

Hummingbird Drama

Year Four

July 2023 - June 2024

Grey Nero

HERE THEIR EVERYWHERE

Gender: Mind, Body, Community

Gregory Nero

Abstract—This essay is a preliminary attempt to organize my current opinions on gender by exploring gender from three distinct but intimately connected perspectives: gender of the mind, gender of the body, and gender of the community. These three categories and their intersections will serve as a foundation for illustrating my experiences with gender. The essay will begin by addressing the question “What is gender?” to motivate and propel the discussion into the three aforementioned genres before concluding with a discussion of the ever-present question of “Why am I non-binary?” which will be an investigation of my experience with gender and a journey of introspection for my own sake. This essay is therefore the light, the object, and the shadow all at once: the concept, the self, and the psyche, all of which exist in community with themselves and with others. Gender means something different to everybody, but here I will explore what it means to me at this stage of my life.

Index Terms—gender, identity, mind, body, community

I. WHAT IS GENDER?

The gender-binary is a reductionist’s agenda and exists because it is *convenient* for it to exist. Let’s start by trying to answer the question of “What is gender?” with an illustrative dialogue which is pretty common. To the question, the answer might be: “Gender is if you are a boy or if you are a girl.” What naturally follows this answer is, for example, the question: “Well, what does it mean to be a boy, or, a man?” This question alone is a platform for lots of great and productive discussion, but in many situations it leads us to the answer: “If you have a penis and testicles you are a boy.” What a horribly dismal and shallow world it would be if we accepted this answer as the end-all! True, there are boys who have these reproductive organs but this doesn’t automatically make you a boy, and just because you are a boy doesn’t imply you have those organs. To even ask the question “What does it mean to be a man or woman, boy or girl?” Is to jump head-first into the sea of the psyche, of identity, of nuanced experience and the culmination of years of socialization. I start with this dialogue to emphasize the separation between gender identity and body alone (more on the relationship between mind and body identity to come later in the essay). Let’s again consider this more productive question and run with it: “What does it mean to be a man or a woman?” Here we can start to get at something with substance. Now, the values emerge. The burdens placed on us and the joys afforded to us by simply being “man” or “woman,” the privileges we inherit and the discrimination we face by being one or the other. Here we start to see gender as something more nuanced than “boys wear blue and girls wear pink.” It’s more than shopping for soap or choosing sizes of clothing or an answer on an online questionnaire. Gender is a mechanism for introspection, for perception, for interaction, for self-discovery. There’s a beautiful and chaotic fluidity to it. It’s a lens through which things are perceived.

It’s something that can be seen and that can’t be seen. It’s the condensed vapor on the foggy bathroom mirror of identity that we can draw little hearts with our finger into and blow again with our own breath to rewrite it. Are we doomed to live rigidly bound to crags of this reduced scheme and the stereotypes forced on us because of it? No, no, no, no. Unless we can hear the word “man” or the word “woman” without any preconceived notion of what either of those might mean we cannot ignore the ways that the gender binary has influenced our way of thinking. As an illustrative metaphorical example, consider the question: “What is love?” We all agree that this isn’t something that can be answered so simply. We all have the unique right to figure out what love means for ourselves and use this concept, this entity of *love*, to grow with ourselves and our community. It is a *platform* on which we can build something beautiful. And so too is gender. By asking the simple question of “What is gender?” we give ourselves the opportunity to critically think about our own identity and how we interact with others. Imagine if somebody told you what love meant to them. Surely, you might agree with some parts of their definition. But there’s a good chance that their definition is incomplete for you. That’s because love is intimate. There are secrets we keep for ourselves and the ones we love that make it so spectacular. Now consider if you shared what love meant to you and were received with “Well, that’s not how I see it so you’re wrong.” Who are they to deprive you of your own intimate way of experiencing the world? And so too with how we can think about gender. It means something different to everyone and that’s what makes it so beautiful. Yes, in some cases it wreaks havoc: men absentmindedly inheriting power and women being discriminated against simply because of their gender. But this is even more a reason to be aware of gender and the ways the binary affects us. Furthermore, gender is something we should get to decide for ourselves. Autonomy of the mind and body includes autonomy of gender and gender expression (To fit this into our framework, we could say we have unique and individual rights to our gender of the mind and similarly we have the rights to express that identity through gender of the body).

So, to answer: “What is gender?” means to weave a tapestry from the treads of billions of unique experiences. We quickly see how this question can become a philosophy. What does gender mean to me? To start to address this question, I have recently found it convenient to think about three areas: gender of the mind, gender of the body, and gender of the community. Each of these feel uniquely different from one another but their intersections form a more comprehensive picture of what gender is and what it means to me.

I’d also like to comment before I proceed: it is not my objective to destroy the gender binary, since many find comfort and peace in it. Relationships, the way society operates: much

of it rides on the stability of the gender binary. And, I'm not trying to be a vigilante for chaos (yet, anyways). I simply want to critically think about it and follow those thoughts where I can.

II. GENDER OF THE MIND

I treasure gender of the mind most dearly. This is where I began my adventures with gender and gender identity. I hold the belief that gender is not something that you can see. This isn't to say that gender lives in the mind alone, but I cherish gender of the mind the most because it feels the most personal. The mind is a sacred place. Gender, being a platform for personal growth and a way of interacting with the world and with myself, is something that first and foremost lives in my mind. What is my gender? That is a question for the mind. I want to know myself, deeply, to my core: I want to be self-intimate. And one aspect of that self-knowing is having the continued discussion with myself: "Do I have a gender and if I do what does that mean?" As somebody who identifies as non-binary I don't have a firm and resolute gender of the mind. And because my mind is mine and mine alone, I alone get to decide that identity. For someone to say to me "No, you are not non-binary" means to subvert my authority and autonomy to have my own identity, which should be a moral crime (what someone actually means when they say this is "No, I don't understand you and I have no desire to, so I will instead invalidate you"). Gender of the mind is also the least tangible, which makes it particularly difficult to describe. It's the seed from which we sprout, buried beneath the soil. And what sprouts? We do: again, and again and again, season after season. And so, we now consider: how is the gender of the mind reflected in gender of the body?

