Diario nb

Sergio A. Godoy

The University of Texas at El Paso

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DIARIO NB

SERGIO ANDRÉS GODOY PRIETO

Master’s Program in Creative Writing

APPROVED:

Jeff Sirkin, Ph.D., Chair

Rosa Alcalá, Ph.D.

Raquel Gutiérrez, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Dedication

A mi familia de raíz, los que me han visto crecer y me acompañaron en el camino.

A mi papá, mi mamá, y mi hermano, por la vida que hemos compartido con amor y los viajes que nos quedan.

A Kalina, with all the love, for everything, everywhere, all at once.

A la familia Gallardo y Duran, que me acogieron en este mundo fronterizo y me dieron un hogar.

To everyone at the Department of Creative Writing at UTEP for allowing me to expand in the safety of your creative community.
“... Estoy buscando, estoy buscando. Intento comprender. Intento dar a alguien lo que he vivido y no sé a quién, pero no quiero quedarme con lo que he vivido. No sé qué hacer con ello, tengo miedo de esa desorganización profunda. Desconfío de lo que me ocurrió[...]

Si me confirmo y me considero verdadera, estaré perdida, porque no sabría dónde encajar mi nuevo modo de ser; si avanzase en mis visiones fragmentarias, el mundo entero tendría que transformarse para que ocupase yo un lugar en él.”

— Clarice Lispector, La pasión según G. H.

“I would like to make a case for a new occupation for artists... I will call the occupation I have in mind “meta-art.”... By “meta-art” I mean the activity of making explicit the thought processes, procedures and presuppositions of making whatever kind of art we make... [Meta-art] requires an epistemic self-consciousness... namely, viewing ourselves as the aesthetic objects we are, then elucidating as fully as possible the thoughts, procedures, and presuppositions that so define us.”

— Adrian Piper, Our of Order, Out of Sight, Volume II.

“The performance may be over for everyone else but in aftermath, the catastrophe, the intimacy, the possibility remains in the artist’s body’ it is still cresting and subsiding”

- Gabrielle Civil, Swallow the Fish

“That's enough. You can stop now: the phrase Sedgwick said she longed to hear whenever she was suffering. (Enough hurting, enough showing off, enough achieving, enough talking, enough trying, enough writing, enough living.)”

— Maggie Nelson, The Argonaut¹

¹ I found this quote after writing the ending of this book, but I was glad when I found it because it made me feel less alone in wanting to stop the suffering.
DIARIO NB

by

SERGIO ANDRES GODOY PRIETO, B.A.

THESIS

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of the Requirements
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Embodied Writing, a Preface

i.

*Diario nb* was born out of necessity. In a world that increasingly makes less and less sense, the words that have come out of my body for this project represent the clearest picture I can make of the last year of my life, a necessary text that has allowed me to spring forward after years of confusion about who I am and what my place is in the world. And I’m not necessarily saying it should all make sense, but when I look at what I’ve written here, I can say it’s at least as warm and alive as my flesh. It’s a record of my embodiment. My last push before going out into the world with everything I’ve learned over the course of my three years in the city of El Paso.

If I was to trace the beginning of the project, I’d have to go back to my first semester at UTEP, right after I arrived at the US from Colombia, in a class I took with Dr. Rosa Alcalá called Documentary Poetry, where I read *Litany for the Long Moment* by Mary-Kim Arnold. The book, in which Arnold reflects on loss and longing through her life as a South Korean orphan raised in America, and the parallels or interests she sees on other artists’ experiences like Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Francesca Woodman, gave me an arresting example of what a personal narrative could be when you interweaved it with archival photographs and documents, as well as theory and poetry. By playing with the limits of each form, Arnold was, for me, able to tap into the potential of hybridity, of opening up different languages to create emotional and intellectual depth. A photograph transformed in the presence of text, narrative was framed by legal documents regarding adoption, verses became short thesis statements about what it’s like to not speak your mother tongue.

I had never considered my life an interesting enough subject for art, but after reading *Litany for the Long Moment*, I started looking at my own struggles with immigration and my mother tongue in a new way. I understood the longing for one’s past, culture and language, and I started seeing the ways my writing could explore that without having to limit myself to one genre and the freedom that gave me. It was like in
film editing, where two images that might be unrelated are assembled one after the other and together they create a third unit of meaning. In this case, it was more than two, it was a plurality.

Of course, it is impossible to talk about this process without considering the pandemic of 2020, which really made me question my place in the world. I’ve said enough about this in the project itself, but it’s important to note here that the instinct I had honed as an artist to see my life as a site for creative exploration, even beyond the page, was also deeply intersected during the pandemic with the notion that everything I did as an artist and as a human being was political and had political ramifications. In that sense, my artistic pursuit became intertwined with my academic pursuits, my life goals, and my transness, a deeply political and transformative part of my being.

Writing about my journey as a trans person in this context was at the time less about the end goal of a thesis, and more about taking advantage of the place I found myself in to continue to embody myself through the written word and, through that embodiment, expand my own notion of myself and the world around me. When it came time to decide what to do for my thesis, it made sense to continue the work I’d been doing about myself, and maybe have it be my first attempt at naming myself to the world.

At the beginning of the project, I was mostly writing poetry, and I was trying to explore my reality through language. Figuring out my gender had given me new perspectives on everything, so I was interested in mapping and understanding that change, and writing my vision so that other people could understand how I saw and interpreted the world around me. I wrote something close to 40 pages of poetry, but as I worked on it I had a feeling that I needed more of a narrative to contrast the poetry and open up possibilities that felt hidden in the poems, ways in which specific moments in my life had affected the writing, so I started writing what me and my thesis advisor have come to call the Tolima Letters.

The Tolima Letters were influenced in great part by Ocean Vuong’s On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous, which is a semi-autobiographical novel where Vuong is addressing his mother in English, a language she can’t read, to tell her about his life “Dear ma, I am writing to reach you—even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are”. I read his novel for a course on Queer Writing, and I
was deeply moved by it. Every line in that book felt endless with meaning and emotion, and he had a way of seeing that was informed by distance and loss, which deeply resonated with me. The fact that his mother would never read what he was writing, that break in communication, felt parallel to my own experience exploring my gender without telling my parents, and making a life in a country far away from them. This made me think of the power of address, and how your words and attitude change depending on who you’re talking to. Tolima was the name me and my partner had given our imaginary child, and so I thought, what better addressee than a future child? What are my hopes for them or for me in their future, what do I want them to know about me and how my life changed in this period of time?

The Tolima Letters got me started, but soon I felt a weight of responsibility that stopped the progress. What if I created expectations about a future child that they could never reach? What if I was creating expectations for myself that were equally hard to fulfill? Did we really need that pressure?

And so, one dark and stormy night, at a point in my journey where I felt like I was finally landing in my nonbinary identity, I finally saw the through line of the archive I had been keeping since day one when I discovered I was trans: It was the incomplete journey from a binary perspective of myself and the world, to a nonbinary one. It was all there in the words I’d been recording in my diary and my notes app, in the pictures and videos I’d made, in the voice notes I’d left myself.

This archive, which I started keeping thanks to that instinct I had developed that my life was political was liberation was art, finally came in and it brought all the elements together.

The narration that developed from the archive, and the way other materials started finding their place within it, was improvised. I already had an internal oral history of my journey, one I had been forging each day just by being alive and embodying my transness, so I wasn’t going at it blind, but this was my first translation of this history into written language, so I wasn’t really sure where I was going. As I started to write things down, I started making connections between the past and the present, finding relationships between different events, and also finding material I had produced for different classes and contests I had entered during my three year run in the MFA. Eventually, that’s what my thesis became. Up to a point.
I’m proud of the way I entered this text, but as time went on and the writing kept coming I started to realize that each stretch of narrative demanded a lot of emotional energy from me, and it made me revisit doubts and fears I’d moved on from. Remembering how the binary between man and woman determined so much of my understandings of gender at the beginning made me feel the edges of that cage creeping back in; the endless doubts I felt about starting hormone replacement therapy started showing up as I went on my second round a year later, although this time I felt sure enough of what I was doing. The writing process became so taxing that at several points I thought I wasn’t going to be able to do it, but in the end, showing up to my computer and writing things down every day allowed me to finish.

What ended up helping the most in the end was a spell I learned from Akwaeke Emezi’s memoir *Dear Senthuran*:

“The spell is to make that future real, which can be done because you are not powerless, and the only thing that needs to be done in the here and now is to make the work. Or, to put is simply, all you have to do it write.” (Emezi, 34)

Emezi’s work is often thought of as metaphorical, and this spell could be taken in the same light, but they mean it as a real spell, and I don’t know if there’s space for Yoruba magic on a thesis preface but I believe it’s as real as you let yourself believe it’s real, and I’m getting there. The fact that colonial reality constructions close us off from native ontologies and simply discount them as “beliefs” doesn’t feel like a good enough excuse for me to gloss over them, and it’s actually been enlightening to open myself up to these questions about my reality as I write about a subject such as queerness and trans embodiments, so heavily redacted from our history books. If I let myself and my work be defined by Western expectations, I’m not going to be seen the way I want to be seen. I want to be honest about my process.

Of course, part of what makes magic work is sacrifice and permutation, and so, Emezi asks, “How much will you give? Your loved ones, your reality, your friends, your pleasures, your time, your security, your sanity, your fear, your control, your illusions? How much will you get?” (Emezi, 37)
I had gotten a taste of the sacrifice, in the way my writing was summoning the anxiety and pain and isolation that had plagued my internal process before, but when Emezi asked what we’d get I looked back at the project and couldn’t really tell. I just had to trust the spell, trust that it would work, and put in the work.

What happened then wasn’t anything short of magical. As the days grew longer and the end of the semester and the MFA program came to an end, I found myself still writing, still putting my suffering down on the page, but still unable to see the end. What was going on?

And then, a voice came and started asking me questions, and I started writing them down on bold face in the text and started noticing that these questions were snapping me out of the sorrowful narrative I was writing, they were helping me voice all my doubts about my own process and about the narrative’s need for my suffering. The voice was the same voice that’s gotten me out of all my crisis, when I get too in my head, it’s an instinct to stop.

That’s when it hit me. I needed to stop writing and I needed to stop explaining my life through this narrative. It sounds strange to write it on a preface for a book, but I think it was an important step to realize that I had let the pressure to explain myself to the world guide my art to the point where it was consuming me and my every waking hour. This pressure that comes from the systemic oppression and erasure we experience as trans folks had seeped into every area of my life and had stopped me from living, making me think I had to explain myself if I wanted to have a space in the world. This was the spell I was making with my body as I was writing, and it was bleeding me dry.

So I finally stopped, I cut the narrative short and faced myself right on the page. Then, after I stopped, I wrote a short piece imagining what life would be actually like after graduating, and ended the project there.

ii.

*Diario nb* grows from a tradition of queer storytelling and world-building that has taken place across generations in multiple geographies. It’s the kind of telling that’s been uttered for young queer people by
Mothers such as Pepper LaBeija and Angie Extravaganza while they cared for them in New York in the 80’s and 90’s (as shown in the documentary *Paris is Burning*, directed by Jennie Levingston); and it’s the tradition alive in Camila Sosa Villada’s auto-fictional novel *Las Malas*, where La Tía Encarna, the oldest travesti in 1990’s Córdoba, Argentina, welcomes other travestis into her house and gives them refuge, community, and support. It’s the kind of telling that hopefully allows others like me to feel that we’re possible and that our lives can have joy and community but doesn’t shy away from the moments of doubt and crises, the kind of in-depth record somebody will find online when they’re questioning their identity and they’re trying to find answers or better questions.

The tradition of storytelling, of passing down knowledge and experience about being queer and the tradition of care and community between queer people is of course older than these two examples, and it goes beyond the realm of the arts to encompass the activism done by important transcestors like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, who fought for LGBTQ+ rights in the 60’s and 70’s in the US, and also current attempts to create an archive of trans history in places like the US (Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art), the UK (Museum of Transology), and Argentina (Archivo Trans). Indeed, due to the systemic oppression and erasure of trans and queer embodiments brought about by colonization and many other violent historical forces, our efforts to survive have taken many forms that don’t fit neatly into the boxes or categories offered by current academic standards, and rather exist in hybrid and liminal spaces.

During my research, and in the midst of a pandemic, I saw these spaces continue to proliferate on the internet, where queer people have created websites, vlogs, reddit communities, articles, Instagram accounts, and many other digital venues and hubs for those of us who didn’t have access to knowledge and stories that could help us understand or complicate who we are AFK. Zoom events with trans activists and poets like Alok Vmenon; websites like The Gender Dysphoria Bible; pictures of dissident gender

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2 Away from Keyboard, a term widely used by Legacy Russel in their book Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto, which comes from chat rooms in the 1990’s to indicate that “you won't be available at your computer or device for a period of time.” (Insider)
3 An open source website with a lot of information about dysphoria that should nevertheless not be used as a medical or psychological self diagnosis guide.
expression by my trans siblings @flvmeprincess, @indyamoore, @breakthebinary and many others; film and television reviews by Drew Gregory on the queer publication Autostraddle, the photo essay Trisha by Vivek Shraya; and many, many discussions over reddit with trans people of all walks of life, ages, and nationalities, talking about hormones, dysphoria, passing, fears, etc., are continuing the tradition of building community and support to survive the mounting oppression we keep experiencing worldwide in the early 21st Century.

In this virtual ecosystem, Diario nb, for me, tries to occupy a space that is longer than what you usually find on the internet (which goes from a few words on instagram posts to a few hundred on reviews and articles to thousands on comedy specials), and one which considers questions and ideas I hadn’t really seen addressed in the many discussion boards and personal narratives I’d read on the subject of being and discovering one’s trans and/or nonbinary identity (I consider myself both nonbinary and trans, which is not something all trans or nonbinary people do). My particular timeline (not having figured out I was trans until I was late in my 20’s), as well as fixation with binary understandings of gender and the discomfort I experienced through them early in my journey, influenced by my passion for philosophy, theory, radical vulnerability, and a decolonial need to understand myself and the world outside of Western constructs (which has driven me to challenge the divide between mind and body), coupled with my immigrant reality, my geographical location, my bilingualism, and my practice of embodiment, felt important to get out out of my body and into the world. The specificity of my story, I hope, could start conversations about identity and embodiment that I desperately want to be a part of, conversations that stay hidden in the day to day thanks to the many ways capitalism and colonialism have of keeping us away from and afraid of ourselves and our bodies.

In the ecosystem of the literary, I knew there was a big queer canon available to me, and the internet was full of lists about the best of the best through history, but I wanted to trust my instincts and only read the books that were speaking to me from the samples, interviews, reviews, descriptions, and authors I stumbled upon whether in research or randomly online. Some of these included Villada’s Las Malas,
Vuong’s *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous*, Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, and Emezi’s *Dear Senthuran*.

There’s little in common between all of those titles, but each of them gave me language that I needed for my own writing and my journey discovering my trans identity. *Diario nb* wants to be a safe and critical space for those who are questioning, just like *Las Malas* became my home when I was trying to understand what it was like to exist in the world as a trans person in South America (Argentina being a very specific, but close enough point of reference for me), but it wants to expand the binary understanding of transitioning that leaves so many of us nonbinary folks without accurate representation. The book also wants to create a space for queer Colombians and hopefully other South Americans living in the US who, like me, are looking for the language to understand the ways our pressure to assimilate affect our identity, and where that conflict between our roots, our mother tongue, and our present, keep challenging and transforming us, like Ocean Vuong does so masterfully in his novel from a Vietnamese perspective.

Like *The Argonauts*, *Diario nb* doesn’t want to shy away from the body and its transformations, but where Maggie Nelson focuses on her pregnancy, *Diario nb* goes through hormone transition, a very different but equally complex journey. In the same vein as her book, though, where Nelson challenges many of the stereotypical notions majority culture has about being pregnant and giving birth, this project is not interested in following the stereotypical timeline for what medical transition is, but complicating it, opening in it up to other possibilities that move away from the binary.

Finally, like *Dear Senthuran* and a lot of Emezi’s work, *Diario nb* is very intentional about the translation that happens between what’s inside me, and how it comes out for others. As Emezi writes, “I talk often about making unleashed work […] about writing without censorship, writing the way we think, not translating it for the humans or the West or white people, not worrying if it fits form, if it had precedent, if we’ll be able to make a living from it, just writing because these stories, these word, are the truest things we know.” (Emezi, 89) *Diario nb* is not fearless, because I’m not fearless yet about who I am, but it wants to challenge that fear head on, write what is usually left out.
In relationship to the literary, but also violently crossed by performance art, Diario nb exists in the same ecosystem as Gabrielle Civil’s Swallow the Fish, a “memoir in performance art that explores the medium from within its beating heart.” My interest in hybrid forms fed from Civil’s use of her personal archive, poetry and narrative to reflect on her life and embodiment as a performance artist. The memoir’s willingness to explore “who got to [do performance art]? Who got to be a performance artist? Which people in which bodies?” showed me that my understanding of gender as a performance (developed from Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble), and my artistic pursuits had overlapped, and I started questioning “who gets to transition? Who gets to be trans? Which people in which bodies?” And it went further than that, to the intimate, when I saw my own questions reflected in her work: “what does it mean to have a body, to be in one? What does it mean for me to have this body, to be in this body for itself?”

Swallow the Fish’s ecosystem was, of course, already populated by other texts and artists, and, in a trend I’ve seen in the memoirs or autobiographical books I’ve mentioned before, Civil made an effort to include or reference some of this work in her book. Thus, Diario nb enters an expansive exchange with other worlds, including Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s, another performance artist, whose essay “In Defense of Performance Art” further blurred the line between my performance of gender and the body, and my artistic pursuit. “In fact, our main artwork is our own body, ridden with semiotic, political, ethnographic, cartographic and mythical implications,” says Peña, and even though he’s talking about the performance artist’s body, I think it suggests a deeper question: are all of our bodies not inscribed in these systems of value that are “semiotic, political, ethnographic, cartographic, and mythical”? Are we not all performing artists in a way? Later on he adds “Perhaps the ultimate goal of performance […] is to decolonize our bodies; and make these decolonizing mechanisms apparent to our audience in the hope that they will get inspired to do the same with their own,” and I know that he’s talking about performance art again, but as a trans person, I understand what he means in a bigger scope. Whenever I’m in a public space, I feel like just me being there is already challenging what people think certain bodies can do and what spaces they can occupy. Without any kind of choice, my body is always “occupied” by the eyes of others, but I perform anyway, I exist, and I hope that in my doing others will get inspired to the same.
That is where my improvisational approach to writing came from, the way I would let my trains of thought and my body tell me where to go next, what idea to explore or what story or text to weave into the narrative. I set up the parameters of my archive and let myself free within them. And there’s one final performance artist who helped me realize that even though I was only thinking and writing, and not dancing or articulating my body in specific ways or engaging with ideas in physical space for my project, what I was doing was a performance: Adrian Piper, also referenced in Gabrielle Civil’s book. “I would like to make a case for a new occupation for artists… I will call the occupation I have in mind “Meta-art.”… By “meta-art.” I mean the activity of making explicit the thought processes, procedures, and presupposition of making whatever kind of art we make… [Meta-art] requires an epistemic self-consciousness… namely viewing ourselves as the aesthetic objects we are, then elucidating as fully as possible the thoughts, procedures, and presuppositions that so define us.” (Civil, 231)

This quote from Piper’s Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. II, included in Swallow the Fish, was the last piece I needed in my puzzle, and curiously enough I had somewhat forgotten about it during my writing, only to rediscover it while writing this preface. Meta-art sounded exactly like what I was doing: exploring my thought process of what it was like and what it meant to be trans for me in this moment and this geography. Diario nb wants to question what is art when that art is a continuation of an embodiment, rather than something that goes along in a parallel tangent. Maybe more than meta-art, I want to talk about being-art. Maybe more than performance art as a discipline, I want to talk about being embodied as a possibility for art.

Diario nb is interested in talking to all these other texts, to be in conversation with these artists, and to exist in the live space of performance art. Even though it’s made of pixels or ink, this project wants to drip with the blood and hormones of its author, pumping life out of the page.

iii.

So what is Diario nb?
For me, *Diario nb* is an entity that exists in text, but that is alive with my story and my thoughts. It’s a part of me that I’ve translated for others, but that feels more like an exorcism than anything else.

