

HARD WIRE

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Hardwire is the undergraduate journal of Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. Our journal provides an academic platform for issues of sexuality and gender. It aims to promote Sexual Diversity Studies and showcase scholarly and creative work by students critically analyzing sexuality at the undergraduate level.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Editors	06
The Consumption Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	08
Rupert Raj’s Written Acts of Activism and Care Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Mia Jakobsen (she/her) Book & Media Studies, Sexual Diversity Studies, and Digital Humanities	09
Jay Baesun Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	14
An Opportunity for Intellectual and Bodily Autonomy: Female Homosexuality in the Abbasid Empire Milena Pappalardo Major in Political Science, with Minors in Sexual Diversity Studies and Material Culture & Semiotics	15
Catboy Crisis Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	18
Attributing a Product of the Queer Underground to the Category of Second Cinema: The Seductive Influence of Barbara Rubin’s Christmas on Earth Zarina Tajimuratova (she/her) Double Major in French Language and Cinema Studies	19
Jake the Foxy Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	23
“Don’t Look Back”: Failed Potential in Sekai-kei Love Stories Janice Hu (any pronouns) Major in History, with Minors in Sexual Diversity Studies and East Asian Studies	24
Tentacle Fun Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	29
The Pursuit of Homosexual Desire Despite All Opposition in Look Down in Mercy Nghì Nguyen (he/him) Specialist in English	30

Femboy Bun	34
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Gender as a Site of Regulation for Racism and Colonialism: Applying Theories of Orientalism to Transgender History	35
Rowan Reddy (they/them) Double Major in Sexual Diversity Studies and English	
Sixt Cosplayer	40
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Consent in Alternative Desires: Kittay's "Gift" Model and Asexuality	41
Rahul KP (he/him) Specialist in Physics	
Boy and his Toys	44
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Rhapsody in Blue	45
Samantha de Verteuil (she/her) Double Major in Ethics, Society, & Law and European Affairs	
Ayden	49
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Sexworld and Sloppy Spill: The Pleasures of Erotic Oppression in Pornography	49
Evyn Armstrong (they/them) Double Major in Cinema Studies and Art History, with Minor in Anthropology	
Human Beings	54
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Johanna Sissy	56
Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) Alumnus in Sexual Diversity Studies	
Cover Art Statement	57
Saysah (they/them)	

Letter from the Editors

It is with heavy hearts that we pen this letter for Issue 7 of *Hardwire*. It seems that every day the world darkens with some new tragedy. What have we to say from our comfortable rooms while others fight for their lives in Palestine, in the Congo, in Ukraine, on Indigenous reservations, in refugee camps, or on island nations threatened by the steady rise of sea water? As members of an institution complicit in genocide, we wish to say what the University of Toronto will not. We stand behind the people of Palestine wholly and unequivocally. We call on the University to make their investments public; to move or withdraw all monetary holdings in connection with or support of Israel; to side with what is right, rather than what is easy. We call also on you, readers of this journal, to boycott businesses that support the genocide, and to seek out and uplift Palestinian voices.

In the face of so much suffering and violence, we turn towards the words of our elders. Audre Lorde reminds us that we must learn to respect and cherish our deepest feelings, desires, terrors, and dreams, for they are the “hidden sources of power from which true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes” (Lorde, 42). With this in mind, we offer you Issue 7 of *Hardwire*. These works of labour and love from undergraduate artists, scholars, and poets gesture towards “the farthest horizons of our hopes and fears” (Lorde, 43). We hope that in these pages you may find something that nourishes you, something that compels you to think and act differently—even if that difference is small—that opens you up to humble curiosity and deep feeling.

As Angela Davis reminds us, “Just

as the struggle to end South African apartheid was embraced by people all over the world and was incorporated into many social justice agendas, solidarity with Palestine must likewise be taken up... all over the world” (Davis, 23). The fight for Black lives is the same fight for Palestinian lives is the same fight for trans lives is the same fight for all. None of us are free until all of us stand together beneath the light of love, peace, and safety.

Issue 7 opens with two historical studies of queerness. Delving into *The ArQuives*, Mia Jakobsen articulates the work of Rupert Raj, a Toronto-based trans activist and community organizer, as forms of queer care. Jakobson demonstrates the enduring impetus for trans community and trans joy, and invites us to honour those who have come before us. Then, taking us to the 10th and 11th centuries, Milena Pappalardo analyses the significance of female homosexuality in the Abbasid Empire, emphasizing the ways in which women negotiated sexuality and partnership in relation to their autonomy and desires.

Moving from historical approaches to analyses of queerness in media, authors Zarina Tajimuratova, Janice Hu, and Nghi Nguyen consider the stories we tell about queer lives and loves. Revisiting Barbara Rubin’s 1963 film *Christmas on Earth*, Zarina Tajimuratova calls for a reconsideration of the film’s place within cinema while underscoring the significance of both queer underground filmmaking and Barbara Rubin’s impact as an auteurial figure. Janice Hu’s essay looks at love stories in *sekai-kei* media and investigates queerness as revolutionary potential within the genre’s apocalyptic landscapes. Finally,

Nghi Nguyen brings us to the realm of literature with an appraisal of queer representation in Water Baxter's novel *Look Down in Mercy*.

Honing in on the structural and theoretical, Rowan Reddy, Rahul Prabha, and Samantha de Verteuil attend to the systems and technologies of power that work on our bodies, subjectivities, and ways of relating. Rowan Reddy builds on the work of Edward Said and Jules Gill-Peterson to examine how certain bodies—here, that of a Black, transgender individual—become sites at which processes of racialization and colonialism play out. Rahul Prabha engages the philosophies of Emmanuel Kant and Eva Kittay to advocate an expanded conceptualization of consent, one which takes into account different sexual orientations, such as asexuality. Samantha de Verteuil, through poetry, contemplates masculinity and the ways in which male socialization impacts lived relationships.

Finally, Issue 7 turns to pleasure. Evyn Armstrong explores the complex relationship between humiliation, pleasure, and identity in their piece on gay hazing pornography and race play. In an evocative poem about the politics of kink, Jasper Bryan explores the tangled complexities of pleasure, power, identity, and humanness. Bryan also offers us a series of erotic watercolour illustrations. These colourful expressions of pleasure and sensation link together the pieces of Issue 7; we have interspersed them throughout the journal to gesture towards a vibrancy and vitality that exists despite violence and tragedy, and which persists to surprise us, nourish us, and inform the actions we take to reimagine and

remake our worlds. The covers of this volume feature collages created by Saysah. Their artwork encloses our volume in a fluid and intimate meditation on Black queer love.

We hope that the amazing work by these authors and artists will bring some light to the darkness of recent days. Thank you to our contributors for sharing their work with us, for their trust and collaboration. Thank you to our volunteer editorial team, whose enduring care and effort have made this publication possible. And of course, thank you to the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies for their unfailing support.

This collective labour is but one small part of the larger fight for liberation, equity, and peace. Amidst ongoing crises and overarching globalized structures of inequity and exploitation, life is differentially unlivable for all of us. With what resources and privileges we have, let us fight for those made most vulnerable to harm.

From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

Saige Severin and Carrie Liu
Editors-in-Chief of *Hardwire*:
The Undergraduate Journal of
Sexual Diversity Studies

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Bryan



The Consumption

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Image Description: A watercolour illustration of a light-complexioned person looking at the viewer from below. Lying amidst a background of blue and teal hues, the person wears only two wristbands, and their hand grasps their groin.

Rupert Raj's Written Acts of Activism and Care Throughout the 1980s and 1990s

Mia Jakobsen (she/they) studies Book and Media Studies, Sexual Diversity Studies, and Digital Humanities, with dreams of becoming a librarian and archivist in the future.

Introduction

In researching acts of activism and care in queer and trans of colour Canadian history for the “60 Years of QTBIPOC Activism and Care” project led by Tara Goldstein and Jenny Salisbury, I examined the personal letters and writing of Rupert Raj. Rupert Raj is a pansexual transgender man of East Indian and Polish descent. His work throughout Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s was indispensable to the trans community; as a psychotherapist, he provided transgender people, their significant others, and the Canadian medical and health communities with research, education, and counselling. Raj founded several trans organisations in Canada, including: the Foundation for the Advancement of Canadian Transsexuals (FACT), the Metamorphosis Medical Research Foundation (MMRF) — which operated from December 1981 to May 1988 — and the Gender Worker (renamed to Gender Consultants in 1989), which ran from 1987 to 1990. Moreover, in June 1999, he co-founded a peer support group at the 519 Community Centre in Toronto for transgender men and women.

Rupert Raj used writing to support his fellow trans friends by disseminating valuable information through three established trans publications. The first, *Gender Review: the FACTual Journal*, ran from 1978 to 1981 in Calgary and Toronto. His subsequent journal, *Metamorphosis*, ran from 1982 to 1988 in Toronto. It was a bi-monthly newsletter for transgender men that promised information

regarding clinical research, hormones, surgery, tips to effectively pass as male in public, and legal reform for trans people. The third, *Gender NetWorker*, published only two issues in Toronto in 1988, directing trans individuals to helpful professionals and resource providers.

Raj aimed to facilitate a communication network between professional and lay providers to bring trans people and the health professionals who worked with trans populations together (The ArQuives, n.d.-b). He provided critical support to and for other trans men through his work, essentially serving as an information broker between the medical/psychological community and trans individuals and their loved ones. Rupert Raj's work was all done with the understanding of the power of media; he shared vital medical information through accessible newsletters and letters, sought to uplift and share trans autobiographies and writing, campaigned for politicians and media publications to remove harmful statements and replace them with informative, positive, and correct messaging, and partnered with other trans media creators. Through his abundant and active correspondence, Rupert Raj developed caring and personal friendships, emphasising how his advocacy was done through a method of care that, in turn, fostered a community among trans Canadians. My research at *The ArQuives* worked to answer my guiding research question: How did Rupert Raj show activism and care to other trans people through his writing?

My Relationship to Raj's Work

I was drawn to Rupert Raj's work because of his extensive writings and publications. Books have always been a significant part of my life and I have always connected to writing because I appreciate its power as an influence, pleasure, and succour for one's life. Raj's work is inspirational, and I was astonished that his comprehensive works are not more well-known or publicised in queer Canadian history. The community he fostered through his work is a testament to the power of prose, and I wanted to explore how it may have impacted other trans people who were readers of his work. Rupert Raj's writing built a space for trans people of colour during a time when there were few places for them in heterosexual and even queer society. He noticed that there were no publications for trans individuals, so he created easily accessible methods in which he could share vital information regarding research and support that would have otherwise been difficult to acquire. I additionally did not know much about trans history in Canada and wanted to employ the research group's aim of decolonial scholarship. In her guest lecture at New College, University of Toronto, in September 2022, Raegan Swanson discussed archival silences — what is (not) presented to the world and what has (not) been documented? — which I feel applies to Raj's work. As previously referenced, Rupert Raj's credits are quite extensive, yet I knew nothing about him before seeking out his work. Elspeth Brown (2020) states in her paper that an "ongoing commitment to anti-racism and trans inclusivity within the historically gay and/or lesbian community archive is necessary" (p. 10), and through researching Raj, I have begun implementing such practices of equity into my *modus operandi*.

My Findings

The Rupert Raj fonds at *The ArQuives* is sizable, so my research focused on his letters and writing in the 1980s and 90s. The letters were part of a three-box series titled "Correspondence and Admin-

istration, 1972-2001." Most letters written by Raj were to doctors and clinics, inquiring after medical knowledge. He then shared their responses with fellow activists, friends, and people who wrote to him requesting information. Under his organisation Gender Consultants in 1990, Rupert Raj reached out to various doctors. He sought information regarding vaginoplasty from doctors across Europe, the United States, Singapore, and Brazil, and requested information regarding mastectomies from doctors across the U.S. In a letter to a doctor in Switzerland, Raj (1987b) requested information on eleven different procedures including: mastectomy (surgery to remove a breast), mammoplasty (surgery to increase breast size), phalloplasty (surgery to construct or reconstruct a penis), thyroid cartilage shave (removes thyroid cartilage, or Adam's apple, from the front of the larynx), and vocal cord surgery (to raise or lower voice pitch). Rupert Raj asked for "detailed information on chemical hair restoration and surgical hair replacement procedures available for transsexual patients" from a doctor in Toronto (Raj-Gauthier, 1990b). Similarly, Raj asked a doctor in New York for details on six "various cosmetic surgical procedures [he performed] on transsexual patients" (Raj-Gauthier, 1990c). The surgeries Rupert Raj requested information on are often critical for gender affirmation. The prevailing view in the 1980s was that hormones and surgery were needed to "align trans people's bodies with their gender identity" (The ArQuives, n.d.-a). Modern attitudes do not solely emphasise surgery as what makes a person trans, but gender-affirming surgery often relieves gender dysphoria and improves trans lives. The detailed information Rupert Raj requested included procedure success rates, patient satisfaction, procedure and miscellaneous costs, and available medical insurance coverage. This information was not commonly available in Canada; while trans individuals could rely on local community experience, Raj's much sought-after work removed barriers such as uneasiness, complicated jargon, and

inaccessible knowledge.

Alongside his requests for information, Raj invited doctors from Switzerland and Belgium to serve on his Board of Professional Consultants (Raj, 1987a). When he wrote to them in 1987, he stated that there were 25 specialists in the field in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., France, Brazil, Singapore, and India. Board members were required to submit any information or materials they had relating to transsexualism and gender dysphoria, as well as share the work of the Board with colleagues and other transgender contacts. Raj additionally sent letters regarding a support group for trans individuals to organisations and people throughout Canada and the United States. His activism advanced trans community goals by establishing a global association specifically for trans scholars: allowing for more collaboration within a small but incredibly impactful field.

After gaining information from his numerous letters to doctors and psychologists, Raj shared it with the multitude of trans people who requested it. In one letter, he enclosed “the list of phalloplastic surgeons as well as the list of F-M TS support groups, newsletters editors, and resource workers,” as well as “professional papers and letters written by surgeons on the phalloplastic procedure” (Raj-Gauthier, 1989). By providing details about and risks of important medical procedures, Rupert Raj ensured that trans individuals felt knowledgeable and reassured about procedures they would undertake. Moreover, he provided the names of doctors who had excellent reputations, allowing trans patients to know that they would be safe and cared for by whoever did their procedure. For instance, in a letter to an individual in Toronto, Raj provided the names, addresses, and phone numbers of three family physicians who were known to treat transgender patients (Raj-Gauthier, 1990d). Similarly, he shared a list with a trans man of eight surgeons in Ontario, Quebec, and New York who performed mastectomies (Raj-Gauthier, 1990e). Raj uplifted other trans voices in his writings

by sharing as many trans-related works as he could. He wrote to various individuals listing six to eight trans autobiographies; in a letter to a fellow trans man, Raj (1990a) remarked that “perhaps, after such a long literary void, the market will be flooded by F-M bios!” Raj’s newsletters provided a space for trans individuals to not only learn information about critical surgeries but to connect with other individuals through writing about and sharing books that would otherwise be unknown. Rupert Raj’s activism reached beyond Canada; by acquiring knowledge from across the globe, he gained a stronger understanding of the literature on transgender health and surgical practices. Having a well-rounded understanding meant that the people who subscribed to his publications also gained the same well-rounded understanding of themselves or their loved ones.

