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Re/searching Gender Euphoria

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RE/SEARCHING GENDER EUPHORIA

Not a perzine

Mika Gratzke



Re/Searching Gender Euphoria

~~Not~~ a perzine



Published in 2023.

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Zine shop:

<https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/DrunkInMyPants>

Makers:

Swaps are very welcome (not just zines).



TL;DR

- My name is Michael Gratzke or Mika.
- My pronouns are he/hän/er which are English, Finnish and German (more on that later).
- I like hän because it is gender neutral. No pronouns in Finnish are gendered.
- I am a zine maker, poet, academic and rugby player.
- I am also a professor of comparative literature at Dundee.
- My research has mostly been into representations of gender, sexualities and relationships.
- I am the founder of the Love Research Network.
- This is my first research zine.
- I'm preparing it for the DIY gender zine fair at Durham in June 2023.
- The zine's title expresses maybe a little more my hope than my actual research outcomes.
- The dark alternative would have been: *Everybody has gender trauma.*

Biography

I studied at the University of Hamburg for my undergraduate degree and doctorate, and have worked at Cambridge, St Andrews, Hull and now Dundee. My background is in German literature, but I have subsequently changed designation to Comparative Literature which reflects better my approach which is informed by themes, tropes and transformations rather than nationalist imaginations of individual, single-language traditions.

My research

I work across genres of 'high' and 'popular' culture. My work combines methodologies from the arts & humanities and social sciences. In terms of topics, my research explores representations of gendered subjectivity in literature, on film and on the Internet. I am particularly interested in the aesthetic representation of extreme experiences and altered states of mind such as in war, love and masochism. I am currently working on a comparative study of romantic love and intimacy (erotically charged intimate love between non-related adults) in 21st century literature. My comparative work addresses German-, English- and Finnish-language prose.



PERVERSIONS SUCH AS SADISM, MASOCHISM & FETISHISM ARE EFFECTS OF SCIENTIFIC & CULTURAL FORMATIONS OF POWER/KNOWLEDGE. THEY CAN BE DESCRIBED USING THE METHODS OF LITERARY CRITICISM & HISTORIOGRAPHY.



I facilitate community-based participatory research into love and 'healthy relationships'.

My own creative practice sits in the realm of DIY culture. I often describe myself as a zine maker rather than a creative writer.

In this zine called *Re/Searching Gender Euphoria*, I will introduce you to some of my recent research themes, methods and methodologies. These themes include life writing by trans, butch, gay and non-binary people, as well as gendered violence in punk writing. I will also summarise my methodology paper *Love is what people say it is* and reflect on the participatory turn in my research which has inspired me to use zine making with community groups and as a tool for autoethnographic reflection.

Zine making

So far I have published five perzines (personal zines), three poetry zines and a collaborative zine/comic book with my Dundee colleague Damon Hart. I have facilitated creative writing and zine making with LGBTQ+ young people, people who have dementia and their loved ones, Spoken Word artists and LGBTQ+ storytellers from different generations. That is on top of the zines and pamphlets in which I was involved in the

1980s and 1990s. You are, however, reading my very first 100% research-themed zine which feels like an exciting new path to explore.

The subtitle of this zine (~~Not~~ a *perzine*) with the struck-through negation expresses that more than ever in my practice as a zine maker and poet I am worrying about disclosure.



I think I/we struck a good balance in the zine/comic book *Truth & Dare*. Still under lockdown conditions and without having met in person, Damon and I sent each other in turn a page without comment. The idea was to bounce off each other's contributions without a precise plan. We only met in person

for the first time, once Damon had the zines printed. It was like a reverse process of getting to know each other.

I think the zine looks gorgeous because of Damon's artwork. Possibly more pertinent for the context of

research and practice-led research, we managed to address complex issues such as relationships, ill health and loss in an engaging, even playful and yet respectful way.

We both used some fictionalisation and fabrication as well in the joint zine, as we have independently of each other been interested in the limits and grey areas of autobiography.

Fictionalisation is a very useful tool, as I have found in my workshops with community groups. When I worked at the Warren youth centre in Hull with the ShhOUT LGBTQ+ group of young people, some of them were not out in the family or at school. These young people were hugely skilful in sharing deep insights into their questioning of identities, sexualities and relationships using cultural codes which were largely inaccessible to adults. Without Hannah, the group's facilitator and her cultural translation skills I would have been lost.

In this zine, you will find both accounts of my research into gender, sexuality and relationships and reflections on my personal investment in researching such topics.

Selected bibliography

2023: Success and productive failure in zine making with young people. A Hull case study. In: Laura Way & Francis Stewart (eds.), *Punk Pedagogies in Practice*.

2022: 'Confessions of a MILF (I chose being an artist over being a wife)'. Love and relationships in Viv Albertine's memoirs.

2021: *Citadel Love Stories - An Intergenerational Creative Storytelling Project* (with Mei Feng & Judith Sixsmith).

2020: In Pursuit of Happiness: Gay Intimacy and Relationships in Peter Rehberg's 'American' novels *Play, Fag Love, and Boy Men*. *German Quarterly* 93:4

2020: The Meanie Club – Gendered violence and post-punk narratives of love in *Miss Farkku-Suomi* by Kauko Röyhkä and *Dorfpunks* by Rocko Schamoni. *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 56:2

2017: *The Materiality of Love. Essays on Affection and Cultural Practice*. Edited by Anna Malinowska and Michael Gratzke

2017: Love is what people say it is. Performativity and Narrativity in Critical Love Studies. *Journal for Popular Romance Studies* 6

*Wieder eine
Einladung...*



die ich nicht zuletzt meinem Friseur verdanke. Er gab mir den guten Rat, bei den ersten Zeichen beginnenden Alterns, den ersten grauen Fäden im Haar, nicht zu resignieren, sondern dem Beispiel unzähliger kluger Frauen zu folgen, die ihrem Haar mit Kleinol-Simplex die Schönheit der Jugend unauffällig erhalten. Niemand ahnt mein Geheimnis, denn

KLEINOL Simplex
färbt naturecht!