III. GENDER OF THE BODY

In what ways do I express the gender of the mind outwardly? How am I perceived by others? And does the way I am perceived by others influence my own perception of myself? How important is it to me that I am perceived by others the way I perceive myself? So many interesting questions to answer. The body is often a powerful force for both euphoria and dysphoria when it comes to gender. When my body is in unison with how my mind sees myself, in whatever complicated way that may be, I feel euphoric. The body, in its entirety (hair, voice, style, mannerisms, etc...) is the platform by which I can express my mind, and is the way I am ultimately perceived by others, especially at first glance. Note: the body is not the mind and is therefore not an identity but a reflection of it! Yes, I can express my gender through my body, but my body does not define my gender. (Interesting tangent here: personality vs. gender? A lot of these discussions of gender and identity and perception – it feels like we're just talking about personality. As in, personality of the mind, personality of the body, personality of the community. Who am I? How do I interact with the world? This feels very similar to how I might go about describing my personality. So, what's the difference? Why even bother with gender when we could

just focus on personality? Why does it have to be gender-centric? It's my opinion that gender expression and identity is a facet of personality and expression. Of course, there are stereotypical castings for different kinds of personalities to each of the binary genders. But we are, often daily, cast into both different kinds of personalities and genders. I can be called annoying, kind, persistent, angry, short-tempered, loving. I can also be called man, woman, faggot, queer. Personality, gender, identity: they are all connected. We assign importance to what matters to us. And I think that gender has a profound effect on the way I interact with the world. Agree or disagree, it doesn't matter. It matters to me right now, so I'm going to write about it.) There is intimacy in getting to know somebody's mind, at which point a person is their essence and not merely a body reflecting their essence, but by and large we are perceived shallowly, quickly. Therefore, the body can be a platform for validation, and just as easily, for invalidation. Being mis-gendered as a man can feel dysphoric because it is dissonant with how I perceive myself. However, when I am correctly gendered based on my expressed gender of the body, it feels extremely euphoric. So, I can't easily dismiss the importance of the gender of the body. At the end of the day, I will be perceived over and over again until the day I die. And my body is an ambassador for how others will perceive me. It is often said "gender is a performance" [Butler] and the gender of the body is a perfect example of that. I am learning to embrace and indulge in euphoria where it exists and grow through dysphoria where it exists. And I can't hold it against people for accidentally mis-gendering me. Since I hold such an importance to gender of the mind, it wouldn't make sense to get angry or upset at people for mis-gendering me because only I know what's going on in my mind: people can't know my gender for certain unless I tell them myself. If I tell people my gender and they mis-gender me that's another thing, but usually it's harmless and without the intent of hurting me or invalidating how I feel. I still accidentally mis-gender people (growth is a long road)! It feels so refreshing to be asked what my pronouns are (they/them/theirs) and have them respected because it feels good to be seen and validated in the identity I see myself as. And because it feels good to know that other people are also thinking about gender. And it feels good to know that I'm not alone in this adventure of gender. Because gender is also a way of connecting with other people. It's a way to be seen by others as the mind and body that I am. It's a way of being part of a community.

IV. GENDER OF THE COMMUNITY

Community is the altar on which I lay my purpose. I am nothing without the people around me, whether it be my family or my friends. It would be a sad existence to be solitary in my ideas and perspectives on life with nobody to share them with, and even more sad to be deprived of hearing how other people think. Community spawns the rich material for growth and love and joy, (yes, also hurt and grief and pain, but through that: more growth and more joy) and what would the seed of identity be without the soil that nourishes it? The way I interact with my communities and the way my communities

interact with me fundamentally shapes the person I am. Yes, I am an individual. Yes, I have my own ways of thinking and of doing things. But still, I am part of a community. There is such a profound joy in this. My communities give me the opportunity to express how I feel, to manifest mind and body, to validate who I am. And gender and community are bound together because gender is part of identity.

V. THE INTERSECTION OF MIND, BODY, AND COMMUNITY

The gender of the mind, body, and community currently form the pyramid of my gender experience. Mind and body become self and form the foundation for identity. Community shapes the mind and validates the body, thereby shaping self and altering mind and body. Then, community becomes a part of self and therefore of mind and body. And we become even more a part of that community that is shaping us. So, gender is both intrinsic and extrinsic. All these are all in constant flux with each other, in a harmony that is both beautiful and overwhelming at times. But that's the joy of existence, to participate in this wonderful chaos. If gender is performance, gender of the community is the stage on which gender of the body performs. But don't we also perform for ourselves in our own elaborate ways? Perhaps gender of the body is how we perform for ourselves, the gender of the mind serving as the wings of the stage before we appear finally, flesh and blood, before ourselves and our community and scream "YES, yes. This is me."

VI. WHY AM I NON-BINARY?

Simply: I am non-binary because I am. I am non-binary because when I look inward and ask myself "Am I a Man?" I say "No, surely this does not feel right." And when I look inward and ask myself "Am I a Woman?" the same response echoes. And so ironically, it is precisely because of the gender binary that I identify like this. Given a genderless society, this would not be necessary. I would simply be a human. But this is not the case. Since I am both and neither simultaneously, I inherit this identify for myself. And happily so, at that. It fills me with a joy that comes from embracing my own abstraction, and from that ambiguity comes a great feeling of peace and freedom. But now, you must see that this ambiguity *must* be intentional. It must be that way because a reductionist's society confines ambiguity to a cage. And so, to thrive outside of that cage, the cage must be opened. To be non-binary in a binary society means accepting an active identity.

Imagine asking a ruby why it is red. To hold beauty in your palm and demand from it: tell me! To know the exact journey of the ruby is not possible. Centuries of earth and pressure and heat have formed the ruby into what it is, but beyond the general abstract process of its formation, you cannot know the ruby's actual journey. The ruby, even, likely does not know exactly how its crystal structure came to be. How could it? The process of becoming is not a linear one. So, to ask such an impossible question doesn't make any sense. And the facets that the ruby chooses to carve out of itself to shine and gleam with beauty are just as nuanced as its innate structure. The ruby is beautiful, that should be enough. But now, to continue

with this long-winded analogy, what if the ruby asked itself: Why am I the way I am? *This* is what I'm trying to do here. I have the liberty to discover this for myself.

As a scientist and someone who has always been scientifically minded, I am driven towards abstraction and generalization. And as an artist I am willed to a life of metaphor. So maybe it is my quest for abstraction, ambiguity, metaphor that has guided me here. The more I think about it, it makes perfect sense that I've arrived here, asking myself "Why?" All around me for as long as I can remember, I've been asking this question of "Why?" And now, I turn my inquiry inwards and ask myself that very same question. Propelled by curiosity I embark on this exploration.

VII. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Here I've laid a foundation for some of my current opinions on gender. But there's more to think about! I'm excited about exploring new, more specific, avenues like: Gender of the Culture, Gender of the Family, and Gender of the Religion (more to come, probably. I'd like to write an entire essay about hair and gender expression at some point.) And I'd like to revisit topics discussed in this essay to expand upon them. But that's all for now. ♡

Bite Me, Centipede: I am Wind, I am Chaos

Gregory Nero

Abstract—I've been thinking about color. Like, how we call things by what they give away. Like: that apple is red because it gives us red. And the apple keeps what it needs to survive. The apple is blue and green. But we call it red. What if we called things by what they keep?

