



HIVES



BUZZ-
ZINE

Vol. 1: Human Animal
Relations

Edited By
Jessica Stokes and
Michael Stokes

Jessica Stokes and Michael Stokes: "Introduction"

HIVES is an ongoing scholarly, artistic, and communal organization dedicated to developing an understanding of the ways in which matter and beings function in interdependent networks. HIVES seeks to create a generative space for conversations on the overlaps of disability studies and animal studies in popular culture. In his book *Brilliant Imperfection*, Eli Clare emphasizes how "White Western culture goes to extraordinary lengths to deny the vital relationships between water and stone, plant and animal, human and nonhuman, as well as the utter reliance of human upon human" (Clare 136). Clare offers the disability studies framework of interdependence as a way to undo fantastical narratives of independence and the individual. HIVES is an engagement with hiveminds, relationality, and interdependence across and within animal/human divides.

In the summer of 2020, HIVES pursued new ways to engage its community of scholars, larvae, artists, pets, and assorted pals at a distance. Working in the rhythm of stores that were out of necessities, small, hugless outdoor gatherings, and trips and stumbles that came from rolling and strolling in uncertain times, this summer project and its editors limped into the fall. By the time Buzz-Zine finally makes it to print, we'll have

already witnessed multiple snow falls on Michigan State University's campus, where HIVES is housed.

As editors of a project carried out in crip time, we are excited that this delayed-release artifact is finally being simul-cast in HTML, in a large print .doc, in a .pdf, in a limited print edition, and in a limited braille-embossed edition. When we first imagined the Buzz-Zine, we had hopes of messing with the genre of the zine while taking advantage of some of its qualities. Zines have historically been cheap and easy to produce/circulate increasing the accessibility of this type of independent publishing. However, they've often lacked image descriptions and lacked a multiplicity of formats thus limiting accessibility. With the Buzz-Zine, we hope to increase access through digital cross-publishing and attention to multiple modes of engaging with creative and scholarly work. Early zines were a way for fans of science fiction to rank favorite stories, to propagate fan theories, and to form social groups; however, they also served gatekeeping functions, upholding some (white, male) voices and silencing others. In the decades since the first sf zines, new movements and publications have made space for people whose ideas and voices have been suppressed in their subcultures (e.g. Riot Grrrl zines that pushed back against the "male-driven punk world of the past"). In the Buzz-Zine, we've gathered a hive of scholarship/poetics/art that challenges the boundaries and definitions of the

zine while reimagining accessibility and community.

Drawn from personal experience and out-of-this-world speculation, these stories, poems, commentary, and visual art rethink our notions of the human, question the limits of representation, and embrace the affective and embodied possibilities and pains in the overlaps and tensions of disability studies and animal studies. Our contributors include a child painter who reimagines spasms as laughing aliens, performers who stretch from Athens, Georgia to Davis, California, as well as professors who speculate on squirrels and worms and humans and other animal companions. We are thankful to each and every contributor for the words, images, and imaginaries they bring to the HIVES community.

This zine was made possible through support provided by Michigan State University's English Department as well as funds received from the Robert L. Decker and Benjamin Muns Friendship Memorial Scholarship. If you are curious about what HIVES is, does, and will do: visit beehives.org.

Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Durham: Duke UP. 2017.

Daniel Christmann: "Mertensia"



Artists' Note:

The man who the collage focuses on is from a medical text called *The Pernkopf Topographic Anatomy of Man*. It contains some of the most detailed, hand rendered illustrations of the human body ever made. Pernkopf was a Nazi doctor. This means that, in all probability, the man was either Jewish, gay, disabled, Roma, or any of the many other people groups that the Nazis deemed undesirable. What I'm trying to get at is that he was probably murdered.

The dynamic of disability has a lot to do with the idea that there are people in this world who, for one reason or another, are undesirable. We don't usually go to the extreme that the Nazis did, but there are people in this world who won't let their children get vaccines because they are afraid it will turn them autistic, which for them is apparently something worse than death. Hepatitis? Nah, at least they'll be normal and diseased, like the rest of us. The interior of this undesirable, with flowers blooming out of him, paintings of an ancient hunt by Neolithic man splayed out next to a swirling cluster of neon neurons, was a fitting rebuttal. The piece references iconography, with its floating saints, and is drenched in a feeling of heavy symbolism of those things that are wild and free in each of us. It's the portrait of a human, none of whom are undesirable.

Marisa Lucca: "A Human Guide Dog?"

I was happy, you see
To begin a journey with new colleagues
To earn a Ph.D. degree
But ableism had other plans for me

I disclosed my disability
I explained I could neither hear nor see
And I told them what I would need
To make inclusion a possibility

I told them particular support was key
A human being who advocates for me
Strives to make things barrier-free
And I told them we achieved inclusion as a team

They were cooperative at first
Eager to quench their thirst
For a Token that would make the bank burst
Exploiting my disability for the inspiration its worth

But their eagerness did not last long
For I did not passively tag along
They were held accountable for what they did wrong
Thanks to my human support who held strong

The college dean called a meeting
Said they didn't mean any mistreating

And wanted to avoid further demeaning
But their words lost their true meaning

You see, we did some educating that day
An advocate defends her client's needs, we say
Acts to keep exclusion at bay
And advocates no matter the snipes and sneers
thrown her way

Ah, they say, we can make this okay
We understand the role you play
We honor guide dogs for the work they do each day
We could let you walk across the stage on
graduation day

Shock overtook our thoughts like fog
For a human support is a guide dog?
How does one liken a guide dog to a human cog?
Is human support as foreign as smog?

We were a bit upset
That they saw her as a working pet
Meant to assist as they expect
And remain silent when they make a threat

We fought ableism 'til emotions made us weary
And soon left, more hurt than cheery
We now turn to Disability Studies with a query
Why does human support become a "human guide dog" in the social imaginary?

seeley quest: "Messages in Bottles"

reaching an edge of Montreal bordered by the St Lawrence river, you pitch the message. C's service dog scouts along the waterline nearby, finds and fetches the bottle.

dear C: i miss you. you ever consider the fact of being in five big car and bike crashes (so far), and that you've had at least five concussions in adulthood? and so Can't venture again without crampons after an ice storm, risk slipping to head-slam repeats? you can't forget, even though your memory's narrator has become less reliable.

i like you describing me as a "lame love"--the edge we know you can push with how intimately you've treated me, how public you've been about your own episodes of halting, encumbered and staggering movement. i like the humour, sincerity, and especially that you checked first and didn't assume it would feel ok to use that.

more disabled folks have tried reclaiming "gimp" and "cripple" than "lame"—it's still a putdown daily. so you know it requires explaining to potential allies: that i sometimes limp, my knees are damaged and mobility impaired even if i can bike most of the time. we must remind all that's what it means, and that we pair it with love for how i physically operate....

now that we've entered a pandemic, numbers of us will grow; can we dispel ableism and grow those

willing to name themselves part of the community? we are many, and strong; still facing gaps in care, still undermined by isolation.

i go on faith you'll get this message, and reply. water, current, a border-crossing habitat of mixed fluids, the effort of bottle containing, gambling, trust--these will bring precious words back to me. waiting and seeking, Q

C returns to make a solid toss into waves. her next message will go downstream, but a humpback whale heading upriver carries this vessel; it washes up where Q stumbles over it.

dear Q, i slide with you into this surreal space, breaking the logic for constructing our narratives: resist the pressure of clarifying whose voice, what's non/fiction, etc. i couldn't even fabricate a missive how i wished, just got lucky a whale arrived to carry it. as someone said at the end of May when Whale came to Montreal, "humans, whales and land mammals, sometimes...are vagrants that go in unusual places"--oui, i think it's a crip too, to ally with for stubborn cross-species survival!

we're amie through exhaustion, communication errors, numbed hands, dislocated heads, with jouissance nonetheless. we embrace joyous energy even more, knowing that's so precious! each casting notes forth to be transmitted, depending only on safe enough passage to carry them, and on adventurous receivers to actively adopt the

messages. merci for engaging in this ritual practice alongside me, for attuning to what's floating in the mix, letting it hold the wayward muse, hints, admissions and commitments. we must believe our records will be found, and yield future story-building. in hope, Yours

slp: [70.] [72.] [73.] [77.]

