity-centric system expects more jobs to fix the problem, ignoring how long we've been damaged and made unfit for their jobs. They encourage the Strong Woman stereotype because it means taking the damage onto ourselves. We need more than jobs; we need social reintegration.

COMMUNICATION

INABILITY TO SHARE STIGMA

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon feeling a connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror

and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma de-humanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.

—Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*

The worst thing is not having other survivors to commiserate with. I can think of people who went through similar situations and were defended, re-integrated. Their stories are paraded through feminist spaces, saturated through social media, and every time I'm exposed to them, I feel less safe, not more. This enhances my feelings of dehumanization: "Why was I not worth protecting in the exact same situation? I must not be human like them".

I often have the overwhelming physical sensation of having a dead person in my life, someone as close as an identical twin. The sensation is of me being the only one still alive after a terrible accident, lingering like an unshriven thing. The inability to share stigma is even worse than the original act of violation. The greater part of a wound is its inability to heal.

INADMISSIBLE NARRATIVES OF ABUSE #1

The typical narrative of abuse on social media doesn't include the problems of the most vulnerable, like how public verbal harassment may only be an ultimately minor part of a trans fem's exile.

The most skilled abusers know that a good exile is done with pure silence, through the whisper network, by having the person wake up one day and have every second or third person she knows or who

practices her profession block her and/or stop talking to her. No one tells her why. She has to painstakingly talk to every friend, every contact, every person she would normally have a cheerful conversation with. The electric shocks of knowing that every simple human interaction you have with a friend or stranger could turn into a nightmare of victim blaming or worse, a cold iciness where they pretend nothing is wrong. Imagine repeating that experience hundreds and hundreds of times, with no way to end it. After the noise, the long years of silence are what kill us.

The backchannels that should be used to protect people from abusers and rapists are instead used to protect abusers and rapists. Any usefulness these channels have is reserved for Real Women. No one warned me about any of the comically large number of predators in my professions. I was considered unrapeable, un-abuseable, not worthy of protection. A trans fem can try to talk about her experiences of abuse for years and have no one listen, but the instant one of her abusers smears her, everyone is alert and awake.

One reason it took me so long to talk about my experiences was that I associated being able to speak against abuse with being an abuser. Because every abuser throughout my life was so good at being believed, I thought that being believed was the exclusive domain of abusers.

This is why my first months in therapy were spent convincing me that I wasn't a sociopath, crazy, abusive, or any of the other terms I had been brainwashed with. Abusers don't spend years disabled by those thoughts because they don't care if they hurt other people.

And when verbal harassment does occur, it's often cloaked in feminist language, making it impossible to fight.

If they call a woman a bitch, people comprehend that as misogyny. But they call trans fems things that are harder to respond to. Rapist, pedophile, male conditioning, etc. They call us things so bad that even denying them is destructive. Who wants to stand up in public and say they aren't those things? Who has the privilege to not get called those things in the first place?

When I look at a cis woman these days, the first thing I think is, I bet no one ever casually called her a rapist.

TRASH ART

When it was really bad, I wrote: "Build the shittiest thing possible. Build out of trash because all i have is trash. Trash materials, trash bodies, trash brain syndrome. Build in the gaps between storms of chronic pain. Build inside the storms. Move a single inch and call it a victory. Mold my sexuality toward immobility. Lie here leaking water from my eyes like a statue covered in melting frost. Zero affect. Build like moss grows. Build like crystals harden. Give up. Make your art the merest displacement of molecules at your slightest quiver. Don't build in spite of the body and fail on their terms, build with the body. Immaculate is boring and impossible. Health based aesthetic."

Twine, trashzines made of wadded up torn paper because we don't have the energy to do binding, street recordings done from our bed where we lie immobilized.

Laziness is not laziness, it is many things: avoiding encountering one's own body, avoiding triggers, avoiding thinking about the future

because it's proven to be unbearable. Slashing the Gordian Knot isn't a sign of strength; it's a sign of exhaustion.