Zwanzig Farbtönen gestatten, das Haar auf jeden Typ und Teint abzustimmen. Fragen Sie Ihren Friseur!

S 10



DAS WAHRZEICHEN FÜR

**Schüle-Teigwaren
Hohenlohe-Nährmittel
Hohenlohe-Suppen**

DIE QUALITÄTSERZEUGNISSE
AUS DEM HAUSE

Schüle-Hohenlohe
PLÜDERHAUSEN · KASSEL · GERABRONN



*Frisch
frisiert* UND DOCH NICHT SCHÖN?

Sie ist unzufrieden trotz ihrer guten Frisur. Dem Haar fehlt der bezaubernde Glanz, den ihm Brunetaflor sogleich verleihen würde! Vollkommen sauber, weich und glänzend wie Seide geht jedes Haar aus einem wohltuenden Bad mit alkali-freiem, hochkonzentriertem Brunetaflor hervor.

Etuch Ihrem Haar geht es "glänzend" mit

BRUNETAFLOR **KAMILLOFLOR**

FÜR DUNKELHAAR FÜR BLONDHAAR

ZWEI BELIEBTB. ERZEUGNISSE

Sh2



Kaliklora
Die
bewährte
Zahnpasta

QUEISSER & CO · HAMBURG 39

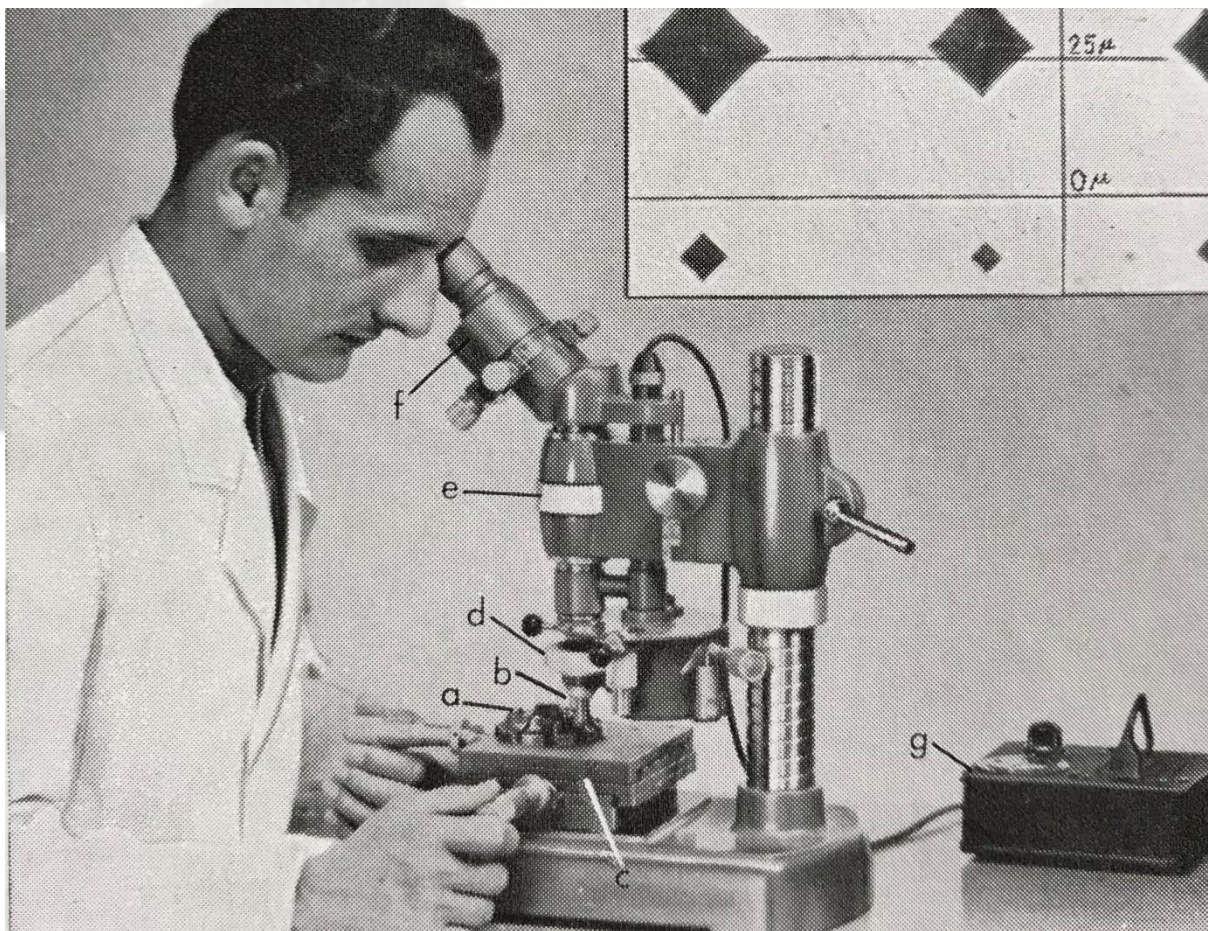
Love is what people say it is.

This article outlines the objectives of Critical Love Studies, their grounding in a wide range of critical theory, a multi-disciplinary methodology linking narrative approaches from literary studies, linguistics, social sciences and psychology, and gives an example of practical application in literary scholarship and participatory community research into experiences of love in the human lifespan.

