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Isom Report

Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender
Studies

Fall 2022

The Isom Report - Fall 2022

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THE ISOM REPORT

2022-2023



EMBODIMENT

FROM THE CENTER: WHY THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT

As we were writing the articles for this Isom report, the Supreme Court released its ruling, *Dobbs v. Jackson*, that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The fallout has been swift and in Mississippi, the state that initiated the case that resulted in this dramatic ruling, particularly brutal. Mississippi has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country (a country that has the highest infant mortality rate of any industrialized nation), one of highest numbers of uninsured people per capita, and huge risk factors for children and mothers in every conceivable category, from substance abuse to gun violence to poverty rate. Given this context, it has been particularly galling to hear our elected officials celebrate the ruling as an affirmation of life and a commitment to the welfare of women and children. This is far from our reality as a state, and this ruling will only make the risk factors worse, especially for women of color and women in poverty.

For us, the theme of “embodiment” has only become more



Demonstrators gathered on the Oxford Square on July 2 in response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

relevant in light of this new post-*Roe* reality. As we discuss in our cover story, women’s bodies have long been regulated, punished, and disciplined, perceived as deviant and inferior; more broadly, the bodies of people of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming folks, immigrant bodies, Southern bodies, poor bodies, homeless bodies, have been framed as grotesque, excessive, dangerous, and vile, and that particular ideological embodiment has results in a host of noxious real-world punishments and traumas. But embod-

ied theory–feminist, queer, trans, and more–has pushed back against their ideologies to imagine our bodies in all their diversity, and splendor, and beauty.

We hope, in our programming this year, to reimagine embodiment, revive hope, and renew our commitment to a better, queerer, more just world.

Director Jaime Harker is on sabbatical in the fall of 2022, working on a book on lesbian literature in the 21st century. Associate director Theresa Starkey will be acting director in the fall; the band will be back together in the spring of 2023.

About the Isom Center:

The Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies was established in 1981 to address the changing roles and expectations of women students, faculty, and staff.

Our Mission is to educate about issues of gender and sexuality, promote interdisciplinary research, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

About the Isom Report:



In acknowledgment that we sit on land that was traditionally inhabited by the Chickasaw Nation, the color scheme for this issue takes inspiration from their flag.

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GLITTERARY 2022: THE LIVE AND IN PERSON VERSION

BY JAIME HARKER

It is hard for me to name my favorite thing from Glitterary this year and the queer celebrations that bookended Glitterary, from Lavender graduation and the first ACE lecture on Thursday, through the Oxford Pride parade and drag show on Saturday. Was it Bear Bergman, wearing a tiara as he rode in the Pride parade? Angela Chen, proclaiming on the ACE panel, “I could still steal your man”? Chatting with Tyler Allen Penny, who reminded me that I had given him a D in a class oh so many years ago? (Sorry, Tyler—though in my defense, you hardly attended class AND turned in a final research paper that was half the size it was supposed to be.) Planning a queer Gen X podcast at the Happy Hour with Nick White? (I’m serious about this, Nick—don’t leave me hanging.) Seeing so many Glitterati enjoying the Pride parade from a table on the Square, making UM fratbros proud? Or watching torrin a. greathouse and Jericho Brown rock the house on a Friday night?

It is hard to choose just one. I

reveled in the brilliant writers, all in their own way queering the South and claiming it for their own, and giving our Oxford community a taste of the



breadth and depth and brilliance and camp charm of the queer literary community. For one glorious week, Oxford was the capitol of the queer South.

Glitterary—live, in person—was a long time coming. We had to cancel in April of 2020 because of the pandemic. In 2021, with another surge and vaccines just barely available, we pivoted to a remote format, with a live reading at Violet Valley Bookstore for a select few who traveled to

Oxford anyway, and a watch party on the Grove that, despite technical difficulties with projection and speaker, still brought a lovely group together, watching on phones, as Dorothy Allison and Ph.D. candidate Sarah Heying had a wonderful conversation. We were very proud

of the line-up for virtual Glitterary, and had participants from around the country and beyond. But we missed the chance to connect in person.