Although I've fashioned this reflection in a manner that some may find legible, it is not a fair representation of my sickness. Writing these paragraphs has taken constant doses of medicine, fevered breaks, a few existential timeouts, and a complete neglect of my other responsibilities. When I tried in true form to write – in my realest moments of sickness – all that emerged were endless ellipses and countless semi-coherent revelations.

—Alli Yates

With the trashzine, I tore up the pages because I didn't have the time or energy to bind them. I put them in ziploc bags—trash binding. In this new form they were resistant to the elements and could go interesting places. I hid one in Oakland under a bridge, and posted coordinates online. Someone found it.

When read, they come out of the bag like my thoughts—fragmented, random, nonlinear. If dropped they become part of the trash.

SOCIAL DYNAMICS

COMMUNITY IS DISPOSABILITY

There are no activist communities, only the desire for communities, or the convenient fiction of communities. A community is a material web that binds people together, for

better and for worse, in interdependence. If its members move away every couple years because the next place seems cooler, it is not a community. If it is easier to kick someone out than to go through a difficult series of conversations with them, it is not a community. Among the societies that had real communities, exile was the most extreme sanction possible, tantamount to killing them. On many levels, losing the community and all the relationships it involved was the same as dying. Let's not kid ourselves: we don't have communities.

—*The Broken Teapot*, Anonymous

People crave community so badly that it constitutes a kind of linguistic virus. Everything in this world apparently has a community attached to it, no matter how fragmented or varied the reality is. This feels like both wishful thinking in an extremely lonely world (trans fems often have a community-shaped wound a mile wide) and also the necessary lens to convert everything to profit. Queerness is a marketplace. Alt is a marketplace. Buy my feminist butt plugs.

The dream of an imaginary community that allows total identification with one's role within it to an extent that rules out interiority or doubt, the fixity and clearness of an external image or cliché as opposed to ephemera of lived experience, a life as it looks from the outside.

—Stephen Murphy

These idealized communities require disposability to maintain the illusion—violence and ostracism against the black/brown/trans/trash

bodies that serve as safety valves for the inevitable anxiety and disillusionment of those who wish “total identification”.

Feminism/queerness takes a vague disposability and makes it a specific one. The vague ambient hate that I felt my whole life became intensely focused—the difference between being soaked in noxious, irritating gasoline and having someone throw a match at you. Normal hate means someone and their friends being shitty toward you; radical hate places a moral dimension onto hate, requiring your exclusion from every possible space—a true social death.

CURATING QUEERNESS

An entire industry of curation has sprung up to rigidly and sometimes violently police the hierarchy of who is allowed to express themselves as a trans or queer person. The LGBT and queer spheres find it upon themselves to create compilations of the “best” art by trans people, to define what a trans story is and to omit the rest. Endless projects to curate, list, own, publish, control, but so few to offer support and mentorship.

The stories that reflect poorly on alt culture are buried in favor of utopianism that everyone aspires toward but where few live. People feed desperately on this aspiration, creating the ever more elaborate hollow structures of brittle chitin that comprise feminist/queer culture.

To find the things I wanted in queerness, I had to find those who had been exiled from it, those who the name had been torn from.

COMPLAINT AND PURITY

there is nothing “wrong” with a politics of
complaint
but there are several risks
like developing a dependent relationship with
“the
enemy”
politically neutralizing oneself by dumping all
of one’s subversive energies into meaningless
channels
or reifying one’s powerlessness by identifying
with it
because it makes one virtuous
complaint becomes a form of subcultural
capital
a way to morally purify oneself
—Jackie Wang, *the tumblrization of everyday life*

Popular feminism encodes pain into its regular complaint/click cycle, keeping everyone on the rim of emotional survival. Constant attack, constant strength, constant purity.

Lacking true community, the energy spent is not restored. Those with more stability in their life can keep up the cycle of complaint, and those with lower amounts of energy are filtered out, creating culture that glorifies a “strength” not everyone can access.

There is immense pressure on trans people to engage in this form of complaint if they want access to spaces—but we, with our higher rates of homelessness, joblessness, lifelessness, lovelessness, are the most fragile. We are the glass fems of an already delicate genderscape.

Purification is meaningless because anyone can perform these rituals—an effigy burnt in digital. And their inflexibility provides a place where abuse can thrive—a set of rules which abusers can hold over their victims.