It introduces the concept of 'love acts' which are likened to performative speech acts in the ways in which they create social reality. The relationship between an occurrence of love (a set of interrelated love acts) and its social context may be affirmative or constitute some form of deviation from the norm. In some cases, love acts which deviate from the norm achieve 'critical mass' and have a transformative effect on their social world.

Finally, this article discusses the love dispositif. A dispositif or apparatus is constituted by the dynamic and productive interplay of discourses, practices, and the material conditions for their existence. The love dispositif hence encompasses love norms, love institutions, love theory, all speech acts and practices generated by and in the name of love, as well as the material conditions, such as the gendered division of

reproductive labour, and even oxytocin levels in people who experience love. None of these in isolation suffice to understand or explain 'love'. Together they produce and reproduce everything we experience or represent as love.



Born in the wrong society?

Narrating the self in recent German- and English-language life writing by trans male, transmasculine and butch authors. (current research)

Ruth Pearce, following earlier authors such as Leslie Feinberg, differentiates between trans-as-condition and trans-as-movement (Pearce 2018). This fundamental categorisation has been helpful in highlighting the differences between two main types of life writing by trans male, transmasculine and butch authors and (where they were used) their ghost writers. Books discussed here, which follow a more standardised pattern of trans life writing closely aligned with medicolegal discourse such as an early realisation of having been assigned the wrong gender, the extensive use of the wrong-body trope, an emphasis on psychological anguish, the projection of lived experiences onto a point-to-point transition between two fixed and opposing binary genders – these books tend to explain transness as a condition which can be fixed. The focus of trans-as-condition falls onto an individual who is perceived as a patient and whose condition is verified by medical experts. More often than not, in the corpus of texts underlying this research, these individuals identify at least after transition as

heterosexual. All autobiographical subjects in this part of the corpus are trans men. Their transition invariably features medical intervention and is more likely to cover phalloplasty as well, sometimes embedded in a teleology of 'full transition'.

Books which do not follow these standardised patterns display a greater variety of biographical scope and a wider range of identification which extends from (trans) man to transmasculine-but-not-a-man, to non-binary and to butch identifications. Some of these texts consciously avoid discussions of childhood and adolescence to side-step the pressure to present an early-stage realisation of having been assigned the wrong gender. In this group, a less teleological understanding of transition is prevalent with some but not all the authors describing medical interventions. These are most commonly double mastectomies ('top surgery') and/or hormone replacement therapy. There is no sustained discussion of phalloplasty in the second group of books. Greater emphasis is put upon social transition and the additional emotional strain as well as occasional joy of partial social unintelligibility.

Going beyond individualism, the second grouping of books also tends to make strong positive reference to queer communities. A common trope is to write about

trans and queer activism including street protests and to depict queer parties. These events do not amount to a celebration of 'monstrosity' as such but convey defiance and pride in being visible and visibly different from the cis-heteronormative majority in society (Pearce et al 2020: 5). Queer sociability in these texts is to be understood as temporary relief from the psychological burden of being born into the wrong society rather than into the wrong body.



Success and productive failure in zine making with community groups.

Having worked with a variety of community groups of different ages, genders and sexual orientations, I have proof of concept (as other researchers have) that creative writing and zine making are viable tools in participatory research addressing complex emotions associated with love and relationships.

The underlying ethos of this research is that love is what people say it is and not what experts (like me) claim it ought to be. Using an inductive methodology which is mindful of each speech act pertaining to love and relationships being concurrently unique and part of wider social and cultural contexts, facilitates a broad and inclusive approach. Love, *it's complicated*, but displays commonalities.

Writing about love, and non-professional writing probably more than high-brow literature which has passed through the kept gates of the publishing industry and literary criticism, shows that most people have a desire to love and to be loved. Many participants in my writing and zine making workshops express, though, that they do not wish to experience love in what they perceive to be normative formats such as favouring romantic love over friendships, holding out for a 'one

true love' or 'soulmate', or being restricted to one intimate partner. Generational differences apply but not universally. Some of the more unconventional lived experiences with and narratives about love and relationships come from older participants who presumably are being drawn to the opportunity to make their difference visible without fear of judgement or retribution.

The materiality of zines, where they are produced in my workshops, adds weight and poignancy to sharing participants' writing about love and relationships. While digital formats of dating, socialising and disseminating opinions provide the convenience of immediacy and deniability, the physical zine itself becomes a token of affection to be shared with friends, families and within communities.

Zine communities and any other communities open to gift giving and trading objects recreate what letter-writing provided to 18th century educated, i.e. middle-class, people: a culture which blends intimacy with wider sharing as well as creating a manifold discursive space in which to explore languages of intimacy and identity.

What I have learned as a researcher, however, is to reign in outright zine geekery, since the material zine is not

the objective in these workshops but a tool and legacy. If a community group prefers to share their thoughts internally only by reading to each other, there is no reason to insist on going public with a zine.

My own zine making has in any case proved to be beneficial in terms of credibility. A researcher, who is prepared to commit to paper, even a zine, intimate lived experiences, to disclose something significant about their emotions and identity, is more likely to be accepted and trusted which makes the entire process of participatory research possible.

This claim warrants a little more exploration in the next two sections of this research zine. Firstly, I will give a practical example of disclosure in my previous work with community groups and how I made this disclosure productive in ways which were hopefully inspiring for participants rather than a narcissistic indulgence on my part.

Secondly, I will reflect on my personal involvement with past and in particular current research into gender, relationships and sexualities in order to situate myself as a researcher and this research zine in the context of the DIY gender zine fair and beyond.



Muschi

sagt man

nicht!

