

In Our Bodies

a zine about pleasure, intimacy, and reality in 2020

by What Would An HIV Doula Do?

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Pleasure and intimacy are vital to our overall health and well-being, but the pandemic, state assaults on reproductive and sexual health, and state sanctioned police violence—including police terror, police murder, and white supremacist vigilante murder against Black and Indigenous people and people of color—have threatened our ability to be close to one another. This, in turn, has increased our experiences of loneliness, fear, and isolation. This was all true before this year, but the decimation wrought by COVID-19 and the violence of the Trump

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presidency have created even more physical and emotional barriers to positive experiences of sex and desire.

Throughout shelter-in-place and safer-at-home orders, Members of What Would an HIV Doula Do? (WWHIVDD) have been meeting online and sharing our experiences and resources. Through regular discussions, social media posts, and conversations with friends and lovers, we've gained many insights about sex, each other, and ourselves. And like good lovers, we wanted to share what we've learned. Here, some members of the collective share their experiences of companionship, sex, longing and much more. Each contribution ends with WHAT HELPS GET US THROUGH, a list of thoughts, questions, and suggested media that we hope provides joy, insight, or at least a change of pace. We tasked ourselves with creating this zine to think through questions about

how to navigate what we need and want in this moment that feels both familiar and totally unprecedented.

This zine is rooted in our understanding that neither intimacy nor sexual health is just about body parts, contact, or viruses. Often, our COVID-19 zoom conversations would begin with questions around sex and hookups, and would evolve from there to include topics such as motherhood + quarantine; complex feelings about wanting to be slutty online; what AIDS has taught us about abstinence; economic barriers to care, sexual, and reproductive health; and the ways in which these overlapping pandemics of the novel coronavirus, HIV, and anti-Black racism impact our sexual health.

When we're talking about sex, sometimes we are talking about freedom—what it means to be in our bodies, free from

Introduction

stigma, coercion, and violence. We know that the medical industrial complex does not care for all of us equally, and that Black women (both cis and trans) have suffered beyond words at the hands of a corrupt medical system. Together, we can change the culture and systems so that this is no longer true. We can care for each other.

In this moment of change, we have an opportunity to learn and unlearn things about sex, care, intimacy, and our needs, desires, and bodies. Like sex, learning and growing as a person is great to do alone, and can also be fun to do with others. Join us. Explore and share!



Space Dates (Alley Makeout I)
Jessica Whitbread / Morgan Page
(Photography by Tania Anderson) 2012

Abdul-Aliy A. Muhammad

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I've found moments of self-intimacy in massaging my body as I moisturize with shea butter and cocoa butter. I've been looking at my body in the mirror more. It's been useful to become reacquainted with myself. Friends have reminded me that phone sex is part of my sexiness skill-set. Phone sex was the first way I began to be intimate; calling folx I liked and saying sexy things on a landline was a daily practice in my teens. Now, I've returned to a once familiar practice, a coming home of sorts or a cumming at home kinda thing. All I can say is that WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and text threads are where foreplay happens now.

What Helps Get Us Through

Take more baths, if you're able, there is something so soothing about being in and around the warmth of water in these times. Reminder: Sex Exists In The Future.

What ritual or practices around intimacy have returned to you or dreamed of by you during these current times?

Homecoming

visual album from Beyoncé

Let 'Im Move You

performance from Jumatatu M Poe

Kuwasi Balagoon: A Soldier's Story

writings from Kuwasi Balagoon

Love's Instruments

book from Melvin Dixon

Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good

book from adrienne maree brown

Tangerine

film from Sean Baker, 2015

The Body Is Not an Apology: The Politics of Radical Self-Love

book from Sonya Renee Taylor

When I Get Home: Director's Cut

performance film from Solange

Alex F

Part I:

COVID Counsel & Summer Sex

This text exchange from mid-June 2020 encapsulates the times for me. Our moment of somewhat-reopening / somewhat-isolation is rife with tension and anxiety—between cuddle puddles, doses of reality (delivered in hashtag form, perhaps to lighten the gravity of the intervention), regular testing, “risk reduction steps,” potential family exposure, and more. The protests have indeed “changed the vibe completely”—the necessity of



COVID-19 texts between Alex F and friend, June 11, 2020

anti-racist activism and gathering in public to do so feels palpable. The friend in the text exchange above is a decade younger than me, and I worried my immediate #covid response made me come across like a mother hen. His follow up registers my anxiety, swinging from justifications related to managing risk to very reasonable desires to meet our needs for touch—“let a girl get her cuddle on.” We are all trying our best, and as I say, “I trust that.”

Part II:
The Mask Kiss

I wrote Part I after 3½ months of relative physical distance and social isolation, from the perspective of lockdown in a small-ish city in Connecticut. Part II comes two weeks later, after a trip to NYC for the Queer Liberation March opened up a lot more for me. I’ve since realized that location can very much dictate

what’s possible. Significantly: In NYC I had sex for the first time in 4 months, since COVID-19 hit stateside. One detail of this exchange and the NYC weekend overall that felt particularly noteworthy and worth wrapping my head around here was what I’ll call the Mask Kiss.

A Mask Kiss is just that: a kiss that happens with your masks on. It occurred a few times between us over the course of the day of the Queer Liberation March—when leaving the house together, upon getting up to exit the subway, and when eventually parting ways. Each time, the Mask Kiss seemed organic, and natural, and made sense in the moment as the culmination of embrace. But equally, how bizarre it was, to press patterned material to each other’s faces, habitually going in for a kiss when mouth-to-mouth contact wasn’t even possible.

After a heartfelt holding on the subway, and talking about how especially amazing touch feels in this moment, a Mask Kiss made sense as we exited the train—we weren't going to take our masks off inside the MTA subway car, that's for sure. A Mask Kiss would suffice, until a future opportunity when we could take the mask off—proverbially letting our guards down again—and return to the particularly intimate exchange that kissing has become in this moment.

The Mask Kiss makes me think of a 1992 painting created amidst the AIDS pandemic by artist Hugh Steers—titled “Plastic Embrace,” the intimate image pictures an attempt at coming together, restrained by a barrier between bodies.

I'm now feeling the physical and emotional whiplash of being back home in CT after an overwhelming, magical weekend



Plastic Embrace, Hugh Steers, 1992

Alex F

towards Queer Liberation in NYC. I'm very grateful for the headspace and physical distance in CT, yet I'm processing a sense of longing. (It was Cancer Season and I was in my feelings. I let it wash over me.) I felt the return to touch, to contact, to sex. I sincerely missed all of it. Now I see that I was somewhat starved without it. The next phase of COVID-19 consciousness has me considering: How can we develop safe and sustainable forms of contact?

What Helps Get Us Through

Talk to your friends in counsel before making move towards sex. Easier said than done, and they might talk you out of actions you otherwise want to take. But as a close mentor says to me when I desire to dive head first into hot yet oftentimes messy situations, ultimately self-esteem comes from esteemable acts, and in this moment, self-awareness and intention have felt essential.

What does dating even look like during COVID? More specifically, and for starters, how do we spark up a first date during COVID?