Index Terms—inwards, outwards

ANOTHER PANIC ATTACK - THE FUTILITY OF DESCRIPTION

Popping open, (almost popping, completely open) open, exploding, inside, my insides are exploding. Not so much in the bloody, bone-shattering way. Maybe: imploding. Maybe I'm imploding. Maybe I'm imploding. Either way, I need to sit. Either way, I need to go to the hospital. Either way, I'm glad you're here. I handed you "Chess Openings: Theory and Practice" by Horowitz. And I sat on my cat rug, head on my knees. We sat on Mountain and I collected what was left of me in cupped hands (leaky, like all cupped hands are) and gradually carried myself back to my bedroom. Then the doctor was drawing my blood. I was sitting on my cat rug. I stood up, another wave: imploding, after all. I shaved my arms and I remember how the IV went into the top of my forearm. "It would have been easier if I had broken my leg or something simple." I felt silly, sitting in the ER. I felt silly, sitting on my cat rug. See, the body has a shape. My body has a shape. But the mind. My mind. It's a shapeshifter tonight. Square, circle, rhombus, formless, too much form, piercing, slow, heat, flashing, pounding, dizzying. Tightness, shaking, hot, lightheaded, faint, trembling. And I'm just a specimen to myself. But no talking please. Just focus on breathing. Take notes for later. Ride the waves for now. I'm safe, I'm safe, I'm safe. But not convincing enough to keep it together.

THEMES FOR FALL 2023

- Feral: be feral
- Self respect
- Stillness
- Judging based on action
- Not carrying dead weight forward
- Prioritizing things that reciprocate
- Routine (eating, exercise)
- Hermitage
- Active practice in being less anxious (for my health)

Inward

Gregory Nero

Abstract—To the asphalt I am only skin and bones and blood.

Index Terms—skin, bones, blood

What else says *always* like footprints in the sand?
And what else says *never* like the high tide?

Tangerine Fingernails

Gregory Nero

Abstract—(screaming loudly behind the wheel of a 2002 Toyota Camry in Tucson) **I KNOW WHAT LOVE FEELS LIKE, I KNOW WHAT LOVE FEELS LIKE, I KNOW WHAT LOVE FEELS LIKE.** (clasped hands across a booth in Brooklyn and a long hug before leaving at the station)

Index Terms—taking, space

FISH, BIRDS

Down at the reservoir, sometimes I'd cast my line into the tree. Tangled, messy plastic and a bright red and white bobber. I thought it was a mistake, then. But now, I know that I must have been fishing for birds.

CAR TIME

I'll pretend it's snowing.
Midnight,
I'll blast the heat
Feet on the dash
And close my eyes.
Scream along to Snail Mail
And pretend that the seasons still exist.

I.

This month. This month was full of craters.

\$6 Ham Pipe Dream

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Seeing how far my skin can stretch. Where it's thinnest, I can see everything.

Index Terms—thinking, a, lot, about, dragons

POEM (COLLABORATIVE) FROM TEXT THREAD

I'm the trapped finch,
Between a rock and a hard place.
I'm the broom,
Live reporting:
Hawk death is preferred.

Participating in the Way Things Die During Winter

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Little treasures, like knowing that mamaw’s lasagna recipe calls for one egg in the ricotta cheese.

Index Terms—connection

HOME (NEW, OLD)

Freshly paved roads dotted with churches and
Self-storage warehouses.

I bike around them when it’s overcast and the parking lots
are empty.

I could stand at the corner and hold up the discount mattress
sign.

Behind flimsy cardboard I would think about you all day.
Hold my hand, please, come to the bar

And play slots in the dead-end corridor behind the fish tank
with me.

I’ll fidget with Mamaw’s gold ring on my pinky finger and
Almost weakly, we’ll sing Wild Horses to ourselves in the
back seat.

On the table in the living room there are little ceramic
houses overflowing with light.

Out of tiny windows they leak with gold just after midnight.

I’ll take one with me in the pocket of my coat

To remind me of Home or something close to it.

And in the morning while it’s raining I can sleep on the
floor underneath my blankie with the Snow Babies.

We’ll dream of blackberry scars and how big grandpa’s tree
is getting.

I. 2024 THEMES / GOALS !

- Friendship and community as "Relationship"
- Do some fuckin good science
- Upgrade Gender OS to V6.18.5
- Figure out what my Blood wants
- Figure out what my Bones want
- bike a LOT
- Nourish my inner child (with more dragon content)
- Being present and invested in the current moment
- Grounded-ness
- Stillness
- Being too sexy for my own good
- Embracing my weirdness and silliness more
- Wimsey
- Be dumb and hot (but in a mature and silly way)
- Prioritize relationships that feel reciprocal !!!!!!! - (hmm maybe not ? See, this implies that those you love and are close to are always going to be able to love and give energy in return, but expecting that from someone all the time is unreasonable. Instead, choose to love unconditionally always, no matter what, forever. - reflect on this more)
- Heath ! Drink more water bishhh
- stop biting fingernails (stretch goal)

Breastfeeding Roadkill

Gregory Nero

Abstract—One thing you have to know about me
Is that when it's windy, I'm reborn.
Now I'm in San Francisco on a Wednesday morning,
And I'm a stranger to me and you and everything familiar.

Index Terms—need, want, desire

I.

When I reach out to touch the skin of experience,
and meet that flesh:
How does that hand lead me?
Gently?
Or does it crush my bones,
Cold grip dragging limp body.

II.

For the raccoon that won't decay,
Stubborn bones and cursed earth.
I too want to laugh at death and say:
These are mine, forever, forever, forever.

III.

In my bag: Murakami short stories and shibari hemp rope.

Oil Spill Brains

Gregory Nero

Abstract—I spent February in my chest. All month, peeking through my ribcage. The back of my hand gently on my heart to feel my pulse. February, time and time again, is a month for transformations.

Index Terms—disenchanted, re-enchanted

ANOTHER PANIC ATTACK BUT THIS TIME I KEPT IT
TOGETHER HELL YEAH

Leaving the concert early to have a panic attack. Space heater on high, blasting me with blankets of heat. I'm hugging myself, wrapped tightly. Futon because the bed is too big for where my mind is. Five vials of blood drawn, riding crimson waves now. In and out and in and out until I'm out for the night. Breathing and breathing some more. And like usual, tender days to follow. Food is just material and my teeth are mechanical.

I. BREAKFAST TIME ON THE 2002 TOYOTA CAMRY

Eating yogurt on the trunk of my car, I watch the clouds before heading to campus for the day. I like the way the sky looks from right here. I'm 89 percent present. The other 11 percent is with the clouds.