Everybody loved Petra

Everybody loved Petra. She was a student and an activist. Her feminist zine collective collectively gave her chocolates and sexy stockings for her birthday. That was at a time when the pages of the zine were filled with heated discussions over the feasibility of non-sexist pornography. My thing with Petra was brief and exciting.

After months of being nice to each other and some weeks of meeting for coffee and cakes as friends, one day, walking down the street in the early evening at the beginning of autumn, our arms accidentally touching more than once because we were walking so closely side by side, she took me by the shoulders, spun me around, pushed me against a graffitied wall and kissed me softly on the mouth. Right after our thing Petra came out as lesbian.

After I had read my text above out aloud. I asked a female member of the group to read it out, too. The group discussed changes in perception regarding the relationship dynamics in the text and between the text and the audience caused by the changed voice (and physical presence of the speaker). We then changed names and pronouns in the text and explored what these changes would do with the text and our individual

perceptions of it. In the main part of the session, the group members wrote short pieces of a similar nature in which they deviated from their real-life gender role and/or experimented with the attribution of gender or no gender to their characters.

For another session, I prepared two further short texts which were similar in style and also seemed to represent a memory each of a past relationship. I asked group members to consider which of the now three texts were an authentic expression of my life experiences and which were fiction. The participants pursued two lines of enquiry. Firstly, they scanned the texts for details which added credibility to the claim that it may be 'real' and about me. The other approach was to ask which experiences with love and relationship I was likely to have had in my life. As the participants did not know much about me, they struggled with this and did not settle on one view.

I then revealed that two texts contained biographical truths about me, and one was a story about their life I had heard from a friend. All stories contained actual people's memories but only one of the stories I had told without changing or adding key elements: *Everybody loved Petra*. We then analysed which elements of the stories had led them to wrong conclusions and which

elements had successfully conveyed a sense of authenticity. These elements did not map easily onto the notion of 'authentic' and 'fictitious'.

Interview with a gender vampire

Me: Mika, you have been involved in gender and relationships research for a long time. What does it mean to you personally?

Myself: Thanks, yes, I've been doing gender research for more or less my entire academic career starting from my Master's dissertation. It's been quite a ride with different periods, languages, themes but ultimately it has always been about gender, love and relationships. Many scholars in the Arts & Humanities have significant emotional investment in their research topics. We're, therefore, also identified with our topics. I've been asked many times whether my focus on love research has impacted negatively on my relationships. The answer is that my research has enriched my lived experience with love and relationships and vice versa.

Me: What does your choice of topics say about you? Masochism and love, war heroes and love, ill mental

health and love, gay men and love, punk and love, trans lives and love...

Myself (laughing): In the first place, it probably says something about the richness of the material and maybe also something about consistency on my part, but I sense you are trying to tease out something else. Am I am masochist? I used to answer that question with a denial and a quip: *I'm not a war hero either*. No need to identify me completely with my research topics.

Me: Are you done denying?

Myself (suddenly serious): In a way I am, but I am not sure what to put into the place of the defence mechanism. The question what my research topics mean to me as a person has indeed become more pressing over the years. There are some things I don't deny: I'm kinky. I'm happily married to a wonderful woman whom I met over twenty years ago. I have had some rather hard periods with poor mental health. I am white, able-bodied, first-generation at university – but also a professor and privileged.

Me (nodding and glancing at the recording device)

Myself: With the help of my wife I have also been able to formulate more recently that I've always felt awkward and at times rather unhappy in my own skin and unhappy with my gendered place in society.

Reading life writing by trans and gender non-conforming people in the last two years, I've seen a lot of my feelings of displacement, alienation or unease with my relationship with myself and the world anticipated or mirrored. This has been quite disconcerting. There was a point after about 40 or 50 memoirs by trans women, trans men, butch and non-binary writers when I needed to take a step back and clarify for myself whether I was doing psychotherapy or literary scholarship.

Me: What did you find mirrored in those memoirs?

Myself: I cannot make a legitimate claim to a trans biography for myself which would be compatible with the patterns expected by medicolegal gatekeepers. There was no early realization in childhood that I was stuck 'in the wrong body'. No insistence to be recognized as a girl. I have experienced a fair amount of body and gender dysmorphia, but have no emotional connection to a specific alternative prospective embodiment. In other words, I don't feel right in my gendered embodiment or position in life but am not able to say with clarity what would feel right.

Me (nodding with a listening face on)

Myself: I don't think this is the place to go into the details which I haven't even processed for myself or

with my wife. (Pauses). However, what I am prepared to share is that I've always felt that there is something fundamentally wrong about the way I see myself and I am perceived in my social interactions. When I was a teenager, people around me helpfully suggested that I may be gay. I gave 'acting gay' a try for some time, and there were some aspects which clicked with me. Being able to express myself in less restrictively hetero-normative ways, being camp, being a bit flamboyant. Being part of gay and queer sociability and community. But the core tenet of being gay (male-to-male romantic and sexual attraction) did not work for me.

Me: You told me a little while ago that you feel you are queer socialized but straight.

Myself: Yes, that is the line which made it into Sarah-Jane Dickens's play about gay and inclusive rugby in Hull. What I shared with the interviewer popped up in the character of Rudi who is from South Africa. I recently saw the play on stage for the first time. It was mind blowing to witness my words embodied and performed by an actor who, by the way, does not look like me at all. Angelo is black.

Me: Does your line about being queer socialised but straight still hold true?

Myself: Yes and no. It still helps to explain my positioning towards gay and queer communities. I don't want to make claims to identities to which I have not contributed, to which I have not had to contribute because of the white, male, straight privilege which I have enjoyed for most of my life.

Me: And the no part? Is that related to trans debates?

