IRREVERENCE

Nothing is Sacred: Femme Subjectivity and the Politics of What Matters to Us

Steff(ania) Juniper

Abstract

The alchemy of lesbian love, polyamory, and anti-violence as they relate to transnational experiences of culture and queer identity are still topics in need of deeper exploration. The alchemy is often silenced by misogyny, which reduces lesbianism to gender-essentialist, feminine expressions of care. Being a lesbian is still a radical act, and is subject to the creation of horror stories, not because of the nature of lesbian love on its own, but because of the way lesbian love is experienced through fighting for its right to exist in a heteronormative world. This is a piece of creative writing written from personal experience. This excerpt is from a larger manuscript that is a work in progress about transfeminist witchcraft and the architecture of lesbian economies of intimacy that disrupt queer idealism, pinkwashing, and capitalist colonialism. The question of what we are haunted by as a cyborg-posthumanist lamentation is posed to query the notion that possession is oppositional to non-possession, and that excess is an inherently problematic state of being. Do objects have a life of their own? How are we free and how are we possessed in our neoliberal affairs, and how does that include the experience and affect of love?

Content Warning

Profanity, sexual imagery, animal sacrifice, body horror, substance use

1.

I lit a small white candle that had already been previously used and washed ashore on the beach. It was still wet at first, so I let it dry in the sun and walked, alone. I walked to the structure that from afar looked like a dilapidated building that the ocean decided to call its own; straddling the tide line, the structure seemed to no longer fully belong to the land. No one bothered to live too close to the half of the building being swallowed by the ocean, I think because it seemed inevitable it would cave into the water over time.

People inhabited the parts closer to the point where the brick met the sun.

It was like looking at the largest sandcastle I ever saw as it decayed into the crashing waves.

After my reminiscent walk, I returned to the dried candle and placed the wedding ring that I found on a flat stone surface. I lit the candle and dripped wax on the stone. I stuck the candle on the dripped wax to stick it upright on the stone in the middle of the ring as though it were a finger and the candle continued to burn in the wind.

I lay two unlit cigarettes nearby. As the wind let the fire burn, I lay some money under a rock.

Losing a ring I would not replace; I would not give in the first place.
I would never give my love a ring because she is not that type.
She would lose it.
I would have to solder it on her, tattoo it on her?
Somehow, it would need to become one with her.
The reason is not because she wouldn't value the ring, it is because simply put, she would lose it.

You must see the insides of her to know.

She did not remember what happened to the ring.
In her mind it was just gone.
I do not know if it was ever a coveted item for her or just a source of anxiety about loss prevention.

In fact, I recall her fret that losing the object would occur, and it was either the first or second version that I tied around her neck to ensure it would not go missing. Just like a homing pigeon, she would need a minuscule item attached to her by a string. You must see the insides of her to know that she loses small pieces, but that does not mean that she lacks care.

I would not recommend a ring to symbolize love in her framework of intimacy. She prefers a kind of architecture of desire of an entirely different nature. The art of how she loses things and holds on is unique to who she is. There is an art to misplacing items. I'm told I am good at finding what is lost, and I think it's because I understand patterns well.
I learned not by choice, but as a survival instinct.
I felt like no one listened to my warnings as I predicted violent escalations, and that changed me.
There are some things we never forget because they do not leave our internal landscapes.

What I love about her is that her patterns of how she moves around space are often incomprehensible

to me and her art of losing things is like the bright colours, shiny fabrics, and theatrics of a gay Commedia dell'arte show. The degree to which she is messy is a skill because it creates performance art spectacles as though her body is moving objects in space as an exquisite corpse of surrealist games. I do not know why everything is everywhere. It's been years and I still do not know her patterns of loss. A while ago I stopped trying, I just cooperate now with the feelings that arise.

When I sat on the shore of the Atlantic with the forgotten ring.
I thought about how I did not know if she ever wanted it, but I knew that when it was gone, she was not bothered. She did not mind that the ring was gone because then she would not need to be reminded of the marriage that never happened, and her ex-fiancé's desires that she was unable to satisfy. Missing that special friend, she almost married, and I miss her too.

2.

Love is not Possession, and if it is, how is it so? When people are in love, they frequently say they feel as though they are free, and yet may act towards one another as though they are possessed. Possessed by each other's spirits, or treating each other as possessions?

What of these worldly possessions is possession these days, anyway?
We call our objects possessions. We call being haunted by malevolent spirits possessions.

How can an object we put on a finger even represent the complex feelings we hold for one another and the ties that bind us in our sleeping and waking hours? In this realm, we are possessed by our mental and emotional states that contain memories of the past.