II. MOUTH LOG MOUTH LOG MOUTH LOG ¹

Monday 2/19

Breakfast was three eggs sunny side up, salt, pepper, two slices of toasted bread with pesto, and a glass of water from princess cup ²

Hunger not present, didn't really enjoy eating it but glad I did

Egg yolk on jean jacket

Feeling very anxious this morning, holding weight in my chest and abdomen

Had second princess cup , # hydrated

Anxiety preventing me from thinking clearly, getting work done - feeling listless — hamster wheel head, knockety and spinning but going nowhere

Got the rumblies around lunch, about 1 ish, HUNGER CUES BABYYYY

Lunch , opportunistic buffet at poster session for IA event , ate until full Apple tea at Turkish cafe

Dinner was miss Saigon , very difficult night

Late night m&m mcflurry for emotional support

Anxiety and hurt manifests in the stomach and abdomen, dull body ache

TUESDAYYYYYYY

Breakfast, not very hungry at alllll , but ate a piece of toasted

bread with cream cheese because I'm trying to be nice to my body

Also drank one princess cup of water # hydrated

Hungry around lunch , had two granola bars and princess cup of water # hydrated

Into the afternoon , another princess cup (# another one) # hydrated !!

Peeing like a villain

Apple at 3:33

CHEEZE itszz

Dinner (late , 9:30) is leftover miss Saigon with egg added (soup ish - noodles, veggies, dumplings)

Anxiety very bad , headache , tightness in body and mind

Wednesday

Fell asleep on futon , woke up at like 1 or 2am and drank a bunch of water cause I was thirsty (thirst cue ???!)

Breakfast was breakfast sandwich from Time market , sort of late, ate hastily with no regard for the passage of time and with an anxious fervor that can only be understood by my distant and flitting stare

By 4pm, drank 51 oz of water

Cup of chamomile tea and banana at EAC

Playing chess with friend, complete absent from the present moment and floating aimlessly around the past and the future Meditating on how to not repeatedly subject myself to the past and re-manifest grief over and over and over

Dinner with friend, they made noodles with brussel sprouts and peanut sauce (got hunger cues - the rumblies)

Discovering that i am the the only thing prohibiting me from finding peace in my mind

Beautiful moments of connection, storm and their winds temporarily stilled

Drank one jar of water

Two sticks of string cheese before bed

THURSDAY

Therapy this morning, learning how to forgive myself and meet myself with the same kindness and compassion I show others (hard)

Rumblies, hunger cue !!!!

For breakfast, two packs of dinosaur oatmeal with oat milk - sat outside on the concrete in the sunlight to eat

Lunch was big Twix, vitamin water (20fl oz) and a brown Tootsie roll pop (field experiment today, on the mountain)

Listening to old country music with the windows down and feeling alive again

Made soup with chicken bouillon, udon noodles, and bag of steamed vegetables

Wasn't feeling super hungry, food was very hot, lots left over Heart is heavy but I saw the Moon rise over the mountains

¹See *Mouth Log* by Sidney Gish

²24 fl oz

so I think everything is going to be okay
 One princess cup of water

Friday (somehow)

Breakyfast was two sausage egg and cheese mcgriddles and princess cup of water
 Emotional burden released to dull ache with temporary bursts of brain heat and body fire
 Lunch - princess cup of water, nature valley granola bar, pack of fruit snacks.
 Dinner is slice of cheese pizza from Time, some chocolate, 51 fl oz of water (hydration goated)
 Night out, had 3-5 PBRs (?), bottle of water, handful of chips, ice cream cake
 I sat on the mountain beneath the moonlight and felt immense peace and love and was truly present
 Beautiful night of connection and reassurance

Saturday

Piece of cornbread filled with corn and other magical things from friend
 Two bagels with cream cheese at TZF volunteering meeting
 28fl oz of Gatorade and some chips with salsa
 Playing games at the park, feeling the whimsy and joy of kidhood
 Also - cinnamon roll and can of lime flavored sparkling water
 Dinner is three slices of mushroom pizza from Domino's and a few bread stick bites
 Drank a princess cup of water
 And another princess cup of water with magic green powder

Sunday !!! 2/25

Hot chocolate for brekky
 Working on conference paper
 Longer chill bike ride with group
 Lunch at Pico de Gallo - fish burrito and cup of horchata
 48 fl oz of water by 3 ish
 Bag of instant rice
 Medium chocolate chip cookie dough blizzard from DQ
 Two double cheeseburgers with onions and a small fry from Ronald Himself
 17fl oz of Lipton peach iced tea
 The mind is an echo chamber and everyone is screaming
 17 fl oz of Perrier

Spring and Winter, Over and Over

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Notes and reflections from my eating journey.

Index Terms—food, food, food

I. MOUTH LOG 2/26 - 3/3 2024

Mondayyyyyy

Brekky is banana , chobani flip, plain bagel with garlic and herb whipped cream cheese, 30oz of water

Hunger cues around 1pm

For lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, provolone, pesto, baby arugula), 6 chips ahoj cookies, 17 fl oz Lipton iced tea peach

Another 30 fl oz of water by 5pm

Hungry around 7 or 8pm

Dinner is bag of uncle bens roasted chicken instant rice, 10 honey battered chicken tenders, baby arugula, ranch dressing
Couple of cookies for snack and about half of 17 oz Lipton peach iced tea before bed

TUESSDDAYYY

Finished that Lipton first thing this morning cause I got that dog in me

Banana, chobani flip, 30 fl oz of water

Cloudy again, sitting on the trunk of my car drinking water ; thinking about things that hurt and things that don't hurt

Mini snickers and 100 grand

For lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, provolone, pesto, baby arugula), 6 chips ahoj cookies, 17 fl oz Lipton iced tea peach

Dinner (lateeeee) chicken tender bagel sandwich with sauceeee , with more chicken tenders for good measure ,AND A BANANA

Wed nes day

Banana, bagel with cream cheese, 30 fl oz of water, mini oat milk pea protein concoction

For lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, provolone, pesto, baby arugula), 4 chips ahoj cookies, 17 fl oz Lipton iced tea peach

Hunger level 6 or 7 , felt in my gut viscerally but not emotionally

Ate wayyy too fast, tummy hurted

17 fl oz of Perrier waterr

75 percent of a tallboi PBR and a small margarita

Marg gave me tummy ache ouchies

Late late dinner , bagel chicken tender sandwich

Thursday holy shit it's Thursday !

