



NOTHING ELSE BUT

Some Fragments Written with the Intention of Becoming
Something More Coherent at a Later Date Despite Experience
Exposing This as Unlikely

Caspar Heinemann





The café waiter 'sir's me, so I follow his lead and piss in the men's, leave the seat up for my blood and feel the familiar boring shame before it transmutes into laughter at the thought of a Man seeing it and thinking his male sex must have died, and I guess, I guess I'm kind of angry at the moment. I walk into the street and look at Men and Women and wonder how I'll ever live at peace with their kinds, their kinds that feel closer to each other than either to me, because they would be loath to admit that, and I eat an orange in bites all bloody and sticky mouth and feral and innuendo and looks of disgust from bystanders, because a guy (sp.?) needs a victory banquet once in a while. I consider telling others I want to experiment with he/him pronouns, you know, like the ones they use for humans and stuff?

I keep trying to explain what I'm writing about and it keeps getting worse and worse.

'It's like, about how all of the contemporary conversations about being trans are really bad...like, TERF, I mean I hate that term because it's so imprecise, but TERF arguments are ahistorical and just collapse gender into sex in a way that is the opposite of 'gender critical' and can never lead to liberation...but then contemporary liberal trans politics that suggest that anyone who has ever had a weird feeling about gender, or who doesn't subscribe totally to binary gender roles is trans...that's also anti-feminist and misogynist and because like, I don't know a single cis woman who doesn't feel like that, and probably cis men too, like gender roles fuck us all up, obviously, but we don't all transition, and then you have trans-medicalist discourse where people argue their brain sex doesn't match their body, but that's obviously also undoing the past 50 years of feminist work, and decolonising work, and resorting to discredited pseudoscience, so I guess the argument is that being trans can never make sense in a materialist framework, um, I mean materialism in the philosophical sense, as opposed to like, idealism or whatever, not in the Marxist sense, because they're not the same thing, though obviously also they're not not the same thing, but people really collapse them, like I'm anti-Western scientific materialism but I'm a materialist, you know...sorry I forgot what I was going to say.'

I get a polite, 'Um, that sounds really interesting...' in return.





The thing is is that it's trying to make sense of a thing that doesn't make sense, but the ways it doesn't make sense change everything. The thing is that when I was 15 I was arrested for protesting a schmaltzy dinner party for arms dealers. The thing is I sued the police for this arrest. The thing is that 9 years later I used this money to pay a private plastic surgeon to perform a voluntary double mastectomy with free nipple grafts, also known as double incision, also known as chest masculinisation, also known as top surgery. The thing is that talking and writing about this feels urgent because on some level I have internalised the fear of what it means to not be able to rationalise my existence as a trans person, and a more general fear of what it means to make a decision that cannot be rationalised. In that sense, this is for me, because I clearly can't let go of the desire to try and make sense. In another sense, I am not remotely interested in writing about myself, or being trans, and especially not myself being trans, but feel compelled to because of what it implies for everything else. In another sense, I believe in the power of a transformative decision that can't be rationalised.

If you can't make sense within the framework maybe the framework is broken.

5 days after top surgery I have a dream that I am moving into a new house, that is also a new town, because the house is the size of a small town. A spectacular heaving crust-baroque contingent mess of scavenged wood and water bottle door stops and leftover lentils feat. miscellaneous vegetables on the stove glueing it all together. New and familiarish and familyish faces. Everyone moves in, drama ensues, I get defensive and dismissive and think SAME OLD SAME OLD and get ready to have some good times then watch the town-house slowly explode and quickly implode and disintegrate back into its decaying period feature bones for the next hopeful civilisation to occupy. There are misunderstandings about everything, of course. Food, labour, money, dogs, boundaries, interior decor, lighting, cats, heat, the bathroom on the 12th floor, rodents, politics, showers, the future, washing up. But something shifts. People figure it out. The herb garden doesn't die, the dishes don't pile up, conflicts are resolved as amicably as can be, people work around the irresolvable and irreconcilable. I look the whole town-house square in the eyes and think YOU MIGHT BE THE ONE. More of the food starts to come from our gardens, we bake and break bread, create a million cultures. Home seeps in through the drafty floorboards. This might be the one where we all get away.