[70.]

Yr dog is not yr happiness to be lost tho ye clutch
the dust yr lost dog
heart faild or utterly achievd who choose the
reason to haunt as reason does yr lost dog

U can live, stony organs pressing out their
purpose, until completed

All those ecstatic ghazal writers sang longing sang
love life temporary
but not the death of love achievd—the poem wd
break under it

where's yr lost god

E'en yr grief must be pretty, u ugly crier, no
Elektra shriek, no hawk's beak
split complete to speak. No speech. It'd be better
these seizures went silent as yr last dog

Faiths a beetle-bitten pine brown tinder for
sadness unslakeable forest firing
and all the ash wont reclaim what yre not done w/

[72.] – first published in *Denver Quarterly*

Friend, expect no sense, as tho t'perceive were
reason
no light for seeing, no breath, air for breath, not
absence

remaining's a fault line stilled w/ sheer faces
forced grind
but choking, but frozen muscle tracts—take my
sense

If I cd die now, I wd, go w/ u, little white
sock-paws pennant-tail. my Friend. limpid stare.

in this air-prickle purple-thunderd post-storm,
post-storm
the storm's missing, the nexus of feeling, all good
sense

my familiar, I'm yrs, I can't take me w/ me
more—
all my nerves explode if I let them in—where'd it
go—

face meets face the only moment that remains to
matter

[73.] – first published in *Denver Quarterly*

who cooks for me when I cannot cook.
anothr disappointment, common as a kitchen

what happens in a room whose use's unused.
this space I made, no one comes

I was a thorn bush, then a bird
caught in my thorn bush

Love, y've left. will I be willing?
unrecognize one for the new animal y're wearing

who rises when Love's not home.
rabbit, take care—

[77.]

my typewriter's poor
flamenco orchestration

dull resonance inside chambers the plodding
go go go of my own w/o echo

steady unrhyming lurch of no one safe
my faulty clock my broken doomsday

rabbit's mirror, dead of burst pump, I am
forever now only losing you

what's to percuss me back into the dark
cabaret studio space, its held starlit candles

Ann Millett-Gallant: "Spooning with Mama"



Cheryl Caesar: "Amphibian"

Post-MS, my legs are clumsy,
half-numb. Dumb to earth's
unevenness, I stumble to the shore.

Half-in the water is hardest. Currents pull,
seaweed sways, leads me this way and that.
I trudge through unseen mud.

But then the feet lift, turn to fins.
My movements grow smooth. Cool fingers
of water stroke my limbs.

Now all is calm. Swallows swoop;
dragonflies hover. I'm a slow-moving head,
no threat. Fish pass oblivious.

.....
Coming out, my legs have forgotten
to be legs. Thigh muscles cry weakness. I stay
horizontal almost to the shore.

When I stand, my knees tremble. Birds take
flight.
Bent over, I wait to regain
my vertical life. And I wonder

what the whales thought, returning to water.
Abandoning legs, letting paws
revert to fins. Did they weigh
what they were losing? Irredentists,

what was the call they heard that brought them
home?

Author's note on "irredentists": For this metaphor
I am indebted to John Noble Wilford, and his
delightful *New York Times* article, "How the Whale
Lost Its Legs And Returned To the Sea" (May 3,
1994).

"Amphibian" has appeared in

-- *The Blue Nib*, Issue 39 | Sept 2019;
-- *Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing*, Sept
2019;
-- *The Reo Town Reading Anthology!: Rejoice,
Everyone!*, October 2020.

Mike Gill: "Squirrels Again"

Even though you tell yourself it does not matter if the squirrels ruin the garden, you still get upset when they dig up the potatoes. You rearrange the deer netting hoping they will not climb up to the cucumbers. You place the plastic plant trays to protect the growing squash. You sprinkle cayenne. And coffee grounds. This will work you lie to yourself. Surely, they will bother my neighbors, you think. What do they say about magical thinking?

At summer camp, there was a song with the lyrics about chickens and tomatoes. And rabbits and carrots. You don't remember anything about squirrels and vegetables. But there should be something. Even a brief mention that squirrels love to dig up, leave half eaten tomatoes, unripe squash. Taunting the gardener. In a moment of desperation, you bring your tomato plants to your neighbor to foster. She has a supposed squirrel proof enclosure to raise the plants. Seriously, just buy tomatoes at the market next year. Your blood pressure and your neighbor will thank you.

Claire K. Robbins: "For Frayda"

*I've come down with a stomach bug.
Unfortunately, I need to postpone our
meeting.*

*Thank you for your understanding.
On the couch, cowering,
the searing pain of shame
pierces my confidence clean through.
The cloud is back.
Every raindrop, a whisper:
You'll never make it.
...not good enough...
...better off without you...
...just can't get it together...
I'll never make it.
Why does everything hurt?
How did I become the cloud?
It's a bad morning.
I gather my weapons:
one numbs, another buries.*



What I don't squash, I silence.
I am a shovel, a shield, a
stronghold;
an insentient cyborg; a stone.

Eventually, I look up.
Your enormous eyes, adoring
portals,
beckon me to the fireplace.
I scoot up to your cozy throne.
You lift your long head toward
mine;
snoot to snoot, you take me in.

With a thud and a sigh,
your silky skull meets my thigh.
My fingers find your cheek, a
whisker.
Your ears, giant triangles, velvet.
Your long legs, capacious chest,
large enough for both of our
hearts.

After a while, I rise.

It's still a bad morning –
but softer.

Natalie Phillips: "On Being Bionic"

"My prosthesis is not my narrative, but my narrative is my prosthesis"



"This is not my disk"

When I actually talk about the disc in my neck—the probable source of my vertigo, “functional gait disorder,” email-resistant double vision, and muscle spasms that take me to the ground—I usually tell people I fell off my bike in that triathlon years ago. If so, I’m lying. Yes, there were 30 to 40 mile per hour headwinds. And people were falling off their bikes left and right. I was too scared, though (because of the time I tore my hip flexor) to risk falling and having that sports injury again. That had been a pain in the...well...psoas, and flared in ways that could keep me from running swimming or biking for days, even weeks.

No, I didn’t fall off that bike; I stayed locked on, my hands iron gripped to the handlebars, head down, as the wind battered me back and forth. As the gusts of wind slammed me, I found a way to keep my head, neck, and shoulders fear-frozen to the handlebars: a crazy mantra I had come up with in that moment about my advisor who was about to die, over and over. “if Jay can handle cancer, you can fucking stay on this bike!” I repeated it until the sound of it in my head drowned out everything around me: the other riders, the wind, the race. Screw the scenery. I never looked at that much anyway; I was gonna stay on that fucking bike.

I did. And, as the story goes, I finished the race. When I got off my bike to transition to the run, my neck felt fine, but my legs felt like lead. *Poor training*, I thought to myself. *I should’ve packed an energy bar*. And as I did that run, lead-legging it, I was surprised how much my body wanted to stop and walk. This was just a sprint triathlon, a mere 5k. Sure I wasn’t flying; not expected. I was one of the slowest runners on the triathlon team. But as the team (and my friends) knew, I could always be counted on to push through—an energizer-bunny of a bodymind that could keep “going & going & going.” And I was proud of my battery-like status, even if I couldn’t sprint for the life of me.

So when someone tapped me, breaking my daze to signal that I should pace to beat the person ahead

for the team [the one and only time this ever happened :-)], I was so proud that I “sprinted,” legs loping unevenly, body begging to walk, across the finish line... just ahead of the girl from UC Berkeley.