Therapy first thing this morning

Trying to identify where I can give myself more space

Later start to day and field experiment later, so this will be

a two meal day which means I should make the first meal count

Breakfast sandwich - two eggs, plain bagel with cream cheese, turkey, provolone, baby arugula

Banana, chobani flipppppp, 30fl oz of water

Feeling very full

Bowl of assorted fruit from Speedway and 17 fl oz of coconut water as snack Plate from Panda Express , double kung Pao with white rice + 2 veggie spring rolls + fortune cookie

17fl oz Lipton peach tea and a handful of chips ahoj cookies
2 montuckys (ya YEEET)

Friday , Friday, Friday

Sausage egg and cheese sandwich from Starbucks

Tall oat milk hazelnut decaf latte from Starbucks

A few assorted candy bar snacks and a muffin

30fl oz of water

One (1) chips ahoj cookie

Two slices of pizza from Time Market

51 fl oz of water

One Coors, one expensive cocktail, and one gigantic fucking ice cube

Smashed the ice cube by vaulting it into the air and curb stomping it into the asphalt

Want to feel more grounded

Saturday

Turbulent and emotional morning, gigantic spike of anxiety, woke up immediately thrown into my mind with no food or water

Holding so much tension in my mind and in my body

Wondering how much longer winter will last and who I will be at the end of it

Bagel with cream cheese for breakfast

Lunch - rice, chicken tenders, baby arugula, 17 floz of Lipton iced tea peach
Dinner is pizza at Time, glass of red wine, some water

Couple of drinks - night out (PBR, kolsch)

Today was simply beautiful and simply absolutely rotten and both of those things are true

Feeling everything, necessarily; wading through waist deep and growing and that's simply beautiful and simply absolutely rotten and both of those things are true

Embracing the dichotomy in everything (except dichotomy implies a two-ness when , in reality, experience is much more higher-dimensional)

Eager for tomorrow

Sunday (GLIZZY bike ride day !!!! - pound of shame 2024 ride , 70 miles)

Morning - simple , piece of toasted white bread

During the course of the day, consumed one pound of Costco hot dogs (four quarter pounders), water, some brisk, chamoy fruit gushers, some ice cream, Gatorade, one Tums
Beautiful wonderful day spent on a bike in the sunshine with lovely people Some nausea later on at night but kept it together!!

Chamomile tea and special moments spent in conversation with Weaver before entering the Fae realm of sleep and train sounds

II. MOUTH LOG 3/4 - 3/10 2024

MONDAAAYY

Skipped breakfast, still recovering from glizzy day yesterday
Lunch is Chic Fil A - two chicken sandwiches (regular chicken + spicy chicken both with cheese and lettuce), Chick-fil-A sauce + ranch, and cookies and cream milkshake
Bottle of sprite

The pitiful remains of blue Gatorade from yesterday
Dinner is rice , chicken tenders, baby arugula , chick fil a sauce, 11froz of peach nectar

Tuesdeyyyy

Breakfast, two toasted pieces of white bread with butter
Skipped lunch (F's in the chat)
Snacks around 4:30pm - chex mix, nature valley pb biscuit, blueberry fig bars
Dinner - bowl of egg noodles with chicken bouillon broth, 17 floz Lipton peach tea
Also McD's two double cheeseburgers, small fry, m-and-m mcflurry
Some non-appreciable amount of water
Please drink more water tomorrow greg

Wednesday !!

Breakfast is pack of basmati instant rice, three eggs, salt, pepper, olive oil, soy sauce (stir-fry style) and piece of toasted white bread with basil pesto and 30 floz of water
Trying to be more mindful of how the food in my mouth actually tastes
Ate breakfast on the trunk of my car again and watched the clouds - becoming good grounding ritual, feeling at peace
Small cup of chamomile tea from cafe luce
Medium fruity drink from Scented Leaf
Another cup of chamomile tea from espresso art
Super fkn hydrated today
Dinner is chicken tenders and Japanese style noodles in chicken bouillon broth
Night out to celebrate friend's birthday, a few drinks

Thursday holy god it's already Thursday

Dreams continue to be a source of joy, curiosity, and torment
Heart and throat are tight this morning, I need to sit down in the rain to remind myself of the Here
Breakfast - not hungry but also hungry , anxiety and mind are forces for appetite suppression
Trunk of my car, sunny today, birdsong goes down easy
Two pieces of toasted white bread with cream cheese - once

I started eating, appetite returned
30froz of water
Mug of hot chocolate
30froz of water
Around 5:30pm a bunch of chicken tenders with chick fil a sauce
Movies , some popcorn, chocolate candy, and some soda

Friday !!!

Breakfast - big moves for brekky this morning
Breakfast stir fry - pack of instant rice, two eggs, tofu, bok choy, radishes with soy sauce, olive oil, salt
Trunk time , crystal pieces wet with dreams and sticky with the night and early morning, precious water and green on the lawn next door, swaying Small jar of water with magic green powder
Two chicken empanadas and some other random spherical thing made of food
Few drinks - Shirley temple, Coors, a bud light that was probably expired, teate
Chicken quesadilla and a few chips ahoj cookies

Saturday !!!!

Woke up early for tour de cookie volunteering , biked about 22 miles , skipped breakfast on the account of being up early
Had 3-4 cookies, 30froz of water
Lunch is pack of instant rice and tofu with curry powder and the remainder of a bottle of 17 floz peach tea
And , a very old gnarly granola bar that I found in my coat pocket — smooshed but still good
Two tamales, rice, salsa at festival of books
17 floz of peach tea
Dancingggg tonight,,, two drinks and a hot dog that was way too fucking expensive

Sundayyyyy eep !

Skipped breakfast , felt too overwhelmed by the consistent pressure and weight of some ambiguous anxiety to act on hunger - decided to clean house instead
Lunch - pad Thai stir fry (radishes, bok choy, brussel sprouts , pack of instant basmati rice, two eggs, pad Thai sauce) with 6 pieces of nigiri sushi from Fry's and one bakery hard roll bread
While eating - felt like I was moving 10000 mph but not in a good way ,, how to slow down and actually taste food ?
Like some kind of primal subconscious feeling kicks in
11froz can of peach nectar
Cosmic brownie
One very large strawberry lemonade
Still feeling very very full from the lunch well into the afternoon
Small m-and-m mcflurry from DQ
30froz of water
Dinner / late snack - bread, butter, imitation crab meat

III. MOUTH LOG 3/11 - 3/17 2024

Monday 3/11

Appetite very low this morning, eager to start the day and

don't really want to eat but I'm going to because my body needs it goddamit
 Breakfast is chobani flip, 11froz muscle milk chocolate protein shake pre-packaged, 30froz of water
 Lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, Swiss cheese, baby spinach, pesto), banana, veggie straws, nature valley peanut butter biscuit bar, cosmic brownie, 17froz Lipton green tea pineapple mango
 Popcorn later for a movie
 Reflecting on Body and my inhabiting of that Body
 Accidentally listen to Blue Raspberry in its entirety and now it's 10pm and I'm overwhelmed by an intense feeling of loss and melancholy
 Scrubbed my skin off in the shower
 Teriyaki noodle bowl with two hard rolls with butter
 Cosmic brownie and 20froz of water (?)