Criminal Queers

video from Chris Vargas with Eric Stanley
(password: loverevolution)

Keith Haring's Line: Race and the Performance of Desire

book from Ricardo Montez

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals

book from Saidiya Hartman

“We Need A Plan for How to Have Casual Sex Again”

article from Mathew Rodriguez

Alexandra Juhasz

alexandrajuhasz.com

I have two beautiful adult children: Gabriel, 21, and Simone, 22. Their other mom is Cheryl. I am the biological mother of Gabriel, Cheryl of Simone. Both kids have the same biological dad, Robert; his partner is Perry. There've been more parents along the way: Peggy, Cheryl's second wife and third mom to Simone; Skip, my husband for a while. There was a step-sibling there as well, Elliot. A bunch more moms came in and out with Cheryl, though none stuck, plus a step-sibling or two who left along with their moms. A few more boyfriends for me. Today, Cheryl is happily married to Karina; I'm coupled with Gavin; Robert and Perry are still together; Simone is with Francis; Gabe lives with me, because of the coronavirus. When you add in all the aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins we are a proper postmodern Brady Bunch! Our family is

peopled lovingly, through marriage and not-marriage, by Blacks, Jews, Italian-Americans, former Catholics, Chinese-Americans, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, bi-racials, trans-folk, gender non-binary people. It's our beautiful mess.

My partner Gavin and I never wanted to live together. And for our 3 years together, we haven't. But then COVID-19 hit, and in March we both had undiagnosed, stay-at-home-and-manage-it-yourself COVID-19. It lingered. For the 5 weeks of our illness and slow recovery, we shared his Fort Greene apartment, while Simone, Gabe, and Francis were isolated in my Ditmas Park apartment, illness-free, taking college classes on Zoom. They mostly got along, but the house was a god-awful mess. Gavin and I took care of each other; we were pretty much symptom-free by May. That same month Simone graduated from college,

and then, with Francis, they moved in with Francis' parents in San Francisco. This meant that Gabe could move out of my bedroom in the apartment, and back into his old room. I could move back into my own apartment! Phew. It was nice to have privacy again, my own life rituals, and a wonderful partner just three miles away (a great bike ride!).

Then, in June, I suffered a period for one week. I'm 56 and have been post-menopausal for several years. Bleeding after the change isn't a good thing. Tests and procedures followed, and my doctors ruled out the worst possible causes. They put me on Progesterone for three months to regularize the extra estrogen my body was suddenly producing for yet to be determined reasons. It is my sense that COVID-19 put my reproductive or vascular systems into overdrive. But no doctor is talking to me about that.

My OB/GYN here in New York is patriarchal and distant. So I look to other experts for good feminist health advice. I have two close friends, an OB/GYN and a family doc, who talk reasonably and lovingly with me about my gynecological health. As my prognosis began to look sunnier, my OB/GYN friend texted me and laughingly remarked in digital short-hand: at least I wasn't pregnant! That is to say, I just might have gotten pregnant the heterosexual way ... at 56—one Covid side effect that not even the most homophobic would hope for!

Proud, defiant, lesbian-Mom, I have sex and kids my way. I want none of COVID-19-sex that messes with my power of agency, choice, or timeline for progeny.

I have and will have no Corona-Baby.

What Helps Get Us Through

How can we control our body, our sex, our sexuality, our fertility, our family-planning, as COVID runs roughshod through our systems?

Dear Gabe

video by Alexandra Juhasz

Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship

book by Kath Weston

In the Best Interests of the Children

film by Frances Reid, Elizabeth Stevens and Cathy Zheutlin

Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families

book by Shelley M. Park

Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines

book edited by Alexis P.Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams

The Owls

film by Cheryl Dunye

Trans Power: Own Your Gender

book edited by Juno Roche

Daniel Sanchez Torres

@sup_dst

I just started seeing a new HIV doc in California after 7 years with my former HIV doc in New York. I'd forgotten what it was like to be a new patient. The new doc was going over the results of my blood work and asking me to answer a lot of questions. The questions definitely sounded important, but I was distracted. California's legal weed hits differently than New York weed, and I've been wondering if I'll get to see - or just talk to! - This Guy I know back in Brooklyn.

The doc was asking me what the medical staff should do if I'm dying and can't answer questions, "In the event that you cannot feed yourself, would you consent to a feeding tube?"

The munchies were starting to kick in. I was hungry, but really I was thinking about This Guy, who isn't talking to me anymore. Probably because His Man doesn't like me and told him he can't. Which is fucked up because when His Man was crying to me on the phone a couple weeks earlier asking me if I was fucking This Guy, His Man said This Guy called me his best friend. And what? Best Friend gets the slow fade out instead of a phone call explaining what's up? Ima need an explanation for that one day and I can't get one if I'm dead, so "I do consent to a feeding tube."

"How many sexual partners have you had in the past 3 months?"

This doctor's appointment was starting to get depressing, "2."

"You sound disappointed."

I am disappointed! Sex has been my confidence. I quit my job three months prior over ethics and morals, then COVID-19 came through stopping everything and tossing my inconvenient little life high into the air. Ethics and morals don't quite pay bills, so I was forced to flee westward. Fast forward and now I am sitting in a doctor's office hoping that This Guy really is ignoring me because of His Man, and not because he didn't think I met the benchmark for friendship, like I didn't meet the benchmark for being his boyfriend.

“Not being able to touch anyone has really fucked with my sex life.”

“What’s your relationship to these two sexual partners?”

“Just these two guys I’ve been having sex with for years.”

One was this White Boy. I stopped sleeping with white boys in 2018, but this particular White Boy still had privileges. He’s a psychologist, the sex is good, and we’ve been able to work out some vers things. He came over two weeks after the first “you up?” late-night text. We were feeling sure that neither of us had the ‘Rona by then. The night he came, I told him he wasn’t allowed to talk once he got to my apartment. Walk in. Get naked. Say nothing. And let’s go. I think he thought I was being kinky, but really white supremacy was getting dismantled

in the streets and I did not want to risk him saying anything to mess up our hook up. I accidentally gave him HIV a couple years ago and I’ve moved past feeling guilty about it to just feeling bad. I get sexually rejected because of my HIV all the time, so when he calls, I still come. The sex is still good and that night he only broke the no talking rule once to say two words: “Oh. Fuck.”

The other guy is my Summer Boyfriend. He’s been my Summer Boyfriend for as long as I’ve had summers in New York. We know just enough about each other to know that sex is all we want—an understanding built from summer after summer of compounding conversations pushing the lines of our boundaries miles from where they started. The week before I left for California he came over for 48 gluttonous, indulgent hours. Once I left Brooklyn, I didn’t know

when I'd have sex again, so I spent those 48 hours soaking in and filling myself with pleasure.

Finally, the doc asked his last question: "Do you have any questions for me?"

I wanted to ask him when I'll be able to have sex again. If he knew when I'd make it back to Brooklyn? If This Guy is gonna reach out? When will my confidence come back?

But I don't think he has the answers to those questions.

"Nope."

What Helps Get Us Through

Weed and alcohol got me through the early days of all this. Until the hangover and the come down from my high started making me feel worse. So hey, try a couple days sober. Maybe the headache you've had the last couple days is actually a hangover. (My headaches the last couple days were actually hangovers.)