Usually I stop the story there before people can ask how in the world I slipped a disc in my neck without falling off my bike. *How the hell do I know?* I know it’s vexed, but I’m still proud they tapped me for that triathlon. Hey, a girl’s human, no matter how twisted the logic, especially at 26. As it turns out, that cue—my body’s desperate cry to come into my physio-cognitive twistiness—is the reason I’m grateful I’ve got this contraption in my neck, even on the days I curse it.

I’m bionic.

I now sing “I am titanium” at the top of my lungs, even though it’s mostly made of steel. This disc in my neck, exemplification of early-FDA biotech malfunction as it may be, still *helped* me. Because even when it moves (in fused torque) to create searing nerve pain when I wanna look up at the stars or leaves me in bed on medicine that dulls my mind for days because I lifted groceries wrong, this fucking artificial disc, the *Prestige*—a one-size-fits-all technological dinosaur that made me a 4th of an inch taller—also...slowly...damn slowly, began pulling me away from my own neurodivergent version of the academic rat race, where I drove my

body to exhaustion just to keep my mind from flying so fast, or compulsively tallying my miles per hour, or adjusting my synonyms over and over as I write.

And so even when my body hurts—on a bad day when I do something “dangerous” like tilt my head to the left, or fail to maintain proper ergonomic posture—and pain shoots through me, or causes a blow-out (what I call “Franken-Nat” unable to turn my head more than a few centimeters left or right), I’m...grateful... painfully grateful. Because having this thing in my neck got me to see how insanely stuck I was/am in the academic “Prestige” system....According to the perfection-wired parts of my brain, having the “strength” to do everything, working my hardest, down to the 13th (or 30th) edit of an essay.

That’s not to say I *don’t* keep doing 30 edits of a paper by the way (be it a student’s paper I’m grading or the one I’m writing now) or that I don’t still clock my aqua-run walking down to the minute, battling against cognitive demons if it’s 29 minutes instead of 30. But at least I could start to see it. And disentangle myself to a point where I’m not living life in a flat-out run, a disembodied (#metoo) race through the world and away from the nonlinear chaos in my mind. Now I actually can—at times slowly and painfully—walk, even jog if I’m lucky. More importantly, sometimes, *just sometimes* I can actually be present in my body

and notice the world around me...the trees, a neighbor, just the sound of my breathing at night...rather than my steps on the Garmin.

And if it's a really good night, like tonight, I can even consider celebrating neurodiversity for myself, not just others. And laugh a bit at my neuroses...and be grateful that I've actually been able to slow down and acknowledge them thanks to the 2 x 2 hunk of malfunctioning metal in my spine.

On these walks, I feel the beauty of being able to walk, embodied, at all kinds of paces. When it works, in one of those divine ephemeral flashes, I can begin to (slowly, sometimes) see the world afresh. To appreciate novelty and beauty around me—flowers, trees, the feel of breeze against my skin, even the grass I'm spasming on when I go down—and *be* THERE. Feel the wet-soft spikiness of grass, the color, the texture... According to Shklovsky, my disc works like poetic language. It slows perception, with mind-time to stop and see a flower, refusing to let me move at a certain self-prescribed pace [sustaining that long-dreamt-of-slightly-under-8-minute mile :-)]. Walking, even when my gait freezes so my heel won't go further than my toe, on days like these, I can feel—rather than just theorize—the novelty and wonder of the world around me.

My friend says Michigan State University is “dog-eat-dog”; as he puts it, an R1 where “you eat what you kill.” For me, MSU has the beauty of a hive, a place where I can imagine writing an essay like this—now, ahem, with tenure...—where I don't have to be afraid of admitting I have this device in my neck for fear of losing my job. Where I have not just the lab, but an ever-growing community of people who know about my neck, about my fear of showing weakness. About my OCD-edging perfectionism and nonlinear mind. To me, it's a place where we are all human, also a chaotically beautiful space for hive-mind. Where I show my no-longer-so-invisible disabilities over and over and over again to my students, my colleagues, my friends. Where I share my professional and academic life as openly as I can [or simply have to because they see me :-)]. Where students are the ones who nurture me and support me and step up to lead without judgement. And where, when I write something like this, I share the first draft with them, and jump on Google Drive to work together (a document that today I cannot see) because that's what we do. How we roll.

And this online space, a techno-biological remix of zoom and notes and voice dictation, amidst the Google Drive maze of comically titled lab documents, we find a place where we can write, together. Where I can write. Not by myself, editing word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, but in community. Where we all tend to write together

just because that's what we do. Because that's what works. And there, then, I'm not running. I've lost my tethers: here, I'm in hive-mind community, interdependent by the force of lived reality. Here at the Digital Humanities & Literary Cognition Lab, I might be lying on the ground spasming.

But I'm flying.

Artist's Statement: I want to acknowledge all the people who read this and gave feedback. It only exists because of interdependence...Something I both find amazingly beautiful and I am still struggling with. Alongside voice dictation, it has been touched by Soohyun Cho, Jes Lopez, Cody Mejeur, Jessica Kane, Craig Pearson, Jess Stokes, Michael Stokes, Devin McAuley, Aline Godfroid, Becky Cavnar, Richard Dines, Patrick Taylor, Mitch Carr, and more I'm not sure I can even remember.

Maurice Moore: "Raheem's Dance"

Two generations of tellers head home on an old country dirt road after a long day visiting plantations cross de south.

Old man: -Spits in slop cup-

Raheem: Daddy why you actin funny today?

Old man: Ok Raheem. Yall been idle long enuf. Next time you finna entertain de folks at dat plantation, and I will sign best as I can. -laughs- Dat's if my arthritis don't hold me back.

Raheem: No, Daddy.

Old man: Don't no me Boy! My memory ain't what it usta be.

Raheem: But, why me Daddy?

Old man: -Spits in slop cup- Cause dat's what our folks do Raheem.

Raheem: -Silence-

Old man: We hold de recipes of our hxrstory. Cook up sumthang good ta feed our peoples souls. Kept

hidden under de guise of recipes, or through our dances; our stories hold our lineage.

-Spits in slop cup-

Raheem: -Silence-

Old man: Look you don't have ta do it like ya Daddy do. Der ain't nothin wrong wit dancing ya tales out. If dat's de way they come out!

Raheem: -voice cracking- I know Daddy! -lowers head-

Old man: Head up Boy! -Spits in slop cup- If ya Daddy Earl could see yall doin dat mess. -shakes head-

Raheem: I know Daddy.

Old man: You know! -laughs- He usta dance his tales bout de ancient folks too.

Raheem: Really?

Old man: -Spits in slop cup- But, in de time of our youth men folk weren't permitted to dance dey tales. Yes, dat was only fa women and femmes.

Raheem: Worlds changed. Yes. But it still be mad scary. It's like I get lifted to another plane of existence when I dance.

Old man: -Spits in slop cup- And how you thank de world changed Raheem? Cause, folks like Daddy Earl risked being banished fo dancing to keep cookin up de past!

Raheem: I know Daddy. So how long do I have ta prepare?

Old man: -Spits in slop cup- Ohh, what we gathered today should last me and yo hungrymouth siblings for bout two weeks.

Raheem: What am I even gon dance bout Daddy?

Old man: Boy don't you know anythang? -laughs- You will take my place as a teller, and so my tales are automaticity bequeath ta your peanut head. Plus, Daddy Earl's too!

Raheem: -laughs- Sounds like a plan Old Man. However, I will go with Daddy Earls moves first.