Tuesday !

Breakfast is bagel with cream cheese, banana, chobani flip, 30froz of water
 Lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, Swiss cheese, baby spinach, pesto), veggie straws, nature valley peanut butter biscuit bar, cosmic brownie, 5 double stuff Oreos, 11froz muscle milk carton
 17froz Lipton green tea pineapple mango
 Late night in lab , ordered Dave's hot chicken with lab pals-chicken sandwich, chicken tenders, some fries, some coke
 Tummy ache
 Thinking about coherence and the measurability of the observable world
 Midnight water, sleepy kitchen stumble, drank until full

Wednesday

Really not feeling motivated or excited about eating today but we gotta get those nutrients so fuck it we ball
 Breakfast - 2 packets of dinosaur oatmeal with oat milk, banana, bagel with cream cheese, 30froz of water
 Trunk time - crucial part of the process is to walk to trunk with no shoes so that I can feel that gravel and the rocks on my feet - small pain is stimulating and engages grounded-ness
 Medium fruity tea drink from Scented Leaf
 Hunger pangs around lunch
 Scavenged some chicken bites left in lab
 Dinner - Tofu, basmati rice, baked brussel sprouts with pad Thai sauce, 30froz of water, another glass of water with magic green powder
 Headache ... After making and eating a fabulous dinner and giving my body a bunch of water, THIS is how it repays me ... nutrition is BUSTED
 Cosmic brownie and veggie straws as snacky

Thursday

Breakfast - banana, 2 packets of dino oatmeal with oat milk, 11froz muscle milk carton (huge gainz)
 Chamomile tea with honey from cafe
 Sandwich (white bread, turkey, Swiss cheese, baby spinach, pesto)
 17froz lipton green tea pineapple mango

Nature valley pb biscuit, cosmic brownie
 Montucky and tiny esses at trivia
 Two hard rolls with butter and imitation crab meat

Friday uhhhhh fridayyy??

Brekky is chobani flip, 30froz of water
 Nature valley pb biscuit
 Nature valley cinnamon almond butter biscuit
 Pre-dinner snack of cosmic brownie and some chicken tenders
 Dinner at lab party, variety of Chinese food and some wine / sparkling water + cake

Saturday!!

Skipped breakfast whoops
 Lunch - meatball sandwich, pickle, Arizona tea from deli
 Half of a Shirley temple
 17froz lipton green tea pineapple mango
 Feeling kind of nauseous around dinner / acid reflux ouchies
 Ginger ale and onion rings
 Dots and some popcorn
 More lovely and wonderful moments of connection

Sunday

Breakfast was breakfast sandwich from Time market and some water
 Hot chocolate from Presta
 Burger and miscellaneous veggies and dip at cookout, maybe even some chips
 Bagel with butter and Swiss cheese
 Cinnamon toast crunch with oat milk

IV. MOUTH LOG 3/18 - 3/24 2024

Monday 3/18

Finally shedding the tremendous weight that winter placed gently on my mind
 Shed it gently, too, or risk the hubris of being in a storm without a coat to warm you
 Breakfast is a bagel with cream cheese, chobani flip
 30froz water by lunch
 Lunch - sandwich (white bread, turkey, Swiss cheese, baby spinach, pesto), veggie straws, 11froz muscle milk carton, cosmic brownie
 17froz Lipton green tea pineapple mango by 6pm
 2 Pacifico's
 Pad Thai noodle bowl with extra instant rice

Tuesday !!

Chobani flip for breakfast
 Decaf oat milk latte from Luce
 2 nature valley PB biscuit bars
 Dinner - Pad Thai noodle bowl with extra instant rice
 Ice cream
 17froz Lipton green tea pineapple mango
 Day in review for diet - not the best , but there's always tomorrow to do better

Wednesday

Breakfast - 2x dinosaur oatmeal packets with oat milk, bagel with cream cheese
 30froz of water by noon
 30froz of water by 2:20pm
 Butterfinger (big boi)
 Egg drop soup (noodles, chicken bouillon, 2 eggs mercifully stirred and dropped)
 Cosmic brownie
 17froz Lipton green tea pineapple mango
 Glass of amber beer and canoli

Thursday

Breakfast - chobani flip, bagel with butter, 11froz muscle milk carton
 Some sweets and bread from Babylon Market, some water
 One (1) Budweiser
 Some water
 Ice cream with oat milk, Oreos, and sprinkles
 Certainly not my best work today ; good to recognize gaps in my food schedule, though ♡

Friday once again

Two packs of dinosaur oatmeal with oat milk for brekky
 Mug of chamomile tea
 Lunch - chicken curry, basmati rice, naan, extra bread from Babylon Market
 30froz of water by 3:30pm
 Banana
 51 froz of water at Time
 Club soda with lime
 Couple of drinks (2x vodka sprite)
 Beautiful and lovely moments of intimacy at the Slab
 Two crunchwrap Supremes hell yeah

Saturday

Trunk time - late breakfast (aka lunch), woke up late - dreams were very intense. Hot metal on thighs, rocks on bare feet (sensations)
 Made solid meal for trunk time - three eggs scrambled with olive oil, salt, pepper, basil flakes, baby spinach, onion (lots of onion), imitation crab meat
 30froz of water
 Churro popcorn, one date, some chocolate, iced decaf oatmilk caramel latte Filled with immense joy and love today laying in the grass with pals and being silly and watching the clouds
 Communal dinner with many lovely people and many lovely food things
 Feeling loved and held and seen

Sundayyy

Anxiety today from dealing with immature and especially difficult people !!
 Today anxiety is just a lil man renting a room in my mind hotel and even though the staff is upset that he's there they are doing their best to be hospitable.
 Anxiety making it hard to function and ruining my appetite tbh but we're gonna eat something and call it a success

because sometimes success is meeting yourself where you're at and I love myself goddamit
 Poured myself some cereal but somebody used the rest of my oat milk, F's in the chat
 Keep it together greg
 Breakfast is nature valley pb biscuit bar, two pieces of toast with butter, 11froz muscle milk carton
 Lunch - food truck chicken quesadilla with veggies and salsa
 Can of seltzer water
 Cosmic brownie
 Dinner - instant noodles with extra rice and imitation crab meat

The Town Prepares for Summer

Gregory Nero

Abstract—I'm a witness to the heat.

Index Terms—marjoram

FOR ANTHONY

In the shower room after swimming,

We leapt over tiny cesspools.

Jumping from islands of dry tile,

Beige-white and cold,

We found the warmest water the furthest back.

Turned crusted silver knobs to the hottest position.