*Ya'll know when I'm gonna have sex again?
If I'm gonna make it back to Brooklyn?
If This Guy is gonna reach out?
When will my confidence come back?*

Yesterday

song by The Beatles

Gives You Hell

song by The All-American Rejects

The Truth

song by I Am Strikes

Calls

song by Robert Glasper Experiment featuring Jill Scott

I Don't Give A Fuck

song by 2Pac

Johnny Would You Love Me If My Dick Were Bigger

book by Brontez Purnell

My Aztlan: White Place from City of God

story by Gil Cuadros

Season 10

from Top Chef

Diana Cage

dianacage.com

The other night I was lying in bed next to my boyfriend; it was late, and we were listening to music in this way I like to listen to it before bed, which is to free associate and play songs related to things that happened during the day. We'd just spent the day in the park with friends who'd had a baby at the beginning of March. They were concerned that the baby had not been held by anyone but them—

no grandparents, friends, or other family members. Lingering parts of this conversation made me play Sinead O'Connor's *The Emperor's New Clothes*, remember the opening line: it seems like years since you held the baby. Maxe often hates when I do this because sometimes it goes on for a long time, and admittedly I can be kind of incessant in my associations. But this time he was into it, and I curled my face into his neck while he sang softly, and I could feel the vibrations in his throat and hear so clearly his soft voice articulating the lyrics. But most importantly I could feel the queer midwestern teenager he used to be. A beautiful trans kid in the early nineties, smoking Gauloises in his friend's car, listening to Sinead O'Conner, and imagining a future adult gay life somewhere other than Indiana. I saw him in my mind. I've seen pictures, his long hair, his boy's face. It was an

incredibly erotic feeling. I wanted to go back and blow that teenager's mind and let him know that eventually he would grow up and meet someone who would desire him with her entire being.

COVID-19 and shelter-in-place have forced me to learn new ways of experiencing and enjoying intimacy similar to the way that having lovers living with HIV taught me to find the smell of latex hot. Shelter-in-place has also forced me to appreciate physical comfort, let go of expectations and accept my body in new ways. I feel lucky to live with the person I love, but that doesn't make it easy. I have no privacy. No way to escape when we have conflict. I'm working with what's available, and that means eroticizing the experience of caring for each other. No forcing the mood if it's not happening. Making banal acts,

like temperature taking, feel kinky.
More talking about fantasy and desire.
Jerking off together when we feel too
drained for sex.

It's been fun to scroll through social
media and talk about who we will invite
over for a threeway once threeways
make sense again. Flirting with masked
strangers at protests feels good. Being
kind to friends feels good. Going to the
beach helps. Finding ways to be a body
around other bodies is important. We are all longing for each other.
Nothing's perfect. It's OK to miss kissing
strangers. The best we can do right now
is take care of each other.

Elizabeth Koke

In more “normal” times, having a body is work. It requires planning, managing, maintenance, accounting, security measures. I have my grooming rituals. My fitness routines. My fashion practices. I would spend a minimum of two hours preparing my body before I leave the house, from breathwork and morning stretches, to precision-measured smoothie consumption, to skincare and cosmetic applications, to costume changes. But only since quarantine have I come to the realization that this body work is not, at its core, about wellness or vanity or the beauty industrial complex, despite my expensive Sephora habit. It’s a daily practice in crafting a public self, and this public body/self has a singular criteria --invulnerability. Examples: A body with

hygiene so exceptional, that all bodiliness is absent, becomes machine, unable to be tracked, hunted. A body that engages well with capitalism likely even benefits from boosted immunity. A body that is grounded but not too willful, attractive but not too sexy, confident but not too loud, self-conscious but not too anxious, empathetic but not too open, and sufficiently medicated but not addicted, will survive to live another day.

Invulnerability is constituted and instituted through repetitious performative acts, along with the advantages and disadvantages that come with age, race, gender, size, class, and ability. My performance became so established (especially over the past several years, I blame the proliferation of social media and the 24 hr public self), I had lost some essential physical functions.

Q: How does one have sex with a longterm, deeply familiar romantic partner without being vulnerable?

A: She doesn't.

But going inside during quarantine disrupted the physical repetition. Day one of the home office, I shower, fix my hair, and put on a face. I wear a bra. I instinctively brush my teeth and pop some breath mints after my garlic greens lunch / before my afternoon Zoom meeting. I apply lipstick before putting on my mask to go to the bodega. I don't cry when I see my friends' faces in little boxes on my screen. But gradually things begin to shift. Having a body miraculously becomes less of a To-Do List and more of a series of experiences. I am depressed and take a midday nap. I feel stiff and anxious and go outside to run around the block, which prompts a surprise release

of uncontrollable laughter. I add extra honey to my smoothie. I wear my favorite pajamas for days at a time, get stoned from eating a green gummy bear, and prance around my apartment to house music. By day 78, I've settled into a different self. She's a little feral. She cares less about perceptions and obligations and survival. Or maybe it's that survival means something else entirely, and that it's ultimately more closely tethered to liberation than to restraint (anti-maskers aside). My new self joins the marches with primal anger and unwashed hair. She hugs her friends for the first time after three months. And the sex? It's messy and embarrassing and awkward and exposed and completely exhilarating and hot as fuck.

What Helps Get Us Through

Follow and support @warriorsinthegarden
@glits_inc
@decrimny

Carry narcan in your fanny pack.

Dolly Parton's America

a podcast from WNYC

Fetch the Bolt Cutters

songs from Fiona Apple

Fleabag (NT Live)

performance from Phoebe Waller-Bridge

I May Destroy You

TV show from Michaela Coel on HBO

Other Balms, Other Gileads

story by Bryn Kelly

Ramy

TV show by Ramy Youssef

The Vernon Subutex Trilogy

novels by Virginie Despentes

Emily Bass

emilybass.club

Shelter-in-place mirrored my experience of having newborns.

Confinement in a domestic sphere whose intensive, continuous occupation is a requirement of care-taking, a badge of honor, a marker of being someone who nurtures, even at the expense of her/his/their own sanity and sanctity. The home, ceaselessly occupied, becomes an extension of the body. The whole dwelling is a corpus. The physical body exhausted, the dwelling-body grows dust, damp, filth and a somatic accretion of the gut pang of inadequacy, the bowel twist of shame. I am not clean.

By the time we lock down, my children are seven and ten. I did not expect to re-experience their newborn lives so viscerally and--how unexpected--communally. I listen. I hear people narrating their COVID-19 confinement narrating an experience that is kin to the experience of people who either bear or are the primary caregivers for newborns (or both).

Confined in a sameness of days without certainty of the ending (when does one sleep through the night again?) that strips the self and degrades the body's sense of power, pleasure, energy, autonomy. The work of communicating across bodies: this is how it is for me. This is how it feels. It is hard work with words. Felt in the flesh, understanding can come fast and hot. Oh. That is how it is. I feel you. It's sexual, yes.

Is there a possibility of a sex of understanding? That in this pandemic in which we think of each other's breath and the moisture it contains, the places hands have rested most often, that there is a slipped-beneath-the-skin intimacy available that allows everyone, or many ones, to feel the experience of living with a newborn, of domestic confinement, of the shaming/gaming/aspiring of the confined caregiver with regard to clean floors and dry bathmats? And if that is available, might a shard of ecstasy be prised out from between the incessantly-trodden floorboards of this time? A shared embodied reality. What is this traditionally-but-not-exclusively women's work? I have felt it. I feel you. To be felt. To feel together. What pleasure.

As for me, when confinement began, I started dancing every morning with

a group of mixed bodies in my filthy kitchen. The repetition of a habit can become a prayer and prayer may be nothing but that which expands space or locates the expanse that is. Or that is what it is for me.

Dancing in my kitchen polished my interior space bright and clean, and the pleasure of using that body has been one of spaciousness, habitation, sensation without over-thinking. Is it because there is a common somatic empathy in the droplet-distributing air? Organic? Orgasmic?

I feel you.

What Helps Get Us Through

*Dance every day — maybe with the **Rise Collective**. Consider volume: within your body, within your home. Would an extra bathmat, set of sheets, bar of soap enlarge the world? Consider the problems with consumption-based solutions, but also the possibility that un- and under-waged domestic labor is a public health problem that requires pleasure-forward action to be solved.*

What makes monogamous co-habitation COVID-19 sex hot for you?