Finally, in 2022, with vaccines widely available and a pause in infection rates, we were able to fulfill that original vision of Beth Ann Fennelly and Kate Leland, conceived over cocktails. It was a great line up, with panels featuring UM students in the morning, on queer ecology and asexuality studies; afternoon panels on Writing the Queer Body, Getting Queer Words Into the World; and Queer Intersections, with fabulous writers from the South and beyond; and the coup de grace, a keynote by the incredible Jericho Brown, a Pulitzer Prize winning poet.

We are taking a pause but already dreaming about Glitterary 2024. Hope to see y’all there.



PARTNERSHIP REFLECTIONS: THE CREATIVE POWER OF SYNERGY

BY THERESA STARKEY

One of the Center's first collaborators and partners for Sarahfest was Living Music Resource (LMR) and its creator, Nancy Maria Balach, who is now the chair of the Department of Music. Blues historian Scott Barretta pointed me to LMR. It was the summer of 2015 and Scott was on-board to do a special episode of his Blues radio show, HWY 61, as part of the Center's fall line-up and thought LMR was worth checking out. He'd heard about the innovative live-streamed show, where Nancy interviewed notable composers, singers, and classically trained musicians in the business. I took Scott's lead and reached out.

"A request for your help from the Sarah Isom Center," was the subject line of my first email to Nancy. Looking at it now, it makes me think of a Public Radio drive-time fundraising pitch. The only thing missing from it is an exclamation mark or two. The cold email query paid off.

Nancy and I arranged to meet up at Bottletree Bakery. Instead of driving to the square, I chose to walk to our first meeting. The humidity was low, a barometric miracle for the month of July. When I got to the restaurant, I took a seat at the counter and watched the entrance. It was like being on a blind date. *Look for me, I'll be the woman with the moleskin notebook and black rimmed glasses. I'll be wearing a corsage.*

I spotted Nancy right away. She is hard to miss with her coiffed red hair and consistent sense of style. When she entered the restaurant, it was like a stage door opened. She greeted me with an energy that was infec-

tious. We talked together for over an hour. I learned about LMR, its creation, and her vision for the program. Nancy talked to me about her fundraising endeavors - the pitfalls and successes. I told her how the Center was venturing into this area, too, and



that we understood what it meant to operate on a limited budget. I learned that she had started taking LMR off campus and into different venues around town. It was a way for more people to discover the program and to learn about the Department of Music. I talked about how Sarahfest was also envisioned as a bridge between the campus and the larger community. It was a way for people to learn about the Sarah Isom Center and explore gender through the arts.

I felt revved up, but not from the caffeine. It was synergy. The 80s verbiage is appropriate, because things were clicking. Goals were aligning. I couldn't wait to debrief Jaime and Kevin back in the office.

To me, Nancy had a DIY ethic and determination. For her, LMR was about the creation of trans-

formative encounters and learning through music. For music students, she envisioned LMR as a way to gain real world experience and professional development. Through LMR, her dream team learned how to produce a show, take it on the road, and problem

solve in real time during a live broadcast. What's the saying? "The show must go on." Her students learned to make it happen.

When fall finally rolled around, the LMR dream team was ready. Nancy and crew interviewed Sarahfest artists at the Powerhouse Community Arts Center and back on campus in Nutt Auditorium. Punk, jazz, zydeco, and indie artists blurred cultural boundaries, while our collaboration bridged campus and town. Sarahfest introduced students and the larger community to an array of artists like Oxford's own Effie Burt, punk pioneer Jon Langford of the Mekons, and Memphis's Marcella and Her Lovers.

LMR has been steadfast collaborator with the Isom Center and Sarahfest ever since.