I think it took a while for the water to get hot,

*But soon it would, and we'd stand almost naked beneath the
showers for minutes or maybe hours.*

Despite this, I don't remember being vulnerable with you.

I wish I could have been more vulnerable with you.

My memory is steamy fog. I want it to be a cold plunge.

*So many hours amassed but I can hardly remember how we
spent them.*

Maybe we did just stand in the heat,

Silently moving between each drop.

I'm sorry I bailed senior year.

When I reflect, I always imagined that you resented me for it.

It feels selfish now, what I did.

I wish I could tell you that I'm sorry.

I wish I could swim a few more cold laps with you

Just so that we could go back to the shower room

To talk about nothing or maybe everything.

I. MOUTH LOG 4/8/24 - 4/14/24

(on Sunday, meal prepped soup ! - chicken broth from cartons, celery, carrots, onion, garlic, pork meatballs, baked chicken breast, wide egg noodles)

MONDAY BABYYYY

Brekky is Bagel with garlic and herb whipped cream cheese and one egg w salt/pepz One mandarin, one banana

Trunk time - feeling the sun and thinking about how anxiety feels in my body

30floz of water by 1:10pm

Lunch is turkey, Swiss sandwich on white bread, two mandarins, nature valley biscuit bar

17 floz of Lipton iced tea lemon drink

Dinner is rice and chili :)

Late nite bowl of soup, nature valley biscuit bar, some Gatorade

Tuesday !!

Breakfast made to-go because the floor was covered in dog

pisss and roommate was coughing up a lung while I was preparing food

Breakfast is : Bagel with cream cheese and egg, mandarin+banana

Sandwich wedge from platter (mystery contents)

30floz of water by 4pm

Maple butter pecan muffin

Dinner is buffet at QTF conference - rice, some greens, veggies, beans, some grains, lemonade, peculiar caramel pudding cup eaten with small silver spoon

Bowl of ice cream with hot fudge, whipped cream (thicky tub kind), sprinkles

One (1) 10 dollar PBR ... god is dead

Nature valley biscuit bar + dry roasted edamame

Some Gatorade

Wednesday !!

Breakfast is bagel with cream cheese, egg, banana, mandarin orange

30floz of water by 2pm

Late lunch is sandwich (turkey and Swiss on white bread), bag of chips, two manadrin oranges, 17 floz tea

Dinner is big ol bowl of soup, Lipton iced tea, gushers for snack, remains of Gatorade

Thursday AHHHHHHH

Wearing my yellow socks today to protect me from everything

Breakfast on the trunk : bagel with cream cheese and one egg, mandarin orange, banana

Today I have the choice to relinquish myself to anxiety or be exceptional despite it

Choose what exceptional means for you today and be it

30floz of water by 2:15pm

Late lunch - turkey and Swiss sandwich, two mandarin oranges, nature valley biscuit bar, 17floz of iced tea

Two tallboi Budweiser cans and some fries

Bagel with butter and CHEESE (very nice)

Friidaayyyee

Breakfast - bagel with cream cheese and decaf iced oat milk latte

Two Reese's PB cups

BIG bowl of soup, 17floz of Lipton iced tea

50floz of water, glass of red wine, chocolate

Couple of brewskies, two croissants (microwaved)

Saturday !

Breakfast - bagel with cream cheese, banana

Thai boba tea

Vietnamese restaurant in PHX for dinner

Cocacolaaa

Thursdayyyyyyy

Not very hungry this morning, but had: chobani flip and banana

Lunch - turkey and Swiss sandwich, mandarin orange, nature valley biscuit bar, 12floz la croix

Chocolate chip cookie

Apple juice and some tea

Soup for dinner, yes, I like the soup in my tummy

Ice cream and sprinkles

30floz of water by the time I meet sleep

Fridayy

Breakfast - chobani flip, blueberries, banana, jar with magic green powder

Salted caramel cashews, mandarin orange, Oreo cakesters

Caramel ribbon crunch frap (lil treat)

Sandwich at time , 50floz of water, chocolate

Saturday

Slept in, no breakfast

Lots of soup for lunch

Bowl of granola with oat milk

30 floz of water

Modelo

Two cheeseburgers with onion

17floz of water

The rest of the weekend - lost to the wind

YOU ARE HERE

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Things I heard last night: gunshots (five), man coughing (phlegm), man screaming (loud).

Index Terms—sexy, fun, casual, deep, dreadful, aching, loving, loving, loving

WRITTEN WHILE BIKING

Saturday night back pocket zyn
Sticky with warm spit and ass sweat

Biking,

No: flying (because this is euphoria)

Down third avenue headed west

Yura yura ugoku and atomic heart mother

Black button up blouse and jean shorts

I'm a wet slimy mess of love

And I'm in love, over and over, with where I'm at right now

Jet-lagged but Otherwise having a pretty good time

Gregory Nero

Abstract—We each take a bite of the peach and launch it off of the cliff. The sound it makes when it hits the earth is something that is only for us.

Index Terms—here, there, everywhere

I. PLACES TO ROT

*I'm looking for somewhere to disappear.
To become the weeds.
To become the cobwebs.
I'm looking for a place to rot.
In between concrete sidewalk slabs
And the forgotten corner of the ceiling.
My bones will be soil.
My veins will be filthy gossamer.*

II. STRANGE PLACES (WITH YOU)

*I want to hold your hand in a place neither of us recognize.
I want to be surrounded by everything unfamiliar and feel
your skin among it.
Like in the back of a packed bus,
Or the noodle shop next to the busy alley.
I want to give you the pit of my plum lollipop,
And play arcade games with you on the third floor.
I want to ride the 182 line with you until we reach the end.
And when it's time to get off, you'll squeeze my hand twice.
We'll leave and get swept up in the busy street,
And maybe we'll disappear until we're ready to be found.
I want to learn something new about ourselves, together.*

III. MORE REFLECTIONS ON GENDER (WRITTEN ON THE PLANE TO TAIPEI)

I was an altar boy and I wore a white alb and I held the scripture for the priest to read. I lit incense before mass and I rang the bells after the words “do this in memory of me.” We said prayers about all things visible and invisible, seen and unseen. We learned about how in order to “properly” crucify someone you need to drive the nails between the wrist bones and not through the hands because the hand bones couldn’t support the weight of the hanging body would rip right through them. We gave peace and shook hands with our neighbors. We believed that out of divine mercy and love the Virgin gave birth to the son of God. We worshiped Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit. We learned this trinity was three in one and one in three. Spirit and body in beautiful harmony. The bread became body and the wine became blood. And we ate his body and drank his blood and asked for the forgiveness of our sins behind a thin screen. And this made sense. Treat thy neighbor as thyself. But not being a man was completely out of the question because that was too confusing and difficult

for other people to understand, as if the crucified Jesus above the altar was crying not for the sake of humanity, but because I don’t want to be a man or a woman.