Myself: You are really trying to corner me here, aren't you. — So, I have noticed far more parallels between trans and gender non-conforming life writing and my lived experience than I had anticipated before starting my research into these topics. I had been a vocal ally of trans people for some time but never made the connection between my own gender discontent, I don't want to say 'gender trauma', and the vicious, demeaning public discourse on transness trans people have been subjected to, especially in the US and UK. At some stage, I started to feel that the transphobes could mean me as well, although I am not (out as) trans or non-binary. That has been a tricky emotion to negotiate because I also know that I am protected by cis-het privilege.



Me: Are you afraid to be seen as an impostor?

Myself: That is an interesting way of looking at it. I am afraid to come across as a tourist, a colonizer, an usurper in trans and queer spaces or discourses. I also

fear, if I came to the realization I was trans, not to be perceived as credible, acceptable, even attractive ...

Me: Not passing?

Myself: That too possibly but bear in mind that 'passing culture' is toxic. I picked that up on TikTok from Mariah Darling. Miss Major has a chapter on this as well in the new collection of interviews *Miss Major Speaks*. For me the balance between my emotional burden of gender discontent and my anxieties around living an openly gender non-conforming life is currently in favour of staying put where I am in the relative safety of cis-het privilege. I find it hard to picture myself at work, in public, in my wider family as anyone else than the person people are used to seeing and interacting with.

Me: Trans people sometimes talk about the egg mode to describe someone who is trans but not out yet. Are you in egg mode? Do you intend to stay in egg mode?

Myself: Well, the egg is a safe place in comparison as Linus Giese writes in his first book about coming out as a trans man. But, no, I don't think I am an egg waiting to crack and to come out as trans. I rather imagine that I carry an egg within me in which I nurture and protect a version of me who could have been trans.

Me: It is probably my fault but I think we have been fudging categories such as trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming in this interview.

Myself: Those are very fudge-able categories in the first place. What medicolegal gatekeepers accept as trans and what people identify with as trans can be vastly different. Transness is not confined to a neat journey from one binary gendered position to the other binary gendered position with the aim of invisibility, assimilation, passing or stealth. For some trans people that is the path they want to go and they should be able to walk it with dignity. For other trans people it is important that their transness remains visible as it represents their personal history. Other people who identify as trans do not seek 'full transition', or in some cases any medical intervention at all.

Me: It appears that you have ruled out coming out as trans because you feel you are not trans enough. Am I overstepping a mark here?

Myself: Whether that statement is palatable to people who are trans I find hard to anticipate. What I would say is that I can see myself included in this quote by Stephen Whittle from the introduction to the *Transgender Studies Reader*: 'A trans identity is now accessible almost anywhere, to anyone who does not feel

comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels “man” or “woman” credited to them by formal authorities. The identity can cover a variety of experiences. It can encompass discomfort with role expectations, being queer, occasional or more frequent cross-dressing, permanent cross-dressing and cross-gender living, through to accessing major health interventions such as hormonal therapy and surgical reassignment procedures. It can take up as little of your life as five minutes a week or as much as a life-long commitment to reconfiguring the body to match the inner self.’ But I don’t feel I have the right to make trans in this broad sense my most prominent identity marker in social contexts. Non-binary may sit more comfortably with me, but that is not fully decided either.

Me: What does non-binary mean to you?

Myself: Well, there are many different takes on this. It is a term which is distinct from androgyny. We should not expect from non-binary people that they look androgynous. On the most basic level, I think the Canadian singer and writer Rae Spoon, who at various stages of their life identified and presented as a cis lesbian and a trans man, got it right when they declared they had ‘retired from gender’. That they refuse to have

their identity defined for them by any gendered expectations. I have been contemplating whether I should retire from gender when I retire from waged labour. I am quite middle-aged already and it is about ten more years of waged labour for me.

Me: Watch this space?

Myself (laughing): I'm not making any promises. Gender and genderedness remain live topics in my research, in my creative practice and in my personal life.

<a few weeks later>

Dear Michael,

Hope you've been well. This is just to keep you abreast with regards to the DIY gender zine fair at 'Gender and Law at Durham GLAD', and my plans for the research-themed zine.

I went down on the Thursday night and stayed over in a Travelodge (cheapest place Angela could find; it was basic but ok). On the Friday, there was a morning workshop for Joy Twemlow's students and the researchers who had contributed zines. In the afternoon, there were presentations on feminist

magazines and the Grrrl zine fair followed by a zine fair in its own right.

I actually started the day with my show-and-tell of zines I have made or contributed to from the 1980s onwards. I tried to tell three stories in one: my zine-making history, my development as a researcher and recent questions about my positionality as a researcher and a person sparked by having read dozens of pieces of life writing by trans and gender non-conforming people.

Joy had introduced me using the singular them as my pronoun. That felt odd (special?) to me. – I think I forgot to tell you that I have just changed the pronouns in my work email to he/they. Only one person has asked me about that so far, and that was Hels who goes by they/she. – Anyway, back to Durham. I think my talk went ok. You know that I can extemporize on any given topic, but it was a bit tricky to talk about discontent with my gendered position in life to and in front of strangers. Until then it had all been in writing or with people who know me well and/or have a highly self-reflexive stance on (their) gender. I felt close to tears which was a bit unfair to my audience who certainly did not expect being part of a self-help group!

There were some amazing zines by academic zine makers. I really liked 'Love and the Law' by Benedict



Douglas and the superb piece (text-wise and in terms of her drawings) by Sage Brice. That's a zine (in preparation of an article) about the ways in which science has been categorizing the natural world using binaries and borders. Catchy title too: 'Not just gay penguins. A zine'. I also got to swap zines with MJS of 'Hail to the zine, baby' who was very kind and enthusiastic in person. MJS lives nearby and came in with a folder of zines for swapping. I guess that gave any new zine makers a nice introduction to zine culture.