Fast forward to last fall and our creative synergy worked again: the Center, LMR, and the Department of Music created the Sarahfest artist-in-residence program. The residency builds upon our past collaborations and allows us to broaden the scope of Sarahfest to include a hands-on professional development opportunity for students.

To accomplish our goal, we invited the talented and versatile singer Kelly Hogan back for the inaugural role. Bringing Hogan back was a way to acknowledge her past participation in the 2015 launch of the Center's resurrected festival. We wanted to draw attention to self-taught, DIY musicians like Hogan, who have learned the ropes of the business



and built careers for themselves as working artists.

Hogan accepted our invitation but believed that it was important for her to have a collaborator as part of the residency – someone who had studied music. One of her goals for the residency was to show how musicians from different backgrounds come together to make music happen. As Hogan put it, “a successful working musician needs to know how to be versatile like a Swiss army knife. You need to listen and learn about all kinds of music; to be ready to step out of your comfort zone to grow as an artist.” Hogan brought the musician Jenny Conlee of the Decemberists as her collaborator.

Through our conversations with Hogan and Conlee, we shaped a unique residency for students, one that was anchored

in active learning, mentorship, and collaboration. Students who participated in the residency program with the two artists received a contract and honorarium, which we viewed as an important component of the real-world experience of working artists.

When the band call went out, students from across disciplines signed up to audition for Hogan and Conlee over Zoom. Seven students were chosen. When Hogan and Conlee arrived on campus, the pair supercharged the process. In seven days, they worked with their seven students, and together they formed an amazing band called The Bored of Education. On the last night of the residency, the band performed together in a free concert as part of Club Sarahfest, where Hogan and Conlee, like their students, had learned new material for the

event. Learning was a two-way street for The Bored of Education. Their performance was electric.

The first Sarahfest artists-in-residence showed us what creative collaboration across the disciplines can look like and what can be accomplished when partners are committed to innovative pedagogy and view programming through a feminist lens.

Hogan’s Swiss Army knife analogy stuck with me. I think it’s because it reminds me of what it means to do interdisciplinary work – to move across disciplines: a desire to acquire new knowledge, methods and perspectives. The move is laced with vulnerability. You have to step outside your comfort zone to grow.

I realize now that I saw this same type of philosophy in Nancy, too. Hogan gave me the language to articulate it clearly. Reaching out to someone for the first time is an act of vulnerability, a new point of contact. That’s what my first meeting with Nancy taught me.



Scan to watch the full "Bored of Education" video

BUILDING FOR THE NEXT 40: ISOM CENTER ADDS FACULTY TO MEET DEMAND

BY JAIME HARKER

The Sarah Isom Center is now 41 years old, but its infrastructure is still stuck in the 80s (and not in a good way). Most research 1 universities have separate departments of Gender Studies, with dedicated tenure track faculty within the department, plus joint appointments with other departments, AND they have a separate women's center that oversees programming, student outreach, and community engagement. The University of Mississippi still only has one center that does everything, and when I started at the center in 2014, there was only one person whose full-time job it was to teach Gender Studies—now associate director Theresa Starkey. All other classes were taught through crosslisted courses, at the whim of individual chairs. Even the director of the Sarah Isom Center had to buy out her time to teach FOR Gender Studies.

Addressing this structural deficit has been a priority since our very first strategic planning session in 2016. To make a case for hires, we had to show demand, which meant offering more classes; to offer more classes, we needed faculty. You see the Catch-22 of that particular proposition, particularly since we had no additional budget to hire faculty. The initial pragmatic solution was to offer online classes: first, because if classes made, the Division of Outreach

would pay the salary, not the perpetually underfunded Sarah Isom Center; and second, because the College of Liberal Arts was eager to expand its online offerings, and offered departments an additional financial incentive of “returns” for those willing to have minors that could be taken entirely online. The more students enrolled in online Gender Studies classes, the more money we would have for programming and professional development and in-person classes.