From the side of the alley, I hear *Hey, that dude isn't wearing any pants!* I continue my walk (well, it was more of a strut) down the mostly ruined avenue and give a glance over my shoulder to see the two figures sitting up against the rusted-sheet-metal fence. Whether this remark was meant as an insult or simply an expression of confusion I’ll never know but I do know that I looked fabulous in that short red dress, sweating beneath the beautiful but harsh Tucson sun.

In the same red dress underneath the same sun someone with a clipboard and sheet of paper shouts *Hey, chica! Chica!* At first I don’t stop, thinking these shouts must be for someone else, but after more hailing I finally pause and reassure the person that I was in fact registered to vote in this county.

Somewhere close to midnight I wait in the McDonald’s drive through on my banana-yellow bicycle, waiting to get an M-and-M frosty. Before I get up to the first window I hear from the car behind me *Hey honey whatchu doin' later?!* I turn around, my ass obviously looking fabulous in my white skirt and the middle section of my back gleaming between its waist and my cropped t-shirt, to see the look of confusion on the faces of driver and the passenger who, after much confusion, apologize and say *Oh sorry bro, we thought you were a girl!* Never before have I experienced such a combination of euphoria and disgust in my life.

On the video call with my family I desperately try to answer the demanding question of *Why?* as tears stream down my face. Only after that did I realize how insulting it is to ask someone that without having the patience to hear the answer to such an impossible question.

I would say that one of my greatest fears is living a life disingenuous to myself. That I’m simply building a puzzle with shapes given to me by others, the edges and colors chosen by anyone else but me. And then when I sit down at the table by myself with the pieces as organized as I can make them, I look at the collection and think *now what the fuck is this jigsaw world trying to make of me?*

I have had a bright green “they/them” pin on my backpack for a few years now. It has a little red heart on it. It’s really cute. When I stand in line to board the plane, I can feel the person behind me staring at it. I wear it proudly, but to be honest, sometimes I’m afraid of being confronted about it. I’m worried that someone will see it and say to me *prove it.* And I’ll stand before them, patchy facial hair and Adam’s apple recovering from a gulp of desperation, with absolutely no clear way of convincing them that I’m neither a man or a woman in a way that they will be satisfied with.

When I shave my facial hair my neck usually bleeds. Unfortunately, this has become a metaphor. Before I leave

for the bars on Friday night I look at my face closely in the mirror and think to myself *you are so fucking beautiful, please know this*. While I'm buying nicotine at the local smoke shop, the cashier gives me a harsh look. I'm not sure if it's because I'm buying an addictive substance or if it's because my skirt is too short. I'm not sure which case is worse to the cashier.

It has been my experience that being queer and non-binary as someone who is typically read as a man (unless hours of cosmetic preparation beforehand can "convince" people otherwise) means never being able to feel like I truly belong in queer spaces because I'm automatically labelled as a man pretending to be queer, and never being able to feel like I belong in cis spaces because I'm just a man pretending to be a woman.

I would like to acknowledge that privilege, though, of being able to "be a man when I want to." This of course means "be a man to *others* when I want to" but sometimes these two very distinct things become blurred. At the McDonald's drive through, I was automatically "safe" because the passengers of the car both "realized I was a man" and backed off. That is a privilege. I escaped harassment simply because they thought I was a man. So, when people say to me I just don't see how the gender binary affects our lives I think of that situation and scream.

One of the tragedies of my identity as non-binary is that the world has forced me to become politically radicalized in order to justify my own existence, when in reality I just wanted to exist in a way that made me feel beautiful. I just wanted to exist without my very existence being a spectacle. But I get caught in a loop which goes something like *Why can't you just be a man that likes to do "girl" things?* with me replying *Why does it matter if I'm not a man or a woman?* My initial naïve acceptance of "gender is made up" comes back swinging with full force when I enter these debates, which is when I realize how fucking wrong that is. Gender is very real and we experience that reality every single day.

I've been considering lately: gender as a system for expression vs gender as a system for oppression. In what ways do I use gender to feel like I belong somewhere in this world and in what ways does that same system come back to bite me later on? Put another way: gender as a game vs. gender as survival. For all the ways I can feel euphoric navigating outside of the binary there are dozens that tell me I'm doing it wrong, or doing it for attention, or that I'm plainly making it up. I initially thought (and maybe I still do, but in a way that feels different) that gender is this beautiful platform on which we can express ourselves. And part of me still believes that, if only we allow gender to be flexible. But recently I've been unsure of this. Gender more recently feels like a tool for making sure that those who don't conform to it feel alienated and afraid, a tool for oppressing and limiting the potential of others. If this is the way gender is and will be then I don't want any part of it.

Before the bike ride, we say our names and pronouns. I pick a new name and say today my pronouns are the sounds that the leaves make. And honestly, I've never felt more like myself.

At the house party, two groups stand separated, simply by

social diffusion, on the back porch. The 'girls' side' and 'the boys' side' emerges as the girls dance and the boys stand around talking about something or another. And someone points that distinction out and makes the comment *hey it's like a middle school dance* and I think of myself in middle school (a stranger I care about a lot) and I nervously leave the boy's side where I was standing talking about nothing to lock myself in the bathroom and sit on the edge of the tub to think about identity and my place in this world. I left shortly after.

I think about gender non-conformity I experienced growing up, however limited it was. I remember the "tomboys," the AFAB gender deviants who wore basketball shorts and baggy shirts and liked to hang out with the boys. But I can't for the life of me remember a single AMAB person who defied gender like that at an early age and I'm devastated because I know the reality is that any hint of that would have been quickly snuffed out. Being a girl who liked boy things was okay, but being a boy who liked girl things was unacceptable. And that fills me with immeasurable sadness and anger. The world would be a gentler place if boys were "allowed" to be girls sooner.

I have a hard time remembering my early childhood and even most parts of my middle-school and high-school life. People sometimes tell me that it's because of trauma but I'm not so sure about that. I am very grateful for the life I had growing up. But still, there's this gigantic gap where my memories should be, memories that my old friends can recount so clearly. Unfortunately, this has also become a metaphor, but I'm still not sure about what yet. I do know that every year I feel like I get closer to myself.

I am my mom's non-binary son. If that doesn't make sense to you then I can't really blame you. That means I'm not a boy but I'm still her son. If that makes things more confusing, then I still can't really blame you. What I mean is that "son" doesn't mean "boy." "Son" means that she raised me and that counts for something. In fact, that counts for a whole lot. And it's precisely because she raised me that I've ended up where I am. I want her to see me the way I see myself. This is a gift I want to give to her. I can be her non-binary son because queerness is a platform for radical inclusion and love. I can do this because there's no "right way" to be non-binary.