In 1988, he asked a doctor in New York if he could make an appearance on air to help the public “understand the distinctions among transsexuals, transgenderists and transvestites,” and to learn to accept them as “human beings who are simply trying to express their opposite gender [...] or are desperately trying to resolve their gender conflict” (Raj, 1988a). In June 1988, he wrote a letter to the *New York Post* editor regarding their lack of research on cross-dressing, stating that the newspaper “mis-led and confused [their] readership by suggesting that crossdressing is a homosexual phenomenon” (Raj, 1988b). He called out a moral responsibility for journalists to promote accurate information, then went on to correct the *Post* and explain that dressing up in clothing of the opposite gender is merely a form of gender expression and a harmless psychological condition which can enrich a marriage or relationship. Raj concluded by stating that misrepresentation, sensationalism, and stigmatisation — perpetrated by fear and ignorance — are not the answer. Comprehensive research, objective reporting, and responsible journalism are instead the solutions (Raj, 1988b). He wrote a similar letter to Governor Mario Matthew Cuomo the same

day (Raj, 1988c). By holding the *New York Post* and politicians accountable and sharing his understanding of transgender life, Raj showed care and advocacy for those in his community. Rupert Raj understood the power of media, as his vast writings throughout the 1980s and 90s demonstrate. Publisher Victoria Burton concurred with this point when she reached out to Raj in 1988 regarding trading publications between Raj's *Gender NetWorker* and her own, the *TV/TS Talk*. Burton praised Raj's work in imparting educational material; Within her letter, she affirmed that "one of the best ways to reach all of the TV's and TS's out there who are not involved either with a group, or don't know where to find counselling help, is through this type of medium" (Burton, 1988). Rupert Raj's connection with Burton underscores how his work strengthened trans activism and care networks, as these educational channels could learn from each other and impart more information to their respective readers. Rupert Raj's letters sharing trans support groups, surgeons who operated trans surgeries, and trans knowledge in general highlight his method of advocating and caring for the trans community.

Personal Friendships

Of course, Raj's letters were not all serious, as Raj had close friendships with many other trans people. He exchanged letters with various people throughout the 1980s and 90s. Although the archive folders do not hold the letters that Raj sent, it is clear from reading the letters he received that he and his friends were dear to each other. A particular series of letters encapsulates the impact of Raj's activism and care towards trans people — the letters to Rupert Raj from David Liebman in 1984, and the subsequent letters Raj received in 1985 from Liebman's family and friends after his death.

Throughout 1984, Liebman wrote Raj six letters. Although the letters were often him updating Raj about his life, Liebman's letters indicate that he had the desire to make more trans and gay friends. He mentioned wanting to be added to

a trans newsletter in Florida, stating: "it would be nice to have a friend like myself in the same state as I am" (Liebman, 1984). Later that year, Liebman wrote Raj, thanking him after a fellow trans man in Florida whom he was planning to meet up with mentioned learning about him through Raj. Moreover, Liebman ordinarily signed off his letters with "your brother," an indication of their cherished friendship (1984). In January 1985, both Liebman's sister and mother wrote to Raj to tell him of his suicide. His sister said she was grateful for his help, while his mother thanked him for reaching out to David, and that Raj's friendship meant a great deal to him (Liebman, 1985). Three of Raj's friends additionally reached out to him to mourn Liebman; a friend talked of David's depression from having "not been born perfect," and revealed that he was only eighteen years old (Liebman, 1985). The letters from and surrounding David Liebman exemplify the importance of care and community amongst trans individuals, in turn revealing how Raj's work impacted Liebman's life.

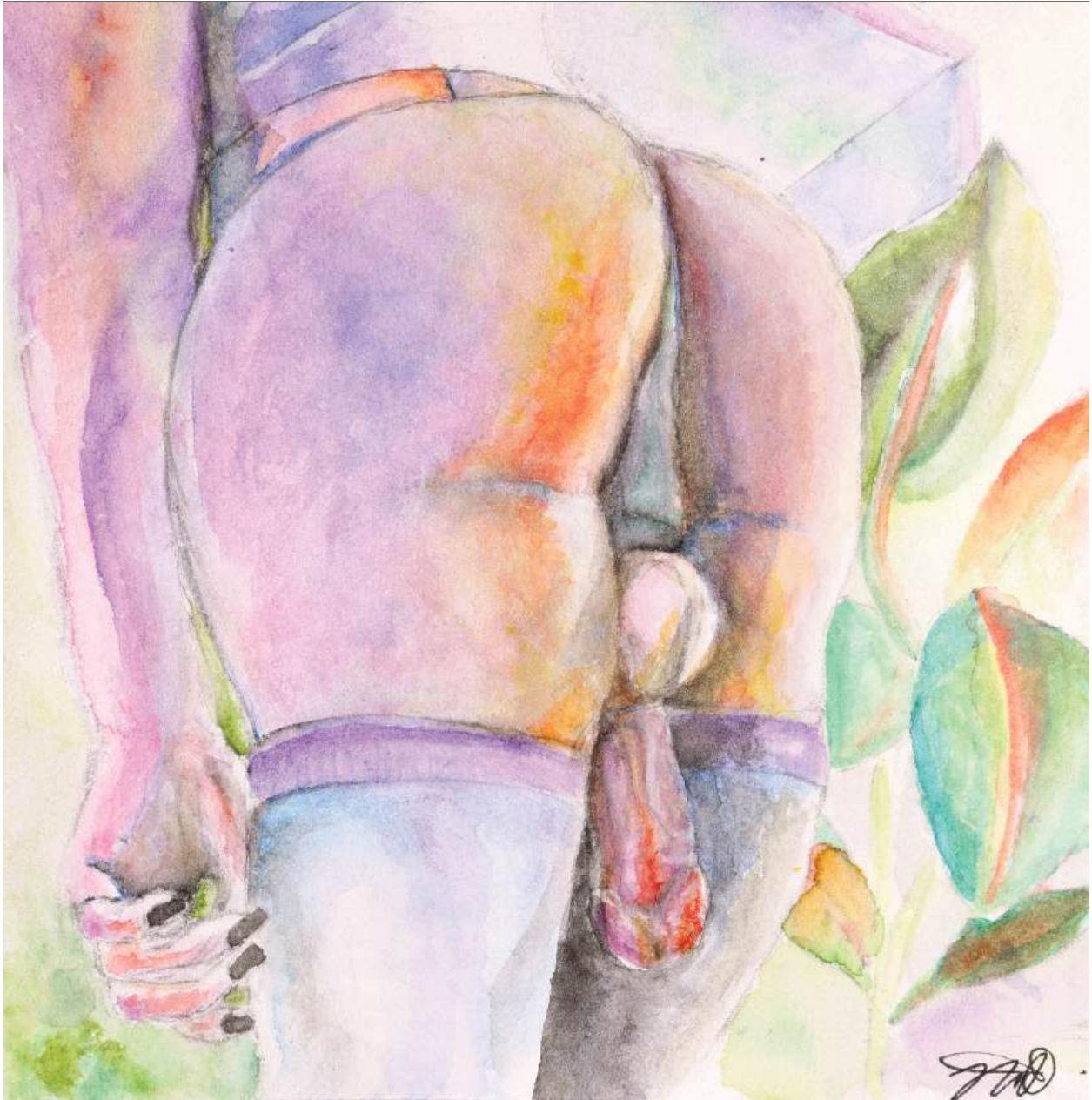
Conclusion

The answer to my research question — "How did Raj show activism and care to other trans people through his writing?" — is thus that Rupert Raj's written publications and letters from the 1980s to 1990s were his method of advocating for the trans community in Canada. Through seeking out trans information around the world, creating a board of trans scholars, then sharing what he learned through his organisations and newsletters, he disseminated essential knowledge which allowed trans individuals to feel more confident and safe. As best illustrated by David Liebman's letters, Raj's activism nurtured a community that was otherwise ostracised by society. As Raegan Swanson emphasised in her lecture, care and relationship building takes time (2022). Rupert Raj took the time to establish practices of care in his activism, which thus cultivated intimacy and kinship between himself and his readers. For that, Raj and his work are tremendously significant to trans Canadian history.

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Bryan



Jay Baesun I

Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) is an SDS alumnus, expressive arts therapist, facilitator, multimodal artist, children's book author and glitter enthusiast. You can find out more about Jasper on his website, www.queerarttherapy.com, or instagram @queerarttherapy.

Image Description: A person with black-painted long nails wears thigh-high socks and faces away from the viewer, revealing their thong and genitalia. Among shades of violet, blue, and pink, a leafy plant of green and orange adorns the background.

An Opportunity for Intellectual and Bodily Autonomy: Female Homosexuality in the Abbasid Empire

Milena Pappalardo is a Political Science major, minoring in SDS and Material Culture and Semiotics.

Abstract *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, written in the 10th century Abbasid empire by Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib is perhaps the first extant account of female homosexuality in the Middle East. This essay analyzes the purported first-hand accounts, debates, testimonies and poetry by *sahaqqat* (women who practiced sex with women) included in the *Encyclopedia* to gain a better picture of women's roles in Abbasid society. I argue that the perspectives of these *sahaqqat* demonstrate how female homosexuality was a way for Baghdadi women to circumvent the social and bodily limitations of heterosexual marriage. Fear of illegitimate pregnancy, shame, and the desire for intellectual freedom were all factors that informed these women's decisions to look to other women for sexual pleasure and intimacy.

Accounts of female homosexuality from the 10th and 11th century Abbasid empire indicate that the practice of lesbianism was not uncommon, and that its causes and validity were openly debated in the spirit of *jadaliyya* (dialectic debate). Although many writers of the era theorized that lesbianism was due to physical deficiencies, participants in the lesbian subculture were motivated by complex reasons. Pregnancy, shame, bodily and intellectual autonomy, and lust all contributed to the fascinating politics of female homosexuality in the medieval Middle East. The practice of lesbianism was an especially favourable option for ladies who grappled with their desire for bodily and intellectual autonomy and sexual pleasure, but could seldom find both before heterosexual marriage.

The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, a 10th-century erotic anthology by Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib, contains the first ever "substantial" treatment of lesbianism and *sahq* (tribadism) in Arabic (Myrne, 2017, 196). Chapter 10, titled "On Lesbianism," includes medical, sociological, anecdotal and poetic accounts of *sahhaqqat* (lesbians or those who practice tribadism). Although scholars are unsure whether the encyclopedia's testimonies are fictionalized or not, it deviates from its precedent in the Abbasid

satirical genre. Before Al-Katib, some satirical fictional debates between lesbians and sodomites had been published, where the pleasure provided by different genitals are discussed lewdly and humorously (Myrne, 2017, 195). Al-Katib's text, however, takes into account a more comprehensive variety of social factors into the discussion he presents. The poems or quotations included in *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* also appear more serious in tone, thus could be "sober and grounded in real experience (Myrne, 2017, 196). Regardless, its mere inclusion proves insightful to the perceived dynamics and motivations of lesbians in the 10th century Abbasid empire.

Al-Katib opens by positing that women practiced lesbianism, or more specifically *sahq*, due to an incompatibility of the penis with their wombs. Women with deeper wombs can only be satisfied by very large members, and thus they turn to *sahq* for sexual pleasure (Al-Katib, X/1988, 188). Al-Katib then contrasts physicians' different theories about the origin of lesbianism, ranging from "an itch between the major and minor labia" to the lesbian's mother having eaten celery and bitter leaves while nursing (189). Katib, however, also offers more nuanced 'accounts' of female homosexuality by prominent ladies in the lesbian

community, other unnamed lesbians, and married women.

While the opening examples establish female homosexuality as a result of physical dysfunction, subsequent accounts from lesbians themselves paint a more nuanced picture. Rather than framing *sahq* as a dysfunction, many female homosexuals of the era describe it as more of a strategic decision to delay or entirely avoid the confines of heterosexual relationships.

Unlike men, women who sought pleasure before marriage risked the lifelong repercussions of an illegitimate pregnancy. Despite the more permissive culture that allowed overtly sexual books like the *Encyclopedia* to be published, penetration outside marriage would still result in social ostracization. Instead, women describe pleasures of *sahq* as a favorable alternative to the disgrace of penetration and pregnancy for unmarried women (Al-Katib, circa 986 CE/1988, 190-1). One “unmarried woman” is reported saying she “rejected fornication, which is disgraceful to a respectable woman. How disgraceful it is to say ‘She is pregnant.’ Nay, I cannot put up with bastards” (ibid). Given the unmarried woman’s lesbian arose from Abbasid cultural notions of female purity, dignity and shame, it would be inaccurate to call her lesbianism a ‘choice.’ It was, however, framed by her as a strategic decision to circumvent the limitations of her day.

The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* endorses male control of female sexuality through the double standards it presents. In the chapter “On Heterosexuality,” al-Katib argues that a woman sleeping around would cause confusion about the inheritance and lineage of her offspring, while a man doing the same would be unproblematic. Therefore, men can take many sexual partners and women cannot (Al-Katib, 132). He goes on to say that women cannot marry their slave boys the same way a man can marry his slave girl, and quotes the following saying: “For women marriage is a sort of slavery. Therefore, choose the right master for your daughter” (133).

Despite the oppressive nature of marriage for women, al-Katib remarks that lesbian women will eventually choose to enter heterosexual marriages. One anecdot-

al conversation reported in the *Encyclopedia* between a lesbian and a married woman encapsulates the lesbian discourse al-Katib presents. The lesbian says:

You have given your heart to men
Although women are more sincere and
worthy of love
Don’t you know that by lesbian inter-
course
We do not suffer from childbirth and
scream as you do?

...

Nay, unlike sheep, we do not suckle
babies
And do not experience the difficulty of
bringing children up.

...

If, on the other hand, we stay from home
longer than usual when we go for a walk,
We needn’t have fear of being blamed
Thus, we enjoy happiness for which we
were created
Whereas you are miserable and humiliat-
ed. (132)

And the married woman replies:

How silly you are! What good is a ring
If a strong man’s finger does not go
through it?
Can a millstone turn
Without an erect, fixed pole?

...

You are like a hungry person who rubs a
mouthful with his lips,
Whilst his stomach is tortured by hunger.

...

Avoid false ways and go back to the
right path, sister!
You will find no better advisor than I.

...

When I reached an orgasm,
I went out of my mind.
If I told you other things that [my hus-
band] did
You would reach an orgasm right away.
(193-194)

Excited at the married woman’s accounts of sexual satisfaction with her new husband, the lesbian replies saying she will repent her ignorant lesbian ways. In her analysis of the poem, Pernilla Myrne says that their dialogi-

cal interaction is consistent with the portrayal of women during the period as guided by sexual passion. The married woman eventually wins the argument not through her witty analogies, but through her description of the penetrative sexual act. The lesbian's final response before renouncing *sahq* is, "I am so madly longing for that which you described that I do not fear becoming a disgrace for my family" (Myrne, 2019). "At the end of the day," says Myrne, "the lesbian is a woman, and as a woman, her lust is stronger than reason" (Myrne, 2019). I would argue, however, that the two women in conversation are engaged in a lively and existential debate: do the carnal pleasures of heterosexuality outweigh the bodily and intellectual freedoms of homosexuality? It was not only a question of the clitoris versus the penis, but of agency.

In his text "The reason for some womens' preference for grinding," 11th-century Egyptian erotic writer al-Maghribi describes a certain type of lesbian possessing manly qualities. She exists in high concentrations among female scholars, writers and Quranic readers — also known as "witty women" (Al-Maghribi, (d. 1180)/2009, 87). According to al-Maghribi, these women are drawn to lesbianism "due to the intensity of restriction imposed on them, where they are unable to be alone safely and privately except with other women" (Al-Maghribi, (d. 1180)/2009, 87). Although the text concerns perhaps a different type of lesbian than the ones addressed in the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, all those who engage in lesbianism are united in their relative freedom from patriarchal control. To the lesbian in the *Encyclopedia* passage above, breastfeeding

is for sheep, a simile which implies that in pregnancy, a woman becomes obedient, and herded like a farm animal, tied to her child and forced to suckle. For the lesbian al-Maghribi describes, the responsibilities of motherhood and married life would detract from her scholarly work and place her under her husband's control — the "restriction" he describes.