This investment has been a boon for us, particularly because it gave students more opportunities to take Gender Studies classes for the first time. We started by offering one online class, then three, and now we are offering 12-14 sections fall and spring semester, with 5-6 sections taught in “2-term”--half-semester classes that start at midterms.

How have we done this? Online Instructional Assistant Professors. Once we filled classes consistently, we were able to make a case for full-time instructors. We have two fantastic online hires already—Dr. Elizabeth Venell and Dr. Leslie Delassus. This last spring, we ran another search, and hired longtime friend of the Cen-

ter, Dr. Julie Enszer. Dr. Enszer has a Ph.D. in Gender Studies from the University of Mary-

land, and she has been teaching Gender Theory, Introduction to Queer Studies, and Introduction to Gender Studies for the Isom Center since 2017. She is also a published poet and the editor of *Sinister Wisdom*, the longest running lesbian feminist journal in the United States, founded in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1976. Julie won a Lambda Literary Award for her edited collection

of Pat Parker's poetry in 2016. We are delighted that she has decided to join us as a full-time instructor. Dr. Enszer began her new IAP position in January of 2022.

Actually, our enrollments were so high that we were able to hire TWO

instructors in the last search. One, unfortunately, ended up resigning before she was scheduled to start in August of 2022, so in May, we opened the search again. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Angela LaGrotteria as our new IAP.

Our second goal was more in-person instruction. One, of course, was for tenure track lines. The other was for visiting assistant professors and graduate instructors to focus on our introductory classes, Introduction to Gender Studies (G ST 201) and Introduction to Queer Studies (G ST 202); these were, we reasoned, the best place to introduce first-year students to Gender Studies and Queer Studies, and we wanted vibrant, brilliant young instructors to show UM students how interesting and fun this study can be—especially for



Dr. Angela LaGrotteria



Dr. Julie Enszer

a minor or a major. We worked with the College to re-establish a Graduate Teaching Fellowship in Gender Studies. Then, we had the opportunity to hire a Visiting



Dr. Nora Augustine

Assistant Professor of Gender Studies, Dr. Hilary Coulsen, an outstanding scholar and teacher who contributed to our department in countless ways (She and her husband moved to the University of Florida last year, which is their gain and our loss.) Last year, we were able to have TWO graduate teaching fellows: Ally Nick and Kara Russell.

Given our consistent filling of in-person classes and the record-breaking incoming first year class at the University of Mississippi, we were able to persuade the College to fund a Visiting Assistant Professor of Gender Studies for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. Our hire is Dr. Nora Augustine, a graduate of the University of North Carolina. Dr. Augustine has a minor in Gender Studies and a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric, and she taught GST 201 for us, online and in person, in the last academic year. She also has extensive experience with nonprofits, working for a gay and lesbian community center in North Carolina and for Violet Valley Bookstore. This community engagement experience will be an immense asset, since Dr. Augustine will be associated with our new Lavender Living Learning Community in the 2023-2024 academic year (please see the story in this issue).

Of all of our work creating infrastructure, the quest for tenure track positions in Gender Studies has often, over the past six years, felt like a quest for the

Holy Grail: obsessive, essential, idealistic, and impossible. Does this seem too dramatic? Consider this: since the Sarah Isom Center was created in 1981, three new interdisciplinary centers in the College of Liberal Arts have been created: the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Croft Institute for International Studies, and the Department

of African American Studies. All three now have joint tenure track appointments: The Croft Institute has fourteen tenure track faculty; the Center for the Study of Southern Culture has eight tenure track faculty; the Department of African American Studies has eight tenure track faculty. We love our collaborations with all three of these interdisciplinary ventures and celebrate the university's investment in them. We also wonder why the university was eager to invest in these newer ventures when they still had not invested in the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies, which as of fall 2021 had exactly ZERO tenure track faculty. (I can give you the answer in two words: institutional sexism. Thank you for coming to my TED talk.)

