

Dreaming Queer Futures: Anthology

Trans/gressive Writers' Workshop

Introduction

On May 18th, 2024, the Trans/gressive Writers' Workshop hosted a poetry workshop at The Ruby Fruit, a sapphic bar in Los Angeles. The weekend of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia led us to discuss, reflect, and write in affirmation and affinity with queerness, desire, needs, and form. For an afternoon, members of TWW Aiko Nakagawa, Josephine Defaye, M. Lopes da Silva, and Pravina Visakan guided workshop participants in writing and breathing exercises and discussion, culminating in a performance of each participant's work from the day's session. This book commemorates the efforts of the poets who wrote there.

This collection of poetry is a profound exploration of trans and gender nonconforming needs and desires; within it the poets authentically examine their dis/connection with their bodies, their sensuality, their spirituality, and their political power. Alternately raw and lyrical, these pieces all come from the heart.

For some poets here, declaring desire for community serves as the first step in creating community. Others name interference with their sense of community. Still others choose their own reality, writing a place into existence. Wars ceased, fire no more; connection is fostered through poetry.

When we reunite with desires that systems of oppression divide us from, when we join together in learning and community, and when we finally are given the space to say what we need to say, we cannot be easily ignored.

Please enjoy the work in these pages. We hope that this is only the beginning of the conversation that we started on that day.

In community and solidarity,
Trans/gressive Writers' Workshop

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Fluid Dynamics

Afton Coombs

Smoke.

I'm not a writer.

I'm a dancer. I'm an engineer. And

I don't like public speaking.

As a child, I barely spoke at all

so I usually don't speak through words

I keep dating, smokers, though. I like

the shape of it, smoke,

the way it bends at small forces passing

through the air, which are invisible

until they have some temporary substance

to give them shape.

When I dance--

a shape, a sound, a moment,

and then I'm nobody

which is perhaps the natural state of things.

It's not having to eat that interferes with the art,

it's having to put my name on it so I can

get paid so I can eat

that fucks it all up.

I never made anything.

I was made

and if I ever built anything,

it was nothing more

than the ripples of my shape

passing through time.

I don't know what I want, let alone what I desire.

Aiko Nakagawa

I do want to want; I want to know desire.

I want to believe I could start to dream.

I want to make peace with the suffering.

I want to find my egg.

I want to find my home.

I want to not be late to everything.

I want to feel more euphoria than anxiety about how my gender is perceived.

I want to have to have desires unrelated to survival.

I want Biden to give out some more checks or at least stand up for one fucking thing.

I want to walk without pain.

I want to tell my dad about my girlfriend and not have to come out again.

I want to be brave.

I want to see a peak of a hopeful queer future.

I want to want more, I want to desire.

Love is a labor I wanna do back

Alma Villegas

I: Oops. I'm not sure what I should be writing. I keep thinking about Ivette. Are we friends? I think about Carina. Are we friends? Needs. I understand we should be writing about needs. I come into spaces thinking about what I'm lacking. I go into white queer spaces and think about

gentrification. I think about POC political spaces and I think about the need for softness. for transness, for queerness. When I went to that queer + trans POC space, I still felt lacking, although safe. I need to feel safe to be myself. And even then. I need friends. whose love and friendship and support can hold me up. wherever I am. wherever I go, I need that quality time to

power me up. I need community. communities. I want to go here and there knowing who I am,

rather than trying to find myself. I was just starting to understand friendship. And something happened. I felt tired. I felt symptoms of my disorder. And now I feel alone all over again. I need

to spend time with others. I need to feel safe. I need to feel connected. And in so many spaces I feel disconnected. isolated. alienated. because I don't know or rather I'm learning to feel safe. to ask for what I need to feel safe. I keep thinking about my pride. thinking about my dad. I'm unemployed. I need a job. I need financial stability.

FORMATION

Andi Defaye

When do I feel most like me?

Gender-bending

mother, father

wallet, home

center, point-guard

assistant?

when I'm small?

Big?

Yeah, big,

GIANT

big enough to hear, "you play basketball right?"

I put fear into humans

who have yet to meet my kind heart

they ignore domesticated animals who treat me

as if treats line the pockets of my overalls

always forgetting

everything within mother's womb is safe

ever expanding

excited to love

my form is powerful

though I want all things without force

to desire what I desire

though I'm just a tiny little innocent babe

I must be big

I'm so small

and still

I must allow my shadow to shade the tallest-buildings

when I dream

I seize futures for myself
and for the children
who have yet to realize
that rainbows are more than an optical-phenomenon

The River Becomes a Sea

Anjali

1. One. Time does not terrify. there is plenty of time. time to do what you love. time moves through you. you move through time.