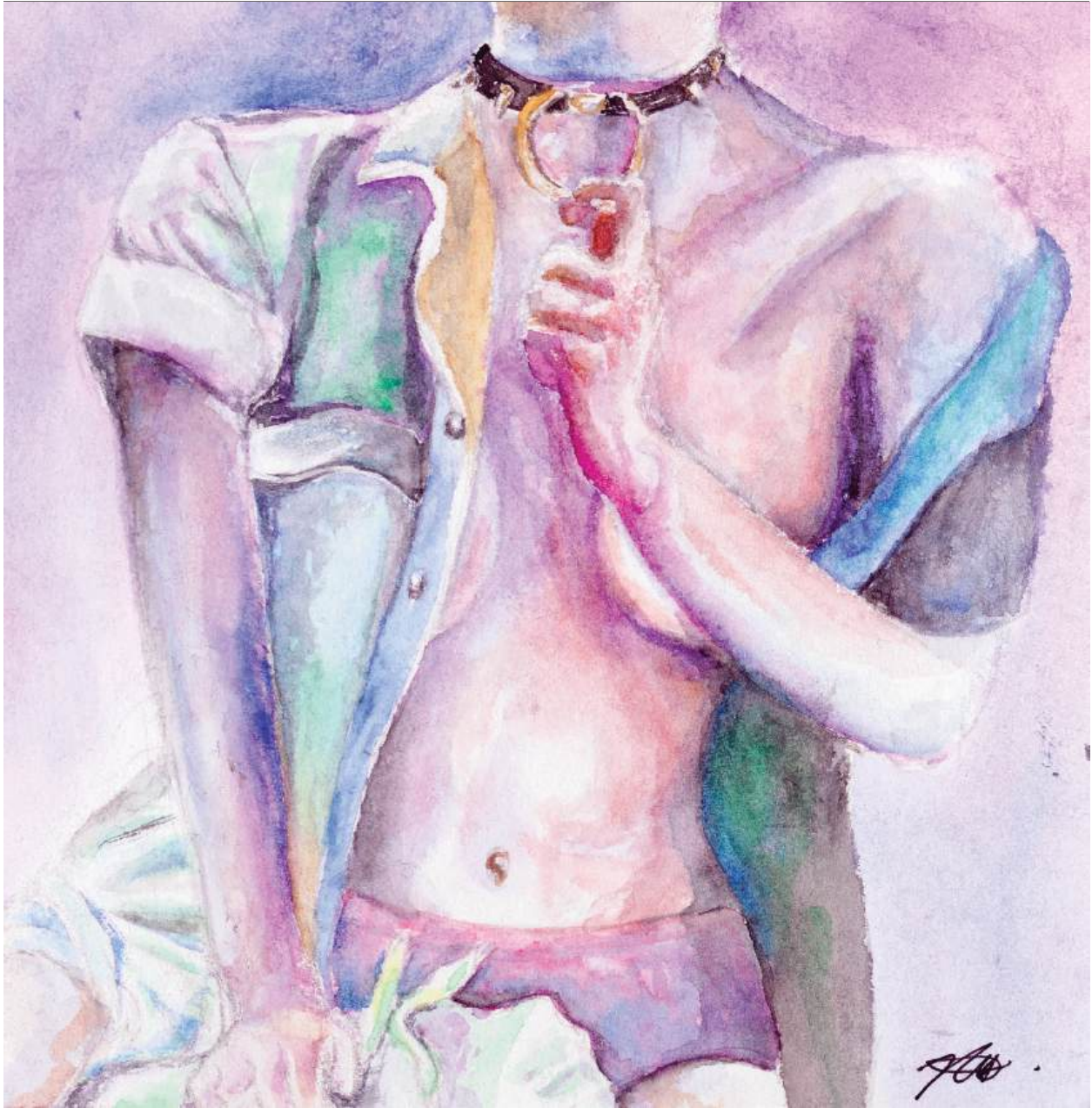
These accounts brazenly show the restrictive nature of a union between the "millstone" and the "pole"; the "ring" and the "finger." For Abbasid women, sex with a man outside of marriage would lead to shame and scorn, while sex within marriage could be akin to slavery. Whether genuinely sexually attracted to the same sex or not, lesbian "witty women" may have elected to lead a life of intellectual pursuit rather than be confined to a controlling heterosexual relationship. The Abbasid lesbian's fears, which in one instance she expresses through her correspondence with a married woman, is a perennial fear that resonates even with me, a young woman in 21st century Canada — will the difficulties of childbirth and motherhood jeopardize my personal and intellectual freedom?

Lesbianism in the Abbasid period was not only about sex, but also freedom from the baggage of heterosexual sex: shame, marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood. Even if some female homosexuals went on to marry men, *sahq* was more than a sexual indulgence; it was an opportunity for women to express their desires and aspirations with an agency that heterosexual unions would not allow. As long as patriarchy exists, female homosexuality is a form of social defiance.

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Bryan



Catboy Crisis

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Image Description: A person in an unbuttoned shirt, underwear, and a spiked choker faces the viewer. Their fingers clutch the center ring of the choker, and their head is out of frame. This watercolour highlights the curvature of the person's clothing and body in shades of teal, deep purple and blue.

Attributing a Product of the Queer Underground to the Category of Second Cinema: The Seductive Influence of Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*

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"For *Christmas on Earth* is not only the quintessence of the 'expanded cinema' practice of the 1960s, but a record of a particular moment in the postwar period when people of various kinds began to explore alternative sexualities in historically unprecedented public venues" (Osterweil, 23). Barbara Rubin's film *Christmas on Earth* (1963) is one of the most influential films to emerge from the queer underground scene of the early 1960s. This experimental film uses the form of the human body and overwrites it with paint to create a sexually liberating and polymorphous aesthetic that separates the performers from their sex-defining body parts. As a result, the film space becomes a space of disassociation, transformation, and reassemblage in a new way. Barbara Rubin's work is a product of the queer underground as it exercises topics of metamorphosis, fluidity, and liberation from the limiting and oppressive constructs of heteronormative society.

The queer underground cinema is a post-war movement that emerged in America in the early 1960s. These films were made by queer artists who used avant-garde aesthetics, combining them with sexually explicit imagery in order to "deconstruct the 'it' of sexuality by obscuring the machinations of bodies" and to create "new forms of relationality both for the people who created them and for the people who beheld them" (Osterweil,

6, 10). The flesh cinema explored in the queer underground used the avant-garde medium to present bodies and corporeal flesh "as an endlessly variable substance that could come unbound from conventional ideologies of gender, identity, or subjectivity through shattering encounters with desire, sex, pain, birth, and death" (Osterweil, 14). As a product of the queer underground, this film has not been officially attributed to any of the four main categories of film, namely the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Cinemas. The First Cinema refers to films made in America, specifically those cohering to the Hollywood model of production (Nagib, 27). The Second Cinema refers to the more experimental European art film, which favors the auteur and works to stray away from the Hollywood conventions (Barclay, 1; Nagib, 27). The Third Cinema emerged during the "new [political] movements" of the 1960-1970s period. It consists of films produced in "third world countries," and are characterized by their lower production budgets and limited market distribution (Shohat & Stam, 248, 256). Finally, the Fourth Cinema refers to films produced by Indigenous filmmakers (Barclay, 1, 11). Using this framework of film categorization, I argue that *Christmas on Earth* can be situated in the category of Second Cinema because of its aesthetic influences from the avant-garde/experimental cinema of the European art film,

the prioritization of auteurial self-expression, and the context of postwar youths' countercultural sentiments.

Christmas on Earth's visual style is greatly inspired by the avant-garde and experimental cinema of the European art film (Osterweil, 23, 52). Structurally, the film does not have a cohesive narrative and instead gives the impression of a psychedelic dream orgy (Osterweil, 23). Rubin's work is comparable to some of the largest names of Underground cinema – such as Andy Warhol and Jack Smith – whose films were considered to be “sexually transgressive work[s] of contemporaneous avant-garde”. However, despite the wide-spread public opinion, that label was never officially attributed to *Christmas on Earth* (Osterweil, 25). Rejecting Hollywood conventions (i.e. cause and effect, cohesive narrative, etc.), Rubin's work presents a visual palimpsest in which three distinct layers operate independently from one another, but combine to create a “sense of love's limitlessness” (Osterweil, 31). The layers are (1) the small black and white frame in the center, (2) the coloured gel filter across the surrounding frame, and (3) the close-up footage of genitals that spans the entirety of the screen. The first two layers are semi-transparent, which allows the audience to simultaneously see the third layer and the footage in the black square. The footage in the center is obstructed by the second layer (an obstruction which represents the mysterious, hidden, “in-between” spaces of physical transformation) (Osterweil, 32). The frame-in-a-frame square shows a multitude of images, including close-ups of a woman's black-and-white painted face showing various reactions, a kaleidoscopic orgy between several people covered in paint, references to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and picturesque tableaux. On the other hand, the footage that plays in the background shows extreme close-ups of male and female genitals in motion. These visuals depict expansion and contraction, stimulation by hand, as well as gyrations and pulsating movements. While the first (1) layer

generally shows discernable, “whole” images wherein both the subject and the action in frame are relatively easy to identify, the third (3) layer's extreme close-up images are harder to make out. These extreme close-ups sever the genitals from the person to whom they belong, giving focus to these isolated sex-defining body parts and allowing them to participate alongside the film's other leading performers. This amalgamation of layered footage and coloured filters stages, between the different layers of the film, a unique intertextual conversation about the spectatorial response to the metamorphosis of the fornicating bodies. The lack of cause-and-effect narrational construct add to the unpredictability of the on-screen images, thereby managing to keep the spectators on the edges of their seats, enjoying the pyrotechnics of the exerted “erotic force” in the visualization of boundlessly fluid transformations of gender identity and sexual liberation (Lyotard, 54). The experimental/avant-garde visual style of *Christmas on Earth* places the film in the category of the Second Cinema. This visual style is also one of the main factors of appeal for queer artists and the public, as it reflected Rubin's self-expression as an auteurial figure.

The prioritization of Barbara Rubin's auteurial self-expression is integral to the structure of *Christmas on Earth* and its reception. Being “a middle-class Jewish girl from Queens, Rubin came to the Underground film community in New York as a teenager,” making *Christmas on Earth* at only seventeen years old (Osterweil, 30). Rubin struggled with drug addiction from early childhood with her family pressuring her into taking diet pills for weight management; this later developed into an addiction to “amphetamines and other narcotics” (Osterweil, 30). While her Jewish background was not directly relevant to the content of *Christmas on Earth*, Rubin's experience with drugs were certainly reflected in the film's visual style and psychedelic dream-like spaces (Osterweil, 23, 29). *Christmas on Earth* is an exploration of Rubin's experiences and understanding

of queer identity. Embracing the ambiguity of darkness, Rubin challenges the rigid visual divisions between people and objects. She uses the actors' bodies as a canvas, erasing, altering, and obscuring large portions of their bodies, all the while emphasizing other select body parts (such as a woman's breasts and stomach area). "In *Christmas on Earth*, binary oppositions cease to obtain as the relationship between anatomical difference and prescribed sexual roles collapses in an orgy of fluid exchanges" (Osterweil, 36). Rubin's film is an artistic manifestation of what being a queer individual means to her. The film shows how predetermined shapes and bodies can be erased and replaced with newly drawn lines, overwritten to show the fluidity of gender and emphasize the performativity of the body (an allusion to the idea of the "performativity of gender roles"). The extreme closeups of male and female genitals are at once invasive and mesmerizing (Osterweil, 32). It almost feels as though Rubin sets up a stage on which the genitals are the main actors, and they perform a display of incredible human flexibility and bodily movement (Osterweil, 46). An aspect that elevates Rubin's film is the viewer's ability to have an idiosyncratic experience with the film upon every viewing. As per Rubin's request, *Christmas on Earth* is screened in conjunction with a modern radio station. This not only engages the film with other media, but also creates a unique experience with every viewing. The unique role of radio in this particular work makes the film timeless. It continuously inspires new viewers across generations, as the visuals and modern audios complement each other, and the film's meanings are enhanced by that pairing. *Christmas on Earth* is a deeply personal exploration of Rubin's history with drugs, her queer identity, and her free-spirited liberation from both societal and Hollywood conventions. These subjects define her vision as an auteur emerging from the socio-political context of the 1960s and further prove that this film belongs to the Second Cinema.

One of the most important parts of the historical context of the 1960s is the countercultural sentiment of the postwar youth. Born in 1945, Barbara Rubin was part of the crowd of teenage baby boomers vital to the counterculture movement in the 60s. At only seventeen years of age, Rubin became an artistic voice of these youth, creating discourse around *Christmas on Earth* and drawing attention to youth's countercultural sentiments, especially in the Underground scene of queer films. Emerging in the 1960s, the counterculture movement was characterized by an anti-establishment stance, student protests against war (The Vietnam war), advocacy for peace, freedom of love, and enthusiasm for drug consumption. Rubin was a figure who embodied all of these beliefs and passions of counterculture, and her work made a huge impact on queer youth (Osterweil, 45). She actively participated in rebellious acts, including an illegal screening of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* on New Year's Eve in 1963-1964, without fear of arrest and prosecution even upon the arrival of police (Osterweil, 39). "Barbara Rubin was more committed to 'showing films in the street and starting a revolution'" — she wanted her art to fuse with real life, surpassing the confines of censorship and diffusing beyond screening rooms to a maximal audience (Osterweil, 40). Rubin also joined student rallies such as the one led by Berkeley students, spontaneously cutting her hair and throwing it to the people into the crowd of Sproul Plaza "in a gesture of defiance" (Osterweil, 40). "Rubin's shock tactics used cinema as an instrument to challenge the bourgeois parameters of social etiquette as well as to expand the role of the media in the counterculture revolution" (Osterweil, 40). The images she presented were made to disturb the audience and provoke outrage while — to the admiration of countercultural communities — criticizing heteronormative constructs and social hierarchies (Osterweil, 40). Rubin's big break in the Underground cinema with *Christmas on Earth* was a defiant move in itself, as the scene was domi-

nated by “established male *auteurs*.” Her film became an inspiration to both queer youth and queer artists, and her spirit became an inspiring symbol for counter-cultural youth as a whole. They looked up to her example — she was a fearless, unapologetic, and a highly expressive young woman who rose against all odds and solidified her legacy as a rebellious icon of the Queer Underground in the 1960s. The tumultuous socio-political atmosphere of the 1960s shaped Barbara Rubin’s distinct voice as an auteur. Analyzing the socio-political context of *Christmas on Earth* in conjunction with Rubin’s role as an auteur shows her active involvement with the counterculture movement. The effects her work had on youth involved in the countercultural movement further proves that Rubin’s film belongs in the category of Second Cinema.

Christmas on Earth can be attributed to the category of Second Cinema because of its aesthetic influences from avant-garde/experimental cinema of the European art film, its prioritization of auteurial self-expression, and the context of postwar youths’ countercultural sentiments. Some features of the film that can complicate its attribution to the Second Cinema are the film’s lack of narration and cohesive plot, as well as its visual density, which can be too ambiguous for viewers to effectively understand Rubin’s themes of sexual liberation and rejecting heteronormativity. *Christmas on Earth* presents profound themes about fluid transformation, transgressing boundaries, and rejecting

both the establishment (through political radicalism) and the formal conventions of the First Cinema. The absence of any narration, dialogue, or voiceover in this film and the use of radio stations as a soundtrack can impair the conveyance of the film’s thematic ideas. Viewers may be too caught up in the visual spectacle of the surreal, dream-like orgy and miss the visual poetry hidden in the film. Another issue with categorizing this film as part of the Second Cinema is that it also displays some characteristics of the Third Cinema. *Christmas on Earth* was created in 1963 amidst the “new movements” of the 1960s-1970s, and its making involved a relatively small production cost, minimal set design, and maximal focus on performers’ bodies (Shohat & Stam, 248, 256). Despite these pitfalls and limitations, *Christmas on Earth* made a huge impact on the underground film and art scene, being commemorated alongside the works of Warhol, Smith, and Kenneth Anger. Rubin’s ability to capture the aesthetic beauty of bodies’ metamorphosis, the flexibility of gender, and liberation from the heteronormative paradigm attracted queer and countercultural youth to *Christmas on Earth*. Rubin’s political sentiments regarding queer identity and her frequent involvement in countercultural activism imprinted on her work, and as a result, she became highly influential and inspirational to the queer youth who resonated with her film and politics, and who found joy and solace in her work during a time of significant political tension.