But here is the good news: after years of arguing, and cajoling, and networking, and collaborating, and sharing my comparison chart of fellow UM interdisciplinary centers and comparable institutions' investment in Gender Studies, we have our VERY FIRST joint appointment in Gender Studies, in partnership with the Department of Music. Starting in the fall of 2022, Dr. Obianuju Njoku will be our inaugural assistant professor of Music and Gender Studies.

Dr. Njoku has a Ph.D. in Music, with an emphasis in ethnomusicology, from Rhodes College in South Africa. Her dissertation, "Traversing Sonic Spaces: Expressions of Identity, Gender, and

Power in the Musical Traditions of the Nupe in Northern Nigeria," explores the role of music in resistance and political activism, especially the role of women in such resistance. Her experience as a teacher, a performer, a field researcher, and a theorist make her an amazing colleague and professor. We are delighted to have her as our inaugural tenure track hire.

Dr. Njoku is teaching an undergraduate Gender Studies class in the fall of 2022. Her course, "Women, Gender, and Popular Music," taught as GST 301, offers an introduction to the relationship between music and gender, and explores women and gender relations in diverse mass-mediated popular music cultures. Drawing on musical case studies, the course will examine the evolution



Dr. Obianuju Njoku

of women in popular music and how multi-media expressions of popular music embody and shape gender dynamics. We plan to have an opening welcome reception just as soon as Dr. Njoku arrives in Oxford. Stay tuned for dates, and welcome Dr. Njoku!

We now have three full-time online IAPs, one joint online IAP, one full-time visiting assistant professor, one jointly appointed tenure track assistant professor, one graduate teaching fellow, and two graduate assistants. Slowly but surely, we are building the infrastructure we need to fulfill our mission.

A HOME AT UM:

LAVENDER LLC TO CREATE A LEARNING & LIVING SPACE FOR FEMINIST & QUEER STUDENTS

BY KEVIN COZART

If there was a bright spot for me during the Covid Pandemic, it was Pentatonix's mash-up entitled "Home" that contained snippets of songs that had the word house and home in them. One of the songs featured is American Idol winner Phillip Phillips' song, also entitled "Home." The chorus begins with: "Just know you're not alone/'Cause I'm gonna make this place your home." These words are at the heart of the effort to develop and launch the Lavender Living Learning Community (LLC) at the University of Mississippi: the first coeducational residential learning environment focused on the study of gender and sexuality in Mississippi and the SEC. We've been working to make UM a safe and welcoming home for feminist and queer students.

The Lavender LLC has been a dream of Dr. Jaime Harker's since her year as interim director (2014-15) and finally last fall the pieces fell in place to begin the formal process of making it a reality. Members of the working group besides Dr. Harker included Sarah Piñón, Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement, Dr. Stephen Monroe and Tyler Gillespie, Department of Writing and Rhetoric, Michael Brown, Student Housing, and myself. While we hoped to launch in the fall of 2022, it took longer than expected to get everything approved which hampered recruiting for this year. Instead, this year we are piloting the program with a small group of students and a freshman-only section of Introduction to Gender Studies



Oxford Pride Week is one example of the variety of social and learning activities available for students in the Lavender LLC.

taught by Dr. Nora Augustine.

With its full launch in 2023, the Lavender Living Learning Community will provide a supportive residential experience that fosters academic and social success for students wishing to create an environment of learning, awareness, respect, and advocacy for all sexual and gender identities. Students in this Living Learning Community will be able to express their whole selves, including their gender identities, expressions, and sexuality in a safe and affirming environment. Students will live together, take classes in writing and gender studies together, and attend events sponsored by the Isom Center and the CICCE together. The Lavender LLC will be open to first year students of any major.