And then the cops come, as always.





We fight, and sometimes win, waves and waves of molotovs keeping the army at bay, protecting the delicate ecosystem we've become with all the force it can summon. But of course we're losing. Facing up to the reality of the near future, myself and a small group of others are sent to run in the opposite direction to the battle, to run away to find a new house for our town, a new town for our house. We sprint down through the steep meadow of flowers at the back of the house, across the river, through fields and forests and hamlets and the landscape is slowly changing but not necessarily for the worst, but for the beautiful, gilded stone masonry reflecting the evening sun, a mystical brutalist lump jutting off a cliff, and we keep running, because the right next place has to be somewhere, and we don't even notice how much everything has changed until we're suddenly running through metal chambers, intricate systems of cogs and levers and pulleys keeping us suspended in space, slowly closing in. I think WE'VE GONE TOO FAR and for the first time turn around, head spinning to catch the sight of a set of interlocking doors beginning to close in behind us. We sprint back and just make it through and run back past the whole of history and everything and I lose the group and get back to the house alone and all the cops are gone and where once stood lines of armoured vehicles and riot cops and barking dogs is now a vast glittering ocean. Azure, beaming in the bright sunshine, lapping fresh foam up to our porch. The rest of my group must have returned first with news of the dead end in the other direction, because there was no movement that way. Instead, people were sitting alone in contemplation, or hugging and saying tearful goodbyes, before throwing themselves into the sea. Some joyful, some serene, one by one every inhabitant leapt from the porch into the rising tide.

When I was a teenager I didn't think I could ever medically transition because the world was ending and I had to try to minimise my dependence on industrial civilisation.

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #12

*the vortex of creation is the vortex of destruction
the vortex of artistic creation is the vortex of self destruction
the vortex of political creation is the vortex of flesh destruction
flesh is in the fire, it curls and terribly warps
fat is in the fire, it drips and sizzling sings
bones are in the fire
they crack tellingly in
subtle hieroglyphs of oracle
charcoal singed
the smell of your burning hair
for every revolutionary must at last will his own destruction
rooted as he is in the past he sets out to destroy*

– Diane di Prima

So I threw my fat into the fire of a medical waste disposal bin to become oracle.





There is a common 'Am I trans???????? please help!' thought experiment that goes along the lines of, 'Imagine that you lived on a desert island and you'd (had? or would?) never come into contact with other people - would you still want to change your body?' And I always think, I don't know, but the question feels like the almost total inability of Hollywood UFO movies to imagine aliens as anything other than slightly weird humanoids. I also don't know what any of my feelings or preferences or desires or fears about literally anything would be on the desert island, do they have Derek Jarman films or Drag City records, have I still developed a defensive self-deprecating wit to survive life on the desert island? 'If you were on a desert island and there were no spiders would you still be scared of spiders???? Sorry, I just have to ask this to see if you would benefit from the arachnophobia treatment programme.'

I am realising it's all about the fear of not living on a desert island, or of living on a densely inhabited desert island with a perceived scarcity of resources.

There is no doubt that in the culture of male-female discreteness, transsexuality is a disaster for the individual transsexual. Every transsexual, white, black, man, woman, rich, poor, is in a state of primary emergency as a transsexual. There are 3 crucial points here. One, every transsexual has the right to survival on his/her own terms. That means that every transsexual is entitled to a sex-change operation, and it should be provided by the community as one of its functions. This is an emergency measure for an emergency condition. Two, by changing our premises about men and women, role-playing, and polarity, the social situation of transsexuals will be transformed, and transsexuals will be integrated into community, no longer persecuted and despised. Three, community built on androgynous identity will mean the end of transsexuality as we know it. Either the transsexual will be able to expand his/her sexuality into a fluid androgyny, or, as roles disappear, the phenomenon of transsexuality will disappear and that energy will be transformed into new modes of sexual identity and behavior.

— Andrea Dworkin, WOMAN HATING, p. 186

We live in a culture of discreteness and I think this is why we hate to think of ourselves as contingent on anything, which is unfortunate because we're really contingent on everything.