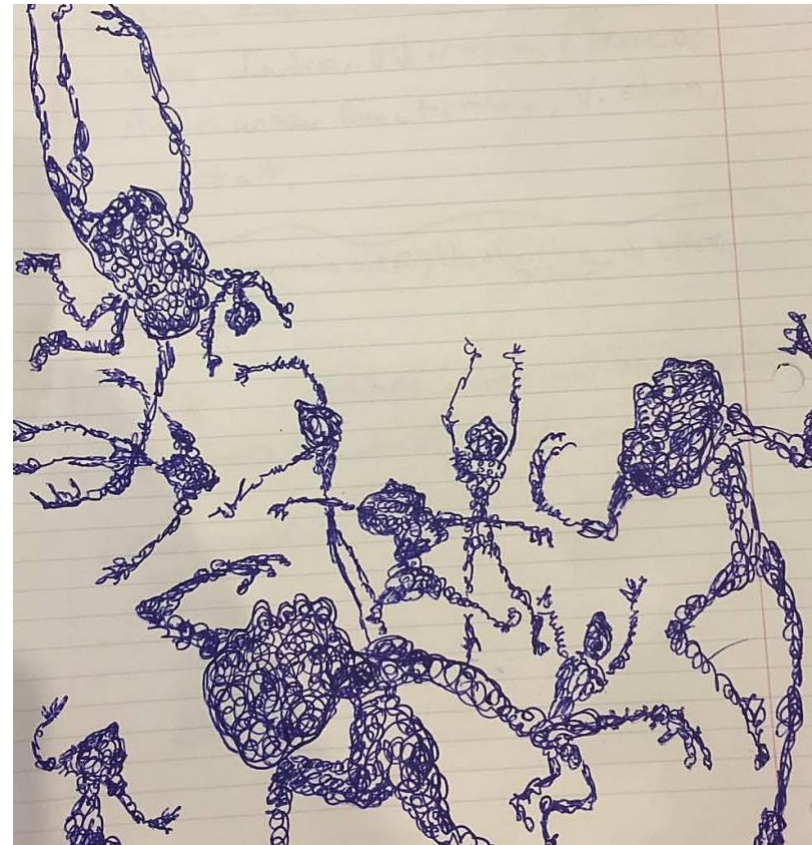
Old man: And, which moves would dat be Boy?

Raheem: -Bending his arms rhythmically and singing- You know dat nursery rhyme we would dance bout de Syncerus folks and de Hunters!

Old man: -Spits in slop cup-

Artist Statement: Based in my artistic practice, my performances/research explores how Black queer

people such as myself have implemented and created a means of survival through Black performance art, creating a mode of active radical resistance. These mode(s) draw upon performative traditions including call and response, improvisation, reading, throwing shade, and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). My pieces extrapolates theories both from queer of color critique and Black foodways, synthesizing different dialects of an innovative visual language.



Petra Kuppers: "Mercury Worms"

Alex screamed for the earthworms. She screamed for the brown promise of their spring wriggling. Once, when she was about ten years old, she had walked into the forests not far from the house she shared with her grandparents, parents and sister. She could still feel the suck of the earth on her rubber boots, the ever-present grind deep inside her knees, the clammy feel of rotten wood as she tore at the earth. She remembered the plank that had locked like a vacuum seal in the dark moor soil. It came up with a sigh, with a stink, and there were brown earthworms between the ghost white root fingers. Earth undulated, like a dragon's spine, hidden nostrils behind tree stumps. The path was a muddy snake. Dripping leaves glued to branches like vines in Tarzan movies.

The ghost fingers reached out for years, cool and hot, cauldron breath in her bones. She saw snake cousins in the poor worms, the sideways sway, the desire to crawl back undisturbed into the winter soil. Eventually, the plank lid lay discarded. A tremor had rushed up her legs. And there were more eyes. Simon's eyes. Judgment, dare, and question. Had she been found wanting? That's how it felt, at least now, in sepia-toned view. She longed, she screamed, she reached for the worms.

Alex awoke, the skin of her legs pricking in the regenerator beam. Pink pajamas cloaked

electrodes that lay along the smarting bones. Electricity tickled the creaky globes of knee joints. The capsule of her bed pod rested on quakeproof runners, ready to respond to any seismic activity by dropping a large metal frame around her. If that should happen, she would wake up inside a cage, unharmed, with access to communications and emergency food. Her pod was large enough for two, or for a human and a number of companion animals. Alex had chosen to sleep alone, though, and her occasional human bed companions dreamed in their own pods, far away.

Simon had never been among them. A childhood crush hardly ever survived hormones, puberty and adulthood. But strangely, Alex thought to herself as another jolt of regeneration undulated her leg muscles, Simon kept intruding in her thoughts.

The night lay heavy on the desert, and on the newmetal adobe hut that housed Alex's pod. Stars rose and fell, and a moon crept bloody on her spherical path.

In the spaceship far above, cruising past Jupiter, Simon laid hands on the joystick, more a remnant of childhood joys than a necessity. Any real course corrections would be done via control, and there really was hardly any way that a pilot could operate the complex array of systems required to escape planetary velocity. Psychological tests had decreed that these old forms of control hardware soothed long-distance pilots and their crews. They were memory objects,

honoring old forms of being connected to the world through technology.

His fingertips nuzzled the folds of leather covering the semi-spherical object. He remembered caresses: the loving touch of David, Jason, Dwayne. So many others. Names he did not know. Hands that were not hands, but appendages of other kinds. Simon remembered alien drinking holes on distant planets, the queer nod that set up scenes that went far beyond gender, but ended in the same place: shudder, release, an opening. A moment of his childhood rose up again, insistent for days, ever since he had firmly decided to leave. There had been a girl, a different kind of iris opening, and the world had changed.

Alex stirred into the morning. Fake desert air drifted into the pod as she released the locks. She activated the com unit and checked in on her messages. Coffee hummed soon into completion, vitamin capsules, her exoskeleton clicking into place around her midriff, hips, leg bones. She moved over to the old-fashioned table on the patio and started work.

One e-com was intriguing. Alex stared at the picture that had arrived, no subject line, no written or recorded content, but not spam. It was a worm, brown-red, an alien creature in macro-view, round sucking organ mouth open and grasping, sensory hairs around the opening erect and alert.

Simon willed Alex to understand, to ping back, to find a way. He could not think of another ally, only this childhood friend. Each night for weeks now it had come back to him: the moment in the woods, Alex lost to the edge, him afraid, nearly pissing himself, aware of powers circling around the forest glade with its spring melt. There had been Alex, her hands rubbing, legs in wide trembling stance, eyes wide. Beneath her, the tangle of white and brown, moving, escape velocity. The triumph. Release. The image of her wide mouth was burned into him. If only he could reach her now.

The e-com tracked bizarrely, with way-laying stations all over the galaxy. Alex put her best tracker skills to the task, and lost herself as the graphics began their elaborate dance between stars, fields, amplifier ships and relay drones. Then the computer interface blinked and belled. She had initiated a crawl of the image's data itself, to see if there was any other information encoded in the worm image. Now the image scrolled over her com interface, with little squiggles shadowing the previously smooth picture. There were messages, hairline code tangling into the color commands. The computer had already executed the commands necessary to assemble and translate the binary data. A new message assembled, on top of the straining worm head. "Please come. Earth worm. Remember the plank."

Alex remembered. The night's dream rose up again, already plowed under in the sequences of everyday life, but now reinstalled in its vivid colors, smell of fecund earth, crisp air, and Simon's stare. He had been initiated. That's what the plank meant here. But what about the worms?

She blinked, and the display shifted back to the tracking software, still tracing the e-com's parabola across known space. Then it stopped. Alex stared at the read-out. Solar system, Explorer class emigration ship Tiresias, Sender ID: Simon Herflug. Simon from the old forest, on a trajectory far away from poisoned Earth. What did he want from her? She began composing a reply, careful to match the level of security protocols Simon had used – not exactly hard to crack, but requiring specialist tools, enough to escape casual attention. No one was watching too hard.