As a literary text, though, *Diario nb* is a hybrid-memoir that gathers materials from my digital archive, including diary entries, poetry, academic essays and short stories I wrote for class, photos and videos, to tell the story of how I came to the realization that I was trans, what it was like to live with that realization for the first few months after it happened, and how I feel about it now, almost a year after it all happened. It’s also a book about our need to explain ourselves for others, and the suffering that need can bring into our lives.

The reason I chose to do a first person memoir to tell this story is because I wanted to be vulnerable in my writing, I wanted to be transparent about my process and show where it was taking me every step of the way. Like Adrian Piper, I was interested in meta-art, in making my thought process explicit.

As for the use of my archive, I decided to use it because I’ve always been obsessed with history and records, and when I saw that I had gathered a lot of material detailing my thinking and my body and my changes through time, I immediately started engaging with it critically, and I thought that this dialogue between past and present was able to elucidate a lot of the assumptions we tend to make as a society about trans folks. By engaging with my confused and conflicted past self, I was able to frame the doubts and see a way forward, which is something I would’ve loved to see when I was going through the thick of it.

The essays and diary entries I included were especially significant to do that because they contained a lot of ideas that I had moved past from, but they also reflected a lot of the doubts and questions a lot of trans folks ask on forums or comment sections online.

In the case of poetry, I wanted to show how the malleability of language had allowed me to embody my feminine self even before I started medically transitioning, something that I’d love more and more people to be able to do when exploring their gender. It also allowed me to create a space outside of the narrative where I felt like I could rest and reset between part 1 and 2 of the book.
Regarding the photographs and video stills that I included, I wanted to exist not only as text but as a physical image in the book. I wanted to show that all the thoughts expressed in the story were happening inside the physical body of a real person. They also allowed me to ground all the language into the physical world.

Finally, the arrangement of all of these parts happened almost by chance, simply following the archive from point A (the video that shows the moment I understood I was trans) to point B (the diary entry I wrote after I came out to my parents), and following my train of thought as I assembled the pieces. There are many detours throughout the book, but they all happened organically as I was writing. The big sections, Part 1, Poemario nb, and Part 2, came up after I was done with the first draft of the story and I realized that the tone switched the same way my life had switched between 2020 and 2021 when I got back to El Paso after the trip with my parents.

iv.

As I was thinking about this project, and as I started writing pieces of it, the idea of sharing space with all of the authors I’ve referenced was something aspirational. If we put out texts together, would they talk? What would Diario nb have to add to the conversation? What audience could it bring to all this amazing work that complemented it? What do I have to say to Gabrielle Civil, to Akwaeke Emezi, to Adrian Piper?

And I guess what I have to say is that I’m here. Diario nb is my naming. I’m Sergio Andrés Godoy Prieto, I’m from Colombia but I live in El Paso, Texas, I’m trans and nonbinary, I’m medically transitioning, and I exist in the constant flux of borders and embodiments. Like Diario nb, I’m hybrid, I pull from many sources to make myself. I am part of an old tradition of queer storytellers but I exist in the present, with technology as an intrinsic part of who I am and how I move through the world. I exist between the digital and the corporeal, performing in all spaces and continuing to grow and evolve.
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Vita 114
Diario nb

I sit here with estrogen in my system, ready to write. It’s a sunny day in El Paso, and it’s finally warm, which I love. I don’t really like the cold months here, but I know I should be thankful we still get them at all. I’m sitting in a yellow, cozy armchair that we got with K, my partner, from the same family that sold us our dining table. I’m facing it towards the window so I can look up and see the endless blue.

I’m trying to show where I am because my thesis director says that’s what I’m missing mostly, and I know he’s right. It’s just hard to hold my body down long enough to go through all the details that make up my experience. Like Gabrielle Civil says in her book Swallow the Fish, “Emphasize the brain. I’m not much of a body.”

I’m trying to be present, though. To do full body writing where my fingers are as into it as my blood-pumping heart, and the air in my lungs is as fresh as the words on the page. I’m trying I’m trying I’m trying to be present because this writing keeps shutting me out. Or maybe I keep shutting it down. I’m not sure.

In theory my task is very simple: I just have to write down a narrative of what happened since I discovered I was not the person I thought I was. November 27th, 2020, the day I discovered I was trans. When I sit down to write, however, details come up and narratives and questions and things that open up more possibilities than I can handle. It’s endless. My brain spills like water over the the ragged and broken

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4 This text is a combination of something I wrote on March 17th and something I’m writing today, April 17th, a month later. I didn’t plan it to be this cyclical, but it’s just the way some things seem to work in my world. Much of the book has been written at this point, but I still need to figure out how to begin. That’s why I’m here in this footnote, metaphysically and literally.

5 My partner, my love, the queer being I met here in El Paso, and with whom I’ve grown hand in hand during this time. They hail from Denver, Colorado. Part of her family lives there, on her mom’s side, and on her dad’s side, most of them live in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from where we live, El Paso, TX. They are also a playwright, a poet, an event organizer, and all around one of the best people I’ve met in my short life.

6 Yes, this is a thesis project I started during my MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Texas at El Paso. I was an international student from Colombia, who knows what I am now.

7 This was the original aim of this project, a narrative in which I would explain and present myself to the world by showing how I first crossed the line from thinking I was a cis man to believing I was a trans woman, and then from thinking I was a trans woman to now where I’m exhausted by labels and I consider myself an undefined nonbinary body on estrogen, or just me, Sergio.
surface that is my body and it falls through the cracks and covers every fold. It drowns me. This is why I need to be present, I need flesh and bone to contain all of that liquid writing and give it some form.

Can these words be as good as bones for this written body? Can the pixels or the ink or the paper be as good as flesh or skin?

And what about the non-written part of me, the one that’s typing this out while looking at the screen? Can its bones and flesh contain me?

(...) There’s that silence again. My head heavy with thought, trying to translate all the noise into the page. No, there’s no body that can contain me. There’s always so much left out. Like the back pain I keep massaging with one hand over and over again while I write this, my body telling me I need to get on with it or quit.

To tell you the truth, dear reader, I’m scared of getting on with it. I’ve tried and I haven’t quit and you’ll see part of my journey, but it’s been hard. Este cuerpo that you’re reading, with its black-ink on white-paper skin, carries in its heart a lot of my pain and my suffering. Don’t be alarmed if it screams or shakes, if it confuses you or asks you weird questions. It means well.

I’m scared of getting on with it because each time I do and I write about what’s happened to me, I’ve also relived the fears and doubts that have plagued a lot of my experience, and each time it gets harder on my body.

Why did I write it, then? Why do I write?

I just want to be seen, and bodies like mine seem to need instructions to be seen.

Do I need a body to be seen? Will my body be enough? I don’t know.

I just know that I brought my body here today, to this writing and typing of my thoughts, to pump blood into this other body that I’m writing. That way I’ll have two and if one doesn’t make it maybe the other one will.
I think I’m ready.\(^8\)

\textbf{January 23rd, 2022}

\textbf{Intro}\(^9\)

I’m Sergio.

Soy Sergio.

Why, por qué, am I, estoy, speaking, hablando, en, in, both, ambos, lenguages? Lenguajes? Spanish, español, and English, e inglés.

Mi voz, my voice, cambia, changes, cuando hablo, when I speak, español, Spanish, e inglés, and English.

I, yo, change, cambio, when I speak Spanish or English, cuando hablo inglés o español.

Pero no estoy dividie, but I’m not divided. Soy ambos, soy yo en ambos idiomas. I am both, I am me in both languages.

I’m trying, estoy intentando, to contain both in the same sentence, contener a ambos en la misma frase, but both Spanish and English, pero tanto el español como el inglés, spill out in different ways, se derraman de formas diferentes.

English starts getting weird and funny.

Y el español se pone serio y profundo.

And they both start, y ambos empiezan, to explore different things, a explorar vainas diferentes, things that make me who I am, cosas que me hacen ser quien soy.

I tried to contain, intenté contener, who I am, quién soy, for 27 years, por 27 años, in two different boxes, en dos compartimentos diferentes, man, hombre, and woman, y mujer, but it turns out that I’m neither and both, pero resulta que soy ambos y ninguno, and more, y más.

I’m not only Spanish or English, I’m both and beyond.

No soy español o inglés, soy ambos y mucho más.

I’m not Colombian nor American, I’m a traveler of Abya Yala. Immigrant.

No soy colombiano o americano, soy viajera de Abya Yala. Inmigrante.

Soy mezcla de razas, I’m mixed raced.

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\(^8\) And well, if the Angel Olsen song I’m listening to has any say in my writing, like I think it does, I should probably go ahead and make a Whole New Mess.

\(^9\) I’ve always been obsessed with presenting myself before I start. Setting up the stakes. Who am I? Why should you listen to me?
I’m more than a masculine or feminine, but I am also both.

Soy más que masculino o femenino, pero también soy ambos.

I’m, estoy, sick, harto, of containing myself, de contenerme.
Chapter 1: Part I

Looking for the beginning in my digital archive…
Go into the Notes app,
on the category of Personales,
and check there, then
select the folder inside that folder called
Gender,
there’s two notes:

Reddit Nonbinary post, created on October 2nd, 2021
Gender, edited on October 2nd, 2021 and created January 3rd, 2021

At the bottom of that last one is a section where I write what I’m feeling about my gender on January 3rd, 2021. I’m wondering if I should address my mental health first before really considering being trans.

That’s not the beginning.
Go to your Photos app,
into your Hidden folder,
and scroll up up up,
and if you see masc nudes you’ve gone too far.
Go back down,
past your rant about HIMYM,
there:

27:59 minutes.
Captured right after that first strong feeling of having breasts instead of my flat chest.

Friday, November 27, 2020, 2:58 PM
The day I discovered I was trans.

Trying to explain what it felt like to be in front of that mirror that first day,
I wrote a short story,
It’s in Desktop>>Maestria>>6. Fall Semester 2021>>1. Queer Writing>>Final Project.
It’s called, On being

i.

When Sergio looked at herself in the mirror wearing a bra, it was like she could ignore her beard and see what existed behind it. The feminine features her mom had passed down to her, things people always pointed out like her eyelashes, the shape of her face, and her laugh, showed in exquisite ways. Her eyes were curious, her chest was heaving, and her ass was looking firm and fine.

The smell of weed was still present in the room, and the afternoon sun was coming in skewed through the bedroom window, bouncing off the white walls and avoiding her brown, hairy skin like it wasn’t ready for the goddess in the room. Sergio’s eyes kept moving over her body, rewriting her anatomy and seeing what had been hidden for almost twenty nine years. She was wearing a blue, sexy bra and pink panties that belonged to her partner, the only wardrobe she had at her disposal, and she couldn’t help but keep touching her sock-filled bra like they were her own breasts.

“Well I need this,” she said to herself, “I definitely need this in my life.”

It was only after a few minutes that she finally landed back on Earth and realized that her discovery threatened to destroy her life as she knew it, and that, moving forward, it was going to be rough.
On Sunday November 29th 2020,

Two days after the fact,
I recorded a podcast where I wanted to leave a record of what had brought me there in the first place.
It’s on the Voice Memos app,
I had finished cooking my breakfast, and was sitting at our dining table. Scrambled eggs with ham on tortillas.
I called the file: Coming out as Trans to myself.
It starts with the sound of me tapping my fingers on the table.

... *Pues parce*....

... *I realized that, um*...

... *First of all, it’s easier to be a woman in English.*

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In English my voice has a higher pitch, which at the time felt more feminine than my voice in Spanish.
“Everything” had started on the summer of 2020, amidst a global pandemic, when a teacher I had in Colombia, the Oscar nominated director Ciro Guerra, was accused of sexual abuse and misconduct by several women in the online feminist portal Volcánicas. I spiraled. Guerra was someone I looked up to, a brown man like me who had made it in Hollywood. He was Colombia’s Quarón or Iñarritu. He gave me hope for my future\textsuperscript{11}. How could he think his behaviour was okay? And most horrifyingly, what about my sexuality? Had I ever done anything similar?

I spent the next few weeks going over all the parties I’d been to in my head, all of my sexual encounters, trying to really make sure that I hadn’t crossed any lines. What if I hadn’t noticed something? What if I did hurt someone or make someone uncomfortable and they didn’t feel like they could stop me because I was a man?

I myself am the victim of sexual abuse, so the idea that I could be a perpetrator, that I could hurt someone else that much, was terrifying. Hopefully, after a lot of self reflection, I understood that from my point of view I hadn’t crossed any lines. But was that good? Was my point of view enough? Wasn’t Guerra the hero in his own story?

After weeks of internal crisis, I came to the conclusion that from what I could tell, I had never abused anybody sexually, but I made a promise to myself that if anyone ever said that I had, I would do whatever’s necessary to help that person heal. That’s the kind of being I want to be. No excuses.

Guerra responded to the accusations soon after the Volcánicas article came out by denying them, and threatening to take legal action towards the journalists who’d published it. It was really disappointing. I thought: what kind of privilege must you have to think that you can sexually abuse someone and then not take responsibility for it? And the answer was: male privilege.

Guerra’s story showed me how no man (or male perceived body) is safe from working for the patriarchy and oppressing others as long as our current patriarchal, racist, white-supremacist, and capitalist systems stay the same. What they might do is harm reduction, try to find a kind of capitalist equality for

\textsuperscript{11} I studied film in college and had always wanted to “make it”.
people of all genders, races, nationalities, etc., but it’s not long term. Long term, there needs to be a revolution.

On one of those days of quarantine summer, when we were discussing male privilege, K told me that when we started going out, her experience of walking the streets of El Paso had changed. She felt safer. Before me, she was usually the only one walking the street, and she got a lot of catcalls, but now, nothing. I understood then that the patriarchy’s work is not only about who men are as people, it’s also based on men’s bodies and the privilege they hold in the world. For example, because my body fits the cosmetic standard for “maleness,” the society and culture I live in is willing to overlook my rage, my aggressiveness, and my possible sexual transgressions, wether it’s catcalling or rape, and see it as “natural” or “instinctual”.

Of course, my body and how I look shouldn’t determine what people think of me in the world or how I should be treated by the State or any other institution, person, or business. Even the Constitution of the USA says that. That’s the idea, at least, but the reality is that men do have historically gotten away with most of the damage they’ve done to others, at least until recent years when the conversation has moved forward thanks to efforts like the #MeToo.

The other side of that coin, though, is that a non-cis-man who has heard from other people or the news that men can follow you, that they can rape you if they get the change, and will probably kill you in a fit of jealousy; a non-cis-man who has felt the violence of the patriarchy in their own skin, is not always going to weight in those options if it’s just them and a man walking down the street. The protective layer built into men’s bodies thanks to the patriarchy works also against them on the street, when, for example, a woman feels unsafe and crosses the street to avoid someone who might kill, rape, or abduct her.

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12 El Paso’s streets are almost always empty of pedestrians, except for Downtown.
13 Out of every 1,000 perpetrators, 975 will walk free, according to RAINN, the US’ largest anti-sexual violence organization.
14 Trans people try to explain this to cis people all the time, but for the opposite reason. We shouldn’t be treated any different from anyone else because of how our bodies look.
15 Just a few of the many violences women experience when they are not in their home.
Facing the harsh realities that my male privilege allowed me to ignore for so long made me realize that because I was born with a body that was classified as “male,” there were a lot of things that were decided for me without my consent, and a majority of them I didn’t agree with.

This violence living in me messed me up. I felt hopeless. Was I doomed to be a man?

Luckily, an earlier experience had made me confront a part of that question, and I was already trying to be different from what was expected of me and my body.

In October, 2018, when I was in Colombia working for a documentary called *When the Guns Go Silent*, I started an emotional affair with a woman that I met on Twitter who had a boyfriend of 6 years. We only ever texted, and I’ve since deleted all our messages, but it was intense. I’ll call her E.E and I met when I messaged her on Twitter after she posted a tweet about loving and being grateful for her family. We bonded through that and started talking. On day three we had this exchange, which I took from Twitter:

**S:** Y espero descansar esta noche porque casi que seguí derecho, gracias!

**E:** Ojalá si puedas; yo no funcionaría sin dormir

**S:** Jeje, cuánto duermes para estar bien? Yo hace rato no logro ni 7 horas :/

**E:** Para estar bien necesito mínimo 9 jajaja pero logró casi siempre 7, a veces con suerte 8

**S:** Jajaja, uy según eso yo hace rato no estoy bien

**E:** Jajajajja que triste

**S:** :( 

**E:** Cuando quieras nos escapamos un fin de semana a dormir todo el día jajaja

**S:** Ush por favor!! Un fin de semana de dormir debe ser lo más rico del mundo.
We started flirting, thinking about what we’d do if we could get away from it all and go to a place like Cartagena, a beautiful city on the Caribbean coast of Colombia where you usually go to relax and be by the beach. From that, we moved on to thinking about other things we could to together, and we spent a few months building a relationship that toyed with the line between friendship and something more.

Then, after I’d become emotionally invested in our conversations, E started being distant and curt, and when I asked her if anything was wrong she said I knew she had a boyfriend and nothing was ever going to happen, so I should stop talking about going away or being with her. When I told her that what I felt was real, she said that I was only a man, a player, and I’d say anything to get with her.

My feelings for her were real, and they had developed through several months of exchanges, but she also had a point. At the time, after my first breakup and first mental crisis\textsuperscript{16}, I felt soulless. Trying to being-in-love my way out of sadness and numbness, going on autopilot to fill an emptiness that never seem to leave. She was right to point out that I’d say anything to get what I wanted, because my crush wasn’t coming from a loving space and I would have said things that I didn’t mean to gain her love.

And yet, being a man or having a male body had doomed any discussion or validation of my feelings. I was just a player. No matter how much I told her I was different, she couldn’t trust me.

I’m thankful to her because that was a wake up call to the way I was relating to women back then. It startled me out of autopilot and after it happened I started to make an effort to change. I became celibate by choice, and tried to get closure from the wounds I had created in my path through the pain. I had several conversations with women I’d gone out with where I opened up about my feelings, about what I wanted, and apologized for not having been clear or upfront about where I was emotionally from the start. I’m friends with most of them now.

The one person I never got closure from was E. After she made it clear that nothing would ever happen between us I had to be honest with myself and decided to back away from the friendship (several

\textsuperscript{16} A mental breakdown I experienced when I was 24 due to the stress I was under with my job in the documentary.
times until it stuck) because I knew I couldn’t be friends with her. I had a lot of feelings that I couldn’t control, and she wasn’t open to trusting my friendship anyway.

I actually recently wrote her something, a kind of personal closure that she’ll never read, a letter I’ll never send, like in the movies. I thought about sending it, but I think it's been too long and it wouldn’t do any good for any of us. We are at peace at a distance, even without closure.

If I go to my Notes app, inside the Tésis folder, there it is, written on December 6th, 2021:

Hola E, sé que hace mucho no hablamos, pero he cambiado mucho desde que nos hicimos amigues, y la verdad es que el proceso que me ha llevado hasta aquí se avivó contigo, y siempre te lo he querido decir pero creo que hasta ahora tengo el valor. Me acuerdo mucho una conversación que tuvimos donde me dijiste de frente que yo era basicamente un fuckboy. El dolor que me produjo saber que tenías toda la razón me ayudó a ver que había un malestar interno muy fuerte con mi masculinidad, y gracias a eso he podido crecer y llegar a un punto donde siento que soy auténticamente yo y donde estoy actuando con mis valores, y pues estoy mucho más feliz. Siempre que pienso en las relaciones que han sido importantes para mi vida te tengo presente porque tu fuiste la que tocó ese nervio, y pues nada, qué lindo como se dan las cosas y cómo llega gente a tu vida para encausarte en un nuevo río.

I haven’t signed it yet, and I don’t think I will. I just think it says everything I feel about our relationship, and it’s a good reminder that it happened and it meant something important: It started me on the path I keep walking today.