Arias

book by Sharon Olds

Braiding Sweetgrass

book from Robin Wall Kimmerer

Enchantments: Selected Poems

book by Wanda Coleman

Legend of Korra

TV series by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko

Queen Sono

TV series by Kagiso Lediga

The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood

book by Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Unorthodox

TV series by Anna Winger and Alexa Karolinski

JD Davids

@thecrankyqueer

I had a fuckkked up white-white-white-supremacy-hurts-me-yet-is-me nightmare the night after the Trump Tulsa rally: it was my birthday party with lots of people around, and a white male teenager, a bigger older version of my friends' child T, was having delusions and wanted to kill me and had a large knife against my throat as we sat at the round kitchen table (aka formative hellish site of my childhood).

No one could help me or hear me... and it went on and on. I kept trying to shout but no one could hear and/or no sound came out, I remember really straining to do it... At one point C -- one of the few people of color in the dream as far as the people I actually knew -- was trying

to help but she was very pregnant and I didn't think it was safe for her to take this on. I gradually talked T down from killing me and found out he had medication and I got him to take it. The vial said it was for coronavirus, and it included sleepy cough syrup. He became docile. He was still sitting at the table with other people except now he wasn't trying to kill me. He was saying he'd been going to a mental health program and I was asking, could we get them to help? And then I was talking to people about I know we shouldn't call the police, what else could we do instead? And at another point I went to another room and yelled Please could one person just be there for me in this situation, stay by me? People were helping, making suggestions, but then wandering off and I felt like I really needed someone to just be with me me me, and I think people were trying to,

but it stayed complicated. And then, just to be even more obvious what this was about, there were people throwing other birthday parties within this party, for other people's birthdays who were mostly or all people of color, younger than me, with cakes and such, and I was thinking about how ordinarily I would be very into that but also I needed help with my situation. In another part of the dream I was in a kink scene that was supposed to be some kind of therapeutic or educational experience for me, i.e. it wasn't hot and wasn't really supposed to be. Someone, a combo of the contentious people M and L, was being restrained against a wall or structure in wall, and I was supposed to be restrained against them but they didn't want to do it and started to walk away, and I was like, I thought we could just do this for 10 min and take break to get something to eat, and they said ok.

What Helps Get Us Through

Touch yourself and/or fuck yourself in 3 timed 10-15 min sessions, one each of white, pink and brown noise playing as loudly as you can take through headphones (find noise generating app via phone).

What happens?

Would you do it again?

Announcing the Health Not Prisons Collective
news by The Body

Apocalypse Survival Skills #10: Lessons
podcast by How To Survive The End of the World Podcast

Brother's Gonna Work It Out: June 20, 2020
music DJ'd by Marty McSorley Show

Essential Workers Are the New "Magical Negro": How Understanding This Cinematic Trope Can Illuminate COVID-era Exploitation
article by Dali Adekunle

Femme Power TV Queerantine Vol. 1
TV by Femme Power Productions

M4BL SixNineteen
broadcast by the Movements for Black Lives

Patient-Led Research Group for COVID-19
information by the people

Spatial Justice 2.0: The Zine
publication by Design Studio for Social Intervention

The City in the Middle of the Night
book by Charlie Jane Anders

Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture
book by Nora Samaran

White People, It's Time to Resign. I Did
article by Jaime Grant

Kristy Harcourt

@chattychapstick

Watching COVID-19 play out on the queer dating and social app Lex has been fascinating. The posts have been charmingly diverse: people seeking roommates, sexting, hookups, recipes, gaming pals, gardening tips, ads for virtual dance parties and sober supports, and post-breakup-solace.

On Lex, queer people link up. We break apart. We reconfigure and link up again. We name who we are. What we want. We're explicit. We're frank. We have short, vivid discussions of care and consent and need and want. There are freedoms in exploration between strangers. Trying on roles, identities. Online worlds are an escape from the fear and loneliness and mundanity of this disaster as it stretches on.

As our phones and computers become worksites, we are at once more visible and more isolated. With physical contact out of reach, what felt good and pleasurable online shifts.

Virtual connections lose their novelty and their balm. A hot and heavy connection can easily fade, disappear, ghost. We adjust our expectations.

Our queer, aging, non-normative bodies find unique access via online engagement. When we can attend from home, suddenly there is much more that we can attend without the nervous mental buzz of, *Will there be seating? How long will I need to stand? Will the washroom be accessible/safe? How far away is the parking? How late will DATS (accessible transit) be available?*

With online life comes access to a dance party hosted in Eastern time. I watch and dance in my kitchen while making supper in Mountain time. The Indigo Girls do a choppy live concert and I watch with friends in Edmonton, Toronto, Vancouver. A friend texts, excited to be able to watch Vivek Shraya's Toronto stage show from home. I miss it (what is time?), but catch her book tour instead. A local drag king group puts on a show and between performances, and there

we all are. Little squares on Zoom. Queer bodies in our homes. Waving. Chatting. Pets and kids and someone's lover colouring their hair. Having bodies we could touch.

What does safe mean in a time of physical distance, when kissing feels the highest risk?

In-person first dates start out with puritanical intent seldom exhibited by stubborn queers. Earnestly sworn plans to remain outdoors, keeping 2 metres apart, end with a sweet kiss or hot make-out. Afterwards, there are no regrets about the physical closeness, but a kind of bashful rethinking of COVID-19 and the consequences surfaces. What type of disclosure is necessary for the people in your bubble? What about your co-parent, roommate, kids?

However cautiously one sees friends and lovers, there is the implication or threat of being called out as a slut, or irresponsible, or of unknowingly becoming a vector of illness. We see safety and risk on an individual level, but what about the responsibilities of systems to help us be safe? I write from Canada where health-care — while problematic and targeted — is available. It is shocking to read American news stories of people being charged money for testing. Of tests being unavailable. American friends isolate in loneliness for much longer than they should need to because their healthcare systems are not equipped to help them.

Reflecting on a pandemic from the middle of it makes it hard to write a conclusion. Protect your tender hearts, lovers.

What Helps Get Us Through

What are the lessons from HIV about how to reinvent or rediscover pride in queer sexuality in the face of freelance judgement?

What would queer sexuality look like if it were unrestrained by safety or convention?

@Shooglet

a Florida based photographer who specializes in fat bodies and water has developed a fascinating distance photography project during COVID-19. In collaboration with photography subjects, they use images and film to celebrate fatness, queerness, and sexuality.

@MutualAidLube

hilarious collages, lube sales used to buy Appalachian medical debt (\$250K in debt purchased as of the time of writing).

Crip Camp

film by James Lebrecht and Nicole Newnham

Great Canadian Baking Show

TV by CBC

On Narrative, Reckoning and the Calculus of Living and Dying

article by Dionne Brand

Pleasure Activism : The Politics of Feeling Good

book by adrienne maree brown

The Fifth Sacred Thing

book by Starhawk

Mathew Rodriguez

@mathewrodriguez

My boyfriend sleeps over with me about once a week. I walk to his place or he comes to mine. We always hand-sanitize or shower before leaving to visit one another. Sometimes, we shower together. Though I am a sexual person, COVID-19 sometimes zaps my horniness. I spend too much time ruminating and sitting with anxiety. When it's time for sex, my mind is a bit too burnt out from spinning wheels. So we cuddle. Cuddling is one of the most mindless physical activities. It allows two people to both share warmth and create warmth. But it doesn't involve the logic and spatial awareness of sex. It is not mathematical or physical, so much as it is about touch and feel, two ways that toddlers learn about the world around them.