Simon opened his morning e-coms and bounced on his cot. She had seen it, and replied! With some luck, he could leave knowing that the news was in good hands, and that he could go out with something more like a clear conscience. It might suffice. So he wrote.

Alex, forgive me for disturbing you, after all these years. I am leaving Earth. It's the final time for me. And on the journey, I recognized what I had been amiss to not lay to rest. The worm and the roots, they are becoming one. I have seen them climb up your legs. I have seen them sink into your limbs. They are moving, now, connecting new orifices in

bodies all over old Earth. I don't know if you ever plan to go back to old Earth. But if you do, look for the worm roots. They are still searching for you. I know: they spoke to me, they called me often, and I was afraid to go back. So it's my message to you, a coward's message: you did it then. Can you do it again?

Stunned. *Simon, what did you do to me?* Alex's hands kneaded, touched the barely responsive flesh of her legs, then the reassuring cool of the wheelchair's titanium. Going back to Earth. Back to the last smells of soil and real water, open water, not the red desert of Mars and its rebreather packs. Would she do it? Was it possible? Of course it was.

Alex had already initiated a credit search, measured against current commonly available transport links back to Earth – a rarely used route direction, but one that was being traversed all the time, by the ships that brought fleeing Earth people to the new pod cities on the planets. She could do it. Credits were fine – it was cheaper than she thought. At least one star glider transport company had their hub not far from her childhood home. Alex had no idea what Simon expected her to do – but she had felt the flower of brown-white tendrils tangle like snakes in her mind, itching to get out.

Alex composed an e-com to the chief of the planetary planning committee, as it was to be her turn to present new hydration plans in group tomorrow. The reports were all done and uploaded.

Her physical presence was not an absolute necessity. It rarely was, which was good, given that she often wasn't able to leave her pod at all. She looked at her calendar and dealt with similar smaller issues. All clear. The e-com with the ticket came through just as she finished a message to her sobriety sister, explaining why she wouldn't be at group, but that she was ok, fine, actually, better than fine for the first time in a long time, with a goal, with a place to go, with a ridiculous but pressing quest. Her side ached, and her toes were frozen like blue ice veins, but she started packing for the 1700 shuttle to the currently deplaning star glider.

Aboard the glider, it was dark and obsidian luster, cushy, but with glints of sharp edges. The authorities had worked out that a journey that evoked womb embrace would lead to a better take-up of new world sensoria upon arrival. Wombs were hardly ever biting sharp, of course – but there were also dwindling resources and credit inflation to adjust to.

Wheeling to her belt station on a return journey, rather than an outward journey to the next place, was a weird sensation, and ran counter to all design elements of the glider. Never mind. Alex clicked herself in, initiated the lay-flat feature of her chair, and curled as far as the metal frame would permit. Most of the journey would happen in cyro-sleep. She scooped up the tablet lying ready by her console and adjusted the monitoring cap on

her head. Within minutes, she was gone, and didn't even notice when the back end of the glider closed, shutting out the last remnant of red Mars light. They took off.

Earth light. To Alex, it just felt like the next morning. She was stiff, needed to both piss and drink copious amounts within seconds of waking. She pissed in her chair pod, knowing that the cleansing routine would take care of it. She had no time to get her wheelchair upright and into the bathroom. The electrolyte-balanced drink helped clear her. At the far end of the glider, the ramp had descended, and morning dawn light broke across the metal. No one was around. The crew might still be asleep, apart from the lonely pilot in their capsule. It was a full Earth day before the glider needed to be got ready for the return journey, full with weather emigrants. So Alex collected her stuff, initiated a quick cleanse, and, still dripping, rolled down.

The light broadened, opened. Her childhood light, her dream light, lumens that were unmatched on exo-planets. She started to cry as the light touched her, air touched her, fabric whistling in the wind. There was a copper tang to the air. Something was off, though – as if a hurricane was coming, a light red-shift, barely noticeable.

Alex rolled across the tarmac, through the station, and out the other end toward ground transport. The tenth self-driving taxi was

accessible, so she waited patiently till it was her turn. She gave the address. This was the nearest street address she could remember. The small forest itself had no address, no coordinates that she could conjure up. Alex felt silly, impulsive, gliding noiselessly over half-drowned villages, encroachments of salt-laden seas far into the plains of middle Europe. She felt reasonably confident that her childhood village was still on maps, otherwise the sat nav would have informed her otherwise. About 60 feet above the waterlogged strata of old Germany and old Netherland, her taxi flew at medium speed. ETA 24 minutes. Alex stretched, and gazed out at the level horizon.

Eventually, the taxi glided to a halt, opened. The red laser light played across her fingertips as she paid up, then left. She was on solid land, on a road. Around her, houses stood alert and awake, even though it wasn't yet 7am local time. Windows blazed over soggy front gardens, lawns long replaced by rain gardens or sandscapes. To her left, Alex saw the dark fringe of the old forest. It was still there. She wheeled forward.

"Alex. I knew you'd come back."
Alex stopped, wheeled about. She stared. "Foerster." She needn't say more, the tone full of repulse as well as nostalgia. Forester, gatekeeper, old man, leech.

"I know, I know. Water under the bridge, Alex. Sorry for the old days. I got a bit slower."

Alex remembered. It had been normal then, the casual violence, sexual harassment, locker-

room talk. Those days were gone, and Foerster must have gone through re-education, given that he was still around and walking freely. She looked for the bulge of an electronic collar around his ankles, found no sign. He stood firm, a walking stick by his side.

"Hey. How is the neighborhood?"

"The same. More and more are leaving. The sun hasn't really been out for 12 years now. Waterlogged. Berlin and Bonn are no help, nor is Strasbourg. It's gone to hell. Where do you live now?"

Alex talked briefly about Mars. They described the land changes they've lived through: a red sun-up on desert land. The shimmering line of a horizon that is water in water. Heat. Drizzle. Decay, in their different forms. They enjoyed the exchange, an old anchor. Long old stories not exactly forgotten, but laid aside for the sake of finding a spindle, a single sharp moment in the past with which to spear the present.

"How did you know I'd come back?"

"Didn't Simon tell you? The worms are calling for you. Can't you hear them? They are calling you now. We, the old ones, are no good to them."
Foerster stood silent. Alex stared. The edges of the man began to swim, to shift. Was he really there? The light crept up, still not really sunlight, oyster color, luminous grey. It shone through the old man. A breath. He was gone.

Alex's fingers were icy on the wheelchair controllers. She wheeled away toward the forest's dark edges, and their black watercolor light.

It was near noon when she arrived. The forest was thinner and smaller than she remembered. She had to navigate multiple pools and small streams, find ways to measure for depth to ensure that her wheels wouldn't wet to the electronic hubs. So it took a while, even with the rugged all-terrain wheel set. She nearly got stuck on the path's grave-dark soil. The frangible stuff first clung lightly, then packed and caked to everything.

Eventually she found what she thought was the old plank: a rectangular ghost of matter, fungoid silver.

She could hear them now. There was singing here. There was movement, shifting, delay and echo. She wedged one nerveless foot under the edge of what was left, and heaved with her arms and upper back.

The worm was a river in the earth. Its back looked like what she imagined an alligator's skin would look like up close: dikes and canals, patches, all glowing orange and white in the wet afternoon light. Its girth was larger than her waist. It moved, gently, as it pulsed earth through its innards, winnowing and conditioning. The hint of translucency brought her an image of a dark vein of soil.

The worm didn't seem to notice her. It was alive, despite the earth's poison. Her titanium

wheels felt clumsy next to the articulating segments of its broad length. She contemplated touching it, but decided against it, didn't wish to become aware of its temperature, the cold-blooded lack of differential. This had never been her, even as the worm's ancestors, or maybe sisters, had found their way in. The worm was transforming the metal poisons, Alex knew in her bones.