This world itself is hell enough to be haunted and possessed by.

Human minds were what crashed the architect's attempt at a perfect world in *The Matrix* (1999). Being a human-animal means we can talk ourselves out of any kind of mental state and then talk ourselves back into it. The emotional complexity of the human-animal is fraught with fragility. We can try to multiply love, clone love, make it bigger, better, stronger and yet it can all just collapse into a messy puddle of feeling total absence. A friend of mine once said, "so much of the queer experience is about how everyone describes that they had this really profound time together and then never talked again."

I wish it wasn't.

Brushing reality under the rug, like hiding the coins on the beach, could never get me as much in the city as it would in the country. When I was lost and disoriented trying to travel to the beach in the rural zone, a stranger wouldn't even take any money for helping me with directions. Eventually, once I arrived at the beach, the coins I had ended up leaving there had been the same coins that I had offered the stranger. I put that money under the rock. I blew out the candle. I continued my walk while the coins, the cigarettes, the candle, and the ring, were all left for someone else to find and make of them what they desire—just like the way we leave our love behind. That's often how we lose things, and how we find them. What about the values of reciprocity in how we give and take?

We never talked much. We shared the same love; you gave her a ring she lost, and I found it more than once. The last time I found it was in the house I lost. In the lobby where I made art with her and where I fell in love with her. I lost that house, that lobby, the woman who owned it who I loved and was

practically married to. The art, it is still here in my heart…

I have it all now, and I'm giving it to the ocean.

"A good wife is a good life" *they* say; by *they* I mean men… Humour and absurdity help when thinking about the severity of love and romance as I remember the bloody doves that have been sacrificed. As they lay dead with broken necks, a heart carved in the mud, I stare at the *ebbó* in the Santeria ritual as I meditate on how metamours could care about each other's lives and think of the meaning of family in divergent ways, but how do they choose to effectively communicate?

3.

Survival is snotty and sticky, I get it.
I'm more concerned with shmaltz at this point. I want to be open to the idea that we don't have to be coupled like chickens with broken necks. If I am wrong or hurtful, I should have to answer to that pain I created, or something, right?

"I did not burn anything, dear. I would rather let the water take it and make it anew."

Chastity is a feeling that cannot be reduced to an iodized object that rests on a finger or that catapults a cock. Loyalty costs a whole lot more than a price tag, so even if the ring came from a bubble-gum machine or robbed lives from a diamond mine, she would lose it. That's not why we aren't married, or why I am not. You see, I'm still recovering from the idea that I'm supposed to be candy-coated and adorned in watchful eyes where everyone is supposed to simultaneously laugh and cry over the concept. I want to spend the rest of my life close to her, always knowing her, but that's my business and it's a heavy weight, much heavier than that of a ring or a cage or tears from an audience.

What if we travelled to faraway lands to sign divorce papers instead of tying knots? Imagine spending tons of money on a party to end your marriage in a faraway land to declare that love is over and to force all your friends and family to spend money on it to have them watch. What if we executed divorce rituals by burning small change in billed money, lighting cigarettes, and throwing rings in the water to wash up to shore for others to find and re-use? What's a ring to a divorced couple, anyway? How do we end things on civil terms so that we can speak again? Some people want to be able to light fires with the contents of each other's houses to reduce the costs of their electricity bills, or to circumvent the need for electricity altogether, and what do we make of it?

Who are we to judge others' sticky snot?

In the meantime, I will watch the flame burn on the candle I found on the beach that washed ashore. I burned it on a rock by an area where people have parties, so that I knew it would be found rather than becoming a desolate structure washed away at sea. The ring was 'inexpensive,' a concept that is also relative to whom the speaker and audience is. Something from a thrift store. Again, relative to the buyer. It fit perfectly over the candle as though I was placing it on a finger. The ring from my girlfriend's ex-fiancé, gold and shining in the sun with two unlit cigarettes and coins in a pile together in a row to say, "life happens." Sometimes dreams are absolute nonsense. What we hold to be sacred now can change and turn into nothingness. Until tomorrow. I say it should have happened yesterday. Otherwise, what was it even worth? Because it felt like it cost me a life to get to that shore and give it to the water, to fight for our friendship. Please do not mistake that for a complaint.

My Jewish queer elder tells me how her nose constantly drips, and it drives her crazy how snot is so gross to everyone. Who cares? Life is messy. We both agree we need to talk more openly about snot cycles. Her daughter is not a fan of polyamory because there are "too many mouths to feed," she says right before driving away without providing me with the opportunity to respond.