Back in my apartment in El Paso in November of 2020, I was recounting all of this to my iPhone as I was finishing a now cold breakfast. I was trying to find signs in my past to confirm that I my discovery was true, I thought I had to trace it down, like solving the mystery of who I was or why I was.
The last thing I say of note in the recording is that after that summer, I decided to take a feminist theory course as part of my masters, and it was in that class where the feminist and queer readings我们 did started chipping away at the wall I had built around myself protecting me from anything cuir.18 I’d done a lot of personal work by then, but it was that class which gave me really concrete tools to dismantle a lot of the beliefs I had around gender and queerness. It was an essential step, and sifting through the essays I wrote for the class, I can see myself working through something that I didn’t have language for yet. For example, after we read a few of the feminist manifestos written in the 70’s and 80’s, the professor, V, asked us to write our own, and even though I was excited to write it, I had trouble figuring out what I wanted to say:

Sept. 19, 2020

Manifesto

Dear V,

I am sorry for not turning in the manifesto on time. The reality is I have been thinking about it for a week, since I read the Chicana manifestos, but every time I sit down to write, I have too many things to put down in one document, and I can’t seem to come up with any actual ideas about what I have to say.

During these past few months I have struggled with my masculinity (accepting the peculiar way in which I perform masculinity, which has been a problem with other men and within myself in the past), my male privilege, my economic privilege, my gender privilege, my education, my country’s history, my personal history and my identity in general. I found struggles of race, colonization, gender and, again, masculinity, living on my body and in my mind, with deep roots in behaviors that I had never questioned before.

17 From Judith Butler to Jack Halberstam to José Esteban Muñoz.
18 A way to write queer in spanish, based on how the word sounds phonetically.
I have welcomed these challenges into my life, and have undergone a profound reevaluation of my relationships to the world and to the people in it. I now understand that there’s a lot that I need to learn and unlearn in order to understand the complexity of my being, my place in this world of power systems that are always tugging at who we are, taking us through history in a frenzy. I still struggle with all of this ideas and how they affect the life that I led before I started this process, how they’ve changed me.

I face every day the fear that there might be something that I’m saying or that I’m communicating with my body or my clothes or my being, that is oppressing another human being or communities of human beings. In my relationship, I am constantly aware of how I communicate with my body and my voice, and how I help to create a non-patriarchal space where my partner and I can grow together.

I understand that I am not perfect, that there are many things out of my control, and that I might fail in trying to do what I think is right. I know that I will be wrong and I am ready to be accountable for my mistakes. I know that this road is never ending and that I will keep being aware of these things hopefully for ever. I also know that I never feel as happy as when I am making an effort to change the world for the better, and that’s the reason why I don’t ever want to give up.

I find myself in the middle of all of these questions, all of these struggles, and I don’t really know where my place is in all of it. For example, in my own body, which is seen simply and broadly as male, I live a contradiction. I am male, yes, but I am also brown, which mean there’s a kind of privilege that I don’t have access to. I look male, yes, but my behavior, clothes, and general sensitivity have been mocked by other
people for being too feminine, or not masculine enough. In my own mind there is a voice of shame that has led me to believe, in the past, that my way of being was wrong, and yet, another voice has made me painfully aware that just based on the physical form of my body, a woman might be scared of me if I’m walking behind her. In my body lives the oppressor and my liberator.

In my road to something new, I have had to question the patriarchy in all of its forms, i.e. sexism, racism, capitalism, colonization, imperialism, etc. I have had to confront the fear that I feel when I realize that even if I have knowledge of what’s wrong with the world, in order to be consequent, I need to actually change, take action. I have had to confront the fear of losing my economic privilege, my male privilege, etc., and I have also had to confront the knowledge that this line of questioning makes me really uncomfortable sometimes and that it’s good.

Maybe, though, I am not in the middle of two things, but in the middle of three or more. This is why I think that I can’t write the manifesto right now. I am living the period before I am able to write the manifesto. I need a third perspective. I now have a need to organize and keep talking about the strange place that I am in right now. To discuss with fellow men but also with a diverse group of people about these ideas and where they could lead a movement focused on concrete action.

I want the manifesto that I am a part of to be a community effort, based on a non-hierarchical exchange of ideas from a diverse set of backgrounds. I want a manifesto that is capable of change, a manifesto that moves through time just as we do. Maybe some day I will get there but for now I feel like I only have the questions.
Just like this book, writing this non-manifesto took a lot of energy, and I can see that energy in the way my consciousness moves through the text, confused, ashamed, and uncertain.

The intention that I had set up after meeting E was still there, I wanted to change, but there was all this weight I was carrying and I didn’t feel like I knew how to let it go or how to move forward.

A few weeks later, on October 31st, I wrote a response for the class that I look back on as a turning point. The title is *On a transformation*, and I wrote it after reading Jack Halberstam, an anarchist and queer theorist that really struck a nerve. In the conclusion, I wrote:

What Halberstam suggests is that we all should embrace intelligibility, even or especially within the normalized majority, in order to really dismantle systems of oppression. We must not normalize queerness within the mainstream, but make the mainstream queer. This was just mind blowing to me, as I’ve often felt at odds with the monolithic idea of masculinity and “manhood”, but haven’t felt like I could understand myself as queer. What I’m thinking is that maybe, if I am to unbelieve in heteronormativity (another term I understand from Halberstam’s perspective as challenging Western systems of thought by unbelieving in the institutions that uphold them) I would like to engage with intelligibility, existing as part of certain historical representations of gender, but not really defining myself in a category. This process is easier said than done, and I actually wouldn’t know where to start, but I do think it’s something worthy of exploration.

Maybe this is the moment where I subconsciously opened myself up to queerness from a political standpoint. Was it enough to want to change? To set an intention? To question my masculinity? To try to support the cause against the patriarchy and heteronormativity while maintaining a clear connection to it? Why was I so invested in not crossing that line, and how did that decision affect the efforts made by other queer people to exist and thrive in a queerphobic society?

When I look back at my archive\(^\text{19}\) to see how I’d been trying to deal with these questions before I had the knowledge to actually address them, I find a recording I made soon after finding out about Ciro

\(^{19}\) The archive is all of the digital files (diary entries, reddit posts, essays, photos, videos, notes, etc.), that I’ve created and/or collected since I started engaging with queerness during the pandemic.
Guerra’s sexual abuse allegations, it’s called Masculinity 1 (spoiler: there’s no second part). I recorded it on June 26th, 2020 when I was alone in the first apartment we shared with my partner K while they were in Denver, their home town, with their friends.

I had just watched Hannah Gadsby’s Nanette, a comedy show where Gadsby questioned the role of comedy in a world where we tend to avoid having tense, sometimes uncomfortable discussions about issues that actually affect people’s lives, issues like violence targeted at anti-LGBTQ+ people, which Gadsby talks about from her own experience. Towards the end, after describing the true nature of an episode of violence which at the beginning of the show she had presented as a joke, she says:

“He beat the shit out of me and nobody stopped him. And I didn’t... report that to the police, and I did not take myself to hospital, and I should have. And you know why I didn't? It's because I thought that was all I was worth. And that is what happens when you soak one child in shame and give permission to another to hate. And that was not homophobia, pure and simple, people. That was gendered. If I’d been feminine, that would not have happened. I am incorrectly female. I am incorrect, and that is a punishable offense. And this tension, it's yours. I am not helping you anymore. You need to learn what this feels like because this... this tension is what not-normals carry inside of them all of the time because it is dangerous to be different!”

Gadsby, a self-described butch lesbian writer-performer with autism, showed me with her performance that me being “incorrectly” male or female was possible, which I didn’t know before, and that it didn’t mean that I was any less deserving of love and care and joy. It made me realize that the tension I carried around my own masculinity wasn’t all mine, it was put on me by gender expectations that were impossible to fulfill.
Watching *Nannette* also helped me release a lot of the pain I had been gathering in my body because of my failure to comply with hegemonic ideas of masculinity, it allowed me to cry away all the tension and self doubt I had felt before trying to fit in with “men”, trying to be okay with their violence and their aggressions against me. I noticed I had been really strong and had learned to survive, but it felt like a cruel performance, and I was sad to see how much damage it had done to me.

If Ciro Guerra’s story had made me question the patriarchy, my privilege and my past behaviour from the perspective of the violence they were capable of, Gadsby’s Nannette showed me the ways in which the patriarchy had fucked me over, the ways it had made it difficult to exist in my own skin.

Going back to the recording, it’s clear that I was having a crisis, but what I hear revisiting it is a lot of truth that’s coming out. How they say in Mexico, me estaban cayendo puros veintes.

The recording begins:

... *Bueno, quiero que esto quede*...

... *Estoy haciendo esta grabación porque creo que el momento que estoy viviendo tiene que significar algo en el futuro, bueno o malo tiene que significar algo en el futuro porque es bastante emotivo y grande. Pero entonces quiero dejar registro para reflexionar al respecto*...

It’s surprising to me to state the stakes so clearly, to declare that what I’m doing in that moment is going to mean something in the future. I’m not even considering being trans at the time, but I can feel something is brewing:

... *Acabo de ver a Hannah Gatsby en Nannette y lloré muchísimo. Lloré muchísimo muchísimo y es muy posible que llore más porque parce, he estado reprimiendo estas cosas por demasiado tiempo y esto es liberador pero también me hace cagarme del susto porque*
significa replantearme vainas que yo no pensé en la vida que me iba a tocar replantearme, o aceptar de mí mismo...

... En este momento estoy questionando mi masculinidad, y se siente absolutamente extraño decirlo en voz alta. Porque a veces ni la quiero...

... Siento que me estoy volviendo loco. Jajaja. ¿Será? ...

... Pero al mismo tiempo siento que tengo razón, tengo razón en sentir estas cosas...

... Tal vez el miedo que siento sea el instinto que tengo de contener eso, que todo siga normal, como que me aguante la tensión que existe.

I’m scared of what I’m walking into as I’m talking, questioning my masculinity. There was a lot of sentimientos encontrados. On the one hand I was happy to have continued with such force a process that would make me a better person, hopefully, but on the other I was really scared for what I’d discover. What if everything changed?

There’s echoes of this questioning later on, when I was dealing with being trans, but back when I was making this recording I didn’t even know where to start. I thought that maybe I had repressed so much of myself to be a “man”, that I had ignored one of the things I kept hearing growing up: maybe I was gay.

I had tried before to see if I could be attracted to men, and I remember being at the super market with my parents when I was a teenager and asking myself point blank “could I be gay?” and then looking at men in the aisles and not even figuring out what I was supposed to look at. What was it that women were attracted to? What part of the male body was attractive? I had no idea. Then, as I started to give up, I remember a woman walked by and my whole body lit up like a Christmas tree. I didn’t even have to think, my eyes knew exactly where to go.

Now that I was questioning my masculinity seriously and was no longer that intimidated by the prospect of finding men attractive, I tried again. It was later that summer, when I went up to Denver to meet up with K and we spent a few days with her gay friends hiking and going out to eat and smoking a lot of weed. I was nervous to be around them and maybe feeling differently about my sexuality, but what ended
up happening was that I felt really uncomfortable, and clearly not attracted to any of them. Why did I feel uncomfortable? What I can gather from my point of view now is that because I’m not a man, the fact that they saw me and treated me as one, together with the fact that one of them kept trying to flirt with me, felt really wrong. It had everything to do with me, and very little to do with them.

To be clear, I am open to liking men now, but not as a gay man but as me, my nonbinary, beautiful self.

Once I realized that liking men or accepting my possible homosexuality wasn’t the way I could start deconstructing my masculinity, I focused my desperate aims at the Feminist Theory course I was going to take that Fall semester at UTEP. And it did not disappoint.

And now we’re back. We’re back at that first weekend where all of these elements came together in front of the mirror and showed me, for a brief second, what I thought was my true face: the face of a woman.

Back then I was convinced being trans meant that if I wasn’t a man, I had to be a woman, and I think that mental framework defined how I felt in my body, making me divide everything I did between masculine and feminine, man or woman, and exhausting me in the process. From the way I talked to the way I danced, to the way I’d hold a burger or pick things up from the floor, I couldn’t escape it. My body was stretched thin by two different scripts and sets of expectations.

Eventually, almost a year later, I was able to break free from the confines of these binary options, but at the beginning, when I was starting to wrap my head around the idea of being trans, in November-December of 2020, the mirror was the territory I explored with my body to determine on which side of the masc/fem spectrum it fit. I never got any definite answers, but the process itself was so inspiring and magical that I decided to translate it into literature:

You see that your body stands before the mirror, naked, existing with the folds and curves that you’ve come to expect from a lifetime of embodiment. You see the
hairs on your legs, your pubic hair around your crotch, and a line of black hair going up to your bellybutton. There’s even some hair around your nipples on your chest that some may find attractive. Sometimes, you find it attractive too. You notice the stubble, and the square but fine lines of your face.

You notice that your body is still there in front of you, with every little detail that you’ve been too bored to get to know until now, but that others have explored freely. You see that you’ve accumulated some fat on your sides, you see that your nipples exist on two mounds of flesh that fall a little flaccid on your chest. You see that when you stand up straight and stretch your neck, it looks soft, pretty.

Your body is still standing in front of you in the mirror, contained by its edges, and when you turn and you’re able to see your nalga from the side, you see a nice and round curve. You stand your leg on your toes and you lift your butt and you can see
how it tightens and becomes as pretty as a peach. You see that if you contort your waist a little, your belly looks slim, and your form and your curves and what you know about your body transforms, right in front of your eyes, right inside the mirror.

You see your fingers run over your skin and feel your touch softly as you caress yourself the way a lover does when you have given yourself to them completely. When there is none of you and all of them. You feel your legs grow strong, you feel your new shape take form and become alive. You see your body naked and novel, standing there
in your room, with the morning light embracing it from the side. You see that you have a body.

You get the golden clip-on earrings with the red gem in the center and you attach them to your ears. You open the drawer and take out the blue bra and you fumble to put it on and you fill it with rolled up socks. You dangle your earrings around when you move, and you smile at yourself and there is love in that smile. You adjust the strap of the bra when it falls from your shoulder and you let your fingers stay there for a second on your skin and you think of all the ways your hand can feel you.

I was still holding tight to the binary idea that I had to be a woman when I wrote this, but I can see in it now an attempt to capture what it felt like to unlearn my body.

But how do you unlearn that a body that is solely perceived as male because of its biology can be more than that? What kind of thing has to happen inside you to make that leap? Or is it always within you? Is that what it is to BE trans? Is there such a thing as being trans as opposed to being cis (people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth)? Isn't that just another binary created by hegemonic powers in order to keep people in separate boxes they can control?
These questions make my head hurt even now, but they come up because there’s always inside me a need to explain who I am to other people, to explain what it’s like to be me, to justify my existence. I feel like if I can find the answers, everyone who hates me or people like me will finally back off.

Of course, in the first days after figuring out I was trans I wasn’t really thinking about society as a whole, but about the people I love, my partner K and my family and friends. I discovered I was trans when I was by myself in the apartment and K was with her family mourning the loss of her grandma. It was the worst possible timing and I knew it, but I wanted to be prepared. What if she stopped loving me? What if she left me? The risk was too big, and she already had enough on her plate, so I decided to reach out to some of my best friends instead.

First, I reached out to Lola, a friend I made in the MFA in El Paso. She was the coolest person I had ever met, she was older and had more life experience, and we really got along on subjects like feminism and queer theory so I felt safe telling her:

[3:41 PM, 11/27/2020] Sergio: Sé que puede no ser el mejor momento para tí


I don’t really remember the anxiety attack,
I have vague memories of laying in bed crying
because I thought my life was over,
but that has happened more than once so
it’s difficult to know if the time I remember
happened specifically before calling her.

As with many things from my past, this memory feels foggy.

All I know is we talked for almost an hour after I recorded the video on Nov. 27th, and that I was encouraged and celebrated by her, which is exactly what I needed at the time.

The next day I text her:


I’ve since started using they/them exclusively in English, but at the time she/hers and ella really opened up a lot of possibilities for me. It’s amazing how pronouns can change the way you more around in the world, the way a “she” can make your emotional side feel more at ease with itself.

Telling Lola and not feeling any hesitancy in my voice was really validating, and it encouraged me to reach out to a friend from Colombia, the only queer friend I have from school. We had shared an apartment for a few years in Bogotá and we had become quite close, and he made me feel like I could tell him anything so after getting a good first reaction, I reached out:

[9:35 AM, 11/28/2020] R: Que se dice el chech
[9:35 AM, 11/28/2020] R: All good?


[9:37 AM, 11/28/2020] Sergio: Jajajaja no puedo... Toca esperar a que hablemos


I call R and tell him the whole story. I had talked with him briefly about questioning my masculinity in the summer and he was so receptive back then that I felt safe telling him I was trans. He listens to me and gets excited about the prospect of me coming to terms with who I am outside of the constructs society had built for me. I think he could see I had found something I’d been struggling with for a long time.

After telling two friends that I’m trans, I was expecting to feel anxious, wanting to take it back, but I ended up feeling okay. I was nervous, yes, but it didn’t feel wrong or untrue. It felt like the truth.

Learning that I could count on people who were close to me to confide and seek support was a great early victory for myself. After I told them, R and Lola always welcomed my messages and my long calls when I was feeling down, and my network of care, which extends geographically from Colombia to Spain to the US, and in time from 1993 when I was born until now, has only grown.

The last person I told before I talked to K was V, my Feminist Theory professor. I knew from the essays I had turned in and her supportive responses to every single one of them, that she knew I was going through something, so when I reached out two days after cracking the egg\(^\text{20}\), I felt confident:

\(^{20}\) This is an expression used in trans circles to refer to the moment one realizes or comes to terms one’s trans identity.
Dear V,

I have had a sort of discovery that feels more like merely a lifting of a veil that didn’t allow myself to see me completely. I decided to try on a bra two days ago, and this incredible feeling overcame me, like I had breasts. I could imagine the contours, the softness of the skin, and even the feeling. It was a wonderful feeling, and seeing myself in the mirror, and then trying on shirts to see how the volume increased on my chest, was magical. I felt like a woman, and it felt like me, like something that’s always been there but I just couldn't see before. I stopped feeling like a man who wore women's clothing, and instead felt like a woman who's finally allowed to dress how she wants.

My body has since become more hybrid. I perceive it differently. There are moments when I can lean on my self as a man, and others where I’m discovering my self as a woman. It is mostly in my woman form that I just feel so happy to see me (since I was a teenager, I had avoided mirrors) I have come out as a woman to three people, asked them to use pronouns she/her/ella when they talk to me... And it makes me feel euphoria21 when they do. Just from using that language and

21 **Euphoria** in this case refers to “a distinct enjoyment or satisfaction caused by the correspondence between the person’s gender identity and gendered features associated with a gender other than the one assigned at birth”, like wearing a dress if you were AMAB (Assigned Male At Birth) or a binder if you were AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth). Its opposite is **Dysphoria**, which is “the distress arising from conflicts between a person’s gender identity or expression and their assigned gender/sex.”
talking about myself in Spanish as a her, I feel like I can communicate the way I have always wanted to communicate. It feels truer when I say I am contenta. And it feels amazing when someone refers to me as her. Those pronouns seem like a gate to a world where I feel true.

Although it has been a very positive experience, I have felt very alone. I reached out to the LGBTQ community at UTEP and they said I was welcomed, but I feel too strange talking to strangers, and that's why I have been trying to communicate with people who know me, who I think could understand this. I haven't told anything to K because I'm really scared to lose her (although I am also excited for what love could look like between us two in this new configuration). I am not sure that transition would be something that I'm interested in, because I feel like my body is a little androgynous. Yes, I would like a little more curves and boobs that I could flaunt at all times, but I'm not sure about hormones, mostly because I do like my genitals. I have been happy in my body; I can't say that I've hated it. My being uncomfortable in it I feel stems more from living in it as a man and not as a woman. I can inhabit my body differently, which makes me feel weird, but also kind of awesome. Like I have a superpower. Maybe as I'll inhabit it more as a woman, things will start to mix.

I have a feeling that non-binary is closer to what I feel in my body when I stop gendering how I want to be. There are ways men are in their bodies that I like, and there are ways women are in their bodies that I love (I definitely lean towards woman). But for me, going from man to non-binary was unimaginable. I've always known the binary, so it makes sense that the exploration after man would be woman, and that as I explore woman, I'll know more about myself and maybe be more of both. I have a lot to figure out.
I am sorry for the long email. I keep writing these texts and coming out because that feels like it’s part of the process. To put it out there and to exist in it. It sort of makes it real.

A part of me feels like this is fake, like I’m just lost. Out of place.

I wanted to tell you all this because I’ve been dealing with it and at the same time having to do all of the things for school, teaching a class, and going through a pandemic and the loss of K’s grandmother, who passed away earlier today. I am overwhelmed. I wanted to ask for your advice, for any words that you might have for me.