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Jake the Foxy

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Image Description: This watercolour features a base of dark blue and purple tones upon which a person in a pink and white animal mask lies with their legs positioned widely apart. Facing the viewer, they are wearing only a pink and white patterned shirt, rolled up to their chest. On the left, they are seen inserting a teal sex toy.

“Don’t Look Back”: Failed Potential in *Sekai-kei* Love Stories

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Abstract The love story between boy and girl might be the most common trope of any narrative, even in nihilistic, end-of-world, postmodern settings. *Sekai-kei* is a genre of manga and anime that unites the trope of boy-girl romance and end-of-world postmodern settings. In his essay on "The Ethics of Sekai-kei," Christopher Howard argues that through its representation of unfulfilled romance, *sekai-kei* embodies a postmodern, nihilistic form of consumption that sustains itself through familiar genre iconography that is devoid of further narrative potential. For Howard, the disunion of the protagonist and the heroine in *sekai-kei* is a symbol of postmodern nihilist consumption that fails to "traverse the fantasy" to confront the postmodern narrative landscape. This essay takes on Howard's notion of postmodern nihilist iconographic consumption to argue that, reunited or not, romance itself is an iconography of postmodern nihilist consumption in its appeals to nostalgia and tradition. By analyzing the queer potentiality of two *sekai-kei* adjacent films — Tsai Ming-Ling's 1998 film, *The Hole*, and Makoto Shinkai's 2016 animated film, *Your Name* — this essay argues that the radical potential of the postmodern end-of-world landscape extends to the intimate and romantic attachments that mobilize the love story as a trope.

Introduction

The love story of 'boy meets girl' is an age-old tale that has taken many shapes and forms. Even in the deeply postmodern and end-of-world landscapes of *sekai-kei* anime and manga, romance inhabits the narrative foreground. In many ways, romance serves as a familiar and comforting presence in an otherwise dark, dreary, and unfamiliar landscape. The *sekai-kei* genre's stories of youthful romance have been criticized, with ost-structuralist writers like Christopher Howard (2014) noting, in his paper "The Ethics of *Sekai-kei*: Reading Hiroki Azuma with Slavoj Žižek," the genre's failure to challenge norms despite their potentially radical settings. The romance between the boy and girl is representative of the relationship between the subject and a symbolic ideal — and as the heroine remains unattainable by the end of the series, so too does the fantastical symbolic ideal. While critics have argued that the unfulfilled romance serves as a

traumatic break from fantasy to reality, Howard maintains that these narratives reinforce notions of maintaining the status quo through 'necessary sacrifices' — thus serving to reaffirm rather than rupture (p. 382).

In this essay, I argue that the classic boy-girl romance in postmodern narratives similar to *sekai-kei* serves not only as an analogy for social conservatism, but is, in itself, an element of the continually renewable "non-threatening libidinal investment" that Howard identifies (p. 380). In the two films discussed in this essay, *The Hole* (1998) and *Your Name* (2016), our romantic leads are successfully united, but instead of any radical possibilities, their union recalls familiar heteronormative and socially conservative sentiments that re-ground the radically changing environment around them. These unconventional romances, which rely almost solely on the heteronormative implication of romance between the male and female leads,

awkwardly fit normativity within radical space. In these narratives, the very presence of the boy-girl romance itself serves as reproductive organs of socially conservative norms. For better or for worse, nostalgia and romanticism for the boy-girl romance in these narratives usher in sentiment for the traditional and cut off the possibilities of their radical worlds.

Postmodern Implications of Sekai-kei

To begin, some consideration must be given to what constitutes *sekai-kei*. While Howard recognizes the *sekai-kei* genre's vast diversity, he notes three commonly accepted narrative features:

“Firstly, a ‘small’ love story between a boy and a girl (kimi to boku/you and me) is situated in the context of an end-of-the-world narrative. Second, within the two lovers the girl usually fights while the boy avoids battle. Thirdly, any description of wider society is usually avoided,” (p. 367).

A number of postmodern interventions have been made on this genre, particularly in regards to its postmodern, nihilistic tone. However, the focus of this essay is the role of the love story. The love story is also of particular interest for Howard, who notes a parallel between the protagonist-heroine relationship and the relationship between the psychoanalytical subject and the *objet a*, (p. 368). That is to say, the unattainability of the heroine in the *sekai-kei* genre is analogous to the relationship between the subject position and a desired ideal (also known as the symbolic). The lack of the lovers' ‘happy ending’ in the classic *sekai-kei* marks a postmodernist recognition of the gap between the subject and the symbolic. *Sekai-kei*, in essence, portrays an unattainable fantasy (the love interest/*moe* heroine) against a dystopian backdrop. Howard's criticism of the *sekai-kei* genre lies largely in its inability to “substantially challenge the symbolic horizon in which they are created” (Howard, 2014, p. 386).

Situated within apocalyptic settings, *sekai-kei* stories have an intrinsic radical potential as the narratives break down conventional structures of the economy, politics, and the state. As it pertains to this essay, *sekai-kei* also breaks down the conventional formula of the boy-girl romance. The unattainable union of the protagonist and the heroine, who are left wanting in the dystopian landscape, marks the narrative as incomplete. Instead, the narrative and genre are sustained by a liminal repetitive state — invested only in the repetition of familiar genre iconography devoid of any further narrative potential (Howard, 2014, p. 375). This, Howard argues, is indicative of a greater postmodern social malaise that Howard calls “otaku consumption,” which, through repetitive iconography, is endlessly gratifying rather than constructive and ripe for radical intervention (p. 380).

In three core *sekai-kei* texts that Howard cites — *Saikano*, *Iriya no Sora*, and *Voice of a Distant Star* — the unattainability of the protagonist and heroine's union preserves “the symbolic order without the threat of the protagonist ever being in full possession of the fantasy object,” (p. 382). In *The Hole* and *Your Name*, however, the “fantasy object” is attained (the protagonist and the heroine are successfully united), yet I would argue that no radical change is presented or even proposed. Rather, the traditional symbolic order is reinforced through the union of the pair. The boy-girl romance can be understood as a repetitive iconography akin to the iconographies of *sekai-kei*; in this case, however, the repetitive iconography is not a genre trope, but the societal trope of heteronormativity. With this in mind, I would like to expand the notion of “otaku consumption,” beyond the subculture of anime, to denote a generally nihilist consumption. I contend that the boy-girl love story is not only an analogy for sustaining the symbolic order, but that it itself sustains that order.

The Hole (1998): Coping in Nostalgia
While Tsai Ming Liang's 1998 film, *The*

Hole, may not strictly adhere to the *sekai-kei* genre, it has a postmodern setting and follows a number of the genre's tropes. The *Hole* centers around a male and female protagonist in an end-of-the-world scenario: a cockroach disease pandemic in Taiwan at the turn of the century. In the story, the female protagonist, the woman-upstairs, is the more active agent of the two, and the larger narrative of the lockdown and pandemic is largely disregarded, in favour of the non-sequitur musical interludes, until the latter half of the film. In fact, little of the film unravels in the conventional progression of a plot besides the romance between the two leads. In addition to this, the romance is developed almost exclusively during the film's series of surreal musical numbers. Romantic development between the two leads is most obvious after the song "I Want Your Love," wherein the pair share the most screen time they ever have together (they are almost always shown in isolated scenes) (Tsai, 1998, 48:20-50:52). The film's love story and musicality are intrinsically linked. In the dreary postmodern landscape that occupies the real-world of the film, the musical sequences supply a nostalgic escapism for the heroine. By using the music of Grace Chang to evoke the bygone eras of the 1950s and 60s, the film's 'love story' is coupled with a nostalgic imaginary. Combining these two familiar and comforting elements (romance and Grace Chang), the film invokes a hopelessly dreamy desire.

This sense of comfort is juxtaposed by the film's otherwise eerie tone — the brutalist stone structure of the apartment complex and the endless downpour outside invests the real-world environment with an inescapable, uncomfortable dampness. While in the musical world, the film's two leads are tied together by their blooming love story, in the real world, their connection — the titular hole in the protagonist's floor and the heroine's ceiling — is disruptive, inciting conflict between the two and destroying their respective apartments. The film establishes a potentially radical

setting, contrasting a romantic nostalgic imaginary with a potentially 'queer' reality (the hole literally destroying the normative structure of 'the home'). Set between a comfortable fantasy and a scary reality that, in turn-of-the-century fashion, also marks the possibility of change, *The Hole* ends by choosing the former. In the last scene of the film, as the heroine is nearly succumbing to the cockroach disease, one final fantasy comforts her; in a surreal fashion, the male protagonist reaches down through the hole with a glass of water, then pulls the heroine through the hole, up into a bright light. The film's aspiration is stated by the end card: "In the year 2000, we are grateful we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us" (Tsai, 1998, 1:27:08). *The Hole* is thus an exemplar of postmodern nihilistic consumption, and if we are to apply Howard's critique, it is perhaps no surprise then that the subject of the film's dreamy imaginary anchors itself in the nostalgic past and the heteronormative romance.

Your Name (2016): Saviour in Tradition

Similar to *The Hole*, Makoto Shinkai's 2016 animated film, *Your Name*, departs considerably from the *sekai-kei* formula — notably, it has a more modern, slice-of-life setting. Despite this, I argue it still recreates a number of *sekai-kei* iconographies and postmodern implications. *Your Name*, which follows a love story between the male protagonist, Taki, and the heroine, Mitsuha, is set in an admittedly one-sided end-of-the-world narrative. In this case, a meteor is set to hit Mitsuha's village, Itomori. Of the two leads, Mitsuha takes the more active role; this is evident particularly in her desire to leave Itomori for Tokyo. Like in *The Hole*, the world-ending element (here, the meteor), is introduced in the latter half of the film when the plot-twist of Itomori's impending (and predestined) disaster is revealed. Once again, the 'love story' between the protagonist and the heroine is largely untold, as they rarely actually interact. They are prohibited from sharing screen time until the very end of the movie by

nature of the body-swapping conceit. Again paralleling *The Hole*, the protagonist and the heroine's interactions are largely hostile, exacerbated by their unusual (and potentially queer) circumstances. Once again, the 'love story' hinges heavily on audience recognition of the iconography of the typical boy-girl romance. Perhaps even more than *The Hole*, *Your Name* indulges in the classic tropes of the young 'love story' typical of *otaku* media.

The nostalgic impulse of most post-modern media is less relevant to *Your Name*, as the film does not exhibit the desolate landscape associated with postmodern settings. Instead of nostalgia, *Your Name* presents another aspect of the past — tradition — as saviour. At the film's beginning, Mitsuha is resistant to the traditional life of her village. She begrudgingly performs her priestess duties and is embarrassed when students from her school react with disgust at an unorthodox traditional ritual (making wine from masticated rice). Her true desire is to go to Tokyo — to leave behind the rural traditional and embrace urban modernity. In the film, tradition is presented as constantly interceded upon by modern interventions. The patriarch of Mitsuha's family has absconded from the traditional temple to pursue politics, and the temple is in decline — the music for the ritual is not provided by community musicians, but a CD recording played on a loudspeaker. Initially, Mitsuha follows that pattern, rejecting her rural reality by body-swapping with the Taki, a Tokyo resident. However, by the end of the film, it is Mitsuha's traditional ritual act that provides Taki with the tools (the *kuchikamizake* wine) necessary to change the course of history and save the day. In the end, it is the apparatus of tradition that stops the disaster so that normalcy can be restored. At its most distilled and somewhat oversimplified form, tradition thwarts radical change and maintains the status quo. *Your Name* nearly concludes in the traditional *sekai-kei* fashion that Howard mentions, wherein the lovers are indefinitely separated for the sake of restoring the status

quo. However, Makoto seems to have 'had his cake and [eaten] it too,' permitting the lovers' union — indulging in the wish fulfillment that prior *sekai-kei* writers had rejected.

Queer Potentiality and "Traversing the Fantasy"

Howard frames his criticism along the stakes of a capitalist critique framework. On the macro level, nihilistic consumption serves "the capitalist system, that is also subject to continual renewal with new instantiations of marginally different characters" (p. 380). In essence, Howard claims that the cyclical renewal of media iconography is culpable to the feedback loop of capitalist consumption — a loop of meaningless pleasure and comfort to distract from the destructive nature of that very consumption (p. 384). Within this framework, "*sekai-kei* typically supports rather than threatens contemporary capitalism" (Howard, 2014, p. 366). *The Hole* and *Your Name* as postmodern, *sekai-kei* adjacent films support rather than threaten, if not contemporary capitalism outright, then *contemporary social norms* of capitalist consumption.

The potentiality of *sekai-kei* is especially important because of what Howard cites as Zizek's 'solution' to postmodern nihilism. One needs to "traverse the fantasy" to confront the void and make radical change, (p. 369). Both *The Hole* and *Your Name* hold radical potential in their postmodern settings. In *The Hole*, at the outbreak of the cockroach pandemic, the Taiwanese government calls for a national lockdown and for people to isolate in their individual homes. While the pandemic disrupts the normal functions of the public world, the hole disrupts the private worlds of the film's two leads. The two leads are given the possibility to transcend the anxiety of alienation that saturates the pandemic, and which represents the socially-alienating capitalist structure at the turn of the century. Ideas such as mutual aid stem from transcending these structures of social and financial isolation. However, unless united in nostalgic fantasy, the protagonist and the heroine of *The Hole*

remain isolated from one another.