The train journey home was uneventful. Angela picked me up at Dundee station. At home I unpacked, showered and drank a little too much gin. There was an emotional numbness in me. I had disclosed more to strangers than ever before and all of that in a setting associated with my actual job.

Having recovered from that a little, I am now finishing off this zine to make it available to the people who were at the Durham workshop and to send it off for printing. Getting the printed copies will be another nail-biter for me, although I am quietly confident that reception will continue to be largely supportive. What I still don't know, apart from adding a new pronoun to my bio and signature, is where this is all going. It feels a little exciting, a little liberating and quite a bit scary to stake

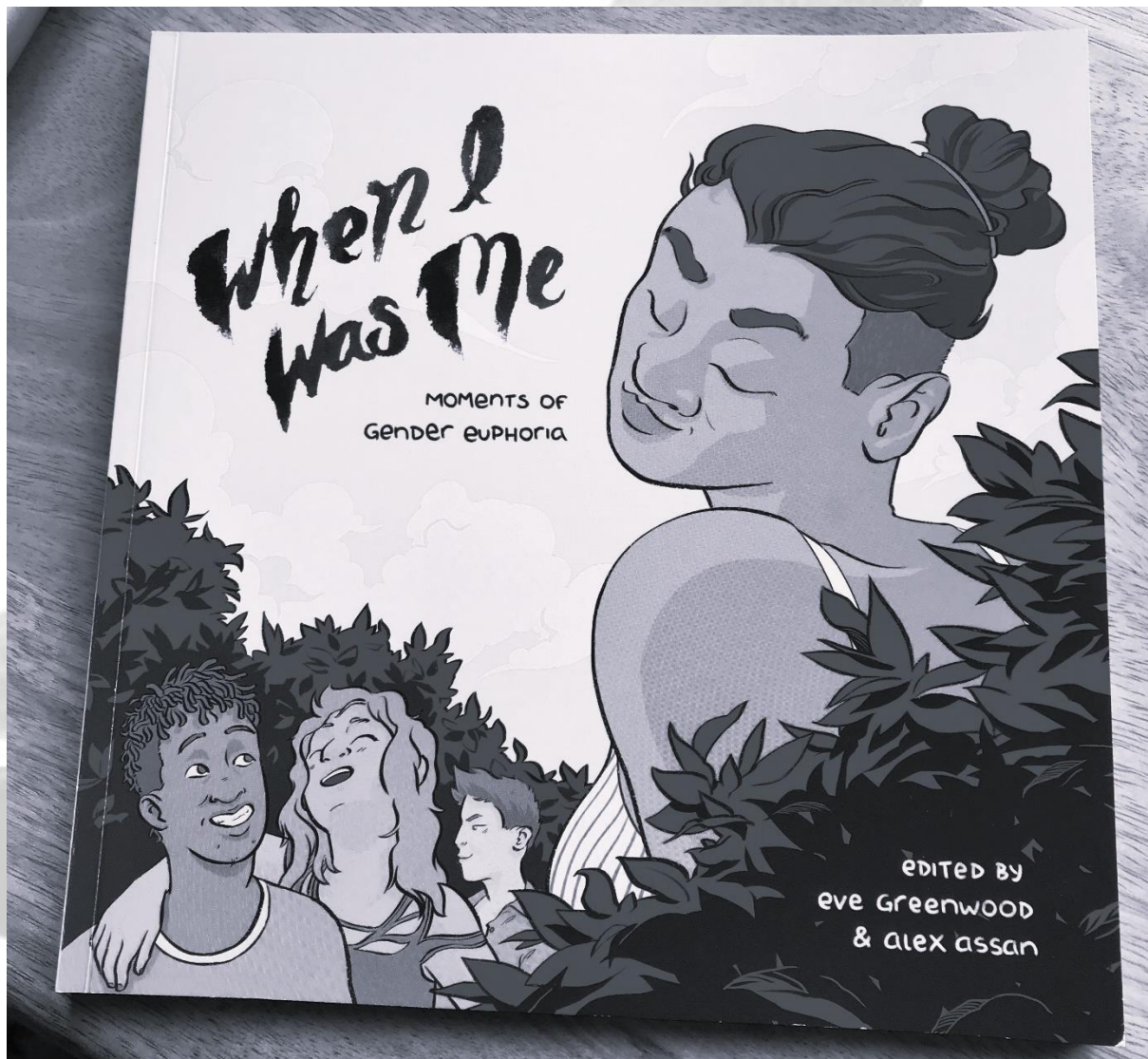
a claim in a gender non-conforming identity. I have always been very cautious not to disclose 'too much' like presenting quite masculine but dropping in the conversation that I performed in drag in the past.

When I recall my life so far, there seems to be a large gap between my exploring feminine/gender non-conforming/non-binary expression and my overall presentation as a cis-het white man. Or is there? I am not so sure anymore. I am somewhat taken aback how little surprise people show when they hear about all of this.

Final thought: as I have been reading up on autotheory, I may very well end up writing an autotheoretical text about myself before embarking on part two of my trans corpus of texts (by trans women).

All the best,

Mika



***When I was me. Moments of Gender Euphoria.* Edited by Eve Greenwood and Alex Assan (2021)**

This book published by Quindrie Press fills me with joy. The book design by Spire Eaton is gorgeous. The editors did a great job organising the one-page comics by trans, binary and gender non-conforming artists into themed sections which are framed by extracts from a poem by Harry Josephine Giles whose creativity I admire anyway.

There are even social-media contact details for the contributors should you want to explore their work more.

The drawing styles vary greatly but there is a prevalence of 21st century styles and techniques (as opposed to the Franco-Belgian comics and graphic novels of the 70s to 90s which are the foundation of my comic-book education).