Thank you for coming into my life. Your class has been an amazing journey for me.

Muy contenta,

S. (¿O algo diferente?) Sergio no podría ser más masculino. Mis papás exageraron demasiado mi género con ese nombre.

I squirm at the frankness with which I speak about feeling like I had breasts or the fact that I was a woman finally able to wear the clothes I like because I can see how fully I had absorbed everything I found online about being trans, and how confused I was. If I was to rewrite that email, I’d just say that I discovered I was not cis, that I was interested in experimenting with feminine clothing and gender presentation, and then I’d ask for guidance, but not anything else. I definitely wouldn’t mention my genitals. I am grateful that she took it lightly, and that maybe she could see that I was going through a lot emotionally, but I really wish I’d done it differently.
Also my talk there at the end about being nonbinary instead of a woman came from the right place, and I actually had an inkling of that truth within me, maybe even subconsciously, but the truth is I felt too insecure to tell the truth to V. How was I supposed to say that I felt like a woman to a woman I wasn’t close to? Me, with my body, with my beard, with my voice, with my masculine presentation and heterosexuality? I knew she’d be accepting, but I just didn’t feel confident enough to do it.

What I really wanted was for my womanhood to be recognized by other women, but saying that out loud was too scary so I hid, from her and from myself.

I got her response the next day:

From: V
Sent: 11/30/2020
To: Godoy, Sergio A
Subject: Re: Support

Dearest S.

Thank you so much for trusting me and for opening up. I have noticed throughout the semester that you have been working through a lot and coming to many realizations. Being a witness to this process has been a huge honor and gift. Although I am sure it has been arduous and loaded with complications. My intuition tells me that only you know and can know what is best, what feels right to you, what makes sense and feels most like home in your body and embodiment(s). My advice is to take it slow, to take some time to continue exploring and working through these waves. From what you are saying, I too have the sense that you would possibly feel happy, más libre and better represented as a nonbinary individual. It also sounds like you feel quite comfortable in your body, perhaps a lot of what you are feeling is also
connected to your rejection of the patriarchy and narrow, binary gender roles and expressions of femininity and masculinity. As you know, there are so many ways of being that go beyond the limited everyday configurations.

When I read you, I sense a very strong desire to refuse the norm, not out of mere rebellion, but out of a lack of identification with the hegemonic model, I sense your search for freedom, a desire to come into a selfhood that needs no explanation, that does not need to contain or adjust themself.

Is it possible for you to allow yourself more freedom as you are, to find other ways to feel empowered as you are? Even if this involves altering your clothing, shifting your pronouns, etc. I wonder how much of this is rooted in a sense of non-belonging or a yearning to go home (to the body that feels most real, most natural to you).

These are all some thoughts that came to mind as I reread your email and thought about what I have read in your work this semester. Ultimately, what is important is that you allow yourself to explore and find clarity, that can take time but you are on the right track. Take your time and go slow, avoid jumping to conclusions out of a desire to quickly label yourself, to conform, the process isn't linear, it's fragmentary, circular, and can be messy. Talking to the LGBTQ community at UTEP might be a good place to start, or even finding another group online.

If you would like to talk, just let me know.

Please, take care and be safe.

Un abrazo enorme
It surprises me that most of the responses I’ve gotten when I have come out have started with how thankful other people are to have my trust, and how honored they feel that I’ve decided to open up to them. I think it’s a great way to start a queer person’s openly queer life, to honor them with those words.

Our internalized shame might say that people don’t mean it when they say this things, that it’s rehearsed, that it’s what you’re supposed to say and nothing more, but the truth is that it doesn’t matter. If people care enough to say it, I think we should take it. It is an honor when I open myself up to people. It’s an honor to hear my story because my story is not supposed to be told. My story is supposed to only leave my lips like a whisper, but here it is in a book. What an honor. 22

V’s email was validating and her invitation to experiment with clothes and pronouns made me feel like this wasn’t the first time someone had come out to her, and that felt reassuring. I wasn’t alone. I also appreciated that she recognized my inner drive to move away from the norm.

Looking back at this exchange, and also all the other times I’ve come out to people, I’m puzzled by the circular movement of it. The repetition of telling my story. V says that the process of figuring out your gender is not linear, and I think she’s right. There’s a lot of reframing, a lot of editing and composing, but the fact that it’s non linear doesn’t mean that when we go back, we repeat everything exactly the same. No. Each time is different. The results are cumulative.

Every repetition, you change.

Every repetition, you change.

Every repetition,

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22 Can you hear my slight sarcasm in that last line? Yes. It’s an honor. But it’s an honor only because the white-supremacist-cis-hetero-patriarchy is doing everything it can to hide and erase people like me from the face of the Earth.

In Texas, for example, the bill S-B 29, which was passed in 2022 prevents transgender youth from participating in a sport corresponding with their gender identity. In Florida, the “Don't Say Gay” bill (HB 1557/SB 1834), blocks teachers from talking about LGBTQ issues or people and undermines existing protections for LGBTQ kids in schools.
Naming my experience, retelling the story and making sense of my journey turned into an empowering oral tradition, a ritual of becoming. Because so much of being trans at the beginning depends on our own belief in ourselves (thanks to a society that makes us think we’re not real), using our story to reclaim space is an act of liberation.

Of course, it’s not as binary as that. When strangers start asking us what we are, when we are forced to disclose our identities for a job interview, on the street, or when we feel the need to explain our entire lives and our transness so that other people can hopefully take our identity and our life seriously, then, our stories become our defining characteristic, like bars on a cage.

I’m not interested in being defined by my transness. I’m not only the hormones I have on my body or my sex. I want to be taken seriously because I’m alive. I think that’s enough. I want to name myself on my terms and tell my story when I want to and to the audience I most see fit.

When I sent my email to V, I was figuring out how it felt to exist in other people’s mind as a trans person. It was the kind of naming that gave me strength. Her words, and our ongoing correspondence, is a beautiful development from this time, and like my relationships with my close friends and loved ones, it’s an important part of who I’ve become.

Later that day, after sending the email to V, I called K and we started talking about how her weekend had gone and all the grief her family was experiencing. Her grandma, whom her grandpa called La pulga, was the matriarch of the family, and was the center of their life in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso. Her loss from Covid-19 not only fractured the family’s bond, but it left a hole that no one will be able to fill.

She was telling me all of this, and I wanted to be present, but I couldn’t stop thinking about the huge news I had for her, and I think she could smell it because she asked me if there was anything wrong and I couldn’t hold it. I told her.
I can’t remember exactly how the whole conversation went, but I could feel by the tone of her voice and her short responses that she was shocked and not ready to deal with it. She said that she felt a lot of internalized transphobia clouding her response, and that we could talk when she came back home the next day. When we hung up I felt horrid and I felt like the world was ending. What was going to become of me? At the time she had told me she identified as bi, which gave me hope, but she hadn’t really embraced her queerness so I wasn’t sure I stood a chance.

Waiting a whole day for her to come home was torture, but I managed to do it by gluing myself to my computer and researching everything I could about trans issues, transition, coming out, and everything else I could think of.

When she finally came home we had a long talk, and she said she loved me and she wanted to stay with me and be supportive, but that she couldn’t promise me that she would love the person I could become. I understood, and I told her I wanted to be with her and support her in her mourning. Our relationship changed forever after that, and we had to overcome many challenges that arose from my discovery, but one thing I can say with certainty is that we have never doubted the love we have for each other.

As part of the short story I wrote for my class on Queer Writing, I included a passage about us, from the point of view of our apartment, which was built in 1903:

ii.

They’d been living inside my walls for about three months, and things were tense. Everyone was staying at home back then, something to do with a virus, like the one my old inhabitants dealt with in 1918, and these two had so much energy and so much going on inside their frame that I actually wondered why it wasn’t worse. I’ve seen worse, back when I didn’t have so many walls dividing me up, but that’s another story.
I was there that day when she was trying out the clothes and smoking weed, getting me all high with her. She was playing music and seeing herself perform in the mirror. She was alone, and her partner wouldn’t be back for a few days so I could tell she felt free to explore. She was dancing like it was nobody’s business and I like to think I was dancing with her, making tap tap tap sounds as she moved her feet on my floors, and feeling the air move on my walls as she danced.

We’ve danced a lot since then, she and I. It’s been quite some time. I’ve listened to the conversations where she told her friends she was trans, I held my breath when she and her partner came together and embraced after the initial few days of confusion. My walls have warmed up as they’ve tried to understand their bodies again, making new shapes on their bed, new sounds, and a whole lot of sweat.

I can’t say they are my favorite couple, and not even my first queer couple, but I will say that I can stay up listening to them talk all night.

The love and support K has given me through this difficult time has been an amazing gift. Even through the toughest parts, the confusions, misunderstandings and gender fucks, she’s been there for me and it’s meant the world.

Sadly, soon after loosing her grandma on her dad’s side, K lost her grandpa on her mom’s side to complications after an initial Covid-19 infection. It was her last grandparent on her mom’s side, and he was a key figure in her teenage years, giving her a home after her dad got deported, and always being there for her when she needed it. I remember after we got word of his passing from his partner, K looked at me and told me she had no tears left to give. She said she felt numb. All we could hope was that the year ended with no more surprises.
At this point in time (December 2020) the pandemic had killed more than 3 million people and most countries were still in lockdown, so we really only had each other to cope with everything that was happening. We spent day after day in the same apartment in Sunset Heights, trying to keep a routine from 7a.m. to 6p.m. to get everything done for school, which was still going, and watching the fantasy show Lovecraft Country on HBO at night until we fell asleep.

I was still exploring what it meant to be trans, and I was trying to wear more and more femme clothing from K’s wardrobe (the only clothes that were available for me at the time), but I also felt like exploring my gender in front of my partner wasn’t working. It was hard to believe I was trans when I was constantly in touch with someone who had met me as a man, and it was even harder to feel like a woman when there was another woman in the room who I kept comparing myself to.
It all happened here, and it’s interesting to think about how all our furniture was so full of that tension. How we had our last call with K’s grandpa on that sofa, how we talked about my transness on the chairs and how we made amends at the table playing rummy.

Being confined to our apartment with all the mounting stress from school, the grief, and the anxiety of my gender exploration was really challenging, but as the year came to a close we saw a way out: My parents were coming to visit me from Colombia and we were going to take a trip through Arizona.

Once school was over, however, K had to go to Las Vegas where her grandpa lived to sort some family stuff out, so I ended up going alone to Phoenix to meet my parents and we had a couple of days
together without her. After not seeing my parents in more than a year, I couldn’t contain my happiness. Seeing them felt otherworldly after the year we’d had.

I had been to Arizona before but I didn’t know Phoenix so there was a lot to explore. We went on a lot of hikes including one at Eagle Eye Mountain, and my parents payed for some delicious pizza and steak, but what I loved the most was that for a couple of nights we really just sat down the three of us in our Airbnb and we talked and watched movies and held each other with love. I had missed their bodies so much during my time in the US that I couldn’t stop hugging them and touching them. There’s nothing quite like a parent’s warmth.

Of course, even in their warm embrace I felt a growing chasm between us because I couldn’t be honest with them about who I was at that point in my life, and that knowledge broke my heart at every turn. I didn’t feel ready to tell them, it was still too new, but I also had never kept anything from them so I felt guilty and ashamed. On the last day before K arrived I went to their bed as they were preparing to go to sleep and I sat between them and told them about what I’d learned in my Feminist Theory class about gender and the patriarchy and I told them about my masculinity crisis and how I had been questioning a lot of things about myself. I didn’t tell them that I was trans, but I thought I laid the groundwork for a conversation we could have later on.

When I explained how the patriarchy works against men as well and how men should work against it my dad said:

“Hijito eres un ser evolucionado. Todo lo que buscan las mujeres.”

I laughed because that was not the point, but I still felt like they were being supportive. Being with them that day in bed, feeling their love, only made the risk of being trans more real. Could I lose them if I told them? Could I stand to lose them?

I was still in a very fragile state of mind, reeling from the harsh weeks we had endured with K, and doubting my transness at the same time that I was deeply in love with it. Feeling that distance between me and my parents made me not want to be trans. I felt absolutely depressed and I actually started doubting my
sanity. I decided I needed to deal with that first. The thought went: if I first dealt with my mental health, then I could know for certain if I was really trans or if it’s all in my head.

The rest of my parent’s visit went smoothly and it really changed the vibes at our apartment for the beginning of 2021. Saying goodbye was hard because I didn’t know when I would see them again, but it also lifted a weight off my shoulders because I could go back to dealing with my gender identity and figuring out who I was.

Of the many pictures I took this one really resonates with me because as shadows we can be more than one body. And yet, I notice my and K’s shadow wasn’t touching theirs.
Poemario nb

At the beginning of 2021, after my parents left and everything had settled at home, I started writing poems about my transness.

Using she/her pronouns in Spanish had opened me up to an embodiment of femininity that felt fierce and transgressive, and I wanted to capture what that felt like on paper.

On January 3rd, I wrote my first piece. I was wearing leggings, something I’d always wanted to do, and I was surrounded by books that made me feel validated and powerful. I took a picture and sent it to K telling her. I was listening to Californication by Red Hot Chili Peppers on a loop.
Poema nobinario/trans

Es que yo
nunca fui solo man,
yo también he sido Sexy.
Tengo un cuerpo humano
con culo lindo,
con piernas hermosas,
al que tal vez le falten tetas,mucho debate aquí
de cara linda,
que quiere hormonas para sentirse propia.
Pero que también disfruta su cock, y cómo la disfruto.

   cambia el poema

Poema a la cock, en femenino
   la cock, hermosa miembro
   del cuerpo, dióse.
   Que te traten como una flor
   que se hierve cuando está
   emocionada.
   Que te besen con pasión,
   con cariño, con ganas.
   Que te consideren como amiga,
   compañera para llegar (y viajar),
   hasta donde los cuerpos nos lleven,
   y que confíen en tí.
   Haz muy empático el amor.

   Querida cock, te amo, me disculpo
   por haberte percibido y pensado como hombre,
o parte de su reino, porque eres
otra, eres tuya, o tuyo, o solo
un miembro de un conjunto
de órganos que componen
o pueden componer un cuerpo
humano.

   el poema vuelve

Soy multitudes.
Soy género sensual,
género aventurera,
género hips don't lie,
género serio
género bonito, tierno.
Claro, es que yo no era man,
es que yo
I felt proud/ashamed after writing *Poema nobinario/trans*. I was proud because it was raging with all my thoughts and the adrenaline of being loud talking about wanting hormones and about understanding my cock as a feminine entity. It felt transgressive, like breaking out of my old skin.

The shame came later, as I started doubting my confidence. Was I even allowed to write like this? What would everyone who knew me before think?

Talking openly these things felt very “unlike” me.

The thing is, I was never supposed to be trans. I was supposed to continue the narrative I’d created collaboratively with the world, that I was a good person, a good citizen, a good worker, a good student, and a good son. I was supposed to keep writing beautiful stories about my ancestors that made my mom cry. I was supposed to write the “simple” slice of life stories that showed beauty in the mundanity of life (I had watched enough movies like American Beauty and Little Miss Sunshine to know that there was value in that). And why would I want to disrupt that narrative when the reality of living in a country that’s been at war since its conception\(^{23}\) is enough to traumatize us for life?

And yet

And yet

Taking control of my narrative and the way I saw myself felt like finally being able to breathe after years of suffocating.

Once I had this first poem, others came along, but none had the propulsive force I felt with *Poema nobinario/trans*. What was my poetics going to be? What kind of poems would I devise as my understanding of gender evolved and I started to change?

The malleability of language that I could access through poetry allowed me to craft a lens through which to see myself and create myself, something that I lacked in my physical reality.

\(^{23}\) After the revolution that birthed the Colombian State, my country entered a period of civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives that has never really stopped, but has taken many forms and many names across our history. Even today we have guerrilla groups like the ELN and the EPL, and paramilitary groups like the Clan del Golfo, which continue to spread death in the countryside.
I’ve always wanted to make a CD, and so for this section of the book I want to show some of the poems that grew out of me in chronological order.

These unfinished poems tried to help me understand my reality, and even when they didn’t do it, they still got me close to this writing that I’m doing now, so this is my homage to them.
Untitled

Me miro en el video y me encuentro encontrándome,
viendo por primera vez el asomo de la mujer que vive en mí.
Siento dolor por lo que se le viene a esa versión de mí,
el dolor y la confusión que todavía no se han ido.

Me miro en el espejo reconociéndome a mí misma,
sin nombre, sin voz. Una existencia reflejada pero no vivida,
o empezada a vivir en ese instante.

Me miro buscando anatomías que no viven en mí.
Pidiendo tetas lindas y cafés,
pidiendo caderas amplias.

Tengo ropa interior rosada y sexy sobre mis piernas peludas,
tengo papel igiénico dándole vida a mis tetas blancas,
tengo un vestido corto (muy corto) verde con líneas horizontaltes.
Tengo las piernas muy juntas para dar la impresión femenina,
y me miro hipnotizado. Sin saber que no hay vuelta atrás.
O más bien, sin entender lo que significa eso.

Me miro consentirme el cuello.
Van 27 minutos de encontrarme,
27 minutos de sentirme y de verme,
27 minutos llenos de emociones,
27 minutos por los que quiero llorar,
para tal vez no ser esto que soy
sino otra cosa.

Me quiero abrazar. Dejar de mirarme y
sentir mi tristeza en mi cuerpo, en el
latir de mi corazón trans.
(Wearing a butch femme outfit)

I’m touching myself
a celebration of womanhood
the celebration of living in the body,
with the potential for desire.

Me toco a mí misma como mujer, aprendiendo
el lenguaje y la experiencia cuerpo + femenino

Una persona femme y lesbiana que se ama y se hace el amor.
Yo.
Mi vientre/estómago,
mis piernas.
Todo me gusta de mí
y me da fisico placer compartir la experiencia
con otro cuerpo femme.
Erotica lesbiana trans,
con mi pene femenino,
y tu pussy mojada.
I stopped writing in Spanish because I got tired of gendering myself.

fea, feo, fee  ugly, ugly, ugly
bonito, bonita, bonite  pretty, pretty, pretty
An exercise:

I stay under the covers on a cold day and touch my body.

Not seeing it, my body transforms and when I touch my hip bones, I can feel the wide hips the mirror hides form me.

Soy super caderona debajo de las cobijas.
Una estrategia:

Vuelvo mi cuerpo borroso, oculto sus límites, sus detalles quedan fuera de mi pensamiento.

Agradezco y amo a mi cuerpo, por eso lo borro.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is seen</th>
<th>what is not seen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beard</td>
<td>rounder face</td>
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<tr>
<td>box frame</td>
<td>breasts</td>
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<tr>
<td>fem legs</td>
<td>wide hips</td>
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<td>hair on chest</td>
<td>me</td>
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<td>penis</td>
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<td>brown eyes</td>
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<tr>
<td>brown skin</td>
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Chapter 2: Part 2

In early January, 2021,
I decided to start writing things down on a diary.

Diario no binario/trans
Jan. 9, 2021

Hoy amanecí sintiéndome tranquilo, sintiéndome “hombre”, o más bien, sintiéndome tranquilo conmigo mismo. A veces el performance es tan familiar que me calma. Sin embargo, también amanecí con ganas de usar leggings y verme las piernas bonitas, sintiéndome sexys. Después del desayuno me probé los aretes, me puse mis senos, me vi la barba y me sentí rara. La barba a veces me la veo como ocultándome las emociones. Como una fachada.
No es que no me guste, pero cambia dependiendo de cómo me vea. A veces cuando no me veo la expresión en el rostro me siento delicada y sensible.

A veces me quiero sentir fuerte como otras mujeres. La fuerza de los hombres muchas veces no me impresiona. Más que todo como padres. Pero me gustaría sentirme más decidida, valiente.

Hoy veo más de cerca lo que podría ser mi tesis.

Un diario trans, no binario, de mis preguntas, inquietudes, vivencias, que sea tan híbrido como yo me siento.

A memory that comes back to me after my references to the beard is when a philosophy teacher in high school told us that in Ancient Greece relationships between adult men and teenage boys was allowed, and that young men were considered attractive when they started growing a bozo. Bozo is the Colombian-Spanish name for the first inklings of mustache male humans develop when they are teenagers, the thin, soft hairs that create a faint shadow on top of the lip. In English, I’ve seen it translated as a beard, but in Spanish bozo is something 13 year-olds deal with before actual real thick hairs start growing out.