What was she to do here? What did this massive worm want from her – guarding a golden, lead, or mercury horde deep by the river's bottom? Was it inviting her to dance in attendance in dark wells? All very unlikely, laughable, no good to a drowning world.

Alex was cold. But she wasn't giving up. Simon might have been a dreamer, but he was no fool. She couldn't think about Foerster. So she investigated around the worm's pulsing presence. Soon, she found a second weaving, another source of movement, less strong, less grand. It had escaped her, at first, in the giant swelling worm dance. At the edges of the worm's embedment in the earth, white-brown roots formed their own rhythm, a dance that was half complex weft, and half actual movement, an ultra-slow breathing, plant triple-time.

This was her interlocutor, the plant worm that had called, not the ancient giant sucker. Alex stemmed herself up from her chair and then lowered down to the soil. The sucking pipeline didn't shift rhythm or otherwise indicated interest. The root worms, though, they knew. They hove up.

One rootlet at a time. A worm's sensory organ's grasp upward. A dance in the pattern of a mimosa's leaf uncurling. It came. They came. Alex lay, arranged her legs next to the gap in the earth, her torso outstretched so her face was near the root strands.

She welcomed them. Opening. Mouth open, zippers undone. Cool. Moisture. A squelch as she shifted into a more comfortable position. Around her, skin breathed. Her own skin shifted spectral color, darker, lighter, violet spectrum, brown, purple. Mushrooms drifted spores, spores so long extinct in so many sites of Old Earth. The waiting rootworms had held on to these tiny black dots, and unclasped the spores from thin mantles wrapped around their writhing lengths. The spores entered Alex, in multiple sites, and her eyes color-shifted, too, a deep blue shining upward.

The giant worm next to her in the earth felt it, shifted infinitesimally. It unleashed new young ones, new root graspers that melded with and opened Alex. Code flowed. Nerve and metal knit, blood and plasma. New sensations climbed up from blue toes. The back of knees signaled in. The back of a mountain range answered. The moon sent Morse-codes full of gravitational pulls. Alex's liver felt them, and responded, giving up its meld-information, beeping back secrets to plant mitochondria. She noted ice under her soles, individual crystals first burrowing toward, then breaking into her flesh. They rocked themselves into her, she into them. She breathed with them.

Slow, equalizing, ice and heat and rain and the slow tilt of a sun's axis. They laid there, entwined, till the sun broke through above Alex, the worm, the nest of weaving tendrils, creatures, rootworms. The sun warmed her, offered a new surface against which to assemble. Eventually, seeds safely deposited, the rootlets withdrew from orifices they had so tenderly explored.

Alex sat up, hand reaching for her wheelchair. The metal had warmed under the late afternoon sun, an orange-red ball so long unseen in these latitudes. She used a combination of strong hands and numb feet to find enough leverage to pull the plank back over the forest worm bed. The sun might do damage, withdraw too much water. This was better.

Alex shifted back in her seat, turned her chariot, and wheeled downward, her nose open to the mold smell of fertile soils and decaying leaves. What had been unraveled was knitting together again. The sun kissed her face, and a mercury tear ran down her cheek.

This story was first published in *Shoreline of Infinity* 16.

Madeleine McAuley: "UFO"



This painting was created by Madeleine McAuley in response to navigating Natalie's new spasms. Together, they call the spasms UFOs because they joke that it seems like an alien is taking over Natalie's body.

Madeleine said she knew exactly what Natalie needed... And painted a picture of UFOs laughing. And it made Natalie laugh so hard she was on the ground, this time laughing instead of spasming.

Michael Stokes: "HIVES Collage"



Cavar: "Meats" "Arboretum" "Aggregation"

Meats

-
There are things we people lack.
Scales. Feathers.
And things for words for people
have but not the words
are for:

Loin.
Flank.
Hindquarters.
Maw.

All for eating.
Maws, too, for eating
animals. (Whose
ever heard of a hum
man with a maw?)

I have
mine. I mean -
- while
 bulbous
 gaping
 hairy
 ugly, the maw
is mine

Arboretum

Spring forths its stems.
Earth proves again to weather.

Snow has given way to tenderness:
dirt gently impressed.

All is gleeful dizzy garden-drunk.
The water warms
and so enjoys the act. The whole tide

changes
(well)
like the tide

which brung beauty back against all laws
of grammar.

Spring is all of us
the bougie flowers, damned
communist weeds

pairing with pollen-pregnant bees
and hanging chrysalids.
Joy is a body

whose special halo
sounds the hum of the year's
first-born sun.

Where have we been
all this time? Who maps the dry cross-

hatching life between our fingers?

Park and pond
and lily-pad and toad
we newly name the countries

made as we feel
countries ought to be: friends
Friends who kiss.
(On occasions such as these)

Aggregation*

(after "Making of" by Franny Choi)

—
Cyborgs are made out of words.
Cyborgs are made out of things

named cyborgs.
Cyborgs are made out of things only

things if you squint at them,
just like their male and female counterparts.

At midnight, I clasp too
hands across my abdomen, pray

to be so small and vast
the cloud will have me.

My prayers are prayers in drag,
poems

who enumerate in wordless codes
fitted to the human throat

*This poem first appeared in *trampset* literary magazine.

Hilda Smith: "Interdependence"



Jonathan W. Thurston: "HIV isn't poetic"; "I Asked for It"; and "Old, Sick Dog"

HIV isn't poetic

I got the call to the doctor's office
January 7, 2015
Sat in the waiting room
waiting

When I got called back, I sat
in another room
in a chair
fearing
expecting
the worst

a nurse came in

she didn't close the door
she didn't sit down
she didn't look at me
just at

her clipboard

and said:

"Well, Mr. Thurston, your tests came back positive for HIV. Is there anything else we can help you with today?"

nothing poetic about that, is there

"Um, no thanks," was all I said.

a part of me is still dead in that chair
still hopeful that all this is a dream

the rest of me is a zombie
walking dead

but I'm not dying
and I'm tired of looking for people with
brains.

I Asked for It

CW: sexual assault and rape

1

My profile said it all: 23yo kinky college student looking for love, hiv-undetectable. NashvilPred236 and I chatted for a month. And it felt *great*. Someone who didn't judge me for a medical chart and didn't care that I had this curse I never asked for and didn't ask me to explain everything to him. And it felt great to be looked at like I wasn't a walking-dead virus. He saw me for my love of books and my love of Disney and my love of Japanese food. So he met me there at a little hole-in-the-wall sushi place off Gallatin Pike. We talked, and he was even more magical in person and I said wow I'm so glad to meet someone who doesn't judge me for my HIV status or anything like that and oh my satan it's so refreshing to be treated like a—Huh? Uh, yeah, I have HIV. It's on my profile...He pulls out the phone and puts on the app and suddenly my head is spinning in the silence and when he doesn't look up and just lays twenties on the table just as the food comes out and leaves, I start to cry. When I try the sushi for two, I'm not sure if I taste soy sauce or tears. I cried on the way home.

2

After sex one time the guy asked how I got pozzed who pozzed me how it happened how it happened to the *detail* and he wanted to know

that my partner had lied about his status and he wanted to know if I had wanted it and he wanted to know why I didn't wear protection and he wanted me to know that he wished *he* could have been the one to pozz me. He didn't know that I wanted and want to be loved *despite* my HIV not *because* of it. He wouldn't let me leave until I said I would call him back. I blocked his number when I got to my car. And cried.

3

I met a guy who scared me once. We talked limits first and I came over and everything was great. He tied me up and used me and made me feel good and bad and rough and raw and full despite my emptiness. And then he whispered in my ear and told me that he actually had no plans of letting me leave. This wasn't the plan. He kept going. He told me he wanted to make me drop out of school and stay there with me as his permanent house slave, always caged, used by his friends when they came over and he told me I was wasting my "purpose" with school when I should really be there to serve him and I just kept trying to look through the haze for a weapon I could use but when he came, his facade broke, and he was just a sweetheart. But we hadn't talked about that happening up front. And I was still scared. When I walked out the door, I was still scared. I haven't stopped. Oh my satan I never stopped.