Reading these comics I feel a little bit like a guest (as opposed to the colonizer or imposter I discuss in the self-interview above). This is not my community as such but I love this community to by my neighbours.

Highlights include the pages by Ella Cesari ('my transness can be cherished'), Alex Assan (the boldness of swapping selfies) and Galactic Jonah (the way the beautiful page is organised centring on a gender-fluid figure).

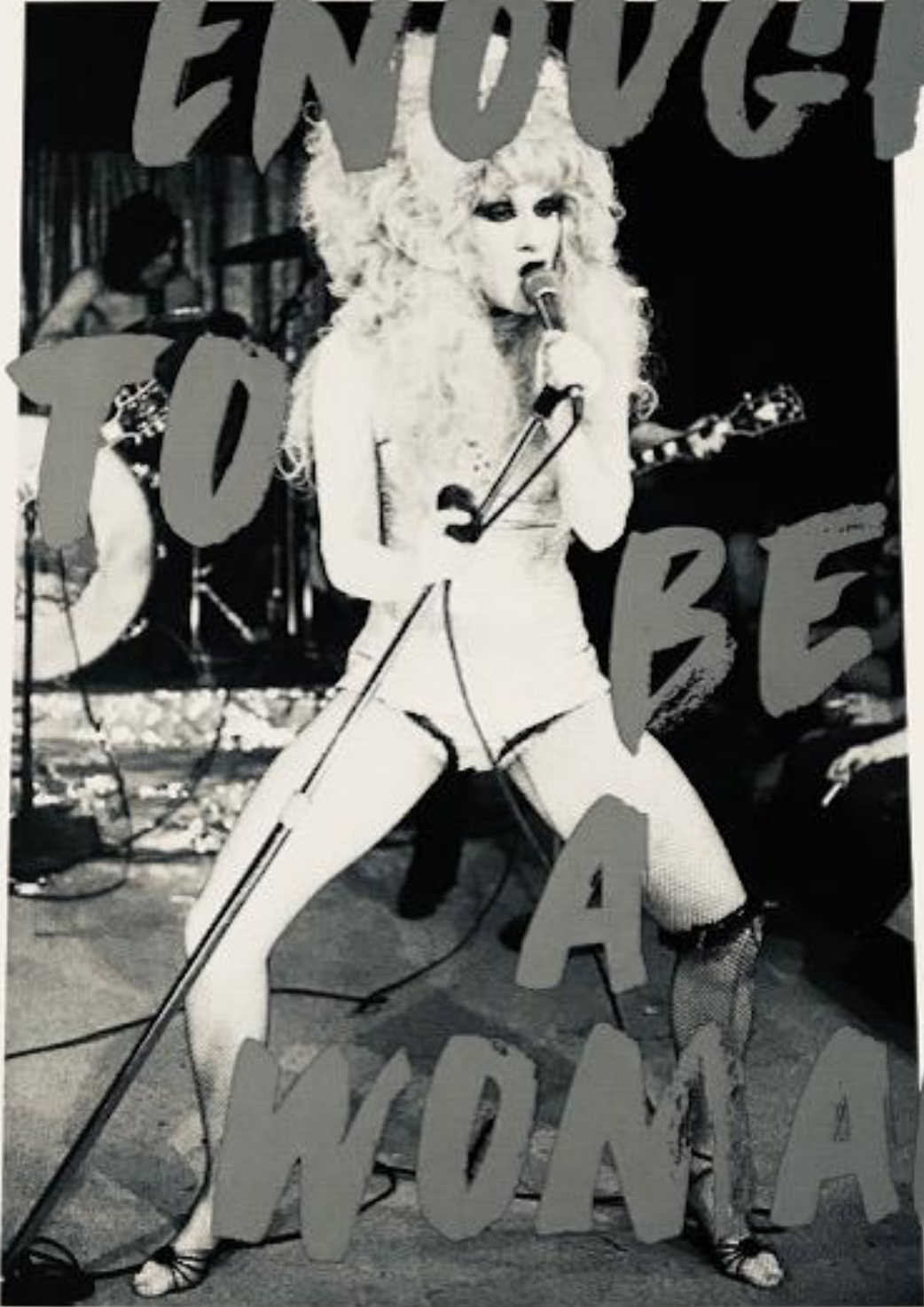
PS I also really like the separate work by Amy Galloway (@hesitantdoodle) who has a comic book out called *Genderness* which is 'a zine exploring body dysmorphia and how perceptions of yourself grow and shape who we become'.

MAN

JAYNE COUNTY

with Rupert Smith

ENOUGH



TO

BE

A

WOMAN

Jayne County with Rupert Smith, *Man enough to be a woman* (new edition 2021)

I have read many punk (auto-) biographies because I am fascinated with the short period in pop culture history when music, rebellion, fashion and being an outsider came together in the wildest possible form. What interests me in particular is how life has gone on for those who were heavily invested in the first waves of punk from the mid-seventies.

It is striking how existential being different was for women and many queer people in punk. You were up against sexism, homophobia and patriarchy before, during and after punk. The window of opportunity which early punk offered (of acceptance, of notoriety, of fame) closed rather quickly and very firmly for those who could not or would not follow the masculinisation of punk.