The idea of Plato or Socrates seeing my bozo and considering me attractive or desirable because of it disturbed me, but learning the word bozo also gave me language to refer to that monstrous thing I had started to see on my classmates’ faces. I was terrified. Was I going to grow one? What could I do about it?

Why weren’t all my friend shaving it?
I started waxing off my upper lip soon after learning about bozos. My mom, who suggested waxing instead of shaving because that way I wouldn’t grow thicker hairs, would take me to a hair salon and ask someone she trusted to do it. It hurt a lot but my distress really diminished so I kept doing it for a few months until I couldn’t ignore the pain anymore and I decided to shave. I was going to grow thicker hairs anyways so I wanted to prepare.

Once I had enough facial hair to give the semblance of a beard (in my mid 20’s), I started to let it grow a little, and eventually I became accustomed to stroking it when I was thinking, which felt like something smart men did. I was happy I had it, but I couldn’t relate to the pressure some friends felt to grow really thick beards and have lots of facial hair. I never thought I was any less because mine was patchy.

The day I decided to shave my beard for gender reasons (which is different from simply wanting to see what your face looks like without a beard), I had the idea that I would be getting closer to seeing “her,” the vision I’d seen that first day in the mirror. For a while I resisted it, thinking I could be one of those cool nonbinary folks that are feminine-presenting and sport beautiful beards, but after a while I just felt like it was holding me back.
I took a before and after photo to keep the record of the transformation. It was January 10th, 2021.

I haven’t grown a beard like that since I took that picture, and I’m not sure I even can now that I’ve been on hormones for a while. The hairs that grow on my face are thinner now, and they don’t look as scrubby as the ones I grew before. The most I’ve let it grow is a few days, but right now I prefer to shave every day. The feeling I get from a close shave makes feel light, and I’m even thinking about saving up some money and getting laser hair removal.

Shaving my beard was, for me, an indication that I was moving further into territories of trans embodiments that were outright femme. I still had a lot of doubts about being trans and wether I wanted to transition, but those doubts couldn’t stop me from getting closer and closer to the image I’d seen that first
day in the mirror. I was deeply divided, and the mounting pressure to start figuring out my thesis project and my future as an immigrant in this country\textsuperscript{24} only added to the stress this process generated on my body.

I wish I could go back and show myself what I’ve become to help ease my past self’s suffering, but not even poetry can do that. What I can do is jump to the future in this writing, to get a glimpse of what’s ahead:

\textbf{In January, 2022, I post this on Reddit:}

Nonbinary transition

I want to hear from other people who, as they've lived their nonbinary lives, have developed a nonbinary relationship with their body that includes both the feminine and the masculine and more even without medical transition. And yet, people who have then listened to their bodies and have heard from it that HRT transition is right for them.

I’m about to start E, and it’s taken a while to get here (a lot of personal growth, introspection and queer readings and sex), but it has been so liberating to experience the dismantling of the binary of bodies and genders within me, and just surrender to the knowledge that I’m both feminine and masculine AND more, even if HRT takes me medically towards the feminine. That hormones don’t define who I get to be (testosterone didn’t make me a man). That my body is this way, cosmically queer and undefined.

Dismantle the binary. Bodies are open ended.

\textsuperscript{24} I came here on a student visa that had me covered for 3 years, but after meeting K, and after figuring out I was trans, I felt like the US was a safer place than Colombia to grow as myself. Being here during quarantine gave me the space and the distance that I needed to really explore and figure myself out, something I couldn't have done under my family’s shadow in Colombia. At this point in 2021 I knew I had to start thinking about what to do, wether we would get married with K or wether I’d apply to a do a PhD, or look for a job. It was really overwhelming because it felt like time was starting to run out.
BTW, I'm listening to Vamónos de Viaje by Bándalos Chinos while I write this. I'm a latinx poet and queer theorist. I love yall.

But how did I get here?

How did I move past all the doubts and the fears?

A year before, I was a mess.

January 2021 saw me full of doubts about being trans. The reality had set in, and the stakes and the stress were high, even if I was enjoying the exploration. Was I ready to give up my whole life for this feeling I had that I was more than a man?

It’s difficult to convey this part of the story because I don’t want it to feel like I was forcing myself to be trans, but I also want to reflect just how often I doubted myself and how the fear and shame I had around who I was becoming distressed me, a very real consequence of living in a world where trans people’s existence is still being debated.

The reason I’m able to write these words today is because my response to that doubt was to start honing a spiritual connection with myself, something that allowed me to have faith on who I was without needing outside validation.

Back when I was here

I felt something new that I hadn’t felt before in my life. The closest thing I can think of for how to explain it is to think about how the Jedi talk about feeling the force. It’s invisible, and it’s an energy that exists through and within them. It’s the source of their power.

I felt the same way about my transness. It was an energy that I could feel inside me, a feminine force that felt powerful, but one that I couldn’t necessarily see in the mirror yet.

And it wasn’t like I’d always felt like I was more than a man. I had never allowed myself to even consider something like that in the 27 years I’d been alive. This new feeling I had about myself was like a
small fire inside me, but the rest of my body and my history were a winter storm that kept threatening to put it out. I had to constantly channel the feeling inside me to keep it alive, otherwise I felt like I fell back into the routine of embodying a man.

Several of my diary entries from January start with this struggle directly at the center, going back and forth between feeling comfortable with the feminine, and going back to the masculine side of me as a default.

Jan 11, 2021
Hoy amanecí sabiendo que me quería probar la pinta completa. Ayer me afeité y me sentí más andrógina, entonces decidí que hoy iba con leggings, con falda, con brasier, crop-top y labial negro. Ah, y los aretes redondos dorados con una piedra roja en el centro. Aretes de diosa.

Jan 14, 2021
Ayer me sentí raro en ropa femenina. Me vestí como man. Estuvo bien, no fue emocionante pero me hizo conectarme con mi masculinidad. Algo que tengo que sanar.

Jan 15th, 2021
Entre ayer y hoy me siento en un neutro extraño pero que me calma un poco.

Jan 17th, 2021
Ayer salí con falda e intenté pasar de mujer cuando fuimos al centro con K a que le hicieran un tatuaje. Me sentí divina y caminar con Kalina así, todas románticas, fue muy bonito.

Jan 18, 2021

Hoy fue un buen día. Empezamos con yoga, que hice en sudadera y camiseta, bien masc. Me vi lindo, pero sigo queriendo mantener un canal de comunicación constante con lo femenino. Me puse mis leggings rojos para verme las piernas hermosas que tengo y todo el día me sentí moviéndome entre dos energías, masc., y fem.

How do you keep a fire going when the environment is determined to put it out?

For me, it was a continued interest in all things trans, from poetry anthologies like Trouble the Line, to novels like Camila Sosa Villada’s Las Malas, to queer theory books like Jack Halberstam’s Trans* or Legacy Russel’s Glitch Feminism, and also instagram influencers like @indyamoore, @breakthebinary and @alokvmenon, whose advocacy for trans rights helped me realize how powerful we could be. On the physical and material realm, I kept spending hours upon hours looking at myself in the mirror and trying skirts, leggings, crop tops, clip-on earrings, and whatever else K had in her wardrobe.

Initially, I only wore the things that were available to me thanks to K, but eventually, in mid January, I went to buy feminine clothes after K told me she felt weird that I was only using her outfits. She said she didn’t want me to become a clone of her style.

As I prepared for this outing, I remember thinking back to the summer of 2020 when I’d gone to a thrift store in El Paso and tried some dresses on. I wasn’t thinking about transness at all at the time, but I was challenging the ideas of what I could look like as a “man”, so I decided to go and try some stuff on.

I think here I should take a small detour and talk a little about Laurel.
Laurel in my history is the name K and me use to refer to the apartment we lived in before moving to our current one where most of the event related in this text took place. And I guess here I should take another detour to talk a little about the story behind us moving in together. A little **backstory**.

Before I do that, though, I’m thinking back to one of Colombia’s great political comedian, Jaime Garzón, who, in a talk he gave to University students talking about the country’s political reality and their role in making a difference, talks about Colombian customs that were strange to him.

“Y tercera costumbre extraña que tenemos los colombianos… Es que los colombianos estamos hablando de un tema, seguimos hablando del otro, cruzamos por otro, volvemos otro, seguimos por aquí… Y uno después dice… ¿de qué estábamos hablando?”

Is it really a Colombian thing? The inability to stay on track and rather wander around through other stories and ideas and eventually lose all direction? No matter. I’ve been told I do this a lot so I keep this quote close to my heart. It makes me feel like I’m a part of a strange group of storytellers who weave different tales into a single telling. My results might not be perfect, but it comes from the heart.

So anyway, **Backstory**.

K and I met at the beginning of September at the UTEP Department of Creative Writing during the 2019 Fall Semester. She began working there at the same time I started my Teaching Assistantship. She was an undergrad who got a part time job with the department organizing events, and I was a master’s student who was assisting with said events. I had just arrived to El Paso to study. She’d been living in El Paso for two years to be close to her mom and dad, who at the time were both living across the border in Ciudad Juarez. She was living with two friends from Denver, where she’s from, and I was renting a room in a student house a few blocks from campus. She loved her roommates. I didn’t really know mine.

As the story goes, and we’ve become experts in telling it, I was working in the Conference Room, a space on the 9th floor of the tallest building at the University (with an amazing view of campus and Mexico across the border) where graduate students usually have their office hours, and then K came in with the Department’s Chair, who told us that she would be helping us with events. As soon as she entered the room,
I thought she was cute, and when the Chair asked if anyone wanted to help her with promoting the events, doing flyers and other promotional material, I volunteered.

We didn’t talk too much that first day, but I remember that when I was waiting for the elevator later with Lola, I told her that I thought K was cute and she got excited for the possibilities and told me she had already added her on facebook, which gave me courage to add her as well. The next day when I sat down next to her to talk about the first promotional piece I had to design we really hit it off and started sharing music and getting to know each other. One of the things I was excited about in coming to the US was practicing my English so talking to her was really fulfilling. We were also both new so there was a sense of camaraderie.

I had always wanted to design posters so the work became a joy, and sharing it with her only made it better. After a few weeks of working together I started to feel like we had a spark and decided to ask her out. Initially I thought I’d take inspiration from a song she’s shared with me called Back Pocket by the band Vulfpeck, which is about leaving a note in your crush’s back pocket asking “do you like me, circle yes or no”, but I ended up just asking her out for coffee and then after that asking her out on a proper date to a museum.

We started officially dating a few days after that outing, and for the duration of the semester we spent a lot of time together at the Conference Room working, making out in the stairs of the building that nobody ever used, and hanging out outside of work going to the movies, to museums, and to restaurants that she wanted to show me.

Soon after we started dating, her friends told her they were moving back to Denver before the end of the year, and she had to decide whether to stay in El Paso or go back with them. K had some commitments with the University so she initially decided to stay a couple of months more to sort things out and then move back. In the mean time, we decided to move in together so she wouldn’t have to move to a smaller apartment, and I could stop sharing a house with strangers. I felt a little rushed, to be honest, but it made sense at the time and in retrospect I think it was the best choice we could’ve made. It’s one of the important ones that led us here.
At the beginning of 2020, after spending the holidays in Denver to get a sense for how she felt back in her home town, we came to our now shared home with some magic mushrooms and decided to take them together to look for answers. Would she really leave in a few months to be with her friends in Denver, or would she stay and complete her degree?

We took the mushrooms in the morning and we spent the day listening to music, dancing and thinking about what we could do with the space we were starting to share. At the end of the day, sitting on the same couch we have in our living room today, K told me she wanted to stay in El Paso for the foreseeable future. At least until she finished college (and we haven’t surpassed that deadline yet).

**Laurel** was the first apartment we shared. When I moved in I only had my suitcase, the few books I’d bought for school, and some kitchenware a friend in the program gave me. K’s friends moved out and left us furniture and kitchenware. The apartment was the whole first floor of a two-story, red painted house that sat on the corner of Laurel and Arizona in Central El Paso, a neighborhood known for being working class. It had two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, and one bathroom with a hot tub. We also had a porch. It was a huge space. We eventually made a study out of the second bedroom, which was very useful for the first part of the pandemic.

Pensando en ubicación geográfica, Laurel was really far from everything that mattered to us. Central was a residential neighborhood and because we didn’t have a car at the time, we had to walk a minimum of 30 minutes to get to anything interesting like Downtown or the restaurants on Cincinnati Street. It was very different from Sunset Heights, the neighborhood where I lived first, which is right by the University, five minutes from Downtown, maybe fifteen minutes from the restaurants, and is full of international students.

Because we didn’t have a car, we had to either walk or take the bus everywhere. Sadly, the bus became quite expensive if you were using it several times each day so we ended up walking more than anything else. We walked one hour to go to the University, a little more than an hour to go to the closest thrift store, and an hour and a half to go to the grocery store. Then we would have to make the same walks in the opposite direction. Eso sí, we became extremely fit from all that walking, something that I miss now that we have a car and live closer to all those places.
Oh, and as for the walking, the thing about El Paso is that it’s really spread out and almost nobody walks the streets. It’s also in the middle of the desert so the sun is almost always present and there’s very little shade. To make matters worse, the wind is constantly hitting you with sand and dirt. Now don’t get me wrong, I love walking El Paso, the sidewalks are ample and well kept and I’m a fan of the heat most of the time, but it does require you to be physically and mentally ready to face the elements for long periods of time. It’s not for everybody.

And that’s that.

Detour ended.

The reason I brought up Laurel is because my experience trying out feminine clothing in an Uptown Cheapskate thrift store in the summer of 2020 was deeply influenced by that one hour walk I had to do to get there. It was an exhausting walk that included several hills, I was the sole pedestrian on the street, and I was wearing a pair of jean shorts that was shorter than anything I’d dared to wear before. I loved the shorts because they showed off my legs, but in that moment my mind was hijacked by anxiety and I couldn’t stop thinking of the men in their big Texas trucks driving by, seeing a young brown “man” wearing shorts that made him look really feminine. What if they were homophobic? What if they yelled at me from their cars? What if they did something worse?

The empty streets of this city put the pedestrians on display in a way that can be very uncomfortable and unsafe.

By the time I got to Uptown, my anxiety was being distractingly loud but I decided to go in anyway. I hadn’t walked all that time for nothing. The store was small and it had a lot of clothes, making the aisles incredibly narrow. There was also a lot of customers, so even when I was trying to find some space to take a breath and center myself, I was tormented by other bodies burping out excuse me’s and sometimes pushing me around.

I started in the male section, which was right by the door, looking for short shorts and colorful linen button ups, but I didn’t find anything that I liked so I moved on to the female section. Thoughts raced
through my head scared of what other people were thinking about me, which made it hard to slow down and really look at the clothes. I felt ashamed to be browsing in the section reserved for the opposite gender, but I was determined to do it. After all, I was trying to challenge my own views on what masculinity meant for me and I felt like I was being brave.

I began browsing the button up section and I found three linen shirts that I really liked. They were beige, green and white respectively, and they were simple and felt breezy. They were also bigger than my actual size, which made them cover more of my body, something I really enjoyed.

My heart became a mad drum when I moved over to the dresses, aching to burst from my body as I slid the hangers on the rack. My eyes kept darting around as well, afraid of what the people in the store might be thinking of me. I didn’t really know what I was looking for so it took me an anxiously long time to pick something. I ended up picking a grey dress that had an orange flower pattern, and a pair of blue overall-style sweats with a white outline that was really tight and had really short legs.

When it came time to try the items I had picked I took a deep breath and I walked over to the dressing rooms. An employee was supposed to give me a turn so I went up to them and, without looking them in the eye, I asked to go in to try the clothes. I couldn’t stand the thought that they might be judging me for trying a dress, or thinking maybe I was a confused, insecure man, but it was there, and I couldn’t ignore it.

It makes me mad that the world I grew up in taught me to feel shame for questioning my gender, and that through policies and cultural beliefs it turned that shame into a weapon that can hurt me both physically and mentally. It’s exhausting, like, what the fuck? I didn’t consent to being a part of that. Is there a reset button I can press?

At the end of my thrift store session I left the dress but I got the button ups and the overalls, and I also took some photos to remember. The anxiety didn’t leave me when checked out, wondering what the cashier was thinking of each of my picks and the fact that I was avoiding eye contact, and it kept its teeth of my neck as I walked home in the heat of the desert, still with my legs on display. When I got home I was
rattled. It felt like the whole outing was a nauseating haze. Alone at Laurel, I felt my shame filling up the space, suffocating me.

In early 2021 when I went to the thrift store again things were very different. I had moved past those initial ideas about my masculinity, and was instead exploring what it meant to be trans and what my gender presentation could look like. I lived closer, so the walk wasn’t a big deal, and I had a small spell with me that kept me grounded: I’m allowed to openly explore my gender through clothes, I’m allowed to be openly trans.

My paranoia wasn’t gone, and neither was my shame, but that little spell helped me every time I felt myself starting to give in to the looks and the feeling that people would judge me for browsing in the female section of the store. Once I repeated that spell to myself I would feel defiant, strangely proud of breaking the expectations people had for someone with my body.

This time around, I took my time browsing through the dresses and skirts and found some really good ones, including a short yellow skirt that was tight enough to show off my butt, and an outfit that I’m planning on wearing the day I graduate: a black pleated skirt with white polkadots, and a yellow top with red polkadots.

At the time, I still wasn’t sure what my style was (and I’m still figuring it out in 2022), but I was interested in skirts and dresses because they were easier to wear in public than pants or leggings designed for women. See, I have a penis, and a penis is hard to hide in legwear that is not designed for male bodies.
I’d love to not care about the bulge (hate that word, by the way), but somehow I do. I don’t really understand where it comes from, even though I know a part of it has to do with society’s shame around sex and genitalia, and our compulsory need to gender clothes depending solely on our sex. But it’s also more than that for me. When I look back at my life, I can see clearly that I’ve always made an effort to hide my penis when I’m dressed. No matter what I’m wearing, I’ve always tried to make it as invisible as possible.

For example, I used to spend a lot of money on tailors trying to get the crotch area of my pants as tight as possible so the material would stretch and wouldn’t fold around my penis. It looked odd, but it helped me feel more comfortable. I also remember that my mom used to point out again and again that when we were laying down on the sofa watching TV, I didn’t seem able to just lay with my legs spread out in front of me, but that I curled them back and folded them in front of me, making me look strained. The truth is I felt really uncomfortable having my legs spread out because you could see my bulge. I needed to do whatever I could to hide it.

It’s fascinating how these memories keep and kept coming back back then, in early 2021, as I was facing everything my discovery of being trans was bringing up about my life and who I’d been. All the little ways I’d been uncomfortable before and all the idiosyncrasies I developed as I grew up to deal with them. Like the pants. Nobody told me how to fix them to get the effect I wanted, I just came up with it on my own through experience. I sometimes think being trans just means listening to what our bodies tell us in order to be more comfortable in our own skin.

That day at the thrift store I ended up buying the yellow skirt, a green one that was a bit longer, and the outfit I wanted to wear for graduation. When it was time to pay for them I remembered how the stylish, femme cashiers at Uptown always complemented K on her picks and wondered if they’d do the same for me. In the past, I’d tried to go as fast as possible, fearing that my masc presenting self would make them feel uncomfortable if I engaged or said something about their outfits, so I wondered if my new self would be able to talk with them without that pressure. Sadly, my mind was foggy with shame and my instinct was to stick to the task, pay, and leave without looking at them in the eye.
Once I had a small wardrobe, I started trying to dress more feminine at home, which I thought would help me feel more comfortable, and would also help K get used to seeing me in this new way. I put on different outfits during the week when we were at home, trying out the skirts I’d chosen with different shirts and tops, but I changed back to masc outfits every time before we went out. We were still deep in the pandemic and had to stay home for most of the day so I had a lot of time to present the way I wanted to, but I didn’t feel ready to be out in the world as a visibly trans person. The threat of anti-trans violence kept me from it.