For the past few months I've browsed the Mumsnet feminism board and so-called gender-critical web communities in an attempt to understand. Most of it is relatively privileged middle aged straight married women claiming to be 'gender-critical' whilst being deeply disturbed by the concept of a 'a man putting on a dress and calling himself a woman.' Trying to avoid instant judgment, beyond the transphobia and violent language, the main feeling that comes across from these communities is defensiveness and fear, a fear of losing a perceived suffering monopoly. I use the term 'gender-critical' in scare quotes, because what it actually denotes is mostly just a different criterium for what is reasonable to deduce gender from, collapsing gender into biological sex. The argument is that trans people deny the 'common sense reality' of dualistic sex, and of biology in general. The term common sense brings me out in chronically weird hives, a boring home counties violence resulting in a neatly broken nose. It feels like a depressing failure that the past 50 years of feminist work to take seriously feelings as facts, to honour intuition and other ways of knowing becomes crushed under the weight of a huge imagined erroneous dick.

I do deny common sense reality, because common sense reality is white patriarchal reality, is enemy.

Under the obscurantist blanket of 'common sense', there are two specific foundational premises that are shaping this view of gender. Common sense is actually a stand in for 'materialism', but a confused combination of two meanings of the word. It is materialism in the philosophical sense, a belief that everything that exists is matter than can be touched and observed. It also claims to be materialist in a Marxist-feminist sense, propagating the idea that there is a cohesive female class, oppressed purely on the basis on sex at birth. This reductive perspective refuses to acknowledge that gendered social oppression and access to material resources is not dictated solely by sex assigned at birth, but rather a combination of factors including class, race, gender presentation, interacting with sex as a mutable social characteristic. The phrase that keeps coming into my head when I try and summarise my position is MATERIALISM AGAINST MATERIALISM (yes, all caps). I don't think that trans people can win the argument on scientific-materialist terms, and to do so would be a loss. Rather than being dragged into the pits of brain chemistry and innate gender, a transfeminist position could instead lean into the absurdity of the situation, the way it breaks everything we know, the intense feeling that bodies are different and mean something different than the entire weight of history bearing down on them, despite all the odds that say I am this, I am really this. But, as a secret Zen Foucaultian, none of this is to suggest there is an outside of power, and this is the other fear. Gender-conforming, middle class, middle aged straight white women can become remarkably terrified by the prospect that trans people are reproducing gender stereotypes, because it triggers the fear that perhaps none of us have a self that is outside of the social, that there is no outside, and we're all flailing in the same vat. Anti-trans feminists cling to the idea of the female body as being a discrete sacred object beyond the social, because to let go would be to fall into the void of complexity and complicity. There is a fundamental misunderstanding at play in the idea that gender is





something one can opt out of by claiming 'woman is an adult human female' without realising 'adult human female' IS a gender. There is no gender abolitionist position to be carved from the idea that some people have more gender than others, reinforce gender more than others, that there is a scale of gender-complicity that it is possible to descend by claiming non-belief. The discomfort with trans people, and specifically trans women, comes from a generalised fear of the mutable, a fear that there might not be a safehouse outside of gender from which to critique it, a fear that if anybody can be a woman, then nobody is.

Which is true.

So far the explanation for my transition that is most acceptable to my mum is that I lived many past lives as male, and am struggling to adjust to my current incarnation, my soul experiencing my body as total ontological phantom limb. While deep in ancient alien Operation Paperclip YouTube funemployment, I am struck by the possibility that perhaps my feeling that my body should be other to now is not a product of how it has been, but a product of how it will be, a manifestation of retrospective pre-cognition. Retrospective pre-cognition, for the uninitiated, is the theory that future events can influence current affects, things happen the way they happen because of what has already happened in the future. This is a controversial parapsychological concept, often dismissed as pseudoscience but recently gaining exposure via a study by Daryl J. Bem at Cornell University, entitled FEELING THE FUTURE: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FOR ANOMALOUS RETROACTIVE INFLUENCES ON COGNITION AND AFFECT. What if the body carries the knowledge that it will one day be different? What if the reason I feel like my body should be different is that it will be, and in the time outside of time, already is?

self-destruction that requires feeling around for what is your self and what is their your self, and that might leave you with more of your self than you started with. so i mean, maybe you can destroy yourself, if you really want to, and it might be a good idea, but it's going to take a lot of work and you might need to get sober and think about what you've done and what's been done to you.