2. Two. To birth something is to labor for it. Our fingers tilled the earth until the soil loosened to birth realities where atoms rearranged themselves in the shape of something not quite then known but inevitable.

3. Three. There is no famine, there is no starvation, there are no kids being bombed, you can hear the birds. The sound of a drone has not been heard in years, decades.

4. Four. We re-planted the olive trees - thousands, and thousands, of them and the trees grew as long as the sky.

5. Five. Our harvest this year - the oranges and olives and figs and dates , filled our coffers - there was enough to feed everyone, and then some more.

6. Six. The kids, they had their mothers, they had their fathers, their parents, their cats, their toys, their sisters, brothers, siblings. The children played and played and the whole air was rife with the sounds of their laughter.

7. Seven. Your belly is fed and these days when it rumbles, it rumbles with gratitude, not hunger.

8. Eight. But we remember, we remember the hunger. And we remember the before. And our remembering birthed our tomorrow.

9. Nine. Refaat said "if i must die / you must live" and we lived. We lived through the calamity, when this world was alight and Gaza was a wound, it was them: their resistance, their steadfastness, it was their strength and courage and grace and sheer humanity that was mightier than the mightiest, the deadliest, the lowest of lows that humanity could become, in the fact of

that terrible force: it was their beauty, their truth, their power, their faith, their love, that brought down an empire to its knees.

10. Ten. In the desert flowers are blooming, there is water, water, water everywhere, there is laughter, laughter, laughter everywhere.

Not somewhere else, but here. The world where scarcity itself was scarce was scary for some. Those who had cordoned off the future, shackled the long maw of tomorrow, and chained our days, our years to what came before: they who told us we had arrived at the end of history, that there was nowhere to go from here, no beyond outside the perimeters of the endless present, history on a hamster wheel, trapped endlessly infinite loop of our past.

I can't tell you now exactly how it happened - how this new world of ours came into being, because it's hard to know where it all began, because in its way it has been going on for a long time - from before the dinosaurs, i think, it's always hard to tell with these things - if time is a river our bodies move through, then i suppose you could call this, a bend in the river. But it was back in those days, before the river became a sea, before the tide started to turn, and when the tide turned, when it turned, at last, it couldn't - stop - they tried, they tried - but there was no stopping, from the river to the endless sea, i don't know exactly when it began, but i suppose you could say it began, when Palestine became free.

too many analogies

Anuradha Srikanth

i desire to exist fluidly.

Being queer is so much more than what I thought at 16. Now, it's like watching a puppet show and being the only one who can see the wires and not buy into the illusions on stage. i feel like I see the seams of our culture so clearly and I pull at loose threads. I wonder what even is gender and what is my role in society and is this society worth upholding? I feel like an anarchist, throwing tomatoes at the people on stage. Too many analogies. sorry.

I desire a world where I just am.

I don't think it needs to be more complicated than that.

Desired form: *Selkie*

Claire Moore

She's made for the sea: free, magical, and rooted in the ever-moving form of water. At sea, she's a seal. She doesn't wear clothing to cover her curves—she wears a speckled, grey pelt. She moves with grace in open waters. She swims as the sun shines on clear days with low tides, but she stays for storms that send cresting peaks to the surface, churning effervescent sea foam. Under ocean waves, she's held by the arms of salty sway. Everything is alive at sea. Shapeless water creates a clear gaze to perceive the smallest of sea creatures: stars, urchins, reefs, and tiny, glittering fish. Larger bodies of aquatic life come around every so often, but they never scare her in this form.

When the tide is low and the moon is draped full in the sky, she grows curious of the sandy shore where the sea ebbs and eats. The name of a two-legged creature, a man, a woman, someone else catches in the breeze and she's intrigued. *Selkie*.

Dancing, prancing
in waves filled
with treasures
I am sure they
are okay, so
I am free of fears
related to being perceived
the ocean is a place
for safety and ease
when I emerge from
the layers of waves,
seaweed and flotsam,

I sit on a rock overlooking
what I've heard is a bay
I stretch out,
my naked body
lit up by cloudless day
I am dreaming of love
the kind that invites
me into desire
beyond the confines of unmet need
the kind that glows like
aquamarine or sea glass
dotting the coastline,
waters now recede—
alone on a rock
the air carries hope
of all that I desire beyond unmet need
a desire for the needs of others to
be met beyond measure
not by me,
but by the earth and sea
to love is not to help
though love does help as
I sail in the sea of desire.