Deleuze wrote, “The problem is no longer getting people to express themselves, but providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don’t stop people from expressing themselves, but rather, force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, or ever rarer, the thing that might be worth saying.”



ENDING

People talk about feminism and queerness the way you’d apologize for an abusive relationship.

This isn’t for the people who are benefiting from these spaces and have no reason to change. This is for the people who were exiled, the people essays aren’t supposed to be written for. This is to say, you didn’t deserve that. That even tens or hundreds or thousands of people can be wrong, and they often are, no matter how much our socially constructed brains take that as a message to lie down and die. That nothing is too bad, too ridiculous, too bizarre to be real when it comes to making marginalized people disappear.

Ideology is a sick fetish.

RESISTING DISPOSABILITY

— Let marginalized people be flawed. Let them fuck up like the Real Humans who get to fuck up all the time.

— Fight criminal-justice thinking. Disposability runs on the innocence/guilt binary, another category that applies dynamically to

certain bodies and not others. The mob trials used to run trans people out of communities are inherently abusive, favor predators, and must be rejected as a process unequivocally. There is no kind of justice that resembles hundreds of people ganging up on one person, or tangible lifelong damage being inflicted on someone for failing the rituals of purification that have no connection to real life.

— Pay attention when people disappear. Like drowning, it's frequently silent. They might be blackmailed, threatened, and/or in shock.

— Even if the victim doesn't want to fight (which is deeply understandable—often moving on is the only response), private support is huge. This is the time to make sure the wound doesn't become infected, that the PTSD they acquire is as minimized as possible. This is the difference between a broken leg healing to the point where they can run again, or walking with a limp for the rest of their life. They've just been victim-blamed by a huge number of people, and as a social organism, their body is telling them to die. They need social reintegration, messages of support, and space to heal.

— Be extremely critical about what people say about trans people, especially things said in vagueness. The rumor mill that keeps trans people out of spaces isn't even so much about people believing what is said, it's about people choosing the safest option—a staining that plays on the average person's risk aversion.

— Ask yourself if the same thing would be happening if they were white/cis/able-bodied.

— “Radical inclusivity recognizes harm done in the name of God.” — Yvette Flunder

Marginalized spaces can't form healthy community purely from rejection of the mainstream. There has to be an acknowledgment of how people have been hurt by feminist spaces and their models.

— A common enemy isn't the same as loving each other.

— Don't be part of spaces that place an ideal or "community leader" above people.

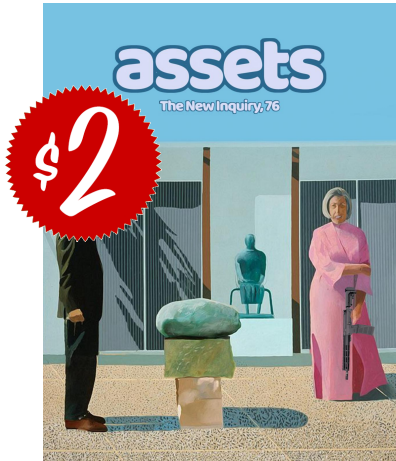
DREAM

On January 18, 2015, I woke up from a dream. It was early morning, still dark. I felt very sad that the dream wasn't real. I wrote it down, like I've written down all my dreams for the last eight years.

"She was my abuser. She came to my house on the island. I begged her to stop what she had done, to clear my name. She would not. It had been two years of being abused like a child because of her. I turned to walk deeper into the house. I looked back. She had a knife. She stabbed me. It was the happiest dream of my life. Because finally an abuser had done something to me that people would pay attention to. When I woke up my entire spirit was crushed because I had not been stabbed. I felt the weight of all these years of abuse. I wished so badly I had been stabbed.

I pulled the knife out. I wrestled the knife away. I called my friend to come over and help me.

I walked along the beach of the island and saw for the first time how PTSD had numbed and corroded every perception I'd had since that August, this debilitating disease. I finally felt the brightness of the air in my lungs, the color of the sand and the waves. It was so beautiful. I just wanted to experience all the things that had been stolen from me."



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