4

I talk to adamsman100 for a good month sharing kinks and interests so when a night opens up and I'm horny for it I message him and we talk about the essentials—what all we planned to get into that night, my limits, my safe words and signs—and I text a friend my address and I head over. Once I'm there, he cuffs my thumbs together—I remember how tight they were and how they cut into my skin—and he pushes me to the ground and he and his friend fuck me and they fuck me too rough and I start using my safe words this wasn't what we talked about this wasn't the plan and his labrador was in the room with us and he says, if you don't shut up, I'll make my dog rape you too. So I lie there. And take it. And I know, no Tennessee judge would see my messages about kink from the past month and say I hadn't asked for it. Not in Tennessee. I take it and cry when I get home. I rub my thumbs.

Old, Sick Dog

No one buys the old dogs
No one buys the sick ones
They cost too much
They die too fast
So I guess I'm an old dog
I spend so long looking for
love
that I sometimes just lie against
the bars
pretending they're just cold arms
hugging me tight
I don't feel sick
But the price displayed on my cage
keeps dropping
And I'll always wonder—
a/ways
—if my lover got me
because I'm cheap.
I'll always wonder
if he'll one day realize
he doesn't have to have
a sick dog.

Kimberly Priest: "First Visit to the Sister Survivor's Exhibit at the MSU Museum" "Ghosts," and "This Much"

First Visit to the Sister Survivors Exhibit at the MSU Museum

The teal ribbon was chosen to represent sexual assault in July of 2000 by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, along with the designation that April would be the month dedicated to honoring survivors.

The chiffon butterflies that vine across the ceiling are delicate as my grandmother's lips, smiling into me; her teal eyes coding themselves into every bright angle of light that turn out to be a spotlight on a face.

Wrinkled trees—delimbed—stand like a copse of petrified saints in the corner of the room, gauze tied at their waists, tiny like my waist when I was a bubbly two-year-old balanced on her lap

and beaming into a camera for the photograph that now hangs in my parents' apartment. All I remember of this woman rushes into the present, my body seizing with the realization

that she might not have died soon enough, mere months after the photograph. That she might have come close to me after a man molested me—an event six years in my future—

and I might have, with disfigured perception, distrusted her kindness for many years after that. I scope the museum walls finally settling on an inscription: *you handed me a pin from the 2012 Olympics*

to ensure my silence, telling me how special I was. I was special, bouncing on her knee three or four times so she could get me to smile for the camera. She made popping and cooing noises to encourage laughter and compliance—an ugly gesture

out of context. *I suffered,* reads another inscription, *but I told myself to be tough.* Soft baby skin folded around her hands, her slender manicured fingers circumferencing my body as she bears

her pearly white teeth at me and I bear mine—impossibly dainty and straight—toward the camera man, he and grandmother working hard to capture my attention and maintain a cheery expression

so I will maintain mine. A balancing act. *For years,* the inscription laments, *I had this atrocious secret and fear. I felt so much shame and embarrassment.* I feel the flinching in my body while standing

in this room alive as a tomb where her perfumed image materializes suddenly and bends close to mine, teal eyes smiling, soft lips tilting into my lost little face—hands holding out a candy for her 'special girl.'

Ghosts*

It has taken me a long time to realize I am human
due to the guttural sound I make
when I'm not having a good time, or the chirp
I feel when suddenly cornered by a man twice my size
who has just decided I am the one thing
he can't let escape from his life—such innocent
captivity—and the blimp of speech rising to my throat
as though I am about to lay a very large egg,
blup, blup, blup, tubular speech attempting to make
linear the circular. Trauma
is funny. I'm starring at my phone, safe distance
between us, trying to explain
in a very long text that I'm not crazy. Not really.
And using some educated jargon,
I give details about how the past intrudes into
the present and how this is scar tissue in my bone
and in my veins, an internal tattoo.
I'm rolling up my sleeves now to show the guy
on the other end of this conversation all its intricate
detail. *Really, I say, it is beautiful. It's part of me.*
But he can't see it. This is all in text.
Because by now I'm afraid to confront him face to face—
to say that what I meant to say is I never wanted
his attention this way, never wanted to be caught,
didn't need to be explained, I wasn't hunting or up for
a *cat-and-mouse* game, but what I do
is stumble, fidget with the verbiage, freeze, pretend
he had my full attention, smile into his dark brown eyes

and all-too-compassionate expression, soft brown
hair in waves. The arch of his body transporting me
to the arch of his body over me—
that other man from my childhood that animates
my memory and molests my protests and questions away—
and his mouth telling me *it's ok*,
your parents said I could do this as he fingers the switch
controlling my whole body,
turns me on, turns me off, turns me on, turns me off,
then ghosts—never answers any of my texts.

*Published in *Borderlands: A Texas Literary Review* 52

This Much*

*Because of the ubiquitous spraying of Roundup
on corn and soy that have been genetically modified
to resist herbicides, the monarch
is in bad trouble in the core of its range,
where its sole host plant, milkweed, is disappearing.*

Center for Biological Diversity

Each year, monarchs re-populate in the Corn Belt,
that vast agricultural region in America's heartland
where they lay their eggs on milkweed plants
in spring while migrating north to Canada.

My friend Cruz and I stand in what used to be
a cornfield, now his handiwork of garden plots
for immigrant families and milkweed plants
to provide a landing pad for sojourning monarchs

to lay their eggs. Here, they reproduce,
and the caterpillars are sometimes whisked into jars
and kept in homes, then freed after incubation
to ensure that yet another butterfly survives the season

despite their overall declining numbers worldwide.
I hold my own jar frocked with milkweed stem
as Cruz tells me how long until the caterpillar
will incubate and how long incubation will be. But,

once home the caterpillar eats and eats its way
up the stem in the jar then dies there,
a long white string extending from its body.
My daughter says that this string is a sign of a pre-

existing parasite. *Not your fault mom*, she says
starring into her computer where she reads all about
monarch diseases and death. Still,
that gnawing sensation that I failed a whole species

by not saving this one, not knowing what could have
been done to cure it of the tiny predator under
its flesh. Peering into the glass jar, insect shriveled
and dangling, I am reminded that three years ago,

my family witnessed my shaken mind as the memories
of childhood sexual assault came rushing back
and, like a tiny predator, traveled through my psyche
feasting on the tissue of my present and future

with terrors from my past. They watched,
but could do nothing to save me from this unraveling
and, in their own fear of exposure
as helpless and vulnerable gods, accused me then