But dear naïve *Selkie*, what do you dream of when all the needs are met—of *everyone* you love on land *and* at sea?

Look Past, See Future

Jess Doss

There's enough air here. The pollen isn't itchy. Bugs buzz but don't bite. My cells regenerate, sending seven years' dust drifting off to assemble into new constellations or atom formations. All but suspended in sonic hypo-speed, dandelion whiskers tickling my chin, a call and response to my own hairs sprouting like 2nd grade dirt cup seeds. Who knew when I was planted it would take 3 more shedding seasons to fertilize the needs of me. Something you can't change but when you get enough inertia you can grow wings and a nourishing home of your own.

My cells are snowing down over schools. I can't be contained. An eye catching fleck in their expanse of days spent standing in a straight line. A "care-giver" taker of their needs, shields their eyes. Won't let them see the shine reflecting back in mine. What is love? What is care? What is nourishment really when we're whisked away from silly prism-pieced patterns, forced into an indistinguishable haze of gray same days.

Fluttering overhead, my wings wishing. If only I could be a guardian angel, but they hold up a funhouse mirror, the convoluted image of myself a demon in disguise. Maybe I'm just an anatomically correct angel. Their bilateral beauty bores me anyway. There are so many eyes on my wings, searching for nameless things, seeing some odd-many countless dreams coming true past their horizon of view.

Piecing Together

Jess Lipaz

Here I am in the land where my life began

The places and sounds that raised me drum together familiar scents stemming from formative memories

This is a gift, an opportunity toward self-actualization

But I know it will not grant immediate freedom without internal mediation

To move, stretch, dance toward my desires I must first survive – with increasing resilience – the ongoing act of piecing together the components of myself I may no longer recognize with current negotiations of my identity, my relationships, my equal parts known and unknown surroundings, such that who I was and who I am today can be merged

The grounding force I am to reach is a wholeness

A certainty of self never severed or called to action in fragments

Rather an unmistakable me,

Seen in full for showing up in full

Josie in Well-Spiced Wonderland

Josephine Defaye

Let there be disco balls, let there be chandeliers. Illuminate the cinnamon sky, the cardamom breeze. I dance with sonnets, kiss ballads; epics and riddles I suck and receive. I didn't come out the closet, I came out the spice cabinet.

My hourglass keeps it tight; you'll never find me late for any of my many-numbered important dates. Swim with my legs, for they are the river, carrying my Meg Thee Stallion knees. My arms—a sword, a pen—guide me across myself. Eat me, drink me: I am a milkshake seeping into the Pacific. Twirl my cotton candy curls. Ask my name and I'll dance with you.

The Abyss

Lana Elauria

When you stare into the abyss
the abyss stares back at you
That's what they say, at least.
What does the abyss think when it stares at me?
Does it see my desire, my pain?
Does it want anything from me?
Does it know I'm jealous?
Of the darkness that hides its form
Of the ambiguity that draws my eye
Of its existence as something made from nothing,
an accepted contradiction?

Does the abyss see me staring?
Does it feel awkward now?
Maybe it's staring back
because it cannot speak
or reach out and touch me
Maybe it's just looking for a moment of connection,
to stare deeply into my soul and know that I'm staring back
Maybe The Abyss just wants to feel seen.

Form

Lev Kotia

I wish I could be the octopus,
with enough heart to give and give
and expect nothing in return.

I wish I could be the cat,
loved and cared for but lonely and bored
waiting for the door to open before the sun sets.

I wish I could be the fire,
warm but dangerous, feared and controlled
contained to a manageable form.

But I am human
with heart to give, soul to be loved, warmth in the night
getting love in return, opening the door on the setting sun, and growing beyond my furnace.

Maybe one day I'll find this form to be enough.

New Moon

M. Lopes da Silva

it took a long time to want this body
honestly, probably too long
I always wanted to be a werewolf ever since I was a kid
sprouting hair + violence every full moon
now I grow my own fur
+ the violence I yearned for I left on some cutting floor
late nights I go out
feel the moon on my skin
I vape
I howl

Poem

Pravina Visakan

All around me are people in need

In want of food and water and shelter

And warmth and love and a place to lay their head down.

I try to give them these things

But so often I resort to feeding them, stoking them, nurturing them with parts of myself

And that never ends well.