Some of the opportunities planned for Lavender LLC students include:

- Participate in a classroom learning community in which critical thinking skills are developed to help students become engaged scholars and global citizens
- Foster an environment of

awareness, respect, and advocacy for all sexual and gender identities

- Learn in a welcoming, affirming, and supportive space that embraces sexual and gender diversity
- Develop positive interpersonal relationships with LLC community members, faculty, staff, and other students through opportunity for active engagement
- Connect to campus and community resources that foster leadership development
- Engage in campus activities and community events that explore sexual and gender diversity
- Foster study groups and discussions regarding common classwork, readings, and events
- Learn to maintain a healthy balance between academic and social pursuits

If you or someone you know might be interested, please visit <https://sarahisomcenter.org/lavenderllc> or contact me at lavenderllc@olemiss.edu.



OUR BODIES OURSELVES

AGENCY, AUTONOMY, & EMBODIMENT

From its earliest days, the women's liberation movement emphasized embodiment. Nothing highlights this more clearly than the evolution of the ground-breaking book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*:

In May of 1969, as the women's movement was gaining momentum, a group of women in Boston met during a "female liberation conference" at Emmanuel College. In a workshop on "Women and Their Bodies," they shared their experiences with doctors and their frustration at how little they knew about how their bodies worked. The discussions were so provocative and fulfilling that they formed the Doctor's Group, the forerunner to the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, to find out more about their bodies, their lives, their sexuality and relationships, and to talk with each other about what they learned.

They decided to put their knowledge into an accessible format that could be shared and would serve as a model for women to learn about themselves, communicate their findings with doctors, and challenge the medical establishment to change and improve the care that women receive.

It is hard to explain, in this age of social media, e-books, and instant access to information, right when one needs it, how ground-breaking this book was. It was the first time, for many of these women, to learn about their bodies, their desires, their choices, without a gatekeeper withholding information or framing possibilities or *judging*; to understand the possibilities of the body, and to make choices about what is best for that body. For a woman? In that time and place? Revolutionary.

Come to think of it, in this current moment and time, it may not be inexplicable after all. Because we are in another moment of restrictions of possibilities



Photo credit: AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe

and choices and knowledge, and now abortion itself, made illegal. From a spate of book banning in public libraries, to banning the study of critical race theory at universities, to restricting knowledge about LGBTQIA+ lives in K-12 education, to prosecuting families for nurturing their trans children, to suing women for terminating pregnancies, to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and 50 years of legal precedent, we are in a sorry state as a nation, where discourse across the country equates knowledge with grooming, nurturing with abuse, and bodily autonomy with felony. The regulation, exploitation, and punishment of certain bodies—assigned female at birth, trans, queer, brown, black, and poor—is endemic to cultural norms. In a fundamental way, your body is not understood to be *yours*. It is for others to regulate: teachers,

doctors, police officers, husbands, fathers.

Imprisonment starts in the mind. We cannot have what we cannot imagine. We cannot desire when we don't know our own desires, and know how to fulfill them. We cannot change an injustice until we can name it and see it.

Liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s—anticolonialism, women's liberation, gay liberation, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, environmentalism, and more—understood this. So many of these movements theorized the root of the problem as Western thought itself. For many thinkers, the mind-body split was the culprit, part of a Western tendency to organize knowledge and experience through a series of binaries, with one pole privileged and the other devalued: male-female,



black-white, straight-gay, human-animal, mind-body. Western thought, critics argued, privileged the mind over the body; the ability to reason was the basis of privilege and power, and those deemed incapable of reason were to be “ruled” by those who had it. Women, people of color, people in poverty, queer folks, trans folks, neurodivergent folks, and “deviants” of every stripe—all have been denied life, liberty, agency, and citizenship because they were defined by mainstream culture as ONLY bodies, ungoverned by the moderating power of the intellect. White men were not understood to be dominated by their bodies, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding.