At home, the new outfits were helping me expand the idea of what I could look like, but I was still struggling with the feeling that I wasn’t woman enough, feminine enough and trans enough, mainly because that force-like feeling I could summon inside me was hard to keep alive. I kept shaming myself every time I didn’t act feminine enough, every time I slipped into the performance of “man”, every time I felt like my past self, my non-trans self, took over my body. Every sign that could betray my new understanding of myself felt like a threat.

And yet.

The distress this dissonance brought up was so high that sometimes I gave up and just let myself relax into old habits, erasing my body from my mind. I had been doing it for most of my life, tuning out the discomfort to face the challenges of everyday life. You can see it in the diary entries from those days. I’m constantly going back and forth.
The clothes helped, to be sure, but they also made the difference between masculine and feminine more stark. I started getting depressed if I stopped wearing feminine outfits for too long, but I also started to feel distress in feminine clothing because I felt like it made my masculine features, like my jawline or my broad shoulders, stand out. I just couldn’t catch a break.

At the same time that I was dealing with this physical dilemma, I was doing a lot of reading online about transness, what it meant to be trans, and what transition could look like. I had read at some point in my research that taking estrogen would not only help your body become more feminine (growing breasts, redistributing fat to “feminine” places like the hips, and more), but that it also had psychological effects. Supposedly, estrogen could make you act more feminine. I was sold. I felt at the time that taking estrogen could make that internal feeling of the feminine, that internal fire, be alive all the time. By leaving testosterone behind, I was convinced, I could leave “man” behind, and go into “woman” in a more direct way.

On February 8th, I wrote a definitive entry in my diary:

**Feb 8, 2021**

Hace dos días decidió que quiero empezar tratamiento hormonal. Lo de usar ropa y maquillaje me gusta, pero estar cambiándome, sentirme impropia, es mamón. Siento que no logro entrar en comunicación con lo femenino de forma profunda como lo he hecho antes. Puede que sea la testosterona hablando. Una parte de mí insiste en disfrutar mi cuerpo y mi ser tal y como es. La disforia no me da duro y creo que puedo sacar provecho de eso. Me miro en el espejo y me gusta lo que veo. Me miro los brazos y me gusta. Lo que es difícil es saber si este es el cuerpo o la cuerpo que me pertenece, que representa todo lo que soy, o si hay alguna incongruencia. Parte de lo que me hace sentir bien
estos días es simplemente ser, sin importar mi género o mi ropa. Sin embargo, ese ser deja atrás mi ser más femenino. Vuelve a lo que he sido siempre, que está bien, físicamente, pero que no es complejo. Estoy pensando hacer de mi transición algo más centrado en las hormonas, en ir encontrando a la mujer que soy con la exploración hormonal, en vez de hacerlo desde la ropa, que puede ser bastante limitada.25

Me preocupa lo del libido, que siento que lo puedo entender a veces más y que me da miedo perderlo, pero estoy lista para eso. Para entender mi cuerpo y mi sexualidad desde otras orillas. Vi un post de una persona que no estaba segura hasta que empezó a tomar estrógeno y se dio cuenta de lo que la hacía sentir la testosterona. Quiero eso, investigar. Estaré muy atenta a mi cuerpo. Empezaré pronto.

Of course, starting hormone therapy was a big decision, and there were a lot of pros and cons, but a part of me was really curious. Could a chemical help me move in the direction I wanted?

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25 I was lying when I stated that dysphoria was not hitting me hard, that I felt good about what I saw in the mirror, and that the estrogen was more for the psychological effects than the effects it might have on my body. I knew something was off about my body and how I felt in it, but I couldn’t put my finger on it so I stuck to thinking about what I liked instead. Recognizing the depth of that discomfort took months.
Get out of your chronology and back to the beginning
This is your search history in Safari:
how to figure out if you’re trans,
how to know if you’re trans
signs that you’re trans
trans test
mft
fml
trans life
trans influencers
trans actors
trans podcasts
NB podcast
nonbinary
trans poetry
reddit trans
do you need to have dysphoria to be trans?
dysphoria bible
vaginoplasty
hormone replacement therapy
hrt
estrogen
testosterone
anti androgens
testosterone puberty
estrogen hrt reddit
estrogen effects trans
images estrogen effects trans
transition videos
indya moore insta
gender
how to figure out if you’re trans
how to figure out if you’re nonbinary
how to figure out if you’re bigender
how to figure out if you’re genderfluid
gender fluid tik tok
nonbinary tik tok
trans tik tok
life as nonbinary
how to tell your partner you’re trans
dating as a trans woman
losing male privilege trans
nonbinary dressing how
trans poetry
trans partner handbook amazon
trans tv shows
queer tv shows
transparent
trans lesbians
trans inclusionary lesbians
autostraddle.com
drew gregory
coming out as trans
how to accept your queer identity
internalized transphobia
internalized homofobia
tucking
tucking tape
gaffs
breast plates
trans writers
Troubling the Line poetry book
Las Malas
Camila Sosa Villada
Camila Sosa Villada entrevista
trans rights
derechos trans en colombia
ser trans en colombia
mejores países para vivir siendo trans
best countries to live trans
best states to live trans
best cities to live trans
San Francisco how much to live
New York how much to live
Oakland how much to live
Canada visa process
New Zealand citizenship
estrogen hrt diy
plume
informed consent
facial feminization surgery
facial feminization surgery cost
laser hair removal
groupon hair removal
plume trans healthcare
how to figure out if you’re trans
signs that you are trans
gender books
gender trouble Judith Butler
Trans* jack halberstam
the argonauts maggie nelson
glitch feminism
disidentifications jose esteban muñoz
how to figure out your gender
estrogen hrt
hot trans women
hrt hairloss
hrt hips trans
hrt face trans
hrt breast growth
trans exclusionary radical feminists
terfs
jk rowling terf
how to confront a terf
signs that you might be trans
coming out as trans
how to come out queer
dating when you’re trans
trans dating
transphobia
sexuality on hrt
how to fuck a trans woman fanzine
queer sex juno roche
trans women porn
feminist views on porn
queer views on porn
queer porn
trans men
trans butch women
nonbinary lesbian
nonbinary pronouns
pronouns
neo pronouns
pronombres
elle diccionario español
nonbinary transition
picking new name trans
how to figure out if you’re trans
signs that you are trans
queer history
stonewall
paris is burning
paris is burning protagonists where are they now?
Octavia St. Laurent
Pepper LaBeija
Venus Extravaganza
ball culture NY
cross dressing balls 17th century europe
molly houses england
historia trans colombia
historia queer colombia
alok nonbinary
la disidencia colombia
traveling while trans
trans support group el paso
queer therapists el paso
does my insurance cover hrt?
If you are doing hormone therapy, do you need to do it for your whole life?
If you are doing hormone therapy, do you need to do it for your whole life? trans
after sex reassignment surgery, do you need to take hormones your whole life?
permanent changes on hrt
sperm bank prices
trans motherhood
motherhood in your 30’s
is hrt worth it?
So then what happened?

I started estrogen.

But when? How was the process?

Well, I started on Plume, a service that works with an informed consent model, and after a short intake I got my appointment.

What does inform consent mean? Isn’t it important for your readers to know?

I can just paste what is says on the website, inform consent

means that a person is able to understand the risks, benefits, alternatives, unknowns, and limitations of a given treatment. In the gender-affirming care setting, this means that medical providers who feel comfortable making an assessment and diagnosis of gender dysphoria are able to start Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy without a prior assessment by a mental health provider. It should be noted that one does not have to have gender dysphoria to be trans or gender non-conforming, but for many folks with gender dysphoria, hormones can be very helpful in reducing gender dysphoria and can often be lifesaving. The informed consent model has already been used by many major LGBTQ health clinics across the country for years, including Fenway Health, Planned Parenthood, and Howard Brown Health to name just a few. But, unfortunately, there are still many providers in the US who require a letter from a therapist before starting GAHT.

And why didn’t you use your health insurance? Maybe it could’ve helped.

Going the insurance route means going to see doctors who may not understand all the different ways there are to be trans or nonbinary, or all the different ways there are to transition, like if maybe you want to microdose the changes to happen slowly or if you want something outside of a binary transition where the goal is to get to the “other side,” to the opposite gender.

For me, it was important to read other experiences of nonbinary transitions because it allowed me to see that what I knew was actually very limited and there were many paths you could take to explore what it meant to be comfortable in your body. I’ve seen butch trans women who developed breasts but still decided to bind because it’s what feels right, I’ve seen AFAB nonbinary people who don’t get top surgery but rather just diminish the size of their breasts, I’ve seen AMAB nonbinary people who transition with estrogen, but still use he/him pronouns and think of themselves as bois. I’ve even learned about embodied
spirits like the Nigerian author Akwaeke Emezi who, after realizing they were not human, decided to take steps to change their body to reflect their inner nature.

There are many ways to transition, and Western medicine’s limited understandings of what it means to be trans doesn’t help us realize all these possibilities. What’s worse, if you go through your insurance you might also run into doctors who might actually be transphobic and might set you back on your goals. Companies like Plume or Folx, which were created and are run by trans and nonbinary people, is the better choice for me. Yes, it’s an extra expense, but at least I feel safe and in charge of the choices I make.

If there’s nonbinary or trans people reading this part maybe they’ll learn that’s an option worth looking into. What would you say to them?

I guess just try to take the time to be in your body and see what feels comfortable and follow your instincts. Doubts never truly leave you, but their weight gets easier to carry once you start listening to your body. At least that’s how it’s been for me. As you know, every trans person es diferente.

True. So then what happened?

Is that’s all this is going to be, just question and answer? Are we ever going to have an exchange of any kind?

I guess I’m just having trouble deciding what to say.

Is there anything you’d like to say to the people reading this?

Just that I hope they can trust me. I’m doing my best to be honest here.

Why is honesty so important to you?

I guess honesty is what I’ve been craving when I’m reading trans stories. And maybe not even honesty but transparency. I want to know the trains of thought other trans people have, I want to know how others feel in their bodies when they’re transitioning.

I get what you mean. I’ve been so obsessed with what goes on in my head. It’s intense. You’re basically questioning what you’ve been told about your reality when you’re trans, all the time, it can be exhausting.

What do you think being honest or transparent about who you are will do for your readers?
I hope they see me. I think one of the main problems I have with society at large right now is that I think they don’t even see us. They have all these filters, these veils that keep them from really acknowledging our life experience. Conceptually I don’t think they can comprehend what it means because they’ve been taught to look at the world one way, and they’ve been taught there should be only one way to look at the world.

If they actually wanted to see me they’d have to recognize the fictions they live in, and that’s too hard for some people.

Like my mom?
Like many people in our family. And that’s sort of what happened anyway, no?
I thought it was going to go different though.

I know. Me too. But before that I remember when we started estrogen.

February 24th, 2021, at 7 a.m.

Can we go back to that?

What do you want to know?

Just keep telling the story. So you got the appointment, what happened then?

I got the appointment and I couldn’t wait, but I was also freaking out. I wrote about it on my diary:

Feb 10, 2021

Ayer hice mi cita con Plume para empezar el tratamiento hormonal. El proceso fue fácil. Estoy emocionado al respecto, emocionada, emocionade. Creo que empezar a entender el efecto de la testosterona en mi cuerpo va a ser importante para el proceso. Al mismo tiempo me preocupa un poco lo sexual. Ayer K

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26 I’m talking here about compulsory heteronormativity and cisnormativity, where people believe that being heterosexual or cis is the only possibility humans are capable of experiencing, and everything outside of that is wrong.
me dijo que le gustaría que tiráramos más, que no sabe cómo sentirse atraída por mí. Creo que tiene que ver con las ideas heteronormativas de hombre y mujer, creo que ambos entendemos la sexualidad desde ahí entonces es difícil saber qué hacer sino. Ella se preocupa por no hacerme sentir mal con mi cuerpo. Yo no sé si mi problema sea con mi cuerpo o con las formas de entenderlo. Lo que no me gusta es sentir expectativas. Pero la verdad es también que ahorita estoy sintiendo menos las ganas de tirar. Y la verdad no sé bien por qué. Quiero sentarme un poco a pensar y conectar ese fin de semana que K no va a estar. Quiero tener una conversación sana al respecto.

Emocionado, emocionada, emocionade. You’re using all the pronouns there. I like that.

I know, that’s the thing about Spanish, ever since finding out I’m trans I haven’t been able to decide on which pronoun I’d like to use. In English it is so easy, I just go by they/them. I love its plurality, its ambiguity, but in español, with the “e”, el elle, contente, bienvenide, etc. I don’t know. It’s cumbersome, it really changes the way most of your sentences sound. It’s a lot of work. Lola says I’ll get used to it so maybe it’s just a matter of speaking more Spanish, but it’s hard. I just try to use all of them now in Spanish, changing them without much logic.

So you’re saying you don’t support the use of the “e” in Spanish?

No! Not at all. If anything I’m just as annoyed with the other two options, the binary options, precisely because they leave me out no matter what I try to do. It’s like there’s no in for me.

Is that why you’re writing in English?

I could ask you the same thing. Don’t you miss Spanish so much? You know, being an immigrant from Colombia and all.

27 to have sex in Colombian Spanish.
Yes. I guess we do miss Spanish. And we don’t?  
Correct. It’s complicated.28

Everything seems complicated here among the queers.

Correct again. That’s why this section is so hard to write. Every little thing I have to say is so complicated. And I’m also supposed to be literary, to bring you in to my world through imagery. Tengo que traer mi A game. Show, don’t tell. The whole creative writing spill.

So how are we doing that if we’re nothing but ethereal voices on a page?

I guess I could tell them that I’m writing this right now at the UTEP library while my stomach is making sounds thanks to a weird ramen I had for lunch? I could say I’m wearing green shorts, a tan T-shirt with an abstract face stamped on it. Also my breasts are sore. They started coming in two weeks ago and it’s been weird.

Whoa. You’ve let them come in? That’s where we stopped last time.

I know. It’s crazy. And kind of hot, but at the same time the image of a grown “male body” growing breasts is not the most attractive, right?

Aren’t you hoping it is?

I am. Yeah.

Okay but we need to keep track. Please!

This is exactly what happens to me all the time. I’ve got so much to say! I’m so exhausted with trying to just say one thing at a time. I thought I covered this when I explained Jaime Garzón.

If you’re tired I can take over. I know this story too.

I’m interested in what we’re talking about, being attractive, because that’s one of the concerns we had in the diary entry. Would K find us attractive if we changed?

28 It’s complicated because after a few years of speaking English at home with K I’ve really gotten used to it. My thoughts happen in English almost as much as they happen in Spanish, and now I even forget some Spanish words when I’m speaking the language. I feel guilty about it, sure, but I think it’s also inevitable, and at least I feel like I have found a personality in this language and I’m no longer just repeating whatever I used to see on TV. I have my own way of speaking, my own way of using my accent.
She said she’d tell me if she stopped finding me attractive, which I’m thankful for, but I think I’m the only one whose opinion I really need, and for the time being, I’m okay.

**It’s not about what others think.**

Well, it is, too. But it’s more important to me what I think at the moment. Like, I still want people to feel attracted to me and I’m not sure that’s going to happen, but as long as I find myself attractive, I’m okay. I’m okay I’m okay I’m okay.

I think I was actually more worried about the sex than anything else.

**The sex was important. It still is, no? And we also mention taking time to ponder that issue when K left, which is a part of the story we’ve not covered yet.**

To figure all of this stuff out (the attraction and sex thing), I did something that still works to this day when I’m too overwhelmed but I’m not necessarily anxious, and it’s to be alone with myself.

K’s dad lives across the border in Juarez so sometimes when she goes to visit him I stay behind. In the days right before I started estrogen, I stayed behind and explored my gender and my sexuality through long masturbation sessions where I would move my hands gently around my body to sense what felt good, putting my fingers in my mouth and making them wet, touching my nipples, grabbing my ass cheeks, caressing my hips, pressing gently on my perineum and rubbing it.

I distinctly remember one time being in all fours in front of the mirror wearing panties and a bra and realizing what true sexual presence could feel like in my body. It was life-changing.

**Talk about imagery! What is all the people you know going to think about you doing all this?**

I want to be open about how trans bodies like mine experience pleasure. It’s not about the people that know me (sorry). And it’s not about cis people. It's about our trans bodies. It’s about what feels good for us, and about allowing our and my pleasure to take up space on the page.

Exploring my sexuality helped me figure out a new relationship to my physical form after years of disconnection, and it helped ease my dysphoria. As I traced new pleasure lines on the map of my body, I could feel a new energy starting to move through me in sex. I was no longer putting up a fight to keep femininity and feminine sensuality away from my body, I was welcoming it.
Taking the time to figure out what I liked also helped me connect with a part of me I felt curious about: being gay. Back when I thought I was cis, I had tried to figure out if I was a gay guy, but men, no matter how cute they were, didn’t really do anything for me. When I figured out I was trans, though, one of the first thoughts I had was that I was also a lesbian, and it made a lot of sense.

Looking back, I remember having the recurrent thought that women were really unlucky to be stuck liking men, as “we” didn’t really offer anything compelling in my view. I also remember being obsessed with the lesbian media I was exposed to growing up, including t.A.T.u’s *All the Things She Said*, Buffy The Vampire Slayer’s character arc for Willow, and an episode of the UK series Skins, where two young women, Naomi and Emily, fall in love.

I’ve always been a romantic and I loved all the heterosexual rom coms I’d seen, but when I watched the episode of Skins where the two characters get together, I immediately downloaded it, put it on my iPod Touch, and started watching it twice a day for months, replaying key moments of their flirting and the scene where they finally make love by a lake.

In all my years of watching heterosexual couples on TV and movies, I had never felt the way I did with Naomi and Emily. There was something between them, in the way they interacted with each other, in the intimacy they shared, that made me feel true.

Take for example a scene in Naomi’s bedroom where they talk about what lesbian sex could be like. At this point, Emily’s feelings for Naomi are not exactly reciprocated, but they’re trying to be friends and prepare for a school presidential election that’s coming up where Naomi is one of the candidates. They’re laying on the floor, kind of drunk, and then Naomi says:

*Naomi:* “I was wondering, what do lesbians do? … In bed -”

*Emily:* “How would I know!?”

*Naomi:* “You’ve never –”

*Emily:* “No, I’ve never!”

*Naomi:* “I mean, is it all oils and strap-ons or -”
Emily: “No... I don’t know. We do what we do to ourselves, only to each other. Probably slightly more aggressively and with oils and stuff”

The scene ends with them saying oils over and over again until they crack up.

Being raised as a man in Colombia in the 90’s, it never crossed my mind that I could talk with women about sex in this way. I felt like there was a wall between the two genders and I couldn’t cross it to talk and laugh nervously at our attraction to each other. I could only cross it to be in a relationship or to have sex, because according to society that’s all women could offer a “man”. Emily and Naomi shared a language that I didn’t feel privy to in my own life, and even years later when I did try to approach things with women in a more sensible manner, I felt like there was something off, something I couldn’t access. There was a dissonance between the kind of relationship I wanted and the type of relationship I got to develop with my romantic partners because of my gender.

Now that I was finally jumping that gender wall through my transness, I was nervous and excited for what could develop between K and me as we started relating to each other as women. Would I be let in the way I wanted to?

After a specially transformative night with myself before starting estrogen, when K came back from Juarez, we started having sex and I stopped to put on a bra while we did it. I was still in a dominant role, but I felt good. At least for a while. I liked being a chick on top, and I remember having this feeling like I knew exactly who I was: a 27 year old woman with experience showing her younger partner a good time like only she could. I loved that I felt knowledgable, that I knew how to move my hips, what sounds to make, how to touch her body. Sadly, as we kept going I started becoming self conscious about my femininity. I felt fake, like a man wearing women’s underwear trying to be something he’s not. As it happened several times after, we ended up confused, flustered, and ashamed.

It was hard to perform femininity with K back then because I felt like I had to prove my womanhood to her even though she never asked anything of me in that regard. I wanted her to see me and think of me as a member of her gender, and I thought that I needed to perform femininity in very conventional ways to
achieve that, but conventional femininity evaded me. What did it take to be a woman? What does it take to be perceived as a woman when the way you look screams “man”?

I felt like I couldn’t really let go of my past as a “man” because K knew me in that role since we began dating. How can you see your partner in a whole new way if that new way isn’t a reality yet?

Up until then in early 2021 my transness had been explored mainly by me in private, and K had more of a passive role supporting me and hearing me out. I knew she accepted me and wanted to be with me but our relationship had changed and I wanted her to be more involved and to learn more so I decided to give her a book called The Trans Partner Handbook by Jo Green.