– me, 2013





Speaking to my friend Kitty before surgery, she comments on the impossibility of talking about gender, how it always feels like it hits this inexplicable numb spot, where the body, culture, consciousness, everything collides with such violent complexity that all the nerves are severed and there is nothing to say. I think about phantom limbs, and the ways that pre- or non-operative trans people often report sensations of phantom limb, sensations in organs they do not actually possess, similar to an amputee who has had a limb removed and yet continues to feel its presence.

I think about how the other thing about numb places is the danger of inadvertent harm without the pain response, but also the sense that you can push them harder.

Returning to a childhood Middle Earth fantasy spot, I try and dig the ground open to the imaginal realm. Epping Forest is a legitimately ancient forest, now enclosed into multiple islands by several of northeast London's major roads. Sitting by the lake, surrounded by brush and attempting to inhabit the Shire and my trans-hobbit subjectivity, I consider taking my shirt off in the autumn sun, now that I 'am allowed', I guess? But the prospect of encountering looks for the scar tape and dressings that still frame my chest almost six weeks post-op feels too heavy for my barely hairy feet to bear. So I eat my banana, either 2nd breakfast or 1st lunch, and continue my path around the rolling sand banks, trying to move as quietly and elegantly as possible, thinking 'Orcs are straight people walking their dogs.' I wonder if my fear of shirtlessness is not just a reaction to the imagined cis gaze, but also my lingering sense of shame, the sense I should be apologising to whatever nature is for whatever I am. I look at the wild daisies and birch trees and listen to the sound of 18-wheelers and think about how self-evidently absurd that should feel here, and then think 'Did someone do this to you or did you do this to yourself?'

It feels as unanswerable and numb here as in my own body, that is also part of the same here.





On a school trip aged 10, around the time I started to have severe body-related panic attacks, the nature guide walking us kids from Hackney through a muddy forest in Kent, pointed at a tree and asked us what we thought might have happened to these trees? My hand instantly shot up, 'They've been coppiced!' The guide looked surprised and impressed, and I was smug and proud, because then, as now, I identified as the kind of girl-boy who knew about forestry. It occurs to me that my body is coppiced. Coppicing is a method of woodland management, traditional to southern England, where I am from and all of this takes place. It involves repeatedly cutting back a tree's branches to ground level to stimulate growth. The sprouting tree stumps, known as stools, are harvested in a cycle. This benefits biodiversity, as a range of growth stages occur simultaneously in a single system.

When the Lord of The Rings was first published in the mid-'50s, it was received as post-nuclear apocalyptic science fiction because that was the only framework that existed.

Society is our extended mind and body. Yet the very society from which the individual is inseparable is using its whole irresistible force to persuade the individual that he is indeed separate!

– Alan Watts

He was a boy and I was a boy and that was what they called us in their language.

– Jordaan Mason





It feels appropriate that I have no idea how to end because I never really started, I mean it's not even in order, I mean I don't even know which paragraph should follow which or when I actually started wearing a binder but sometimes you still have to say that something happened in the past tense. I still have some sense of a pent up academic urge to explain this all PROPERLY, which battles with my sense that the entire point is that it can't be explained properly, that it defies all the properly. I intended to go into a serious discussion of the dual uses of materialism, what an anti-materialist spiritual-communist trans politics could be, how gender solidarity could be liberating in that it fundamentally clashes with our cultural desire for total individuation outside of the social and historical, why anti-trans feminism is ahistorical, some thoughts on Zen transsexualism, the close relationship between knowing the shape of your body has to be changed and knowing the shape of bodies doesn't mean much at all, etc etc. Instead, I am left with all the weird, crusty, maybe too burnt to eat scrapings at the bottom of the pan - the dream I had pre-surgery where I left my body during the operation and went for a walk, the psilocybin insight that we're all just the universe in drag, all the ghosts and spirits that didn't make it in through the cracks this time.

Maybe sometimes all you can do is be the messy incoherent first draft you want to see in the universe.