Punk has its roots in what became known as glam rock; the New York Dolls styled themselves as gender-ambivalent; some of the first venues in NYC and London which hosted punk acts were gay bars and clubs. The early punks in the UK had just a few months earlier followed David Bowie and Mott the Hoople on tour. After its early heyday, punk turned into something much

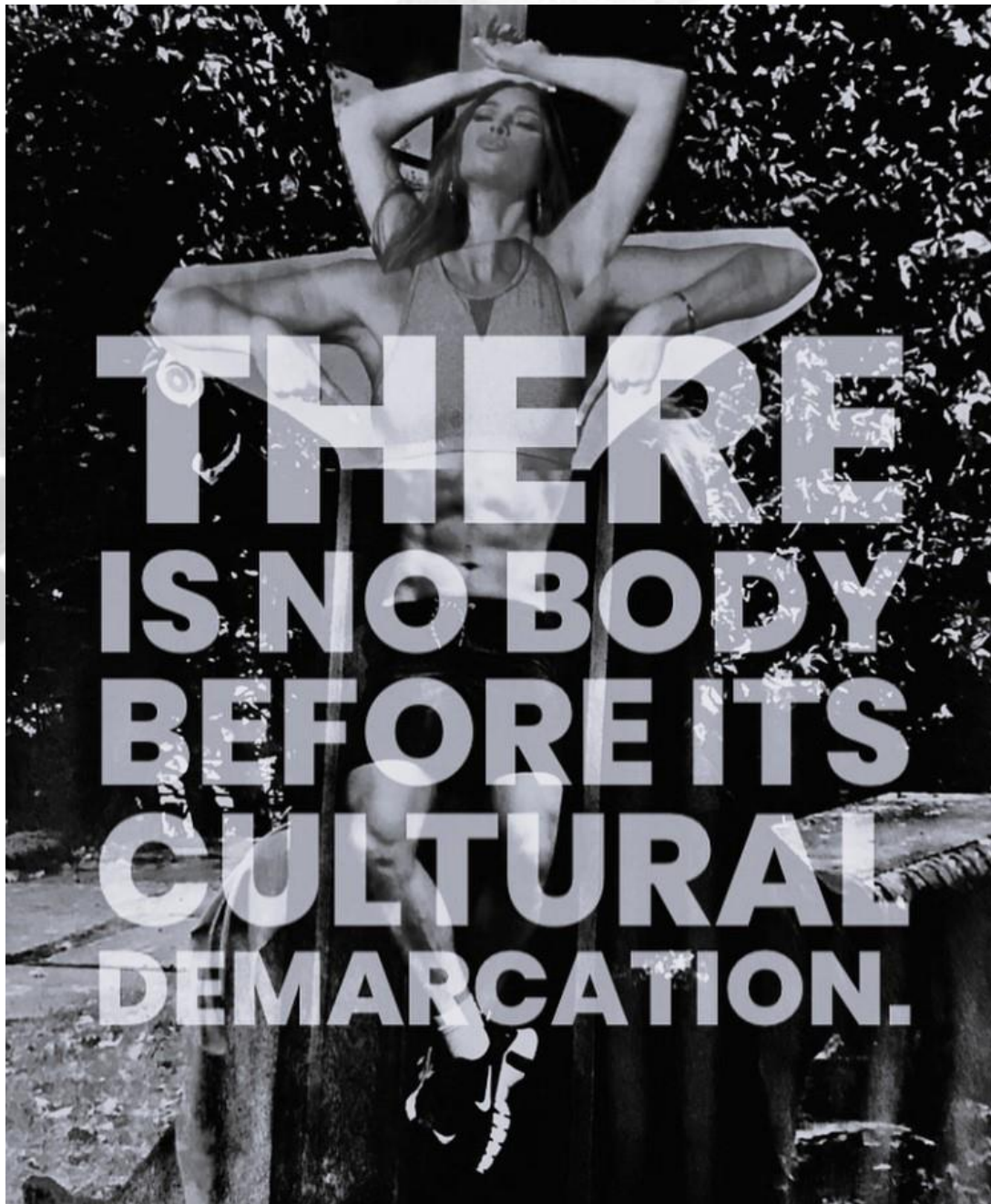
more rigid, arguably less provocative, and in any case less experimental.

Jayne County tells her story from being a 'sissy boy' in rural Georgia (USA) via stations as a 'screaming queen', 'hippie queen', 'trannie', Warhol Factory underground star in NYC, to becoming a trans woman living a hectic life trying finally to break through as a recording artist. She was repeatedly being thrown back into precarity including stints of sex work and frankly had a chaotic love life.

Her life has been one of not fitting in: too serious about being trans for punk, too rock'n'roll for gay disco, too 'trannie' for the sensibilities of gay liberation and modern-day LGBTQIA+ campaigners. Along the way, Jayne has met everyone and anyone who was someone in rock'n'roll, in punk, in avantgarde art, and in travesty and drag performance. She is candid about her own experiences, the mistakes she has made, and the compromises she has made in order to survive.

I find the additional chapter at the end, which fills in the gap between first publication in the 1990s to the present day, particularly interesting. Jayne chose to rebuild her relationships with family members, very conservative and in the case of her mother very religious Southerners, and spent years as a live-in carer to her

parents. She now lives in the rural south with many cats, has given up on romance, paints – and has music and art agents who take good care of her legacy.





Sylvester, You make me feel (Mighty real) (Fantasy Records, 1978)

All my perzines have a few pages with a playlist of music which is either relevant to the main themes of the zine or to which I have been listening a lot in the period of making the zine. It is, therefore, only apt to insert one song which carries special meaning to me into this ~~not~~-a-perzine.

Sylvester (Sylvester James Jr.) was an African-American gay performer who rose to stardom in the original disco era. He presented androgynously. His biographer states that gender was a daily choice for Sylvester. The track speaks to me about queer love and being recognised as one's true self regardless of mainstream society's norms and expectations. In 1989 it was famously covered by Jimmy Somerville of Bronski Beat and Communards fame.

The original and the cover nicely bracket the first period in my life in which I got confused by gender and sexuality.

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My research interests

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