She wasn’t too into it at the beginning, she felt like she didn’t really need it, but after a while she surprised me by telling me she’d read it and she felt bad that she wasn’t more supportive or involved in my process. She admitted that she was grieving a version of me and our relationship that was gone, and that her internalized transphobia was making it hard to feel close to me, but she also recognized my struggles with dysphoria and all the alienation I had been feeling from the world.

The book really helped us connect, as it goes over many aspects of the transition process, from the coming out to the hormones to the surgeries, name changes, etc., and it’s peppered with interviews with other people who, like K, had trans partners. At the end of one of out talks she told me that, after weeks of feeling like she was the only one dealing with something like this, she had realized she wasn’t alone.

The day I made the decision to start hormone therapy, on February 6th, we went on a walk through Sunset Heights and ended up at Mundy Park, a small neighborhood park with a basketball court, kids’ games, and cement benches painted green that sit proudly next to big trees. We sat in one of those benches, and I told her that I’d decided to start hormones.

There’s many things I’ve forgotten about those days, small conversations we had about my gender, fights we had about feeling disconnected, and much more, but I do remember that moment on that bench, when I told her that I wanted to start my medical transition. It doesn’t feel tremendously significant looking back, since it was more of an announcement than a consultation, but still, it’s interesting to me that the memory
is there in my mind so vividly. Maybe it meant something deeper that I have not yet realized. Maybe it just showed that I also wasn’t alone.

Remember that time you and your neighbors got together after a Chicano Batman concert, months later, and one of them said y’all gave lesbian vibes?

One of my proudest moments, yes.

Or the time K was getting a tattoo downtown and you went with her in your yellow skirt looking incredible and a woman walking by told you both your outfits were “one hundred”?

Yes, the time a guy from the masters program saw me and said hi, and I felt embarrassed.

You still looked hone hundred.

So okay, we’re back at the beginning, right before we started E. Did we really need to go all those other places?

I’m not sure. The blank page underneath, disappearing as I write, is like a fog. I’m not sure what’s ahead, but whatever gets me there will at least show me more of the terrain. I think it was important to talk about my sexuality, wouldn’t you agree?

But that goes after, in the summer, when you stopped taking hormones and figured out that you needed to give your “normal” body a chance. We just need to advance right now.

Fine. I got my appointment at Plume, and as it got close, I started to panic:

Feb 17, 2021

Ayer tuve toda una crisis con lo del género. Vi fotos de mi pasado y no fue fácil. A veces veo esas fotos y no me reconozco. Como que puedo sentir que en esos momentos habría cosas de mi cuerpo y de mi uso de ropa que no me dejaba sentir del todo tranquila con mi cuerpo. Es como que siempre hay algo. Anyway, ya pasó. Estoy contenta de empezar HRT y ver cómo reacciona mi
Looking back at old pictures and being unable to remember what it was like to be alive in those moments was hard to process. I felt a rush of sadness overcome me. Why wasn’t I able to connect to my own past? And when I did, why did I always remember anguish? Why had it taken me so long to figure out what was making me unhappy? Why all the trials and tribulations?

I felt angry, and I still am, because even today in 2022 there’s people who are fighting to eliminate the notion of transness from the globe with the idea that doing so will magically erase all trans people. Trans children will not stop being born, but if they grow up in the world these communities are trying to build, they will grow up sad and confused and they won’t know why, just like I did.

As usual with my diary entries, I tried to give myself some comfort, but the possible consequences of my actions regarding my gender were seeping into every area of my life. If the coming months felt uncertain, what about growing old, what about my family?

Feb 18, 2021

Ayer estuve pensando en el futuro y la muerte. Me pregunté cómo veo mi futuro, en qué cuerpo, y la verdad es que no me esperaba un cuerpo femenino a mi muerte. Imaginarme abuela es rarísimo. Ya me había pensado papá y abuelo. Me imaginaba un ejemplo masculino diferente, amable, cariñoso, definitivamente sin senos. En mi muerte me imaginaba un hombre. Sin embargo, lo que pienso ultimamente es que sin importar el futuro imaginado, quiero por lo menos vivir en un cuerpo que se sienta más mío, que refleje en el exterior como me siento adentro, y obvio también que voy a intentar estrógeno, pero voy a ser cuidadoso con cómo me siento.
A veces pienso que ser trans también puede ser darse cuenta de que lo que doy por sentado como mi género no es ninguna esencia sino conceptos impuestos sobre mi identidad y mi cuerpo. Que los puedo cambiar si quiero, y que lo mínimo es cuestionarlos. Lo que es más duro es romper con un pasado al que estoy atada. Se siente como acabar con una vida, terminarla y si estuviera sola en el mundo no habría problema, pero lo de la familia no me deja. Se siente imposible. Mi familia parece llena de certezas. Sobre todo, parece necesitar las certezas porque el mundo por lo demás no les da una vida fácil. Cambiar el hijo por hija, y después someterme a ideas de feminidad, ¡qué mameda! Y que duro para mi mamá y su fé.

Do you feel ready to talk about this?

I’m not sure. Talking about my family is always so scary. It makes me not want to share this book. I have a feeling it would hurt my family.

But do you need to avoid hurting them? Wasn’t that the problem later on?

K was just telling me that your role as the one asking questions only was going to get annoying and it has. What if I asked you? If I took over the role of the interviewer?

Is what what we’re doing? Why do you keep deflecting? I’m not going to take another detour.

Okay.

Thinking about my body growing old in its maleness felt uncomfortable even before I knew I was trans. When I looked in the mirror I saw an old, tired man who had come to the end of the line. I didn’t feel a future coming, I just felt dread. My eyes were surrounded by a grey aura, my nipples hung sadly on my chest, my skin was dry, and the fat on my sides made me so square you’d think I was a living rectangle. It sucked. I started getting really sad. It felt like I was coming to the end of my life (and I was, in a way.)
Once I started thinking about taking hormones and changing my body, I felt like life was returning, and my body felt more alive than it had for a while, but I felt shame about it because I thought maybe I was just afraid to grow old instead of wanting to be a woman. Could I confuse the two things?

I didn’t have an answer, but the thought of following the expected biological course male bodies take as they grow old made me feel hopeless, like my body was expired and had nothing left to give. And I guess here I could fall into the unhelpful binary where I say that now things are better and I don’t dread getting fat or getting old because the body I’m creating feels more like home, because I do, but I have to give more information because this is a binary that creates the myth trans people’s joy and purpose can only be in medically transitioning, and that could not be farther from the truth.

The thing is, it’s not binary, because this experience is specific to me, and it’s different from other people’s experience. Someone else could be happy not changing their body and still expressing their transness through clothes or pronouns or in conversation. They could even not be okay with how they look but transition is not an option for them and they’ve made peace with it. There’s people who feel alright with their body aging in its original configuration even when their gender identity doesn’t match what other people perceive, and there’s people who try not to center their bodies’ perceived image at all in their life, and think of the body as a vessel, more interested in its functionality than appearance. There’s as many possibilities as there are people, I just happen to feel the way that I do about my body.

How cool would it be if in the future a human born with a penis could say “I’ve had a happy life with a penis, identifying as a man, and now I want to have breasts and look more feminine and identify as nonbinary” without having to give a reason, and without being judged but cared for?

When I try to imagine it, I still can’t see what my face will look like at my funeral (I hope it’s at least one I like), but I like the idea of being a mom/dad. I have a certainty in my body that if I could bear children, I would, but I’m not sure that my role after that would be binary. I’d just want to be a mix of both.

And as for my family. I’m still in the same place. I’m scared of losing them, and I’m afraid there’s no way out of that.
You talk about breaking from your past, end a life, how does the breaking feel in your body?

How does death?

Breaking is a kind of sadness that rests on my bones sometimes and makes me heavy and unable to move, or a tear that threatens to break my chest wide open in one violent motion. It can also be a scream, a tongue cut in half. Death can be the dryness of my skin as it breaks during the hot summer months here in El Paso, or my unquenchable thirst. It can be the tears I imagine falling from my mom’s eyes, or my dad’s eyes never meeting mine again.

It was already hard not to see my family all the time like I used to in Colombia, but after I figured out I was trans I also started hiding a huge part of my life from them. I was so afraid of breaking their hearts or feeling their disapproval or disgust that I just pretended like nothing was happening, and it felt awful. I used to share everything with them but I knew there was a limit, and that limit was being trans.

I’m just not sure how much I want to share about this.

That’s a fair concern, you love them. You don’t want to hurt them. But we need to let go, right? That’s why this keeps coming up, even though you’ve tried to avoid it so much.

But isn’t it too long?

It doesn’t have to be. You are their first child, and you were always a good kid at school, and a decent human being, so you felt a pressure to keep being that throughout your life. You’ve never wanted to disappoint them. Being trans is considered to be a failure in your culture, it’s supposed to be bad. Your mom taught you that doing drugs or modifying your body was bad, and you have felt shame about tattooing, doing drugs, and a lot of other things regarding your body because of that. When you got that piercing your mom said you had damaged your body, imagine how she’d react if she knew you started hormone replacement therapy?

And to top it off, the people who taught you shame are the same ones you told everything to, the people you trusted the most.

Remember when you were 14, that night at that school party when you finally opened up to a friend about the sexual abuse you had experienced on the internet, after months of carrying the
weight in silence, and then, the next morning in your house when you woke up, remember that thought you had, that if movies had taught you anything, it was that parents were always there for their children no matter what, and then do you remember going to their room and waking them up and saying that you had to tell them something and then do you remember telling them the story? Remember how worried they were for you, how much love they showed you, and how they never treated you differently? How they washed away the shame you felt (because you blamed yourself) con sus caricias?

I remember, and I also remember making the decision to tell them my darkest secrets from then on.

That’s why it was so hard! What was my life supposed to be like without them? How could I make my new life without completely trashing my old one?

It’s sad I didn’t have the answers at the time. I had no idea that most of my “old” life would just end up meshing with my “new” life organically over many months, as I told more and more people from my past that I was trans. When I wrote that diary entry, it felt like I was being pulled in two different directions, one was the direction my parents and my past self intended for me, which included getting married, finding economic stability, having children, and growing old in better or at least equal economic conditions than the ones I was born into; the other one was unknown, and probably fiscally irresponsible, but at least it included a version of me that felt truer.

All of these thoughts were going around in my head as my appointment got closer and I had no answers. I just knew I didn’t want to stop.

And then, finally, the day of the appointment came.

Feb 23, 2021

Hoy tengo la cita con Plume, y si todo va bien, me darán la prescripción de las hormonas para empezar el tratamiento. Estoy muy pero muy nerviosa. Pensar en habitar el mundo de una forma tan diferente me asusta muchísimo. Cambiar. Una parte de mí
tiene miedo, pero otra se siente más bien correcta, como que voy por donde es, así sea difícil. Lo que pienso es que la transición social puede ser más lenta, a medida que me sienta cómoda en mi cuerpo.

Y es que la verdad andar con un cuerpo que a veces prefiero ignorar, que no me fascina reconocer en fotos, que es leído dentro de narrativas machistas, y que me da beneficios patriarcales, no me está haciendo feliz (bueno, los privilegios sí, la capacidad de una existencia más tranquila gracias a mi masculinidad y mi forma de verme es eso, un privilegio, y aunque abandonarlo me de mucho miedo, creo que es necesario). No es que no me guste mi cuerpo, la verdad sí me gusta, y eso a veces es raro, pero la verdad también es que muchas veces no me siento cómoda en él, cuando estoy frente al espejo es como si estuviera en otro cuerpo y quiero escuchar ese instinto. Tal vez sea mejor.

I was still very affected by the internal struggle I’d had with the make privilege I’d inherited thanks to my body. I liked the safety it had given me, the ability to go unnoticed from bullies and other threats growing up, but I disliked that I couldn’t really be seen by others the way I saw myself. My idea to socially transition after I’d already seen some changes in my body was influenced by that fear of losing safety, but it also had to do with the idea that I needed to pass if I wanted to be truly seen. I was uncomfortable at the

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29 In trans binary terms, pass means to successfully look as the other gender, being able to “fool” society into thinking you’re cis. Because trans people experience so much violence for the way we look, passing can be a safety concern, but in more recent years the idea that you have to pass has come under scrutiny as more and more trans and nonbinary folks have argued that passing is a pressure created by a system that oppresses us, and we shouldn’t conform.
thought of looking like a feminine man instead of a woman, and I was afraid of how vulnerable that made me in public, so I thought waiting until I could look my best was the better choice.

I finally had my virtual appointment later that day and after discussing all the side effects, and asking all the questions I had to the physician over Zoom, I got my prescription sent to the nearest Wallgreens. Immediately after it happened I asked K if she could come with me and we walked all the way there, a 90 minute walk under the sun.

I was nervous about facing the pharmacist because I was in boymode and I wondered if maybe seeing a prescription for estrogen from a person who looked like a man would be a red flag for someone who hated trans people. Luckily I was with K and she helped me calm down and the pharmacist ended up not even really engaging with me at all when I gave him the prescription. He just handed me the medicine without incident.

Once we got home I opened the bottle and counted 57 pills instead of the 60 I should have gotten, but I brushed it off because I didn’t want to go back there and ask him to correct his mistake and, in doing so, call more attention to myself. I also decided to start the next day, taking my first double dose once in the morning, and once at night.

Starting hrt is often presented in online forums as a pivotal moment in one’s transition, so the next morning when I woke up and was ready to start the treatment I decided to record the moment and save it for the archive.

The video is 30 seconds long. I’m in my pajamas still a little tired from waking up early. It felt like an important moment but at the same time I tried to be careful not to get too excited about something so big and so unpredictable. There was no way of knowing exactly how the hormone was going to affect my
body, and I hadn’t solved all my doubts about my gender so I didn’t want to create expectations that were impossible to meet.

In my life so far I’d also never had to be on any medication for a long time, so starting this process and considering that I might need to take pills for the rest of my life was overwhelming. To make matters worse, whenever I put a pill under my tongue I had to wait a long time until it dissolved, and I felt like it never dissolved properly so I ended up checking it with my tongue and swallowing it most of the time, only what I swallowed was not the hard pill but the grainy moist one full of saliva.

Over the next few weeks I kept the routine, but the same doubts I’d been having since day one started playing in the background like a song on loop. Was I really trans? Was I really willing to change my whole life based on the fact that I thought I was trans? What if I regretted it?

Was I going to lose everything and everyone I cared about?

Was anyone going to love me?

Was someone suffering from culturally induced transphobia going to kill me?

Questions, fueled by anxiety, can become like a fog, and I started to feel that fog get denser and denser as the time passed. I had no one to talk to about what I was going through except a couple of friends and K, but even then I felt so ashamed of myself and all my hesitation that I didn’t feel like I deserved any help. I started isolating myself from the people I cared about and my constant questioning and the persistent monologue going on in my head was so heavy that I felt like a burden all the time. My body started reacting as well, and, as it often happens when I’m stressed, I started having horrible back pain and no matter how much sleep I got, I didn’t feel rested at all.

Starting hormones was supposed to help reduce the distress I felt around my gender, but it was doing the opposite. My dysphoria was getting worse and it had started affecting me in ways that I hadn’t experienced before. I felt like I was fighting myself all the time, hating on my body and my thoughts and the way I moved in the world, was I being too delicate, too harsh, was I laughing too loudly like a guy or too dainty like a girl, was I being a tough guy or was I being too weak, too emotional, was I being too dumb, was I was I was I was I?
Add to this endless line of thought that I still had to turn in work for school and start thinking about my thesis project for the MFA, and you can sense that I was about to break.

**But you didn’t.**

Well by the time I had this crisis I had tools and lived experience dealing with my mental health\(^3\). I’d been going to therapy for more than a year, and I could sense from what I’d learned during my sessions that the current state of affairs wasn’t sustainable, so I knew I had to ground myself back into my body, and stop making it the enemy.

What I notice looking back on my diary is that whereas the first entries I did focused mostly on my mental woes, the ones I wrote after I started estrogen began incorporating more of a narrative and description of my day to day life. I was now making an effort to place my body in space, to record my movements and my conversations to reassure myself that I did exist in the flesh and that I was part of the fabric of the world.

It could appear like something trivial, but I’m proud of this shift in narrative because it was an effort to get out of my head and start putting my body on the map.

**Where was your body before? On what map?**

That’s the thing, now that I was actually thinking about and trying to be conscious of my body, I was becoming aware of how much my body was missing from my memory. I remember having a body and being places, but there’s a fogginess about it that makes it feel ethereal in my mind’s eye. Was that even me back then? With all those masks I had to wear to be seen?

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\(^3\) At 24 I had what you’d call a mental breakdown due to the pressure I was experiencing at work and in my personal life, and because nobody in my family thought a therapist was an option, I had to deal with it on my own (I had their support but there was only so much they could do without knowing anything about mental health.) It was months before I started getting better, but I remember thinking that I had to make an effort, get up every day and keep going because I just wasn’t ready to give up or die. The experience showed me my inner strength and I draw on its knowledge every time I face a difficult situation.
It’s sad when you finally feel the distance you’ve had with your body for years because of the discomfort it brings you. All those years of muted pain. When you access that feeling it’s like the floodgates open up and you drown in tears and heartache. It’s overwhelming.

You feel like you’ve lost so much.

That’s why it was so important to start writing my body into my diary. If my memory failed, I could always go back to the archive.

MY MEMORY IS FAILING
(or how I let my past self do the writing between here and when I told my parents I was trans)

Marzo 4, 2021

Cumplí años esta semana. 28. Ya estoy grande. No fue tan celebrado, aunque sí comimos McDonalds de desayuno y en el almuerzo comimos Sonic. Había mucho trabajo y casi no hicimos nada. Se supone que mañana viernes vamos a hacer más cosas. El día anterior en mi último día de 27 salí en la noche, muy confundida conmigo misma. Estaba muy triste, y la verdad eso no ha cambiado tanto.

Estaba muy triste porque no me ubicaba, la biblia de la disforia me hizo sentir que hay cosas de mí que han sido duras. La distancia con mi cuerpo y mis emociones, sentirme incómoda con mi ropa. Como que hizo muy real ciertas incomodidades de mi vida. A veces no me las creo que soy trans. Parece más una carga que otra cosa. El caso es que salí a caminar y grabé un audio en la montaña cerca de la casa. Lloré.

Las hormonas todavía no han generado cambios que pueda notar. Las erecciones siguen sucediendo y nada físico ha cambiado. Lo
único es más resequedad en la piel. Por suerte tengo crema humectante.

Sobre la sexualidad con K las cosas están un poco estancadas. Extraño saber qué hacer, cómo sentirme sexy cuando mi cuerpo como que no es como lo imagino. Pero bueno, ahí vamos descubriendo cosas. K dice que no sabe qué hacer conmigo, y que se siente muy hetero en el sexo. Eso puede cambiar a futuro con los cambios que traigan las hormonas, pero igual tengo fé en que ambas queremos experimentar y lo haremos juntas.

En la conversación le dije que estoy dudando y tal vez soy más masculina. Como que tal vez no quiero transicionar médicamente. Es verdad que a veces esa transición es abrumadora. Buscar ropa interior que oculte el bulge\textsuperscript{31}, o mirar formas de tucking me dan jartera. Me da mucha pereza que una mujer no pueda tener pene. Quisiera sentir que mi cuerpo sería hermoso, pero a veces miro fotos de mujeres trans y no veo esa hermosura que tienen tantas mujeres cis. Me da foco todo lo que tengo que hacer para verme genial. Entiendo que hay transfobia en mi mirada, pero eso no quita que sea duro. Lo último es como querer cirugía, tener una vagina y poder usar toda la ropa femenina sin problemas. Sería un sueño, pero de nuevo, es tanto! Y significa tanto! Es agotador. Siento a veces que me supera y que no voy a ser capaz, pero hay algo que no me deja detenerme.

\textsuperscript{31} la protuberancia que se nota por encima de la ropa gracias al pene.
Lo otro que ha pasado estos días es que siento que no tengo una voz artística. Que me hace falta tener voz. Me hace falta apoyo para creérmelas que soy trans. Y parte de eso siento que tiene que ver con la comunidad. Me gustaría poder estar más en el mundo como persona trans. Empezar a hablar y ocupar espacios así, y que todo no sea un secreto. Quisiera contarles a mis papás para tenerlos como red de apoyo. Quisiera que mi mamá me enseñara cosas de mujer, quisiera tener guías. Los foros de reddit han funcionado, pero no son suficientes. La pandemia lo hace todo muy difícil.