I've noticed that people in my sexual networks who are looking for sexual expression with others are having more phone sex. Phone sex was the only way I had sex in college — I didn't lose my virginity until senior year, to a stranger who lived on Riverside Drive. As a fat person who wanted to have sex, I always felt like my body was getting in the way of my having sex. Phone sex allowed me to have sex in a way where my seemingly cumbersome body was out of the equation. I used to put ads on Craigslist and ask men to have random phone encounters with me. We'd email each other our phone numbers and then get off. Sometimes, we'd email some pics. But it was mostly just voices. To this day, I still love phone sex — and sexting, sexy voice notes, and sending nudes — because of my earliest sexual adventures. I remember the warmth of the phone on my ear and saying

goodnight to some stranger as I wondered why he needed phone sex as much as I did.

I haven't had sex with someone for the first time in months. When I am horny, sometimes I think about having sex with someone I've never had sex with before, because I miss the process of getting to know someone's body. What might I discover? What new knowledge might I learn? Before mid-March, when social isolation began, I had hookup plans with a few people who were coming to visit New York City. Among the many things I am grieving — a loss of space, of energy, of loved ones, of plans, of normalcy — I also grieve that sex and that knowledge.

I listen to Rihanna's "We Found Love" every so often. This is, no doubt, a hopeless place. What does it mean to find love now?

Is the love we find for others? For ourselves? For our communities? Who is the “we”? Where did we find this love? How did we know how to recognize it? One of the side effects of the pandemic is that it’s been very hard for me to watch new shows. People recommend them, but I can’t follow through. Instead, I rewatch old things for comfort and one of those old things has been *Desperate Housewives*, an almost all-white, upper-class show, which regularly features Republicans, violence, and everything I hate. And yet, I’ve been so taken with it during lockdown. I love that it asks us to care about extremely flawed people who fuck up again and again and asks us to believe that at the end of the day, they are good and just trying to navigate what life throws at them.

What Helps Get Us Through

*What does forgiveness look like during
COVID-19?*

What does empathy look like?

**Unthinkable Thoughts: Call-Out Culture in the Age
of COVID-19**

article by adrienne maree brown

The Changeling

book by Victor LaValle

Night Film

book by Marisha Pessl

Maxe Crandall

maxecrandall.com

@maxemaxo

Under shelter-in-place in early May, I made a radio play of Robert Chesley's Jerker—a 1986 two-hander about phone sex, connection, and the power that comes from loving and caring for strangers. I had two collaborators, Diana and Emmett. Emmett and I are working on a project about Chesley that was becoming about what Chesley was helping us become. We read the lines over and over; the two characters in the play are learning about isolation and desire, queer sex in a pandemic. It's a drama about the sexiness and tensions of two men, together, accessing their fantasies. The extent to which this play about HIV and intimacy, suddenly reverberates within COVID-19 and shelter-in-place is almost shocking. It is a play we can use, instructive in how to conjure queer intimacies in isolation, how language and sexiness create worlds within the self that show the self what to fight for, listen to.

I obsessed over our recording as I edited, making small cuts, trimming it down to an hour. I went on long walks in the Oakland Hills listening closely to every sigh, mistake, thrill. One thing we liked was how blurry it was getting: Did Emmett really cum that time? Did I? I noted which parts of each scene corresponded with my want. I've always loved triangulation when it comes to desire—so sturdy and architectural, actually impossible—and here I had it in many dimensions. Three of us making it within our own coordinates (Emmett lives in Minneapolis; Diana and I live together in Oakland). Emmett and I have never been lovers; we make art together sometimes, and Diana's often like you two would make cute lovers. In *Jerker*, the two actors play out many of their scenes as brothers, that vast queer landscape of imagination that maps so beautifully (I think?) onto T4T fag love as it manifests in any number of different imagined relations.

Before the play aired, Emmett started up at least two different phone sex relationships, as if the show manifested new sexual possibilities. Diana, reading stage notes, enacted a kind of reverse voyeurism as she literally announced each scene—a reminder of how sexy watching can be (also the sexiness of her voice). An entire play in sounds. And the triangulation with an audience we can't see, that can't see us. When you listen to the radio play, you get to imagine the visuals/us however you want. We could become anything. Queer fantasy perpetually inviting and allowing the objects, the circuits, and frames for desire to become something else.

What Helps Get Us Through

Look at a painting online every day.

What can fantasy do for life in quarantine?

Margery Kempe

novel by Robert Glück

M Archive

novel by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

My Tender Matador

novel by Pedro Lemebel

We Are Made of Diamond Stuff

novel by Isabel Waidner

radio.montezpress.com

[@yllw_ltrs_x_closeups](https://www.instagram.com/yllw_ltrs_x_closeups)

Insta

[@voicesofsanquentin](https://www.instagram.com/voicesofsanquentin)

Insta

My Smutty Valentine Virtual Yearbook 2018-2020

digital chap by the Anchoress Syndicate

Max Zev

mackenziereynolds.com

No resistance of body against body against wall against floor. No sweat or smells or taste beyond your own. No knees and hands, no asses, no rasp of breath. Lots of good talk, hot even, but always somehow chaste. Reminds me of flirting as a teenager, virgin pledge card in my back pocket, urging, teasing my boyfriends on the phone. I didn't want to be abstinent then, and I don't want to be now. I want tongues and mouths and pressure and hardness and slick.

We have learned to fuck, in the flesh, through pandemics before. I want to learn again. I don't want to be afraid of your body against mine.

What Helps Get Us Through

Journal. Talk with friends and lovers.

What does connection mean to you?

What does protection and safety mean to you?

What does your body want? What does your heart desire? How might you get (some version of) it?

What are your boundaries? Where do you want to push yourself?

bury it

poems from sam sax

(**review** by Margaryta Golovchenko)

Covid-19, Loosening of Lockdown, Intimacy & Moving Forward Within a Pandemic

words by George Forgan-Smith

Don't Give Up

music video by Herbie Hancock,
John Legend, Pink

Everyone on the Moon is Essential Personnel

book by Julian K Jarboe

Extract by Acera, or the Witches Dance

moving image by Jean Painlevé

Memoir of a Race Traitor

book by Mab Segrest

Sex in an Epidemic

film by Jean Carlomusto

The Motion of Light in Water

book by Samuel Delany

To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life

book from Hervé Guibert

When I or Else

poem from June Jordan

Where the World Ends and My Body Begins

book from Amber Dawn

Molly M. Pearson

In April of this year, I found myself washing and sanitizing my 71 year-old dad's sex toy collection. It was not news to me that he had one. My whole life, his porn DVDs were stacked under the low table that held our TV, with his dildos and buttplugs wrapped in towels and placed in a paper bag nearby. On a warm spring day in the time of COVID-19, at the age of 33, I found myself carrying the toys to the sink, taking care to wash them thoroughly with soap and water, gliding my gloved hands

over every groove and curve. I didn't boil them because I couldn't be certain they were silicone, and he wasn't sure either, although there was one glass piece.

My dad was very, very sick at the beginning of this year. I rang in New Year's Eve at his bedside. He had severe pneumonia that was compounded by COPD, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and chronic depression. He was intubated in the ICU for a week, in a standard hospital room for a week and a half, and then inpatient rehab for two more weeks. Once released from rehab, a whole team of physical and occupational therapists and nurses were dispatched to his home on a rotating schedule over the course of two months—just as COVID-19 was officially embedded as reality in the United States. The home health team was tasked with helping him rebuild his strength. In their words, the goal was to make him “self-sufficient” again.