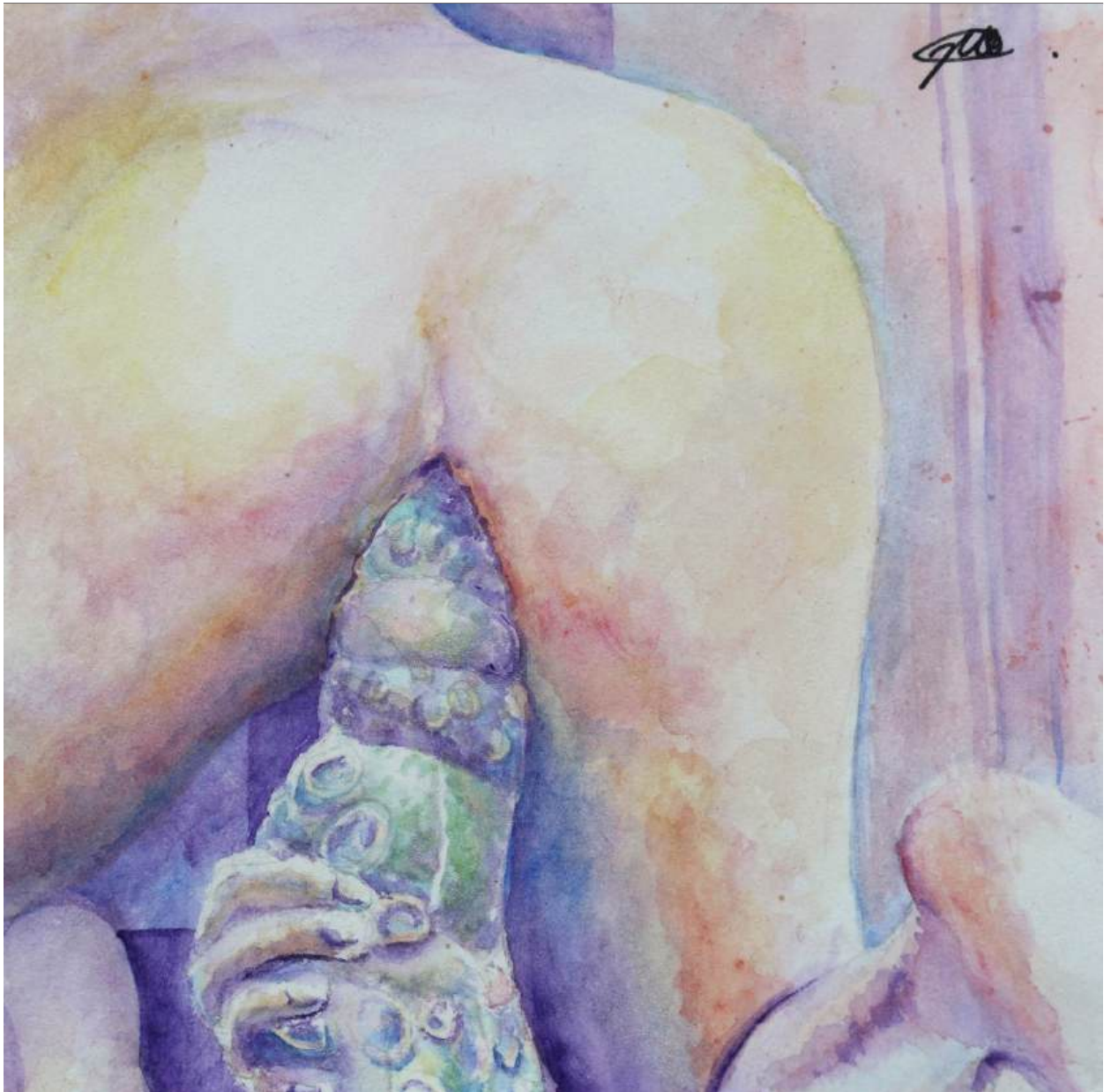
The radical potential of *Your Name* lies in the film's core concept of body-swapping, which has the potential to both challenge and limit gender norms. The fantastical body-swap element of the film between the male and female leads opens up a range of possible queer interventions by playing along and against the gender binary. Both Taki and Mitsuha improve their interpersonal relationships through their swapping. Mitsuha becomes more popular and affirmative, while Taki's potentially romantic relationship with Okudera is facilitated by Mitsuha's "feminine powers" (Makoto, 2016, 26:28). By all counts, these characters are enhanced by their inadvertent performance of gender non-conformity. Mitsuha, in particular, carries the queer potentiality of the leading duo. While a heteronormative reading of the date with Okudera marks the turning point of Taki's crush to Mitsuha, a queer reading can situate Mitsuha as a figure of queer desire. In this retelling, Mitsuha, feeling trapped in her small town, wishes to be made "a handsome Tokyo boy in [her] next life" (Makoto, 2016, 17:00). When her wish is granted, Mitsuha goes on to explore a transgender potentiality and falls in love with an older woman, who she eventually asks on a date. This queer potential is unfulfilled, however, due to the inevitability of Mitsuha's death — and while Taki manages to save her, the potentially queer Mitsuha stays dead, as the heteronormative machinations of *destiny itself* foreclose her to womanhood and heterosexuality by the film's 'happy ending.'

Conclusion

As a genre, *sekai-kei* is built on an amalgamation of tropes and conventions that produce a narrative form latent with potential for radical interventions. Often situated in desolate landscapes that reflect postmodern nihilist sentiments, *sekai-kei* has the potential to intervene directly on this increasingly common state of mind. Despite this, and as Christopher Howard critiques, *sekai-kei* stories more often than not fall backwards rather than forwards, as seen in the two films discussed in this essay. *The Hole* falls backwards into nostalgia, and *Your Name* into tradition — and both fall back on the most familiar and comforting trope of them all, the 'love story.' While hints of radical intervention are felt through the queer potentiality of imagining new ways of existing in post-modern spaces and bodies, the urge to find solace in familiar iconographies persists, buttressed by increasingly meaningless modes of nihilistic media consumption. The stakes of this failed potential could not be more important than it is now, as our world feels increasingly bleak. The question we must ask now is: in an increasingly scary and unfamiliar landscape, what will looking backwards instead of forwards cost us? Like Orpheus leading Eurydice out of Hades, can we afford to look back?

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Tentacle Fun

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Image Description: Against a backdrop of misty purple, blue, and muted pink, a person on their knees, ass facing the viewer, grasps a purple and green coloured toy tentacle. The tentacle, dotted with ridged suckers, is seen to be penetrating the subject's body.

The Pursuit of Homosexual Desire Despite All Opposition in *Look Down in Mercy*

Nghi Nguyen (he/him) is an English Specialist who dreams to be a librarian, an author of fantasy novels, and a caretaker of many cats.

Foreward Narrowing down my thesis and gathering evidence to support it was, strangely, one of the most affecting experiences I have ever had with an essay. One question took hold of my mind: since two versions of this novel exist, what had the author actually wanted to write? Walter Baxter, who I believe is a gifted writer, only managed to publish two books before he and his publisher were tried for obscenity in 1953. I was haunted as I learned that the trials ceased Baxter's writing career.

Fiction offers interiority, which is often excluded from history textbooks. When I read fiction, I am privileged to experience the emotional complexities of another person's life. *Look Down in Mercy* enlightened me to think about all the queer experiences that have never been represented. I would never know what stories were still bursting from Baxter's fingertips, or what stories queer writers of no repute never dared to tell. Those stories are dead, and that fact frustrates and breaks me, as does the claim that "gay" is somehow new and trendy — when queer voices were systematically suppressed for the longest time.

Writers of any background, please write for the sake of writing. Your stories deserve to be inscribed in prose and to persist for millennia to come.

Introduction

Originally written for ENG273: Queer Writing, this essay is in response to the (paraphrased) prompt "Is Walter Baxter's Kent, despite his homophobia, racism and misogyny, a positive representative of homosexuality?"

Look Down in Mercy follows Tony Kent, an officer of the British Army, as he attempts to navigate both a discovery of his homosexuality and the bloodshed of World War II. As he realises his desire for his batman Anson, Kent grapples with his deeply ingrained homophobia, all the while being threatened with court-martialing.

The novel was first published in London by Heinemann in 1951, then in the U.S. by G. P. Putnam in 1952. After the author's obscenity trials in 1953, the

book was out of print until it was republished by Valancourt Books in 2014. The American edition offers an alternative ending wherein Kent fails to commit suicide via defenestration and several more explicit depictions of homosexual intimacy.

Look Down in Mercy is a character study of a queer man marked with ambiguity. Tony Kent is a murderer, a homophobe, a racist, a misogynist and a rapist. He does not treat those close to him as equals, often taking advantage of them, and his lover Anson is no exception. Despite Kent's discriminatory behaviour, Gregory Woods, former Chair in Gay and Lesbian Studies at Nottingham Trent University, posits that Kent is yet "a positive representative of homosexuality: masculine, patriotic, mature, and

capable” (Baxter, 2014, p. ix). The representation of Kent’s queerness is realistic, but it is not singly negative or positive — it is and must be both simultaneously. While homophobia, racism and misogyny are nurtured ideologies, homosexuality is an intrinsic quality that cannot, in and of itself, be changed or nurtured. Homosexual *behaviour* can be enacted by anybody, but not anyone can *be gay* — Goodwin’s lust for Anson exemplifies the peculiar dynamic of homosexual desire without intrinsic queerness. To be homosexual is not something that is chosen. The only incorrect and *unrealistic* manner by which to represent queerness would be to portray it as extrinsic. No matter the strides Kent takes to absolve himself of his queerness, he fails. Kent’s homosexuality follows him throughout every action, good and bad, malevolent and triumphant. Kent is an authentic representation of homosexuality because of his moral ambiguity, not in spite of it. Simply “positive,” then, is inapt to describe the novel’s portrayal of queerness, so I will apply the term more narrowly. Should “positive” strictly describe Kent’s manner of *coping* with his homosexuality, rather than how well he *represents* queer identities, then I agree with Wood’s statement. Kent is, as I will argue henceforth, a positive representative of homosexuality. Despite his ideologies and the risk of being court-martialed, Kent still exercises autonomy by pursuing his desires — or love — for Anson. In doing so, Kent also rejects misconstrued stereotypes of the homosexual man. The American publication, showcasing Kent’s failed suicide attempt, also subverts the Bury Your Gays trope.

To represent homosexuality in its most “positive”¹ light is to present it as love — or emotional desire — one possesses for someone else of the same sex. Simpler definitions for homosexuality explain it as same-sex *attraction* or sexual desire. Fetishisation and juvenile expressions of sexual desire can fall under these broader definitions, allowing for far more negative or insignificant portrayals of homosexuality. The novel can represent homosexuality as a “good”

sexual orientation by demarcating love from simple attraction. Such distinctions can be seen when contrasting the relationship between Goodwin and Anson with that of Kent and Anson.

Goodwin denies *being* queer. He says as he tries to blackmail Kent, “I don’t like brown-hatters, that’s why we split up” (Baxter, 2014, p. 227). “Brown-hatters” alludes to gay men. Despite Goodwin’s abject homophobia, multiple instances in the novel suggest that he is homosexually *attracted* to Anson. When Kent first meets Anson and Goodwin, Kent asks, ““Are you muckers?”” to which Anson confirms, ““Yes”” (Baxter, 2014, p. 20). Kent “used the word that means more than mere friends;” he “sometimes wonder[s] exactly what it [covers]” (Baxter, 2014, p. 20). If Kent’s definition of “muckers” is accurate, “more than mere friends” implies that the connection between Anson and Goodwin is, or was at some time, sexual. After Goodwin murders the woman outside the temple, he feels “more strongly than ever the need for affection. Anson [is] the only one from whom he [can] attain it” (Baxter, 2014, p. 28). The word “affection” is particular in the passage; “affection” is more tender than perhaps “comfort” or “consolation,” and its implications could be platonic or sexual, whereas its aforementioned synonyms seem strictly platonic.

Another, more overt expression of Goodwin’s sexual desire for Anson occurs when he invites Anson to visit a brothel with him. One of few times he “remember[s] feeling satisfied in a brothel [is] the only occasion when Anson came inside the house[;]” Goodwin “want[s] Anson to come again into a brothel with him and wait, not outside the cubicle this time but inside, standing inside, watching” (Baxter, 2014, p. 22). Goodwin’s desire is no more than a voyeuristic fetish. Within the context of 1940s Britain, his perversion appears to be a model example of homosexuality. This perversion is Kent’s image of homosexuality as well: the day after the first time Kent wrapped his arm around Anson, Kent “saw himself as a contemptible pervert [...] the word conjured

up, for him, repelling images of furtive old men peering over the tops of public urinals [...] and effeminate shop assistants talking like a musical-hall comedian” (Baxter, 2014, p. 170). Kent deeply fears that he is intrinsically perverted, but he does not reflect stereotypes of a homosexual man; he is not a voyeur or a paederast, nor is he particularly effeminate. Contrarily, Kent fits rather well into the traditional image of masculinity. He is a military officer; he can be physically violent, as evidenced when he kills Goodwin; and he engages in heterosexual sex. Kent’s character rejects base stereotypes of homosexuality.

Romantic and sexual, Kent’s attraction to Anson is honest, mutual, and deeply emotional — this attraction is never named “love” in the novel for Kent struggles to articulate and understand it himself, but love is heavily implied. The initial suggestion of love appears when Kent expresses his desire for Anson for the first time. Wrapping his arm around Anson, Kent “close[s] his eyes and exclude[s] everything from his mind except the peace of lying in the darkness with someone for whom at that moment he could almost feel love” (Baxter, 2014, p. 153-4). Kent’s attraction which is “almost love” allows him comfort amidst the screaming and gunfire of warfare. An attraction that is purely physical or perverted would not as likely provide comfort in the same situation. Kent might be, at the time of this quotation, so early in his discovery of his homosexuality that his attraction could be infatuation. A heavier implication of love appears near the end of the novel.

At last reaching safety in Imphal, Anson must return to the battalion and Kent warns him to be careful should anyone suspect them of having homosexual relations. Anson suggests, “[Y]ou must have known something about it [...] when you were a kid at school...” (Baxter, 2014, p. 261). “It” alludes to Kent’s homosexuality, but neither Kent nor Anson attempts to clarify the ambiguous noun. Kent denies the notion, saying, “It was just dirty-mindedness [...] fooling around in the lavatories. [...] It wasn’t anything like

this” (Baxter, 2014, p. 261). “This” refers to his and Anson’s relationship, though its connotations are, again, ambiguous. Still struggling with deeply internalised homophobia, Kent does not define what his attraction to Anson *is* but rather what it is not. It certainly is not purely physical like Goodwin’s fetishism or schoolboys “fooling around.” In the novel’s entirety, this dialogue is the closest Kent comes to verbally admitting to Anson that his attraction to the man is something like love. Before this conversation, much of Kent’s and Anson’s correspondence is physical: the men wrap their arms around each other, they curl against each other during sleep. This conversation in Imphal confirms that Kent’s attraction for a man transcends the physical into the emotional, from infatuation to something much deeper.

In the American edition of the novel, the method with which Kent copes with his homosexuality is optimistic, if not conclusive. Kent’s realisation of the certainty of his homosexuality mortifies him — he would surely be less disgraceful and criminal should he only *act* like a homosexual, but evidence shows that he *is* one. Kent says, in one of his last conversations with Anson, “I’ve never done anything like this before in my life. I never even thought about it except as a filthy joke. I couldn’t bear to become like that, or even have people suspect me in any way” (Baxter, 2014, p. 261). Again, Kent is using multiple ambiguous nouns to refer generally to homosexuality: “like this” refers broadly to his relationship with Anson, and “about it” and “like that” refer to being homosexual. Kent’s avoidance of using direct terms, while partly due to the lack of language he has to articulate his sexuality, can mostly be accounted for by his internalised homophobia. The words and slurs surrounding homosexuality might be so immoral to him that he finds them difficult to verbalise. His tolerance of his homosexuality is all the more admirable in the presence of his abject homophobia. Kent does not need to, in his words, “become” homosexual — he already is, and indeed, in one ending he cannot

bear with himself.

The Bury Your Gays trope is a literary trope which emerged the late 19th century, featuring a same-sex couple wherein one lover dies and the other returns to a heterosexual relationship. The trope has been used by queer authors to publish without censorship or political repercussion (Hulan, H., 2017). Bury Your Gays is exemplified in the British publication of *Look Down in Mercy*, wherein Kent commits suicide. Should the novel conclude with his death, Kent would not at all be an empowering example of a homosexual man. In the British ending, he is consumed by his own homophobia and self-loathing. The novel's American ending, however, usurps the Bury Your Gays trope and allows Kent to live. After Kent attempts to jump out the hotel window, he "[knows] he [has] solved nothing and he persuade[s] himself there [is] nothing to solve, all he [has] to do [is] to go on living and be with Anson" (Baxter, 2014, p. 276). The "puzzle" that Kent has not solved is his homosexuality and all his tortured emotions about it. Kent has — at the most minute level — come to tolerate his queerness. Kent's decision to accept himself is not entirely autonomous. Kent does not intend to save himself: he "[has] no idea that the failure of his attempt [is] inevitable, he regard[s] it as an incredible piece of luck" (Baxter, 2014, p. 276). Kent might have not chosen to live, but afforded another chance at living, he feels "lucky" and chooses to take the opportunity. The novel ends shortly after depicting Kent's attempt at defenestration. The reader does not know if Kent truly pursues Anson or what consequences come to them because of their relationship. The ambiguous American ending is not overtly positive or happy, but it is optimistic. Kent is alive, and thus has access to a future where he can

engage in "positive" events, as opposed to harmful or fatal ones. Kent may not be able to be with Anson, but his resolve to fulfill his homosexual desire — following his attempt at erasing his homosexuality entirely — is commendable. Kent could have just as well decided not to.

Of the portrayals of homosexuality in *Look Down in Mercy*, Tony Kent's character is the most ambiguous and complex. Kent has internalised abject homophobia, and as a result, he struggles extremely to cope with his intrinsic queerness. In the British version of the novel, coping is impossible, and he commits suicide. To him, "homosexual" as a word is so dirty that he is not even able to speak it. Yet, Kent still pursues his love for Anson, which compromises Kent's ideologies and puts him at risk of being criminalised. The novel's depiction of Kent's queer desire as *love* also rejects stereotypes of the homosexual man in 1940s Britain. The American version of the novel offers a more optimistic ending that usurps the Bury Your Gay trope. Ultimately, Kent's resolve to exercise his autonomy despite all opposition is what makes him a "positive" representative of homosexuality.