What is the horror of lesbian idealism on love and longing?
Getting stuck in-between a sticky mess of snot and having an epiphany, thinking more love is better instead of ending it when its time. We cannot keep running on such little steam; our resources can only go so far, like the difference in how far our money goes in the city and the country, and… which country?

What is the horror of lesbian idealism on love and longing?
Trying to make love work when you feel like everything is working against you, metaphysically.
"I've never been so sure."
I thought.

4.

My girlfriend is holding me in the dark, reminded me why she wants to touch me:
"…To be close to your soul," she says.
"What did you say?" I reply.
"It's because I want to feel your soul."
"No one has ever said that to me."

There's a soy-scented candle marketed for that exact moment.
That does not make it any less divine.

Sandcastles wash away as the tides rise and fall; so, too, does our desire for sensuality. The scent of the candle "Seven Seas" emanates throughout the bedroom in the apartment surrounded by gridlocked urban life. Sometimes I just need alone time and it's nothing personal. My domestic partner is still learning what that means, and I'm genuinely fascinated by how comfortable I am spending hours with her deliberating over what bed frame we should buy. She gets upset when she has disappointed me about the tidiness of the bedroom, and I'm confused about how many extra rinses she needs to do to feel like the laundry isn't soapy. I never thought so much about laundry before, I just spent more time in the past avoiding thinking about it. We work on things together and sometimes we hurt each other's feelings and then feel mutual sadness because we don't want to hurt each other's feelings. We avoid hurting each other's feelings and then it somehow just happens because it seems inevitable that feelings work that way. Especially when you are two sensitive people committed to feeling your emotions and not washing them away with booze, or dope, or whatever else the kids do these days who are convinced it's totally chill because it came from the earth rather than a bathroom cabinet. (We were kids once too.) The thing about living together is that you can't just leave unless you are going on a vacation or staying at a friend's place for a night, so you must be sure it's what you want. If you aren't sure, then you will be stuck, and it won't be pretty. The snow is sharply hitting the skylight in our bedroom. I am still learning to say "our"… It's not because of any sort of deeper philosophical concern per se, but more just a matter of adjustment. Many queers are obsessed with self-actualization and fostering an identity outside of their relationships to an unhealthy degree. It screams of gridlocked city living concerns with the scent of rural landscapes in a candle on the tiny bedside table. My domestic partner is from a small town, so when I told her my view on this queer concern as we walked down the aisle of

the oligopoly drug store she sarcastically remarked, “in the country, people aren’t so worried about their partners being the only ones they see because there just aren’t that many people you see in the first place.” It was nice to know we were on the same page. Neither of us had an issue about how much time we spent doing things together. While the snow melted on the skylight in our bedroom, I think about how lovely it is neither of us have to commute from Regent Park to Parkdale and back by subway, streetcar, bus, bike, cab, and sometimes by foot because you’re upset about being in love with a junkie who yelled at you about putting her towel on the toilet seat like you’re the crusty one when the truth is you actually are the one that grew up in the immaculately clean suburban southern Italian home which is why you put your towel on the toilet seat because it looks clean and so that just remained a habit even in unclean spaces like punk houses that aren’t clean. Not like I am any less of a junkie for having a backstory about why I care so much about cleanliness. The truth is we are all idiosyncratic in our own unique ways. There’s never going to be someone who isn’t without any semblance of cognitive dissonance. It’s through the dirt and our habits of knowing one another that we come to see what this means and that despite our different ways of living and being—or, rather, considering our differences all-in-all—we make a complimentary whole. Hypocrisy is a normal, banal human thing, just like being one with the world of machine or a cyborg or whatever. Working on the nuts and bolts of being tethered to our existence and its connectivity to the world of objects, and with each other makes me think of what Throbbing Gristle sounds like and what the baby in *Eraserhead* (1977) looks like. Somethings are just *as* they are but are they for *us*?

“Deciding where to live is a hard thing,” my mom says. It echoes back in my head.

References

Lynch, David. 1977. *Eraserhead*. Libra Films. 1 hr., 29 min.

Wachowski, Lana and Lilly Wachowski, directors. 1999. *The Matrix.* Warner Bros. 2 hr., 16 min.

Author Biography

Steff(ania) Juniper is a third-generation, southern Italian-Canadian. They are a queer, nonbinary trans witch, a mad/disability justice worker, feminist writer and sound artist. They have completed an arts-based MA in Critical Disability Studies at York University, titled "Trans-Feminist Witchcraft: A Psychiatric Survivor Narrative." They are currently working on a PhD in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies, continuing their arts-based research creation goals. To find some of their sound art check out https://quivering.bandcamp.com/ and for more musings related to their cultural work find them on Instagram: @mx.steffania