Unwashed Toys - Molly M. Pearson 2020



Washed Toys - Molly M. Pearson 2020

Before the home health workers' initial arrival, I checked out their company website to view their non-discrimination policy. Unsurprised to see that sexual orientation was not included, not to mention the subtle, yet apparent religious affiliation of the company, I scrambled to wrangle his porn collection out from under the TV. I tucked it away in the closet and covered it with a blanket.

As the weeks passed with the home health team, he learned tips and tricks to deal with basic daily tasks. They taught him breathing exercises that made it easier to stand up. They helped him rearrange his bedroom so he could make it to the bathroom with less effort. They worked with him to place chairs strategically in the kitchen so he could easily sit down while he prepared meals. They held his arm to keep him steady as he walked

outside, to the end of the driveway, and back, and shared in his delight as he felt the sun and wind on his skin for the first time in months.

There was no demonstration of how he could enjoy penetration in ways that would be gentle on his weakened muscles and joints. There were no exercises that helped him budget his breathing and energy output through an orgasm. He figured these things out on his own. While many of the meal-prep hacks he learned could technically apply to washing his sex toys, that didn't mean it was easy. After orgasm, he would muster the strength to wrap that day's toy of choice in a few tissues, and set it on the ground under his bed, out of view. They accumulated, and that day in April, I gathered them in a bowl, and washed them with the same care and attention to detail

I took when I stripped the bed and washed the sheets, scrubbed the counters, swept the floor, and ran to the pharmacy earlier that same day. He cooked us dinner and made a fresh batch of iced tea, and between taking breaks to use his CPAP machine, told me the stories that I always need to hear about the queer lineage I come from. That day, and many days like it, we have failed beautifully at self-sufficiency.

My dad has been celibate, more or less, since 1989. No, that's not right—my dad has not had penetrative sex with another man since 1989. After watching my bio-dad, my mom, and many lovers and friends die of AIDS, he's told me many times, "I knew that if I didn't stop fucking around the way that I was, I would die. Condoms weren't sexy to me. So I stopped." He is not living with HIV in his body. Yet he still had to learn to live with

the virus in his life, in ways that worked for him. While he fully embraced sex with himself, he still managed to fail beautifully at sexual self-sufficiency. His sex life for the last 31 years would not have been possible without all of the porn actors and producers who created the DVDs and websites that he loves. It would not have been possible without the sex shop sales clerks who offered their honest reviews of the new buttplug models that just came in, or the particular clerk who was a family friend and gave him the employee discount. It would not have been possible without his three almost, sort of hook-ups that occurred during this time, which were met with realizations of *Wait I Don't Actually Want This / I Can't Do This / This Isn't Working For Me*. Maybe memories of the very best touch are far sexier than actual touch that makes us feel foreboding.



Uncovered Porn - Molly M. Pearson 2020



Covered Porn - Molly M. Pearson 2020

My dad, and all of us, are learning to live with yet another virus in our lives. It is one thing to learn to live with a virus all around us, and it is another to learn to live with illness. My dad is still learning to live with chronic illness, even with years of practice already behind him. He is learning to live with his aging body. I am learning how to support him through it, and sometimes that means taking the trash out, doing the dishes, hiding his porn collection from the nurses, and washing a big bowl of dicks. Pleasure demands interdependence.

What Helps Get Us Through

*Find a flower — the thicker the better.
I recommend a peony. A Rose is also a good
choice. Gently squeeze the base of the blossom,
just above where it meets the stem. Then take
your other hand, and squeeze the thickest
part of your thigh. Repeat, one after the
other, or at the same time. Switch hands/
thighs if you want.*

*What are concrete actions you can take
to support your own and others' access
to pleasure? How do we make pleasure a
community effort?*

All My Relations

podcast

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice

book by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

DISCO WISDOM

inspiration by me!

Never “single.”

video by Dr. Kim Tallbear

opening remarks

by Loleatta Holloway of the song
'Love Sensation'

The Case for New Erotic Language

article by Dalychia Saah

The Duke of Burgundy

film by Peter Strickland

Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality

essay by Gayle Rubin

Too Old for Sex? Not at This Nursing Home

article by Winnie Hu (Note: this is from 2016,
but still important!)

Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power

essay written and performed by Audre Lorde

Pato Hebert

@volandito



Lingering 1 - Pato Hebert 2020

When the mayor closed the pools and gyms in March, I started walking in Los Angeles' Elysian Park. It is also where I got tested by the county for COVID-19. And it is where I returned once I finally had enough energy to take a gentle, 15-minute walk during the early stages of recovering from coronavirus. My now daily, two-mile walks in the park have been a lifesaver. They've slowly helped to build up my lung capacity and strengthen my spirit. These walks also offer the gift of images. Reminders of the pandemic are everywhere. The park is marked by people's protection, affection and pleasure. Here is a sampling of the emerging body of work I am calling the Lingering series, 2020.



Lingering 2 - Pato Hebert 2020



Lingering 3 - Pato Hebert 2020



Lingering 4 - Pato Hebert 2020



Lingering 5 - Pato Hebert 2020

What Helps Get Us Through

*Move in a way that is uncomfortable,
unfamiliar or unexpected. What did
you discover?*

What would you do for touch right now?

Comfort Woman

album by Meshell Ndegeocello

Much Handled Things Are Always Soft

short film by Derrick Woods-Morrow

Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good

book by adrienne maree brown

Salonee Bhaman

@saloneee

In the summer of 1988, Learie Sohraindo, an inspector with the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, made six trips to the Cinema 14 theater on 3rd Avenue, near 14th Street.

In a deposition on behalf of the City's health department, he describes his last trip to the theater on August 27th, where he saw: "seven doorless cubicles each containing a stool. Each of the wooden partitions separating the cubicles contains a small opening which patrons use for sexual activity." He goes on to note, in a tone lost to history, "one act in which one male stuck his penis through the hole cut out in the cubicle wall. This enabled the individual in the

adjacent cubicle to perform oral sex although their bodies were separated by a wall.”

Sohraindo’s testimony goes on to note that he also witnessed mutual masturbation, oral, and anal sex while in the theater. His affidavit is at once clinical and salacious; the reader can hardly help but imagine the rooms of the theater, each crowded with sexual energy. His subjects are described briefly: short, tall, slender, blond, bald— all cast in “dim lighting conditions” and placed in groups, in couples, or alone. Only once, on August 17, is Sohraindo himself approached by a “blond haired male,” who quickly takes the hint and abandons him for another patron, leaning against the wall. It is one of three accounts by City Inspectors visiting Cinema 14, each attesting to its failure to prevent gay men from having “high risk sex,” a designation not defined

by condom use, but rather by how public and profane it may seem. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if the inspectors’ depositions are smut or evidence. Maybe they are both. Despite providing free condoms, lube, and displaying ample signage about how to practice safe sex, the Court ordered Cinema 14 closed, citing the mounting AIDS death toll as evidence of the wanton risk of the behavior within it. [These are excerpts culled from documents found in Folders 6 and 7 of the Robert Bailey papers at the LGBT Center in New York City. I miss The Center, and holding lovingly preserved documents like these.]

Now, in a different public health crisis, I cannot help but think of the utility of the glory hole that Sohraindo described as I read that the [Safer Sex guidelines](#) put out by the Department of Health suggest that we might “Make it a little kinky” and

get “creative with sexual positions and physical barriers, like walls, that allow sexual contact while preventing close face to face contact.” Of course, it is not 1987-- but I am confident that this document would not have existed in this form were it not for the people who worked through just how one might **continue to have sex in an epidemic.**

Sitting in my hot apartment, I am inspired by their commitment to foregrounding the importance of pleasure and touch to the human experience. Socially distant from the thrum of city life, my body misses the everyday frisson of my commute. The daily dishes in the sink, waiting to be washed, imperceptible accumulations of skin into dust, and the tumbleweeds of cat/human hair in my apartment are reminders that my body continues to exist and persist in this moment, but I often feel my spirit shrink from them.