Notes

¹The word "positive" encompasses many vast meanings subjective to individual opinions and texts. "To present [homosexuality] as love [or] as emotional desire" is the working definition that I have chosen, for this portion of the essay, to argue for the "positivity" of Kent's homosexual desire.

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Bryan



Femboy Bun

Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) is an SDS alumnus, expressive arts therapist, facilitator, multimodal artist, children's book author and glitter enthusiast. You can find out more about Jasper on his website, www.queerarttherapy.com, or instagram @queerarttherapy.

Image Description: Sitting facing away from the viewer, a person with brown skin wears a tank top and scalloped-edge thong of white, plush fabric. They hold a stuffed bear, which wears a ribbon bow and looks directly at the viewer. The scene is shaded in soft, cloudy pastels of purple, blue, and pink.

Gender as a Site of Regulation for Racism and Colonialism: Applying Theories of Orientalism to Transgender History

Rowan Reddy (they/them) is an English and SDS double major who has a passion for combining their two majors in every possible essay they can.

Abstract This essay explores and connects the ways gender becomes a site of colonial regulation and violence by analyzing Black trans representation in the medical archive. It uses the work of Edward Said to produce an analytic framework discussing authorial exteriority. Said's work is applied to the historical representation and location of Black trans individuals in the medical archive. It analyzes the role constructions of modernity have in othering Black and brown bodies. The work also touches on the relationship between gender, settler colonialism, and Indigenous sovereignty. Using Said's work to discuss the ways gender and history are constructed, as well as the archival privileging of whiteness in transgender histories, this essay attempts to move beyond historically privileged constructions of gender and towards decolonial possibilities.

This essay aims to explore and connect the ways in which gender becomes a site of colonial regulation and violence by analyzing Black trans representation in the medical archive. Using the analytical frameworks developed by Edward Said in his discussions of Orientalism and authorial exteriority, this essay analyzes a specific historical representation of gender abnormalities and transgressions in black and brown bodies. It touches on the historical representation and location of Black trans individuals in medical archives. It then examines the construction of modernity in relation to race, gender, and sex, and how these constructions contribute to processes of othering. Finally, it offers a brief look at the relationship between gender, settler colonialism, and Indigenous sovereignty. Using Said's work to discuss the ways gender and history are constructed, as well as the archival privileging of whiteness in transgender histories, this essay attempts to move beyond historically

privileged constructions of gender and towards decolonial possibilities.

Many pre-colonial cultures across Asia, Africa, and the Americas have been recorded to have culturally-specific genders that do not fit with contemporary Eurocentric norms of binary gender and heteropatriarchy. As Alex Wilson states in "Our Coming In Stories: Cree Identity, Body Sovereignty and Gender Self-Determination," the mechanism for the shift towards binary gender was, more often than not, colonialism. European colonialism brought a "commitment... to heteropatriarchy and gender binaries" (Wilson 2015, pp. 2) to the Indigenous people in North America, whose forms and practices of gender and sexuality were seen by Europeans as "threatening" (Wilson 2015, pp. 2). As colonial processes continued, sexuality and gender became an important site of regulation. Heteropatriarchal and binary expectations of gender became avenues through which the colonial subject could

be subjugated. The regulation of gender separated colonized people from their cultures and ways of being through a “continuum of violence” (Wilson 2015, pp. 2). As Jules Gill-Peterson states in her article “Trans of Color Critique before Transsexuality,” “gender and transgender have “always” been racial categories” (2018, pp. 608). The imposition of regulation and violence on racialized bodies and colonial subjects, particularly as they transgress colonial prescriptions of gender, reveals the relationship between race, colonialism, and gender.

The relationship between race and gender offers an interesting avenue through which to analyze gender using techniques and theories from race and colonial/post-colonial studies. Utilizing frameworks which understand history and race as constructed and applying them to transgender histories can provide further insight into the relationship between race and gender. Specifically, Said’s conceptualization of authorial “exteriority” (Said 2003, pp. 20) discussed in his book *Orientalism* is used in this essay to examine the historical medical mistreatment and misrepresentation of Black trans individuals in America. Said’s work deals in the constructions of history and culture, revealing the ways in which histories are constructed in order to critique them. Applying Said’s work to historical archives of Black trans individuals allows this analysis to move beyond the archives’s contents to consider the construction of historical representations and what these representations say – or don’t say – about Black trans individuals and the white doctors treating them.

Gill-Peterson’s “Trans of Colour Critique” explores the Johns Hopkins Hospital medical archive of black trans and trans of colour experiences during the twentieth century. Gill-Peterson analyzes the medical records of a patient, who she has given the pseudonym “Billie.” Billie, a black individual read as trans, was notable for their place within Dr. Hugh Hampton Young’s published textbook *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphroditism, and Related Adrenal Diseases*

(2018, pp. 609). In the textbook, Billie is particularly notable for their lack of an assigned sex, and their profile contains an abridged interview and short biography as opposed to a medical record of procedures taken (Gill-Peterson 2018). The analytical and theoretical frameworks Said presents in *Orientalism* can be introduced here to further analyze Billie’s presence in medical archives. A large focus of Said’s *Orientalism* is the “exteriority” (Said 2003, pp. 20) present in much of the writing on the Orient. It analyses representations of the Orient created and purported by authors positioned exterior to it, and how the creation of such representations reinforces the writer’s exterior position (Said 2003). The writer’s exteriority provides them a supposedly objective perspective to comment on the Orient (Said 2003). Exterior representations of the Orient are justified by the argument that the Orient cannot represent itself, or it already would have (Said 2003). This claim works to legitimate the West’s representations of the Orient and, in doing so, corroborates the material structures that govern and control the Orient. The content of the representations matters less than the West’s ability to “make the Orient visible” (Said 2003, p. 22) by reproducing existing institutions and conventions governing the Orient (Said 2003).

Though for Gill-Peterson, the subject is a Black trans individual and not the Orient, Said’s concepts of exteriority can be applied to Billie’s representation in Young’s publication. Gill-Peterson juxtaposes the information on Billie published for public consumption in Young’s book with that of the private and protected medical archives that she investigates but cannot disclose. The publicly available interview with Billie contains paraphrased and edited dialogue, which Gill-Peterson highlights in comparison to the hospital’s detailed but protected medical records (2018, pp. 612). The unabridged accounts of patients’ medical histories are protected under the retrospective criteria of HIPAA, therefore no archival information about Billie can

be disclosed (other than what is already publicly accessible). As a result, Billie remains publicly legible only through Young's lens, precluding any evaluation of the veracity of his account or whether Billie may have enacted greater agency in the encounter than written (Gill-Peterson 2018). Billie's case presents the double-sided limitations of the archive, simultaneously revealing the illegibility and invisibility of racialized individuals' voices and the "racialized logics of medical discourse" (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 607) present in Billie's archival representation. Billie's representation for public consumption is delimited by Young's exterior lens, and challenging this exterior representation is disrupted by the privacy regulations imposed on Billie's medical records. The protection of Billie's medical archives, combined with the racist exploitation of Billie's body, image, and story in *Genital Abnormalities*, creates unique "limitations on and limitations of knowledge" (Gill-Peterson 2018 pp. 614) regarding Billie's ability to represent themselves and challenge existing public representations. The authority given by Young's whiteness and position as a doctor allows him to alter and erase Billie's words and power. Young can reaffirm his position of privilege and power through the act of editing Billie's public presentation. The privacy governance of Billie's medical records and the epistemic power wielded by Young makes the exteriority of Billie's representation difficult to disrupt.

The medicalization of gender and transgender experiences figures strongly in Billie's case. This medicalization builds directly off of the 20th century medical discourses and procedures developed around intersex bodies. Sex identification and procedures to treat intersex "abnormalities" were often devised via unethical experimentation on Black and brown bodies (Gill-Peterson 2018). Once the technology existed, intersex bodies were seen as in need of medical correction; framed as the "fullest expression of a concept of sexed plasticity," (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 610) intersex bodies were central

to discourses of medical intervention and alterability in the 20th century. The ability to medically transform a body's birth sex was associated with modernity due to the modern medical procedures used to remake these bodies into binary form (Gill-Peterson 2018). Just as Orientalism relies on constructing histories and stories in order to create the other through affirmations of difference (Said 2003), medical discourse around sex plasticity was racialized to create a Black and brown other. Because Black and brown patients had less access to these body-altering procedures, medical discourses constructed Black and brown bodies, sexes and genders as less plastic and thus less modern than their white counterparts (Gill-Peterson 2018). This allowed related dominant structures of race and gender to proclaim their superiority over another which ostensibly lacked modernity and "powers of self-transformation" (Kaiwar & Mazumdar 2020, pp. 270). The construction of an "other" against which the dominant group defines itself is comparable to tactics utilized by the Occident to establish a dominant position over the Orient (Said 2003). Black and brown bodies were constructed as inferior to white bodies through their status as medical subjects in the testing of sex-altering procedures and the manufactured connection between their limited access to sex-altering procedures decrying them as less modern. Western medical authorities determined Black and brown bodies as less worthy of medical care from their constructed inferiority based on a lower capacity for sex plasticity (Gill-Peterson 2018).

Since so much knowledge and technique were borrowed from intersex surgical studies and procedures, the relationship between plasticity of sex and modernity continued with the rise of transsexuality and transsexual procedures (Gill-Peterson 2018). In a bid for acceptance from greater cultural forces, transsexuality leaned on its relation to sex plasticity to become a "technology of modernization" (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 615). Much of how it did this was

by “activating its whiteness” (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 615) and relying on the ways sex plasticity — or lack thereof — had been racialized. Transsexuality was promoted as part of the same set of medical procedures and discourses as concerned white intersex bodies. Under this cultural agenda, transsexuality became a “universal category” that was “innocent of race” (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 615), built on a strategic cultural forgetting of black trans or trans of colour historicity that “directly precedes and exceeds it” (Gill-Peterson 2018, pp. 615). This strategic forgetting is part of the way history is constructed: not just through what is said and written, but through what is excluded and reshaped into narratives that suit the dominant group's interests (Said 2003). In their article “Race, Orient, Nation in the Time-Space of Modernity,” Kaiwar and Mazumdar discuss the double amnesia of Orientalism, a concept which can be applied to the forgetting of Black trans and trans of colour histories. Forgetting of the institutional agency required in construction of knowledge allows constructions of transsexual universality through whiteness. Black trans and trans of colour histories are purposely omitted and forgotten while white trans histories are uplifted, cemented by a further erasure of the actions required to omit Black and brown histories from the collective historical consciousness. Further, othering Black and brown bodies through sex plasticity allows whiteness to reassert itself as modern and deserving of a place in history while silencing black trans and trans of colour historicity.

Analyses of imperialism and colonialism rely heavily on similar frameworks of historical construction. Imperialism and colonialism often rely on the regulation of sex and gender as a method by which to establish power and reinforce domination over colonial subjects. Sex and gender are reconstructed on colonial terms to create sites of regulation and license colonial violence. These understandings are further substantiated by specific representations of racialized gender in culturally dominant con-

structions of history, which often elide the historicities of colonial subjects in favour of narratives of whiteness and modernity. The significance of gender as a site of colonial regulation produces queer expressions of gender as a site for anti-colonial resistance; in the case of settler colonialism, gender can be a site for reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty. Through a “continuum of violence” (Wilson 2015, pp. 2), Indigenous people have been forcibly separated from their ways of being and denied self-governance of their bodies, genders, and sexualities (Wilson 2015). In movements to reclaim Indigenous sovereignty from settler colonial agendas, Indigenous people have adopted strategies to negotiate gender as a site of settler colonial regulation. The term two-spirit has been adopted by many Indigenous people to represent a uniquely Indigenous understanding of gender and sexuality (Wilson 2015). The use of a specifically Indigenous term that operates beyond colonial frameworks of gender becomes a method for Indigenous people to “[proclaim] sovereignty over [their] bodies, gender expressions and sexualities” (Wilson 2015, pp. 3). Wilson emphasizes Indigenous people's bodily sovereignty and self-expression as a necessary and inextricable part of Indigenous land sovereignty and self-governance (2015). Gender as a site of colonial regulation requires accounting for gender regulation and racialization when developing decolonial and anticolonial strategies.

Gender as a site of racist and colonial regulation involves constructions of gender that promote whiteness or create a racialized other. When analyzed through frameworks of Orientalist study, historical representations of Black or brown trans individuals can reveal the ways in which gender and history are constructed. Analyses of medical archives and public representations of Black and brown bodies in discourses about intersexuality and transsexuality can reveal, on one hand, how the information included in published narratives works to create a racialized other; on the other, how what is left out regarding

black trans and trans of colour history challenges colonial narratives around gender. The cultural construction of gender science as modern and white reinforces the othering of racialized bodies, deeming them insufficiently modern and less deserving of medical care. As exemplified by the emergence of alternative identifications like two-spirit, exploring gender's possibilities as a site for decolonial work is important to the project of challenging colonial struc-

tures and systems of knowledge. The relationship between race and gender enables intersectional analysis of gender and queer histories using analytical frameworks developed to study race. Incorporation of these frameworks and a continued challenging of the racism and colonialism present in transgender histories presents further opportunity for decolonial and anti-racist reparative action working from the intersections of both oppressive structures and histories.

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Bryan



Sixt Cosplayer

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Image Description: A light-complexioned person sits nude, legs apart, facing the viewer as if presenting their genitalia. One hand rests on their thigh, while the other hand is by their face, which is out of view. Bright blue hair drapes down their chest, and multiple tattoos decorate their body.

Consent in Alternative Desires: Kittay's "Gift" Model and Asexuality

Rahul KP (he/him) is a Physics specialist, crochet wizard (in training), and would never miss a chance to recommend Taiyo Matsumoto's Ping Pong (watch the anime!).

Abstract This paper considers the application of two philosophical models of consent (Alan Soble's "contractual" model and Eva Kittay's "gift" model) to the instance of sexual contact between persons identifying as asexual (which, in this paper's limited context, I take to mean a person who does not experience physical gratification from sexual contact with another person) and a partner who experiences sexual desire. Kittay argues that the conventionally understood contractual notion of consent cannot be morally applied within the context of sex for it overrides the Kantian moral principle that qualifies respectful sex as that which recognizes mutual, concurrent sexual desire. I'll first present both models and outline Kittay's argument against the contractual model which motivated her conception of the gift model. I'll further argue that the gift model is still an incomplete understanding of consent by questioning her assertion as to what constitutes respectful sex via the claim that non-sexual desires can motivate sexual contact without overriding the Kantian principle.

In her paper "AH! My Foolish Heart," philosopher Eva Kittay argues that one's consent to a sexual act must be a malleable notion that is subject to their itinerant desires and willingness to continue at each moment. This is the "gift" model of consent. She makes this argument in response to Alan Soble, who claims that one has an obligation to complete an act once they have consented to it. A less binding understanding of consent, according to Soble, undermines this obligation (Kittay, 1997). This model of consent - termed the "contractual" model by Kittay - is how people generally define consent outside the context of sex. In this paper, I first provide historical context and motivations behind the discussion of consent as a philosophical model. I then outline Kittay's arguments against the contractual model of consent. To make the appeal that a more inclusive and thorough discussion of consent is necessary in the modern landscape, I apply her gift model to asexuality and other instances where non-sexual

desires motivate sexual contact.

Our current notions of sexual consent were largely conceived of and disseminated through a patriarchal lens. Historically, the sexual agency afforded to women was limited to the confines of marriage and the power dynamic it engendered. Such an ethic was used to justify the entitlement exercised by husbands over their wives' bodies, which goes against the intuitive moral principle of the right to bodily autonomy. This entitlement over women's bodies was enshrined in patriarchal systems of knowledge and was the primary mode through which the Western philosophical paradigm understood consent until the radical feminist boom of the 1980's. The first of its kind, Kittay's paper responding to Alan Soble's criticism of Antioch College's affirmative consent policy shifted the paradigm for philosophical discourse surrounding consent.