But if I were a building I could do all that without carving out the soft pieces of my body,

I could share my love freely with people

And they could come and go freely

And it wouldn't matter.

I'd have strong walls that they could lean against

It's smart foundations that could weather any earthquake

A kind little piece of the whole world.

But in training this am I still just carving?

While dressing myself in brick would solve

The jealousy
The fomo
The indecisiveness
The Anxiety

A building can't feel the warmth of a well-cooked meal.

It can do a few things well providing shelter,

But it's the community inside that does the rest.

So maybe relationships can work like that too

And it'll all work out in the end.

I Dream of a Society Where we are all Free

Rucksana Visakan

I dream of a society where we are all free.

Free from our anxieties, our depressions, and the expectations we put on ourselves and others.

I dream of a society where we can be less guarded and have the ability to be vulnerable with one another.

I want my soul to touch yours, to caress and hold your raw, divine, form so I can protect you from the aches, pains, and all the grief you keep inside yourself.

I dream of a society where we are not shackled by our daily burdens and can instead release our grievances, give up our guns, and accept one another exactly as we are.

I dream of a society where there is no society. Only love, compassion, and care for one another.

Where we are only concerned with uplifting each other and sharing our bounty until everyone's bellies are full.

Ascend

Sam Javitch

What if we could ascend
To a higher height
What would we find there?
A landscape that was previously unseen by our eyes,
Hidden by the forest of doubt we walk through down here on the ground?
What if we could sing a new song
A song unfettered by the molasses of the every-day
What would we sing then?
A song with harmony yet unheard by human ears?
What if we could transcend
The muck and mire of this world
The standards put on us by those who know nothing of us
And what if I, stuck in an imperfect body, that has come so far from a damaged past,
Could perceive a future filled with look what I did instead of look what I could do?
A future filled with with now instead of then, free to cry, free to try , free to fly
And what if we could ascend right up to the sky, and right through the obstacles in our way,
Would we find out how to light the way? Would I feel the right to stay?

And what if I could recall, the feeling of it all,
How it feels to be free, to be me
Sometime when I wasn't shackled by the thoughts they told me to think
That pushed me towards the brink.
There have been moments where I have known how that felt
In small glimmers and pretty shimmers
Under disco balls in dance halls.
So I leave you with this,
I manifest a place where we all feel this again
Where we all come together as one as fluid and unique as the clouds under the sun.

I am the Magician

Toby Castellana

Kisses rained down one night, all night,
and pool, glittering, fiery
on the soft Earth and dirty sidewalk
to make a puddle of liquid gold.
The wind stirs the glitzy silt on the surface
and stars reflect beneath
and the puddle recognizes these points of light
as deep and true. The puddle names itself the Magician
and so he stands up and puts on a suitjacket.
The Magician walks, and as he does
he sheds those refracted stars wherever he goes:
little sparks of joy for anyone to find on the sidewalk
that burns beneath his feet
and makes him skip and twirl accordingly.
He carries jasmine blossoms and summer
and in his wake, a spot of shade
blooms. He sings back and forth with the nightingale
after seeing the neighborhood kids home safe
after dark; I heard him one night, all night,
strumming the air softly and letting desires
float out freely with a smile in his voice.

Eternity

Josephine Defaye

Mara opens the new space for us, the old dental office next door. She offers checkered tablecloths, red and white to supplement our sparkly purple. She and Beverly and I decorate the tables: fake sunflowers, a bust of Sappho, spray painted gold, matching my pink Sappho bust earrings.

Aiko and Pravina strategize the room: how best to spread out the chairs? Are there enough chairs? Enough tables? Materials? Having no answer, I nonetheless run home to bring more chairs. I return with my partner and mascara. The perfect room calms me. I organize my papers, place posters on the wall, review the agenda, and know everything will be as it ought to be.

Andi eats popcorn chicken and brings me an elderflower spritz and a diet coke in the small bottle, talking to Lana, who greets attendees with words, offering the sign-in sheet, a name tag, a menu.

I wait for the time to feel right, to clap my hands. To begin.

They say they wish to be water. They say they wish to be the Hulk. They say they wish to opt-out of gender. They say they wish to be gender. They say they struggle to feel worthy of desiring. They become pens and swords and knives and spoons and forks.

I gulp four diet cokes in the small bottle. I listen to 18 of them—spells and incantations, recipes and instruction manuals, weather forecasts and self-help guides—poetry.

Contributor Bios

Afton Coombs (they/them) is a percussive dancer, musician, and engineer. They aim to use their engineering skills to support human-centered technology (and to dance every day). These days, they don't write very often and so they appreciate having this opportunity through the Transgressive Writers Workshop to do something new.