Sometimes I feel disassociated from desire, able to access it only in proxy form— biting a messy nectarine, drinking cold water. I miss life like it was; I feel guilty about that, too.

Steven G. Fullwood

@stevengfullwood

the seraphim. literally in “vogue.” these black and brown men are here and there and all over the world, and i am in toledo. between us glass and a fuzzy transmission. we see a face, his face, luis: stone, almost mocking the camera. long fingers frame face frozen in pose. 8 counts.

jose, large, lost piercing eyes invite, excite, remind you that queerness is not something you are, it’s something that possesses you, something you better use (like rage) before it eats you alive. blonde hair distracts me from the gyrating bodies taunting. no matter. stock still or in motion the dancers rock me, confound me, forever unavailable to me. their wings flutter as they pull back the curtain on...

back then I was sheltered and in place. in toledo, featherless, afraid to imagine a life promised by those broken seraphim.

i wasn't ready for harlem. it was ready for me though. even as the sexual revolution was getting off its back and rolling onto its stomach, the piers, keller's, the warehouse, paradise garage, and the oh so many leaving or almost gone were fading into a brown elder queen's memories. my thirties and forties were crammed with sex parties, adam4adam, grindr, scruff, jack'd, several fuck buddies, dalliances overseas, an engagement (!) and stinging loneliness. my former former life prepared me for the terror of touch, and the recent former life taught me to fulfill my basest desires NO MATTER WHAT.

summer 2020: i build my body with repetition, lick it clean of noise and stink. so much history, so little time left. 54 stevens sweat sit bare assed in your front yard and eat dirt. what's next?



"Luis" by Negronius, 2020

What Helps Get Us Through

Sex is letting (it) go and you're the only one who understands what it is.

How can a virus free us? How does it remind us of our always connection?

Can't have good sex if you're afraid of dying. embrace death so you can free yourself here and now.

Imagine what it feels like to live forever, unembodied, loose...this is what sex offers us, a rabbit hole that'll never close.

DMT: The Spirit Molecule

film by Mitch Schultz

Donnie Darko

film by Richard Kelly

Stalker

film by Andrei Tarkovsky

The Brief History of the Dead

book by Kevin Brockmeier

The Salt Eaters

book by Toni Cade Bambara

Sur Rodney (Sur)

Writing short stories to entertain a love affair during physical distancing.

Never realizing it would be months before we would see each other again, I'd gifted him a small Yoko Ono artwork, die cut with one word: TOUCH, before his leaving me hugged. Phillip was big on hugging. I missed them. He knew what his hugs could do. A line from one of his poems tattooed on my outer forearm for the feasting of flight — experiencing the flight offered in a blowjob. His feather design tattooed on my inner right forearm hugging him as

he pump-hugged my body against the bulk of his, having me leaking like a faucet.

Speaking on the phone to check-in on 12-hour cycles. Twice daily. Often for hours. Only voice, occasionally on a speakerphone. No face time on any platform. On our calls he often wears headphones. Or, leaves his phone in a bowl for its audio effect. He's testing my hearing. I'm without any external hearing devices for my \$30 Panasonic cordless. This has his voice sounding more like a porn star, in my desperate imaginings. He'd never talk to me like one. We had rules. He could infer if to tease me, to make a point albeit never name it. He wasn't into torture unless I begged for it. I never would. He never needed to.

Our conversations began to take shape in a series of stories I began to write.

April Fools, How About That titled the first story in the series. Followed by *May Flowers* preceding *June Buggery*. In all of them, our bodies and intimacy played a part. Touch was never available.

April 5

Dream: I venture uptown to present him a gift wrapped package. He's enamored of my gift giving, excited to see what I had to offer. A standard UPS delivery workers uniform. My offering inspired by a conversation we'd had earlier. My gift perfectly fit his burly build. He's standing before me now fully attired. His allure brings me to my knees before hearing him say "*It's against the rules.*" "*What rules?*" I protest. "*The UPS rules that show up on my tracking device before delivering any package.*"

How about that.

April 12

I asked him to have sex with a stuffed toy at my bedside. He responded with nothing more than a simple "no." His "no" was spoken so definitively it startled me. He wouldn't have sex with my stuffed toy? This from a man that would get blowjobs between moving subway cars. No, not by me, some other guy. Although thinking of what he looks like, I might have dared. Taken aback by his firm declaration. It's not like I was expecting him to perform on the spot. He could take it home and perform without an audience. I tried a polite plead. His response was the same. Why did I want him to have sex with my stuffed toy anyway? To keep company with the sweaty t-shirt I asked him for that I use as a pillow case.

How about that.



Fuzzy Wassy, the authors toy - Sur Rodney (Sur) 2020

My short calendar of notations and conversations would inspire more writing. In one story, he's a 10-year old boy in the Appalachian mountains of Eastern Kentucky. In another, he's reprimanding me for what I had to say in my story *Dick Guys Measure Up*, wherein I wrote:

I've never thought about my dick as any kind of pride and joy any more than say...my fingers. I would easily give up my dick to save my fingers if I had to make a choice. I've seen fingers on hands that excite me more than a dick. My dick I'd resigned to believe was more there for my partners than me. There are so many ways to find pleasure and leave less of a mess. My muse is now thinking I've lost my mind. "*You love the mess!*" he tells me. "*It's a healthy part of your diet.*" "*Non-essential,*" I remark. "*No more treats for you,*" he responds. Now my life is ruined. I'll have to now

convince him it was a joke, albeit it wasn't. Now he'll have me begging for treats. If I wanted to be active with dick I would call it cock. Cock as a word, opens the larynx more than dick does, and is more appealing to my cocksucking delight, depending.

At some point in my weeks of writing my short stories, I interrupted my flow to write about COVID-19, AIDS, death, fear, care, and sex. I felt it imperative for reasons I'll never fully understand. Some of it expressed on social media. It began with joggers along a river park pathway unmasked.

Tamara Oyola- Santiago

@flordepascuas

Las múltiples capas de la intimidad
reveladas (re-descubiertas).

The multiple layers of intimacy revealed
(re-discovered).

La migración conlleva distancia geográfica. Ese movimiento ya sea impuesto por fuerzas económicas, sociales o políticas nos lleva comúnmente a las metrópolis donde se concentran los recursos. Tendremos más dinero pero ¡se pierde tanto! Como muchxs que comparten esta experiencia, el watsapp infame se convierte en la manera más fácil de comunicar y reconectar con la patria. Creo que para el/la/le privilegiadx que nunca ha tenido que montarse en la guagua aérea o cruzado ríos y océanos y el no poder volver (o volver con menos frecuencia), la pandemia ha causado una nostalgia física. Se añora el tocar, el besar y el oler de la intimidad. No digo que durante la pandemia esto no se haya perdido para lxs que hemos creado hogar en el imperio, pero siento que es territorio familiar. ¿El resultado para mi y lxs míos? Más llamadas por video, a todas horas, espacios y cuerpos revelados desde camas en

Migration connotes geographic distancing. This movement, be it by economic, social, or political forces, often takes us to the metropolis where concentration of resources resides. We may have more money, but so much is lost! Like many who share this experience, the infamous WhatsApp becomes my lifeline, the easiest way to communicate and reconnect with the motherland. I think that for the privileged who never had to board the airbus or cross rivers and oceans and cannot return (or can return less often), the pandemic has created a physical nostalgia. One feels and misses the touch, the kiss, the smell of intimacy. I am not saying that those of us that created homes in the empire do not feel this loss, but it is familiar territory. The result of the pandemic for me and my loved ones? More video calls, the revealing of emotions and bodies from beds in the vulnerability of

la vulnerabilidad de la noche, viéndonos las caras mientras vemos una película a la misma vez, recetas mezcladas con ingredientes de aquí y allá, positividad (a veces forzada) para no demostrar la tristeza. Los amores se concentran y uno recuerda y añora ese primer beso, el baile en la disco en las noches de reggaeton, el sentir antes de la emigración, antes del saber que el amor y la patria se pueden dividir. Con la pandemia ya somos más los que conocen la melancolía.

the night, seeing each other's faces as we watch a film together, cooking with ingredients from here and there (you have this and I have that), a (sometimes forced) positivity to not reveal sadness. Loves are memorialized and one remembers that first kiss, the dance at the disco on reggaeton nights, before migration, before one discovered that home and love can be divided. With the pandemic, there are more of us who know melancholy.