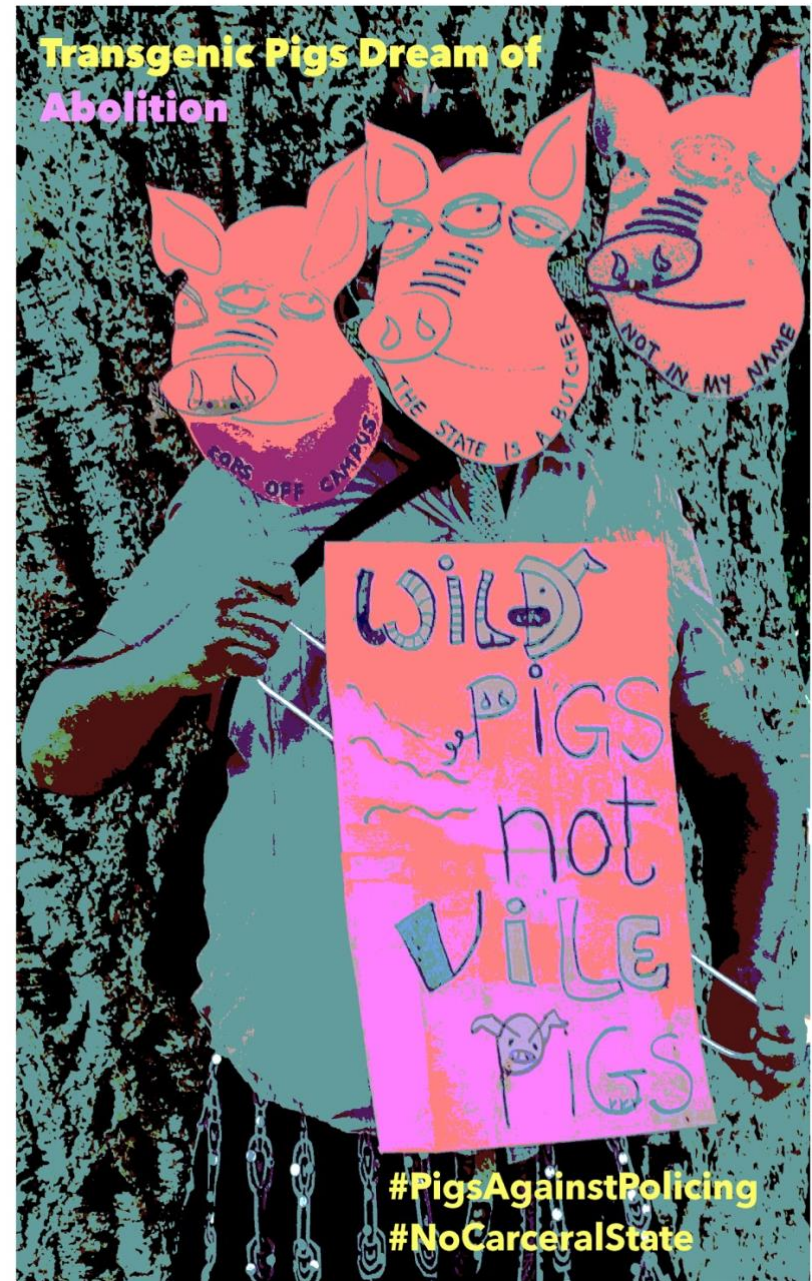
and there of dying, then turned away—
as I began, alone, working out my narratives
hoping they would appreciate my trying.
The caterpillar hung in the jar for a whole two weeks

before I decided to clean it out as I let our mutual
helplessness exist between us, refusing to ignore
its obvious shame. *Love is never a failure*, a friend of mine
tells me, and I know he means to add, *even if its lost*.

I caress the side of the jar consoling myself concerning
this dead would-be monarch, its tiny
fingerlike worm sutured to the lid knowing how long
and hard it fought to accomplish just this much.

*first published in *About Place Journal* V 6.2

Anuj Vaidya: "Transgenic Pigs Dream of Abolition"



Contributors:

Ann Millett-Gallant

Ann Millett-Gallant received her PhD in Art History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and teaches online courses based on visual culture for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her research crosses the disciplines of Art History and Disability Studies. She has written and co-edited several books and journal essays. She is also a painter and mixed-media collage artist. Her website is annmg.com

Anuj Vaidya

Anuj Vaidya is an artist/educator/student whose work meanders around the themes of queer ecologies. This work was made in collaboration with the Pig Brigade, an abolitionist activist collective comprised of university students, faculty and community members, at UC Davis.

Cavar

Sarah Cavar (they/them) is currently pursuing their PhD in cultural studies at UC Davis, focusing on queercrit/transmad digital epistemologies. Cavar is also author of two forthcoming chapbooks, *A HOLE WALKED IN* (Sword & Kettle Press, 2020) and *THE DREAM JOURNALS* (giallo lit, 2021), and edits at Stone of Madness Press.

Cheryl Caesar

Returned from Europe after 25 years, Cheryl Caesar now teaches writing at Michigan State University and protests injustices, especially in her new chapbook *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era*, available from Amazon.

Claire K. Robbins

Claire K. Robbins lives in Blacksburg, Virginia, with Frayda's other human, Nicholas. They continue to celebrate the life of their soft, pointy girl, who died peacefully in May at age 13.

Daniel Christmann

Dan Christmann is a man (?) without a plan, Stan. He lives, he breathes, and makes things with his mind.

Hilda Smith

Hilda Smith is a queer, trans and disabled person who is a vanguard of new and radical social justice work, focusing on disability, addiction, and knowledge mobilization. They recently finished their doctorate in Critical Disability Studies at York University.

Jessica Stokes

Jessica Stokes has a purple wheelchair and a lot of hair. She lives in Michigan.

Jonathan W. Thurston

Jonathan W. Thurston (they/them) is an HIV activist and has written *Blood Criminals*, a journalistic exposé of HIV in 21st century America. They live in Lansing with their fiancé Izzy and their dog Temerita.

Kimberly Priest

Kimberly Ann Priest is the author of *Slaughter the One Bird* (Sundress 2021), *Parrot Flower* (Glass 2021), *Still Life* (PANK 2020), and *White Goat Black Sheep* (FLP 2018). She is an associate poetry editor for the Nimrod International Journal of Prose and Poetry and Embody reader for The Maine Review.

Madeleine McAuley

Madeleine McAuley is currently a seventh-grade student at Haslett middle school.

Marisa Lucca

Marisa, a scholar-advocate who is deafblind, works with her team members, Trish Brockway and Sabrina Marks, to advance social change agendas in disability communities through collaborative research and practical interventions and foreground the voices and ideas of people with disabilities. When not engaged in scholarly work, Marisa indulges her creative and adventurous spirit by exploring Florida's waterways, landscaping her homestead, baking delectable treats, and playing with her nieces and nephews.

Maurice Moore

Maurice Moore is currently a doctoral Performance Studies student at the University of California-Davis. He recently completed his Master's in African American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the spring of 2018. From 2011 to 2020, he has exhibited work and performed at the International House Davis (I-House) in Davis California, Christina Ray Gallery in Soho New York, the Lee Hansley Gallery in Raleigh North Carolina, the Greenville Museum of Art in Greenville North Carolina, the Gallery 307 + Orbit Galleries in Georgia Athens, and worked with Rios/Miralda for the Garbage Celebration performance in Madison Wisconsin.

Michael Stokes

Michael Stokes is a sci-fi buff who is not buff. He lives in a state of confusion.

Mike Gill

Mike Gill is Associate Professor of Disability Studies at Syracuse University. He really does love tomatoes.

Natalie Phillips

Natalie Phillips is Associate Professor of English, Affiliated faculty in Cognitive Science Program, and founder and co-director of the Digital Humanities and Literary Cognition Lab (DHLC) at Michigan State University. After leading Accessible Art initiatives with a focus on neurodiversity (2014-present), during COVID-19, she has begun writing an autobiography about living with her disability, *Teaching from the Floor: Adventures of a Neurological Disorder*.

Petra Kupperts

Petra Kupperts is an internationally active disability culture activist, a community performance artist, Artistic Director of The Olimpias performance research collective, and a Professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Petra grounds her work in site-specific performance and disability culture methods.

seeley quest

seeley quest is a trans disabled writer, performer, organizer, and environmentalist, in Montreal since 2017. Working primarily in literary and body-based composition, curation and occasionally multimedia installation, sie presented actively in the San Francisco Bay Area 2001-14, with the Sins Invalid project 2007-15, and has toured in Canada and many U.S. cities. Find hir via email at <https://questletters.substack.com>.

slp

slp is a writer, poet, musician, and educator with an MFA in poetry and too many instruments to play, living near the river and the mountains. slp is queer/mad. The love of her/their life was a schnauzer named Fred.

Special thanks to Alicia of shoplostunic0rn for the use of the [Vegan Pig](#) image.