Lo cierto es que las dudas que tengo no son suficientes para detenerme. Siento que quiero seguir, quiero vivir esto, dentro de mí, sin importar lo que mi exterior me haga sentir.

**Marzo 12, 2021**

Hoy ya estoy sola, aunque la casa está desorganizada y la gata está, y no he recogido la nevera. Me he masturbado mucho entre ayer y hoy, con porno heterosexual. Vi porno queer y aunque me pareció hermoso, no me excitó. Sobre todo la locación siempre era la misma, y tal vez todo se veía demasiado real. Creo que me gusta un poco el show. Me gustan las narrativas ficticias. Fue interesante eso sí, que a veces quería ser la persona con pene, y otras quería ser la mujer. Tal vez ambos instintos viven en mí.

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32 K’s sibling’s cat.
También fui a donde Zen para una reunión. Estuvo muy divertida. Por momentos me imaginaba lo que sería o cómo sería estar vestida de mujer. De verdad que no sé. Tengo mucho miedo de cambiar para siempre, irreversiblemente. Tengo miedo de que me violen, de que me quede sin seguro médico, de todos los trámites. Tengo miedo de tener un cuerpo que no me guste, cuando el que tengo está bien y me gusta. Pero al mismo tiempo siento que ese cuerpo que “me gusta” no lo siento requele mío. Siento que quiero saber y estar más en contacto con mis emociones (eso sería muy diferente con estrógeno?) Estoy en un punto extraño de querer algo nuevo, y otro de querer volver a lo viejo, a lo “normal,” y también un punto de mucho miedo y duda.

En la devuelta de donde Zen, me vine hablando con Ala de literatura trans, muy interesante. Hablamos de cambiar de pronombres a lo largo de la novela, empezar masculino y terminar femenino, o tener un sujeto plural. También la idea de ser dos personas al tiempo, la que se era y la que uno crea. En ese sentido, pensarse a una como madre. Muy interesante. Me siento muy mujer en bicicleta, aunque sé que como soy percibida hombre estoy más segura. Me da mucho miedo ser abusada o morirme. Estoy muy muy confundida. Y cansada.

Siento que mi cuerpo sería feo, que mi pene lo arruinaría todo, pero también temo perder el líbido y no volver a sentir placer en el sexo. Creo que aprecio un poco más lo que fui. Lo que he

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33 A friend from the MFA.
34 Another friend from the MFA.
sido. Quisiera saber si puedo sentirlo mío, propio, o si ya es muy tarde. Otra parte de mí no ha dejado de tomar las hormonas. Sigo mi camino.
A veces la verdad es que me siento insensible, como que no tengo género, un sentido claro de un género.
Todo es confusión, pero ahí vamos.

**Abril 3, 2021**

Hoy me quedé sola e intenté leer pero me distraje. Finalmente en la tarde fui a un parque y lei pero tuve como un momento de mucha conexión conmigo mismo y decidí decírselo a mis papás y a mi hermano. Se los conté por el lado médico. Les expliqué la disforia y que no me sentía como hombre. Y estuvo más o menos bien hasta que hablé de hormonas. Mi mamá y mi hermano están muy en contra de alterar el cuerpo. Les aseguré que yo misma tengo dudas sobre eso. Y hasta ahí llegó. Hablamos mucho, expliqué mucho, y mi hermano dijo que no le extrañaba, que él había pensado desde antes que algo así era posible, por mi expresión de género. Mi papá me apoyo un montón. Fue genial. Mi mamá lloró en un momento, y creo que se resiste mucho a la idea, pero me dijo que me apoyaba igual, que era mi vida. Me siento en shock de haberles dicho. Kalina también estaba impresionada. Se siente muy muy real, y aunque no sienta que haya dicho mentiras, estos días voy y vengo mucho con la idea de ser trans o por lo menos de usar hormonas. Tengo dudas aunque en este punto me da miedo regresar a la testosterona.
Lo seguiré procesando pero fue un paso importante.

And this is where it all went to shit.

Thank you, movie line\textsuperscript{35}.

And yes.

I was sitting in a park that I love close to our house, the afternoon sun was hitting me just right, and I was feeling completely in tune with myself and the nature around me. I thought “what better time to tell my parents I’m trans?”

And so I went home, called them, and told them everything.

Sadly, even though my timing felt perfect from my point of view, it was the opposite for my family. My brother was going through some health problems at the time that I didn’t know about, and my mom and dad were under a lot of stress trying to take care of him so when I broke my news, they were already on the edge.

They were kind of accepting of the fact that I was trans, but it really bothered them that I was taking hormones. I explained to them that I had done my research and I had talked with a physician, but they didn’t think that was enough. For them, and especially for my mom, an important goal in life was to die with exactly the same body you were born with. No tattoos, no piercings, and nothing else that could “corrupt” your flesh.

“Are you going to grow a vagina?” she asked, and I don’t know if she was actually ignorant about what hormones do, or she just wanted to hurt me, but it made me feel like a freak. I explained to her that I would grow boobs, but my sex couldn’t change only with hormones, that change required surgery.

At the end of the call, even though it hadn’t been smooth sailing, my dad made sure to say that whatever I decided, I had their support, and so I was left feeling relieved.

\textsuperscript{35} K always says I speak in movie, and it might be true, after all, most of the English I learned came from movies I watched.
I didn’t hear from anyone in my family for a few days, which was odd, but then I called my mom and she told me they were taking the news really bad. The stress they were all under had gotten way worse because of me, my dad was devastated, and my brother’s health problem had worsen. Before we hung up she admitted she might never be able to accept it.

Abril 8th, 2021

Han sido días muy difíciles. Después de contarle (que soy trans) a mis papás tuve un buen día, donde me sentí segura de mí misma, y después hablé con mi mamá y todo se fue a la mierda. Mi papá estaba tomando la noticia muy mal (según mi mamá), mi hermano estaba jodido con su salud, y mi mamá no sabía si iba a poder manejar los cambios. Me dijo que solo estaba confundida, que habían muchas opciones. (En realidad no me dijo que estaba confundida, pero sí lo sentí así).

El ánimo se me fue al piso, me sentí como al comienzo del proceso, muchas más dudas, mucho odio propio, ansiedad. Casi no me pude concentrar. K me ha apoyado y me ha hecho sentir validada, pero las dudas persisten y hay una sensación muy pesada sobre mi pecho, tanto que estoy considerando un cambio de rumbo. Pensar en mi papá triste me vuelve nada, siento que les arruiné todo. Me siento horrible y curiosamente me siento muy Sergio y nada Sae

Esa es la vuelta esta semana, estoy sintiendo muchas dudas, y estoy considerando la idea de no ser necesariamente mujer trans,

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36 Sae was a name I tried for a bit, but I never really felt comfortable with it. K came up with it while writing a character based on me for a play, although she spelled it “Say.”
y de no querer en realidad cambiar mi cuerpo y modificarme con hormonas. Me da miedo arrepentirme, me da miedo cambiar y no reconocer la persona que soy, y que quiero en este momento. Hay muchos momentos de felicidad en mi vida, alegría y muchas cosas que disfruto, y no las quiero perder.

Me confunde mucho sentirme mujer, o femenina, y después tener momentos de masculinidad. Y en realidad es muy difícil saber cómo me siento en mi cuerpo, en mi cara. Lo que sé es que cuando me olvido de mi cuerpo, soy yo. Cuando me visto con ropa que sé que me queda bien, puedo como space out y no tengo que pensar en cómo me veo. Pero eso me hace sentir que tiene más que ver con la presentación que la identidad e género. Me doy cuenta que cuando no me miro al espejo es difícil pensar en mi rostro. Como que lo percibo pero no sé si lo siento propio siempre. De verdad no sé. Casi que dependo del espejo para saber quién soy. Cuando me veo como que me ubico. No sé si al tener tantas dudas sea bueno seguir. Y más con el mundo encima. Puedo por lo pronto seguir con el plan de los 3 meses y ver a partir de ahí qué.

Lo otro es que mi pecho está súper sensible. Y la verdad no sé cómo sentirme al respecto. Es muy raro. Hay definitivamente una parte de mí que los quiere, pero otra tiene mucho miedo de lo que se viene, los otros cambios. Hoy vi un video en el que una doctora habla de un tipping point después del cual una

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37 I’m talking about boobs. Senos.
finalmente se empieza a ver a sí misma y dice que después de eso una se vuelve más valiente. Esa idea me intriga.

Mi mente está constantemente trayendo a colación momentos de incomodidad con mi género: incomodidad con ciertos hombres, y en general un “no tengo idea qué hacer o qué decir con ellos.” Querer afeitarme el bigote desde que empezó a salir. Querer hacer ejercicios de cola de mujer para tener cola de mujer. Odio la idea de que mi pelo fuera un casco. Sentirme fuera de onda con ciertos roles masculinos, como “bailar como hombre”, sentir el instinto de propiedad sobre mi pareja, o sentir que tengo que protegerla. La envidia de la ropa. El rol sexual masculino (hay momentos donde lo disfruto pero más por el placer que doy y por los cuerpos que por mi satisfacción personal). Sentirme mal por ser emocional. Envidia de lo que pueden hacer las mujeres que siempre parecen luchar por lo que quieren y que al final del día son las que tienen la razón, las duras del paseo.

El video es que la mayoría del tiempo eso es lo que son, pensamientos. En realidad hay tantas otras veces donde me siento bien socialmente o incluso con K. Momentos de disfrute, O eso creo. El otro día donde Zen nos divertimos bastante, y hay momentos donde me emociono y hablo y soy feliz. Es eso suficiente? Y la verdad, el sufrimiento diario no es tan necesario para ser trans. Para querer cambiarse el cuerpo. No tengo que probar nada. Creo que lo único que me preocupa es:
This is too much.

Your family, your chest sensitivity, your back pain, your isolation, all the responsibilities you had for school, your immigration status, the pandemic, and the fact that you were having a deep identity crisis that was bringing up a lot of shame and self-hate. All of these were happening at the same time, and you were dealing with them mostly by yourself?

I had a therapist, and K supported me where it counted.

But it wasn’t enough, right? I mean, look at those diary entries, look at this body you’ve created here, all the times you’ve used the word pain, doubt, shame, all the times you’ve embodied that pain as you put it down on the page. That’s so much tortuous thought.

Your thesis director keeps saying you need to bring down all the abstract feelings and thoughts into imagery the reader can relate to, but what good has that done? You’re just reliving all that trauma. As it stands now, reading this book is like moving through very depressing mud.

Well that’s exactly what it was like. I lost myself in the process. Completely. I didn’t know which way was up or down. I was fully and completely in distress.

So is the rest of the story in the same vein? We get a little piece or archive and then you tell us your thoughts about it in hopes more and more people will understand what it’s like to be you, and then at the end you tell them that maybe there’s hope?

 Aren’t you, right now, in 2022, a few weeks away from your thesis defense, still going through a lot, precisely because you’re still trying to explain yourself?

And I know how the story goes:

you stopped hrt a few days later

and convinced your parents you had gotten over “being trans”;
you went on a summer road trip through the South,
the East Coast, and North Dakota, and came back in full crisis with K38;
you opened up your relationship and tried Ethical Non-Monogamy
but ended up almost breaking up;
you didn’t write much of your thesis and panicked because of it;
you started teaching intro to creative writing with Felicia Rose Chavez’
*The Anti Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Classroom* as your guide,
the highlight of your time in El Paso;
you eventually started presenting femme in public and
hanging out with other queer people (which was great),
but you also started to feel more dysphoria
because you felt like you weren’t trans enough, again;
you finally plateaued at the beginning of 2022
feeling okay with your body, leaving behind the worry to define what you are;
you started the thesis and started reliving all the past trauma and putting it here;
you started hormones again but this time you kept it from your parents;
you started to grow breasts again just a few weeks ago,
and decided to get married with K after you reconciled
so you can stay and start a life with them,
but eventually back tracked a lot of the progress
and started feeling shame again, isolation and distress.

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38 due to the fact that you both had a lot unresolved issues with gender, sexuality, and grief stemming from the pandemic, your transition, K’s coming to terms with her queerness, and a sense that you were both trapped in the relationship.
Look at this thing, this body mirroring your life right now, almost to the date. You stopped hormones last time right about this time last year. April 2021. We’re in April 2022, is this just another cycle of your pain?

Haven’t you had enough?

Can you please give me a good reason to keep going with this?
Dear Tolima,

I made you up one day when K was thinking about baby names and suggested Durango because that’s the State her dad was born in, I said, well, my dad comes from the state of Tolima, so maybe we can do that too? And then I started writing to you as part of this thesis, an addressee I could talk to about my hopes and dreams for the future. I gave up after 7 entries, but looking back, there’s one I want to keep, the last one:

Dear Tolima,

Can we start a new way of life?
Where gender is pure embodiment,
with labels only opening up possibilities
instead of creating boxes.
Where I am free to choose how I want to live,
who I want to be, and no one can force me to do otherwise?
Where whiteness is not the base reality for everyone, but just one (temporarily) disfavored option?

When I started writing to you I thought I would reflect a lot on my gender and my history. I thought that reaching you through my writing would open up possibilities to explore my identity, and well, it did, but I am such a full being right now that my mind wanders into things beyond my gender, and it goes more towards other ways in which my life can be liberated. Colonization being the main thing. I’m centered now on my physical reality as it mixes with my emotions.
I’m navigating the emotional territories of my body and it’s assemblages with the time and space I currently inhabit. The fears that come from immigration, from body transformation, from family fractures, from ancestral grief. And the more I am, the less I can see you. My wish to be a mother is intact, but I am more than a mother waiting to happen.

That doesn’t mean I don’t have things to tell you, but it’s more to ask you to understand why everything on this book feels out of place.

You see, I thought this book was about telling my story, presenting myself to the world so the world would see me. I thought if I showed my archive people would understand and they would open up space for me.

I thought that if I put it all down, I could heal, I could be heard, I could be understood!

I thought, I thought, I thought…

All my life I’ve wanted to say something. Something that would change the world, that would bring about peace. I wanted to use language to move people, to end oppression, to liberate us. I thought I had that kind of power.

I thought, if I tell you who I am, maybe you’ll listen to what I have to say. If I tell you how I experience my body, my emotions, my history, maybe you’ll think what I have to say is valuable.

I keep thinking and thinking and thinking and writing and writing and writing, and asking for validation, for approval, for change. I keep asking for a way out of this pain that is our pain.

Will you make it stop?

(...)

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I thought this book was about telling my story, presenting myself to the world so the world would see me. But every single word I put on here creates more confusion, more doubt. These words that I’m trying to use to define me are trapping me.

So I think I can’t keep writing this book.

There will never be enough space to say all the things I want to say, and I keep being held down by language.

I’m glad I got to tell you some of the story, and I’m sorry if it got dark or I made you feel hopeless. I’m sorry I rushed the ending. I just couldn’t relive everything, it was too hard.

I thought this book was about telling my story, presenting myself to the world so the world would see me. But maybe it’s more about stopping. Getting myself to stop. Stop trying to get others to see me and start living instead. Stop asking myself all the questions created by a world that can’t imagine a being like me can exist and instead start asking my own questions.

Maybe I should just stop.

Stop.
Me despierto fría porque a K le gusta dejar prendido el ventilador toda la noche, aún cuando apenas está empezando a hacer calor. Antes de quitarme el antifaz y descubrir mis ojos, extiendo la pierna derecha hasta encontrar la de ella. Después me acerco más y la abrazo, acaricio su piel, y la doy un par de besos mañaneros.

“Buenos días baybe, ¿Qué quieres de desayuno?” Le pregunto, y entre sueños K me dice “algo rico.”

Me quito el antifaz y la veo, passed out. Está haciendo un día soleado y caluroso y la luz amarilla se filtra por la ventana y nos toca la piel morena.

Me levanto, pongo el antifaz sobre la mesa de noche, camino hasta el estudio, donde tengo el iPad, y lo llevo conmigo a la cocina. Prendo el speaker y pongo mi podcast favorito: Corriendo con tijeras, donde Caietana y Ale me hablan de cómo es vivir la vida a los 30. El episodio de hoy se llama Corriendo con el porro, entonces yo agarro mi pipa y me hecho un par de toques antes de empezar.

En el lavaplatos todavía hay losa del día anterior, entonces mientras me pongo pacheca lavo los platos. Cuando termino agarro las tortillas, los huevos, el jamón, mi queso, y el queso vegano de Kalina. Hoy comeremos: tortillas con jamón y queso + huevos fritos.

Me demoro un poco más de lo que quería haciendo el desayuno, pero Caietana y Ale me hacen reír entonces no me molesta mucho. Cuando termino, hago el llamado que me aprendí a mi papá: YA ESTÁ SERVIDO.

K sale del cuarto con los ojos apenas abiertos y cuando ve los huevos fritos se entusiasma. He pausado el podcast entonces comemos con el ruido de la calle. Le pregunto qué tiene planeado para el día y ella me cuenta que va a estar ensayando con actores todo el día en el desierto donde está haciendo su nueva pieza de ciencia ficción chicana. Después tiene una cita con L, y está emocionada porque ya van tres y las cosas pintan bien. A mí L me cae muy bien porque le ha enseñado mucho español a K, cosa que yo nunca pude hacer.

Por mi parte, le cuento que mi día es complejo, pero creo que va a salir bien. Tengo clase en la mañana, un performance en la tarde, y en la noche voy a ir con mis amigues al festival de cine que acaba de empezar.
Cuando terminamos de desayunar, K me ayuda a llevar los platos a la cocina y yo continúo mi podcast mientras los lavo. Ella entra a la ducha mientras yo termino de arreglar la cocina, y se alista para salir.

Una vez K se va, yo pongo You Get What You Give de los New Radicals y me alisto. Estoy haciendo calorsito entonces me pongo una pantalona corta amarilla, un crop top gris bien coqueto, y una camiseta abierta que también es amarilla, para combinar. Me acabo de pintar las uñas de naranja entonces me pongo unas sandalias grises para que se vean bonitas.

Todavía faltan un par de horas para la clase entonces me siento en el escritorio a repasar la lección. Hoy vamos a hablar de no-ficción entonces tengo preparado un ejercicio donde los pongo en parejas, y les pido que compartan cada una una anécdota para que le otre lo escriba.

Antes del ejercicio vamos a hablar de lo que significa contar la historia de alguien más, la responsabilidad que se tiene, pero también la libertad de experimentar. Quiero que piensen en qué significa que alguien más les confíe una historia, en cómo sus bias pueden afectar la forma en la que la van a contar, y cómo reflexionar sobre esto puede ayudarles a encontrar la mejor forma de contarla.

Las anécdotas que quiero que compartan son aquellas que estén situadas en el barrio donde doy la clase, Central, donde, debido a la gentrificación, muchos de mis estudiantes se van a tener que desplazar. La idea del proyecto es recolectar el conocimiento colectivo y la historia del barrio para que no se pierda con el paso del tiempo.

Una vez reviso la lección, preparo mi maleta con el computador, y también las cosas que necesito para el performance que vamos a hacer con la comunidad inmigrante más tarde en el centro. Vamos caminar por la calle, unas 300 personas, y vamos a ir contando nuestra historia. Seremos relatos andantes, vagando sin rumbo por la ciudad.

Antes de salir de la casa empaco mi almuerzo (un ajiaco que hice el día anterior y que quedó buenísimo) y llamo a mi mejor amigue. Hablamos del performance y la película que vamos a ver después.

Cuando estoy lista, abro la puerta y me voy.
References


Vita

Sergio Andrés Godoy Prieto was born in Bogotá, Colombia. They hold a Bachelors’ degree from the Universidad Central de Colombia on Cinematography. They’ve been published in the Journals Hojas Universitarias and Plural Personal. They have taught the class Introduction to Creative Writing for 2 years at the University of Texas at El Paso.

In Documentary Film, they have worked with Colombian production company Pulso Mundo S.A., where they held the position of Impact Producer for the documentary film When the Guns Go Silent, directed by Natalia Orozco.

Contact Information: <sergiogodoy96@gmail.com>