What Helps Get Us Through

Juega. Descubre nuevas maneras de jugar que requieren un convivir a través de la distancia. (Tú ahora y luego yo.)

Imaginar las respuestas a estas preguntas. ¿Qué harás cuando finalmente estemos juntxs? Y si no podemos volver a re-encontrarnos, ¿qué haremos?

Play. Discover new ways of playing with others that requires a tag team approach across distance.

Imagine the answers to these questions: What will you do when we are finally together? And if we cannot come together, what to do then?

Escuchar/Listen:

Patria

de Rubén Blades

Geometría Polisentimental

de Fangoria

La Hora de Volvé

de Rita Indiana

Tu Rumba

de iLe

Por Siempre

de Sylvia Rexach y Tuti Umpierre

Leer/Read:

Invitación Al Polvo

de Manuel Ramos Otero

Ithaka

de C.P. Cavafy

Theodore (ted) Kerr

tedkerr.club

Early June:

At a moment when it seems like everything is up for massive change, I have found myself emotionally healthier than I have ever been—except when it comes to my sex life—in part because I have felt unable to fully express it, and maybe because I have been unable to fully explore it. I am not sure what the summer will bring, but I am hoping for more progressive change (#defundpolice) and some fun make-out sessions.

Late June:

“I have already had COVID.” A tall man with a brick for a face said these words to me while I peed through a fence in the park outside of Stonewall. It was PRIDE. The streets were a dance floor. A DJ was set up in an old school bus. People — including a

young person with long braids and rainbow wings — danced on top of the bus. Everyone else — mostly in masks, but not 6 feet apart — danced below. I told a man wearing nothing but running shoes, a mask, and a g-string that he had great moves. He did not respond. I think he was possessed by the music.

I had spent the day telling myself that I should go home. That I had work to do. That it was not safe to be out. That PRIDE will be even better next year. If we survived. But I did not leave. I marched from City Hall to Stonewall, then walked with a roommate and old friends to the pier. We got trapped in the rain, found shelter under scaffolding. Everyone was miserable and shivering until someone played some music and a dance party started, and then a double rainbow appeared, and then we started walking, and then

we ran into friends and friends and exes and hook-ups and friends. And then it was late, and the music started, and a man with a brick for a face — JUST THE WAY I LIKE IT — watched me as I peed and asked if we could kiss. Could we?

Mid July:

Minneapolis voted to disband their police force. Trump sent the National Guard into cities. Since we started counting, over 625 000 people worldwide have died of COVID-19. There have been over 50 days of non-stop protesting in New York City since the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and many others. We are having intimate and national conversations about what we mean when we say defund, reparation, uprising. Our collective has met countless times. I have cried on the streets, in my bedroom, while watching AOC on my phone.



Graffiti on the The Surrogate's Courthouse near NYC's City Hall - Theodore (ted) Kerr, 2020



Dancing outside of Stonewall after the Queer Liberation March for Black Lives and Against Police Brutality - Theodore (ted) Kerr, 2020



A marcher with a David Wojnarowicz mask at the Queer Liberation March for Black Lives and Against Police Brutality - Theodore (ted) Kerr, 2020



Screen grab from Instagram

I have listened to countless podcasts and ruminated on the difference between guilt and shame. I have biked as much as I did the year I lived in a small village in Spain and worked in the nearby city. I have not been tested for COVID-19 or the antibodies. I have jacked off with strangers online and in the park; I have had sex on rooftops and in bedrooms with people in my COVID-19 pod; I have made plans to have sex with strangers and people I used to work with “when things get back to normal.” I cruised a guy in a cemetery, to no avail. I went on a terrible date on which someone vented to me about guys with HIV who don’t disclose their status. Before the date I imagined how cute it would be to tell our friends how we met. I have worried about money. I have donated money to friends and strangers. I have lost jobs. I have gained opportunities. I have neglected my friends. I have been overwhelmed. I finished a book

with a friend. I have worked on projects I am proud of. I have stayed up late watching sitcoms. I have sexted more guys to completion than I care to admit. I have shouted in the streets. I have seen my saliva land on someone’s arm and apologized like I have never apologized before. I made new friends. I have learned to smile with my eyes. I kissed a stranger at PRIDE and then felt relief when we lost each other in the crowd, and even more relief two weeks later when neither me nor anyone I knew had come down with symptoms. I have learned no new languages. I baked once and hated it. I have faceted with my brother and sister and niece. I have emailed my mother. I have worried about my visa status. I have bargained with myself, others, and reason. I have judged and been judged. I have doubted all my life choices and exploded in laughter at how fortunate I am to have the life I do.

What Helps Get Us Through

Make a list of everything you did so far this summer. Don't forget about sex; privilege it, even in your retelling. Then edit the list a bit and share it with friends.

B.P.M.

film by Robin Campillo

Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure

book by Eli Clare

Paris 05:59: Théo & Hugo

film by Olivier Ducastel, Jacques Martineau

The Man Who Fell In Love with the Moon

book by Tom Spanbauer

Throb

music performance from Janet Jackson



Space Dates (Bedroom I)
Jessica Whitbread / Morgan Page
(Photography by Tania Anderson) 2012

Credits

Space Dates is a collaborative project by Canadian queer artist-activists Jessica Whitbread and Morgan M Page (Odofemi) focused on interrogating, in often hilarious and somewhat surreal ways, the intersection of the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure, the 'safer sex industrial complex,' and queer women's sexualities. The project centres on the visual theme of two women in spacesuits going on cute dates and attempting to have so-safe-you-can't-even-feel-it sex with each other.

Space Date –“Picnic” was first performed as part of a Day With(out) Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (2012) as an extension of the PosterVIRUS collaboration with Onya Hogan-Finally on I DON'T NEED TO WEAR A SPACE SUIT TO FUCK YOU! “Eating Out” was performed at Rats 9 Gallery in Montreal, Quebec (2013).

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This zine is the second in an ongoing series during COVID-19. Our first zine entitled, *WHAT DOES A COVID-19 DOULA DO?* Co-created with ONE Archives Foundation. [Download it for free.](#)

What Would an HIV Doula Do? is a community of people joined in response to the ongoing AIDS Crisis. We understand a doula as someone who holds space during times of transition. We understand HIV as a series of transitions that begins long before being tested or getting a diagnosis, and continues after treatment. We doula ourselves, each other, institutions and culture. Foundational to our process is asking questions.

Visit us at www.hivdoula.work

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This document was edited by people living on Lenape and Ohlone land; designed on Lenape land.