Policies on consent generally follow the contractual model (Kittay, 1997). Consent is outlined as a binding agreement wherein the one who consents

is obliged to act in such a manner as to fulfill the agreement. The consentor has a moral imperative to “make good” on their obligation. In some sense, this consideration of consent can be best understood as a commitment where nonfulfillment is morally wrong. This understanding of consent implies that refusal to continue with a consented sex act is immoral. Having legitimized the act, the consentor is morally obliged to fulfill it, and the “consentee” is thus entitled to the act in the agreement.

In contrast, Kittay’s gift model of consent does not obligate consentors to fulfill a contract in order to legitimize the act as moral. Instead of a contract, one consents to receiving a gift. Therefore, they are not held to the “terms” of a contract and do not have a moral imperative to fulfill a specific act. Kittay’s model is built on the notion that one consents to a gift based on the desire to give or incite pleasure in the receiver, rather than out of obligation. According to this model, refusal to engage in an already consented-to act does not breach any moral imperative. Because a partner has no claim over specific acts within this model, one is morally allowed to revoke their consent the moment they stop desiring these acts.

Kittay argues that the gift model is a more appropriate way to describe consent in relation to sex. Her argument hinges on Kantian moral principle to characterize respectful sex; Kant’s moral principle dictates that one should not use oneself or others as means to an end, but instead must recognize people as ends in themselves. Kittay argues that, according to this principle, the contractual model treats the consentor as an object whose sexual agency is overridden by obligation. When one partner stops desiring a consented-to sex act, sexual desire is no longer mutual. If the other partner continues the act, they are no longer a moral agent, and the act is no longer respectful. If the desire to stop is disregarded, then one partner is being treated as a means to the other’s sexual satisfaction. In this scenario, the contractual model insists that a moral obli-

gation is owed by the consentor, despite the act being inherently immoral. This raises a contradiction. Kittay resolves the contradiction through application of the gift model. The moment a sex act is not mutually desired, Kittay argues, consent can be revoked by the one who now wishes to disengage. This is morally acceptable under the gift model as discussed earlier. Thus, one is able to respect their own wishes and treat themselves as a moral agent participating in sex, not just as an object.

Kittay thereby extends Kant’s principle to sex by claiming that moral sex necessitates mutual sexual desire along every point of the way, and not just at the outset. This implies that a contractual model of consent cannot be applied to sex, as obligatory sexual activity against one’s itinerant desires would no longer be moral. The only resolution would be to warrant that genuine desire be owed by the consentor, but we can intuitively categorize this as impossible (Piercy, 2022). By considering Kant’s moral principle, Kittay’s claim implies that treating consent to sex as a contractual agreement is incompatible with the conditions for respectful sex. She further shows that the gift model incurs no such incompatibility, and thence should be the correct characterization of sexual consent.

I will now raise an objection to Kittay’s argument by challenging her claim of what qualifies as respectful sex. I do this by showing that desires which are not entirely “sexual” in nature could still fulfill Kant’s moral principle, and thereby be considered moral while not being “respectful sex” in the sense Kittay describes (Piercy, 2022).

Under Kittay’s application of the gift model, engaging in sex without the desire to experience sexual contact at that very moment would be immoral, as respectful sex requires a mutual desire for sexual gratification. She asserts that when one is not a sexual agent, participating in a sexual act is a violation of the Kantian moral principle. I object to this claim and assert that sexual agency is not a necessary condition for morality

— only a sufficient one. Consider sexual contact between someone who identifies as asexual and a partner who experiences sexual desire. The asexual partner is inherently not a sexual agent in this case as, at any given moment, they likely do not desire the sexual act or physical pleasure engendered by it. However, their involvement in sexual contact could be motivated by a desire to achieve gratification from their partner's pleasure and not from sex itself. They may desire their partner's satisfaction and derive emotional fulfillment from it. While not strictly a sexual agent, the asexual partner still doesn't "objectify" themselves in the Kantian sense and is not a means to the other partner's end. Thus, contrary to how the gift model would describe this case, I argue that this is a morally unambiguous instance of sexual contact.

Alternatively, one could apply the contractual model of consent to this scenario. The asexual partner consents to a given sexual activity while not inherently desiring it at any point in time. Since they are now obliged to engage in sexual contact, it can be considered moral despite the lack of sexual agency. Note that the presence of some sort of agency is still required, as otherwise the asexual partner would be rendering themselves an object. When the partner desires to stop engaging in sexual contact, I believe it would override whichever "non-sexual" desire caused them to consent to it initially (emotional fulfillment for example) due to the urgent and present nature of disengagement. Although the contractual model interprets this scenario as moral, when one of the partners wants to stop, it is still faced with the same inconsistency that Kittay

pointed out. Thus, one could use the same argument of Kantian objectification as Kittay did to conclude that the obligation caused by the contractual model is morally contradictory.

I agree with Kittay in that the gift model is the morally superior interpretation of consent in relation to sex. However, I also believe that a more robust philosophical consideration of consent is needed to better accommodate the scenario I presented in my objection, or in any other instances of sexual contact where one is not a strictly sexual agent, such as in prostitution. Mutual desire must still remain a necessary condition for respectful sex, but one could broaden its scope beyond just the desire for sexual gratification. As shown in my objection, a partner can be motivated by a desire that is not sexual and still engage in what can be intuitively understood as respectful contact. The Kantian moral principle is not violated, as we still stipulate consent and mutual concern for the other's well-being at every level. These requirements are mutually exclusive to the nature of the partners' desires. For example, a sex worker and their client can be mutually concerned with the other's well-being without each truly desiring the other's sexual gratification or agency. This would still be respectful sex under the Kantian ethic, when each "level" of the contact is consented to. In addition, the modern sexual landscape is more diverse than the heteronormative conceptions of sex that dominate the discourse. Thus, more research and discourse regarding consent is needed to help us better navigate today's diverse sexual landscape.

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Bryan



Boy and his Toys

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Image Description: A person whose face is out of view leans back holding a Nintendo Switch. The main subject's genitalia rests on their stomach. On the screen of the Switch a somewhat hazy figure is visible. This person's ass faces the camera and their tail and headphones are clearly visible. The main subject is drawn with harsher, stronger blues and purples than the figure on the screen.

Rhapsody in Blue

Samantha de Verteuil (she/her) is a double major in Ethics, Society, and Law and European Affairs (with a focus in the Russian language).

Abstract "Rhapsody in Blue" is a long-form poem exploring male socialization and how the infantilization of men inhibits their ability to form meaningful connections with the women in their lives. It plays on themes from youth. Each 'act' is a different child-like fixation — I. space, II. carnival/ circus, III. tooth fairy, IV. the home/ kitchen — while the protagonist's narrative distance illustrates his masculine refusal to connect. This works to illustrate the threat that gender socialization poses to interpersonal relationships.

I.

Jam was made from the prospect of prolonged life. That preservatives, with their seedy bunches and pustule juice, could marinate towards eternity. That the suckling infant could spread the same raspberry upon his birth as he did on his twenty-first birthday. Then knock his budding buck teeth against the too-thick-rimmed diner cup, as he would on the shot glass later.

There was dark matter stretching across this nightly fabric like webs. The mouth consuming its matter, no spider legs in sight, cocooned its prey all the same—the pulsars, with their collapsed heart spinning as a cosmic clock, fate's precious little jewel. Inescapable laws bind the web's elastic and clear, rubbery shape. It cocooned him all the same.

He had sat most summers in the poorly funded planetarium, with white creases in its dome lid and necking teenagers in its darkness. Eyes pried wide, sappy in the reflection of spiraling gems.

He was always good at mining, with his brute force and eye for shine. But he failed to pull back, shattering the diamond dust with his instrument of extraction. Stars tumbled. With sacked lunch inspiration, the alcohol-black scent of his mother's love scrawled across in bold declaration. He could achieve anything, anywhere, that need not remain whole. Like fiberglass dreams, the astronomical glitter stuck out from his thumb, a splinter of failure. He would never gaze down scientific magnifying tubes towards the heavens or chart their tantalizing spin. No, no, but he would lay against his flattened and slim pillow, hand tracing her protruding bare hip, and explain the science he once loved. His body grew, but his knowledge did not, and the red-headed body next to him had little use for middle school project explorations. She nodded just the same.

"how long ago was it?"

"eight or seven years ago." He had that habit of referencing the largest value first as if the ceiling were where his existence began and all else was reaching within his inevitable fall. His wounded thumb danced along his chipped tooth edge, its clay shard long discarded. Man was made from the improbability of life. A galactic primordial soup, raspberries smashed in a palm. With stained lips, we heated ourselves over a stovetop, jarring our attempted eternity.

II.

de Verteuil

Smacking on their dough ears, gray suede-draped creature. Suspended butter-slicked popcorn, acrobatic turn.

“I can’t do everything around here.”

“I’m tired too.”

“you’re tired too?” Her eyes spun in an orbic set of three, juggled and lit.

The Nevada landscape sprawled, pink and malleable, an abandoned saltwater taffy. The sight of it pulled across his water-lined eye. Road spotted with billboards, attorneys of law, damage control, divorce.

“I work all day, all day I work and come home and work around you.”

Beyond the capsizing cardboard lay the Elvis-ridden city, with its drive-through chapels and joystick losses. Casino carpet caked in cigarette smoke. Showgirls who wouldn’t complain.

“you know what I think,”

The spotlight lit and oriented towards the little red car. Red-nosed men curled and compact — the air smelt of grease. Salt crusted along his elbow.

“I think you believe you can have it all, that it’s not a goal but a natural born right for you to be spoiled. but what have you done? what do you have to show for it? just me, and I’m gone. I’m gone.”

Vegas shows ran in a heated melodic trance, contortionists bent and sprung on endless occasions. Every night, her body split down the middle, sawed in half by the wobbling aluminum edge. They run, and they run, and they run. Until all of us ask, “Are they really still putting that thing on?” Then the posters curl and tumble down from their plastered shells. The showmen scrape off their coated faces.

III.

In the vastness of youthful ignorance, we spot shapes from miles off and wonder about their possible click into our internal puzzle. Very few times do we meet someone who will fit.

We lose a whole set of teeth. Baby ones toppling out of our gums. In increments, they sprout back up. Did our ancestors pull out their eventually worn second pair under the impression of a third rebirth? Did they stuff their bleeding gums with the receipt with your number on it? Red ink, pinker than your hair, but red all the same. When he called you that second night, did you hear a shakiness in his voice? If you did, it would have saved you. You would have understood he is the type of foolish man who, in hard times, grabs a set of pliers and grips at his last set of teeth.

Another person might not fit between his gapped tooth smile, but that wadded memory lay snug in the concavity. Very few times do we meet someone who will fit.

But the telephone static held the air, unconnected line and bloody-lipped man babbling through one side. The white nobs rolled between the curled wire, coins under a sleeper’s pillow. He did not understand, with his self-induced age regression, that this is why she left. A teething infant was no equal. A boy, no lover.

The mouth she kissed always two mounds of gum.

IV.

Baking is often the initial exposure to chemistry. Scales, spoons, procedures. The atomists — the philosophers, not the scientists — predicted the concept of the atom and how they could bounce and ricochet. But there wasn't a foundation for this belief — an oddball observation pinged off the heads of wearily insightful men. They could not see their all-surrounding orphic spheres as he could not see the chemistry of his mother's bread.

When she poured her ounces, it was without a scientist's precision. The flour bag weighed far too much, the clear bowl unsterilized. She has a superstitious fold of her dough, a ritualistic art. It was not science that led to the atom, but theology. It was not chemistry that raised the loaf, it was belief.

"That coolness —"
"Feel it till' it's gone."

He lifted that meaty bear paw, with its oil-mined palm still succulent and tender faced now towards the sky. His father's ring was angular and gold. Its weight worth her body and the exhaustion of her limbs.

The fire danced below his toes, encased in their workman's boot. He wore wool socks. It made little sense in this heat.

"I'll leave in the morning."
"Off so soon?"

As she aged, her hands shook, violent seizures dawned at her fingertips and halted before her wrists. Their fault line tremors bound by her womanly veins. Measurements skewed, dough into a paste, or soup. With a faulty body, she could no longer knead, and her son, never devout, failed to see the oven as an altar. He could not adopt her practice. He never learned to enter a kitchen. To kneel before the heated rack. It would be an act of submission, loving.

Emotion spotted the atomic before the empirical, not because the gods ordained it. There is a revelation only reached by the act of devotion, particles in complete surrenderance to their scientific laws. Raw humanity. He saw very little from his stone-topped pedestal step. His calcified knees were unbandaged and unknissed.

Bryan



Ayden

Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) is an SDS alumnus, expressive arts therapist, facilitator, multimodal artist, children's book author and glitter enthusiast. You can find out more about Jasper on his website, www.queerarttherapy.com, or instagram [@queerarttherapy](https://www.instagram.com/queerarttherapy).

Image Description: A plus-sized, light-complexioned person lifts their shirt so their genitals are visible. Their face is offscreen. Their thighs take up the bottom third of the image, and each thigh is covered with a garment in the colors of the trans pride flag.

***Sexworld* and *Sloppy Spill*: The Pleasures of Erotic Oppression in Pornography**

Evyn Armstrong (they/them) is a student majoring in Cinema Studies and Art History, with an Anthropology minor and a great love for long video essays.

Abstract This paper proposes a similarity between the tactics used to generate pleasure in contemporary gay hazing pornography and race play. The paper relies on Jennifer Nash's book, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, which uses analysis of Anthony Spinelli's *Sexworld* to establish race play as an instrument to communicate fantasies and heighten eroticism. The places where race pleasure and the pleasures of queer degradation fail to align also support Nash's constructions of race pleasure as uniquely complicated. A hazing-themed film from the gay pornography company Fraternity X, entitled *Sloppy Spill*, will serve as a framework to view this construction of sexualized queerness. *Sloppy Spill* will be compared with Anthony Spinelli's *Sexworld* (1978) to demonstrate the parallel techniques of Nash's race pleasure and queer pleasure, a practice referred to here as erotic oppression. The paper analyzes the similarities of race and queer oppressive pleasures in terms of their relationship to fantasy and how they generate pleasure. Further, the critical issue of sexualized otherness is compared across the erotic pleasures of *Sexworld* and *Sloppy Spill*.

In Jennifer Nash's influential book *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, she paints a picture of the pleasures possible to black people in the practice of race play. These pleasures, she argues, are "far more complex than problematically seductive pleasures in humiliation" (Nash, 2020, p.105). To prove this, Nash examines the interracial scenes in Anthony Spinelli's *Sexworld* (1978) as a model for the implementation of blackness as a dialect to express desire. *Sexworld* follows its sexually dissatisfied characters to a sort of sex vacation world which promises to fulfill the guests' wildest fantasies, thus adapting the story of Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1973) as a pornographic tale. Two of the characters on this trip, Jill and Roger, are paired together to satisfy their desires, resulting in a series of interracial sex scenes that emphasize the pleasure found in their racial difference. This racial difference is developed in Jill's blackness, played by the notable adult film

star Desiree West, while her partner is a white man. This paper will argue that contemporary gay pornography employs a similar tactic to this example of race play, using the derogation of queer people as an instrument to communicate fantasies and heighten eroticism. A hazing-themed film from the gay pornography company Fraternity X, entitled *Sloppy Spill*, will serve as a framework to view this construction of sexualized queerness. *Sloppy Spill* will be compared with *Sexworld* to demonstrate the parallel techniques of Nash's race pleasure and queer pleasure, a pairing referred to here as erotic oppression. This term reflects the fact that these pleasures rely on the participation of historically privileged groups to generate humiliation, rather than purely growing from isolated power differentials. The places where these racial and queer pleasures fail to align also support Nash's constructions of race pleasure as uniquely complicated (Nash, 2020, p.105).