Aiko Nakagawa (they/them): By day they take the form of a person in the nonprofit world and a sensible human. By night they take their preferred form of being an egg in the sky.

Alma Villegas (they/them): My relationship to writing and desire is evolving. They are tools I use to find my voice and express vulnerability. Feelings and facts inspire my creative work, and I hope readers who live with mental illness, specifically Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), will feel less alone after reading my free-flow, unedited piece.

Andi Defaye (she/they) is a Virgo from Los Angeles. They're also a dog and human milf, and semi-official photographer for Trans/gressive Writers' Workshop. Find her on social media @iamthatandi.

Anjali (she/her) is a queer, Dalit and immigrant writer from India. Growing up in rural India without access to quality education, she found companionship and magic in books, dreaming of someday seeing more of the world. She's lived and made homes in Bombay, Boston, Los Angeles, and New York. Not having access to much else but language growing up, she takes Adrienne Rich's dictum seriously: "You must write, and read, as if your life depended on it." In her writing and life she is passionate about the collective liberation of our people, animals and planet.

Anuradha Srikanth is an LA based creative and producer. Anuradha's shorts have gone on to premiere at LAAPFF and the American Black Film Festival. Anuradha was also selected for the Rickshaw Film Foundation Producers' Program in 2023. Anuradha continues to produce independent shorts while working at a talent agency.

Claire Olivia Moore is a practicing nurse and an artist of dance, words and magic. She writes with an intent to root into life, to move toward care, and to alchemize an experience, a question, or a concern. You can find her work on medium as well as through her—currently on hiatus—podcast at www.whatthellhellisuppod.com.

Jess Doss (they/he) is a trans midwesterner, pet dad, and writer of untold forms. They are an advocate for youth narrative empowerment through their Programs work at the non-profit Young Storytellers. Jess believes in harnessing the power of self-expression to facilitate transformative healing and create societal shifts of perception.

Jess Lipaz (she/her) is a sexual and mental health educator who writes to make sense of her world. She is inspired by coincidence, relationships, and understanding what moves artists to create. Jess is currently working on a documentary about the open mic community in Los Angeles.

Josephine (Josie) Defaye (she/her) is a writer, educator, and founder of 'Trans/gressive Writers' Workshop. She lives in Los Angeles with her human family and their two dogs, Duncan and Lady Macbeth. Find her work in Gulf Stream Magazine, Resurrection Magazine, and on Medium @josiedefaye.

Lana Elauria (she/her) is a transgender woman living in West Hollywood, finding her writing voice after falling out of the tech world. She turned to poetry for its healing potential and reflective power, and she draws inspiration from her peers in LA's trans community, finding strength in sharing our pains, our joys, our fears, and our desires.

Lev Kotia (he/they): My writing is inspired by my queer journey, the ways I experience love and heartbreak, and the struggles that I see in the world around me and that I face on my own. I don't write much, but I like writing song lyrics, and poetry is similar enough to me. This poem is the first one that I've written and shared in a group setting.

M. Lopes da Silva (he/they/she) is a non-binary trans masc author, artist, poet, and critic from Los Angeles. He believes that the articulation of desire is political power. Weirdpunk Books just released his collection of heartbreaking and exquisite trans and queer horror stories,

Infinity Mathing at the Shore and Other Disruptions, in March of 2024. You can find him on Instagram @authormlopesdasilva.

Pravina Visakan (she/her) is a computer programmer and aspirational poet/activist living in Los Angeles. When not crawling through bookstores and libraries, she is thinking about identities, technologies, and futures.

My name is **Rucksana Visakan** and my pronouns are she/they. I am an aspiring writer who is deeply influenced by the world around me, current events, and the communities that support and uplift me.

Sam Javitch (she/her) is a New York born and bred jazz pianist and composer currently living in Los Angeles. She feels that her music and lyrics capture the essence of who she is as both a musician and a Trans-femme individual striving to express her truest self through life and music. This poem speaks to the freedom of expression and being we in the LGBTQ community all seek and serves as a testament to her belief that this ideal is something we can and must strive for each and every day.

Toby Castellana (they/them/theirs, he/him/his/) hopes their work brings you joy. He's been writing all his life, inspired by the worlds around and within him, and has recently added erotica to his writing practice of poetry and prose. He will be launching a custom queer erotica commissions page soon, which you can find on Instagram at @honeyedbrine

Acknowledgments

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