A significant point of comparison between race pleasures and queer pleasures is their relationship to fantasy. For each case, the enactment of fantasy is marked by extreme performativity and a sense of excess that betrays the illusory nature of the interaction. According to Nash, Jill's exaggerated performance of race in interactions with Roger includes the conscious invocation of "racial fictions" which "transform Roger's aversion into desire" (Nash, 2020, pp. 90-91). In the first and longest scene between the pair, Jill capitalizes on racialized language and stereotypes to seduce Roger, referencing her "sweet juice" and the "rhythm" between her thighs (Spinelli, 1978). The first statement alludes to the phrase "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," while the second comments on the notion that black people have an innate and attractive sense of rhythm. Nash emphasizes Jill's raised eyebrow when she delivers the line: "I provides entertainment, sir" (Spinelli, 1978). Here, Nash argues that Jill's emphasis on "provides" and her facial expression proves that acting out of black subservience is a deliberate source of pleasure for Jill (Nash, 2020, p.91). The implied recognition of the racial performativity in *Sexworld* reveals how these overstated depictions can use the conflicting dynamic of oppression to generate pleasure. As argued by Smith and Luykx, this capacity of race play media is located within the racist social context of their production, relying on explicit racism to function (Smith & Luykx, 2017, p. 438).

In contrast to *Sexworld*, the bottom, submissive participant in *Sloppy Spill* begins the scene with an artificially reluctant acceptance of this degradation. The scene warms up to its homophobic humiliation by insulting the bottom — given the name "Bitch" on the Fraternity X website — for his awkwardness, clothing, and hair colour (Frat X, 2023). In calling attention to his "short-shorts" and referring to him as a "bitch," this initial sequence sets up the humiliation on the basis of Bitch's queerness (Fraternity X, 2023). Importantly, this queerness is constructed predominantly through as-

sertions of Bitch's effeminacy, enjoyment of his degraded position in the group of straight men, and his skill at oral and anal sex. This construction exposes how this erotic oppression relies on the belief in the otherness of the participants, locating its eroticism in part on the boundaries crossed.

As Bitch quickly acquiesces to the unrealistic requests of the fraternity brothers, the excess of queer and straight performances in the film becomes obvious. First, Bitch is asked to pick up and sort spilled Skittles off the ground and feed them to the brothers, all the while being repeatedly verbally humiliated. This action is ridiculous, but the attempt to establish the subservience of its queer participant clearly marks its exaggerated fantasy. In the film, Bitch's sexual pleasure is displayed through dramatic moaning and active participation in the sex acts depicted, appearing enthusiastic while providing oral sex and riding his partners. Additionally, though the video does not contain the moment of Bitch's orgasm, the emphasized, external ejaculation of his partner — the "money-shot" — serves as a stand-in for both men's ultimate pleasure. In each of these cases of erotic oppression, the excessive adherence to stereotypical racial or queer abasement serves as a site of pleasure.

Furthermore, the fantasy of these situations relies on the ability to reenact specific scenarios of oppression or violence, rather than entirely fabricate them. As indicated by Ariane Cruz in *The Color of Kink*, many practitioners of BDSM race play incorporate aesthetics and rhetoric of historical slavery to receive sexual pleasure, demonstrating how "slime [...] becomes lubricant" (Cruz, 2020, p. 32). While the scenes between Roger and Jill in *Sexworld* are not reenacting scenes of slavery, less extreme narratives of black servitude are still in full effect. When Roger first sees Jill in his hotel room at *Sexworld*, he asks her if she is there to clean, to which she responds, "Clean your wet cock when we's done, sir" (Spinelli, 1978). This interaction quickly establishes how Jill will be

responsible for the labour of seducing Roger into the sexual encounter and, through her intonation and commitment to the racial character, shows how she will find pleasure in her performance of servility.

In contrast to *Sexworld's* somewhat subtle reenactment, the videos of Fraternity X invariably claim adherence to fraternity hazing or bonding rituals. In *Sloppy Spill*, the reproduction of a hazing ritual is immediately established in the mise-en-scène of the film, reminiscent of a fraternity house — full of dirty beige carpeting, posters, and young white men. Crucially, the whiteness of the participants is critical to the believability of the heterosexual fraternity facet central in hazing scenes (Ward, 2020, p. 181). Further, Ward asserts in “Haze Him!” that the pleasurable potential of hazing porn originates from the eroticization of “what is, or can be made to be, disgusting or repulsive about homosexuality” (Ward, 2020, p. 176). For films like *Sloppy Spill*, this allows pleasure to be created from the idea that participation in homosexual sex is inherently degrading, especially for those in the more precarious roles of submissives and bottoms (Ward, 2020, p. 183).

In tracking the differences between the racial and queer erotic oppression, it is crucial to investigate how these approaches develop processes for pleasure. In both cases, the main foundational factor is erotic humiliation, specifically degradation that bases itself on ideas of naturalized inferiority. In the race pleasures of *Sexworld*, the erotic humiliation is twofold — on the basis of Jill’s race and her gender. While the recognition and performance of Jill’s blackness evidently calls forth notions of inferiority and subservience, the fact of her womanhood also allows for denigration of her femininity. This is evidenced in *Sexworld* when Roger asks Jill “What’s a nice black girl like you doing in a place like this?” (Spinelli, 1978). This question demonstrates how Jill’s sexual assertiveness becomes a site of indignity as it negates her potential to appear as a respectable, ideal woman. Thus, racial

erotic oppression can compound with multiple levels of identification, including queerness. Race and racial erotic oppression can also impact the queer characters of gay pornography (Cruz, 2020, p. 72).

Parallel to *Sexworld's* erotic oppression, *Sloppy Spill* also centers its humiliation on the perceived state of femininity of its degradee. In *Sexworld*, Jill’s blackness, and the eroticism that it generates, is compounded by her femininity but not derived from it; her femininity augments the appearance of her blackness without constituting it. In contrast, femininity in *Sloppy Spill* is welded into queer erotic oppression, rather than augmenting it. In addition to the degradingly effeminate title of “bitch” that appears on the Frat X website and throughout the dialogue of the video, this description highlights the un-masculine character of Bitch as a receiver of penises, stating “we got a lot accomplished with our dicks and his mouth” (Frat X, 2023). Along with this, the description ends by asserting that Bitch will now “clean the kitchen and make us dinner” (Frat X, 2023). Moreover, the website refers to Bitch using she/her and he/him pronouns. In combination with the feminine stereotypes established above, this pronoun use supports a clear effort to feminize Bitch as part of his degradation, not to indicate a gender identity. The misogynistic vision of femininity in *Sloppy Spill* finds proximity to women inherently degrading, but does not distinguish between queerness and femininity in its humiliation of Bitch.

Moreover, behind the erotic factor of subservience and degradation in these scenes of erotic oppression is a sexualized difference between the participants. Without the presence or performance of non-blackness or non-queerness, the pleasure derived from oppression would be unattainable. According to Smith and Luykx, images of black/white interracial sex always include an underlying manifestation of sexualized racial otherness, either by emphasizing race or attempting to erase it (Smith & Luykx, 2017, p. 434). Therefore, it is race play’s ability to recognize, control, and counteract the om-

nipresence of race that allows it to become a “lexicon of desire” (Nash, 2020, 86). The sexualized otherness of queer humiliation is much more muddy than race play, as its participants don’t necessarily embody the difference it eroticizes. Here, the contrast between straight and queer is frequently performed by two queer men, each actively taking pleasure in the queer sex they attempt to characterize as humiliating. While viewers do seem to pay attention to the credibility of heterosexual performance, Kiss et al. found that this facet was not considered highly erotic to most gay men. Instead, erotic value is concentrated in signifiers of traditional masculinity of straight performers and the pleasure they experience in queer sex (Kiss, Morrison, & Parker, 2019, p. 188).

Although it is not unique to hazing porn or race play, the morality of erotic oppression in pornography is central to the experience of viewers and participants alike. In *Abuse Porn: Reading Reactions to Boys Halfway House*, Joseph Brennan illustrates how the majority of viewers of humiliation porn feel concerned about the genre’s potential to damage future pornography and harm performers and real victims of abuse (Brennan, 2017, p. 424). The commentators Brennan studied primarily feared that extreme porn, including humiliation porn, had “gone too far” and would encourage people to accept and enact rape or coercion in the real world. Cruz also recognizes the moral discourse of race play, complicating issues of consent and abuse (Brennan, 2017, p. 432). In the chapter “The Dark Side of Desire,” she argues that “consent is not a universal principle,” but actually depends upon and reinforces sexual norms (Cruz, 2020, p. 46). Against the backdrop of slavery, consent in race play is of vital importance as it is what differentiates this play from abuse; the act of consent and enthusiastic participation in race play makes it powerful. Comparably, Brennan points to the potential for subjectivity in pleasure and abuse, and to the complications embedded as a result of the ambiguous separation between fantasy

and practice (Brennan, 2017, p. 431).

In public discourse, race play and queer humiliation are perceived as distinct in their severity and potential for harm. While queer erotic oppression is more easily downplayed as an issue of sexually deviant individuals, the latent harm of race play is extrapolated to the whole of black women. Historically, black people have been imagined in the dominant culture as a uniquely sexual “other” in comparison to the white “us.” This perception has manifested in basically every avenue of individual, social, and political expression. The perception of extreme sexual otherness is epitomized in the case of Saartjie Baartman, a black woman who was paraded around as the “Hottentot Venus” in the 1810s (Hobson, 2002, p. 52). In her case, Baartman’s body, particularly her rear, became a public spectacle, evidence of the black body’s essential difference (Hobson, 2002, p. 52). By contrast, queerness is visualized through an innately sexual lens, often envisioned as a decidedly modern identity defined by the type of non-normative sex people have. This difference allows for the race-pleasures of black women to be expanded into a broad continuation of cycles of historical violence, while pleasure in queer degradation becomes further proof of the deviancy of contemporary queer people. Thus, race play is often understood as more severe, posing a harm to black participants that is largely absent in discussions of queer degradation. This is further evidenced by the presence of therapeutic narratives in reactions to and discourses on race play, with the reenactment of trauma serving to heal it (Cruz, 2020, p. 63). This restorative notion of race play is founded on the idea that the trauma of racism is historically-bound, occurring as a result of specific events that are essential to the black lived experience. Queerness, however, is not thought of as something that brings along an unwavering, homogenous trauma. Rather, queerness is understood as an individualized experience that is broadly shared but never identical. The therapeutic element of healing is there-

fore lacking in discussions of the pleasure or morality of queer degradation. The performance of the fantasy of abuse is seen as shameful and inhumane, rather than a source of healing (Brennan, 2017, p. 437). This shows how reactions to queer erotic oppression are less concerned with the underlying and historical power differentials than responses regarding race play.

Within the context of Nash's race-pleasures, the generation of pleasure in *Sexworld* and *Sloppy Spill*'s racial and queer erotic oppressions provide the possibility for a way of "speaking sex" (Nash, 2020, p. 88). Each method of erotic oppression relies on exaggerated performance and reenactment, although to different degrees and with variable bases for reproduction. While the performance of race play includes recreation of historical subservience and acts on the socially real racial difference among participants, the act simultaneously critiques the systems it replicates through its inherent performativity and the explicit naming of race. Meanwhile, queer

humiliation reenacts scenes of humiliating straight men through homosexual sex, but need not include genuinely heterosexual men. Therefore, queer erotic degradation models an artificial scene of oppression with situations that do not compound on historical injustice. The distinct origins of pleasure among these two approaches proves how the heritage of racism in interracial sex engenders a uniquely historical locus of pleasure in race play. This difference to race-pleasures also plays out in moral discourse, affording race play a condition of ethical peril above queer denigration. Further, the capacity for racial degradation to be compounded through other elements such as gender (while queer degradation is instead completely altered) demonstrates the distinction between queer and racial erotic degradation. All of these differences prove how Nash is correct in characterizing the race pleasures in *Sexworld* and beyond as "far more complex than problematically seductive pleasures in humiliation" (Nash, 2020, p. 105).

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Human Beings

Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) is an SDS alumnus, expressive arts therapist, facilitator, multimodal artist, children's book author and glitter enthusiast. You can find out more about Jasper on his website, www.queerarttherapy.com, or instagram @queerarttherapy.

Artist Statement This erotic poem is inspired by the complex contradictions between one's everyday and kink identities. It explores the power of a queer dominance/submission relationship to transcend social norms and expectations in conflicting, messy, forbidden, and transformative ways.

Power constructs me —
boa constrictor
my vocal chords slither between sounds inhuman
I become creature
and digest you whole.

Carnivore, dinosaur, fossilized ancestral urges
Hunting prey
Sinful prayers
Purging conscience
I am creature.

Greed is my fingernails
Hooked in your neck
open, velvet—mine.
Greed is the smell of leather on lavender
tears wash off the remainder
of your dignity
a reminder
of what you have become.
of what
I have made you,
Makeup on the pillowcase
pillowy lips speak my hard cock into being
coated in gloss and cum.

Greed becomes me
Power constructs me
The air is hot with hierarchy

My socialism becomes
prickly,
frayed, frightened,
I circle it around your wrists and tighten.

My feminism purples in the bruises on your body
wettens in the river of your pussy
abandons itself in the tattoo melting
down the steep curve of your hips.

My humanity becomes
realer as I become
Creature
Sharper, finer, higher, louder, faster, harder, freer.

When human becomes creature, creature becomes whole
When I own your body,
You own my soul.

Bryan



Johanna Sissy

Jasper Bryan (he/him/they) is an SDS alumnus, expressive arts therapist, facilitator, multimodal artist, children's book author and glitter enthusiast. You can find out more about Jasper on his website, www.queerarttherapy.com, or instagram [@queerarttherapy](https://www.instagram.com/queerarttherapy).

Image Description: The subject of the image is a light-skinned person. Viewed from the back, only their bare ass, tail, and paws are visible. The tail and paws are drawn in shades of pink and purple, while the subject's skin is in shades of peach and red.

Cover Artist Statement: A Close Study on Black Queer Love

Saysah (they/them) is trying to be in right relationship within the body, waters, land(s) and community.

we held on through it all

we held on through it

we held on through

we held on

we held

we

we held

we held on

we held on through

we held on through it

we held on through it all

this piece came to me when i was rereading an offering that my partner had sent me in preparation for a coffee ceremony and grief circle we were co-facilitating in community in the coming weeks.

the offering was that of a dear friend and incredible poet, Sanna Wani's Good Grief, for the Syllabus Project.

i found myself doing a close study of Sanna's syllabus, and in turn a close study of the love i have been cultivating and growing with my love. that day that i wrote this piece and created these collages, i wanted to send them a prayer.

it came out of me in a quiet burst.

i knew the weeks, months and probable years ahead felt bleak; i knew we both felt this way.

yet, we continued to hold on
hold on to chosen kin, lovers, friends, each other and ourselves.

Saysah

the descending and ascending form of this piece represents an encapsulation of the form of my grief.

waxing.

waning.

ever present.

i feel hopeful someday, and others... well... not so much.

i began to wonder why we hold on.

i did not come to a conclusive answer, but it still feels like a necessary question to ask.

a living question, and maybe that living is all i can do right now.

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Uses of the Erotic
The Erotic as Power

Now, as you awaken...
by Mahmoud Darwish

Now, as you awaken, remember the swan's last dance. Did you dance with young angels while you were dreaming? Did the butterfly light you up when it burned with the eternal light of the rose? Did the phoenix appear clearly before you and call you by your name? Did you see the morning dawn from the fingers of the one you love? Did you touch the dream with your hand or did you leave it to dream alone, aware suddenly of your own absence? Dreamers don't abandon their dreams, they flare and continue the life they have in the dream...tell me how you lived your dream in a certain place and time, who you are. And now, remember if you have wronged anyone, then remain true to yourself.

السيف
تقرأ في الوطن
عند المرحمة