Susan Bordo’s groundbreaking book, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, captures this larger conversation in feminist theory. Bordo ana-

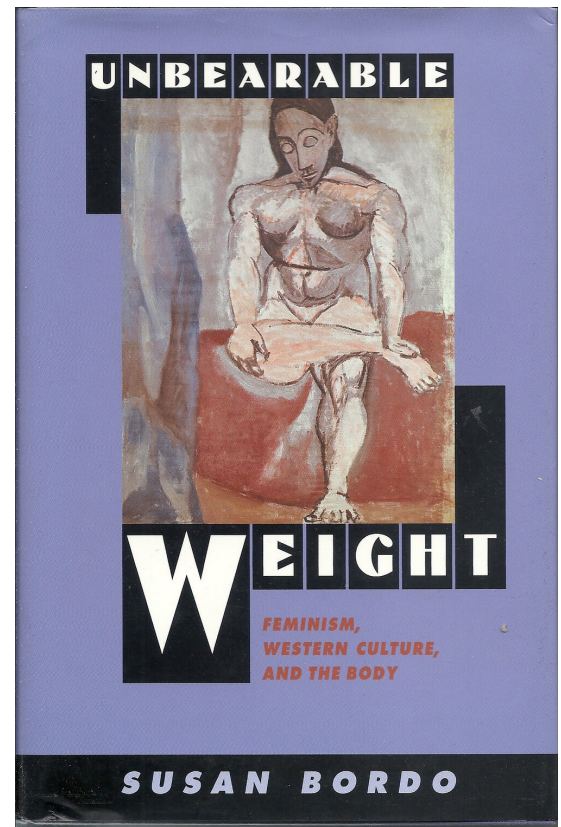
lyzes how ideology and popular culture discipline and shape actual bodies. Heteropatriarchy, she argues, constructs women’s bodies as deviant and other, in need of ‘improvement’ and correction, based on abstract ideologies and distinctive cultural norms.

What is the relation of gender to this dualism? As feminists have shown, the scheme is frequently gendered, with woman cast in the role of the body, “weighted down,” in Beauvoir’s words, “by everything peculiar to it.” In contrast, man casts himself as the “inevitable, like a pure idea, like the One, the All, the Absolute Spirit.” . . . The cost of such projections to women is obvious. For if, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death. (U of California P, 2003, 5)

Bordo’s most famous work is on eating disorders, but she also wrote presciently about *Roe v. Wade* and its implications in her 1993 book.

What gets obscured when abortion rights are considered in abstraction from issues involving forced medical treatment, legal, and social interference in the management of pregnancy, and so forth, is the fact that it is not only the women’s reproductive rights that are being challenged, but women’s status as subjects, within a system in which—for better or worse—the protection of “the subject” remains a central value. What also gets obscured are the interlocking and mutually supporting effacements of subjectivity that are involved when the woman is perceived as a racial or economic “other” as well. So long as the abortion debate over reproductive control is conceptualized solely in the dominant terms of the abortion

debate—that is, a conflict between the fetus’s right to life and the woman’s right to choose—we are fooled into thinking that is only the fetus whose ethical and legal status are at issue. The pregnant woman (whose ethical and legal status as a person is not constructed as a question in the abortion debate, which most people wrongly assume is fully protected legally) is seen as fighting, not for her personhood, but “only” for her right



to control her reproductive destiny. (Ibid, 93-94)

You can see the relevance of this in the current moment—in the ways that certain bodies are not understood to have agency. Mainstream culture maintains that women do not have the right to a sexuality that isn’t moderated and regulated by men’s desires; they do not have the right to decide how, when, and whether to bear children. Queer people are not allowed to expressed desire outside of heteronormative forms; trans and nonbinary and gender nonconforming folks are not granted agency to experience



research.

Gender Studies has created a brilliant body of work that foregrounds embodiment, and the right of multiple kinds of bodies to survive and thrive in the world. This legacy of embodiment helps everyone. When queer communities argue that “love is love,” they push back not only against homophobia but against the right of any society to

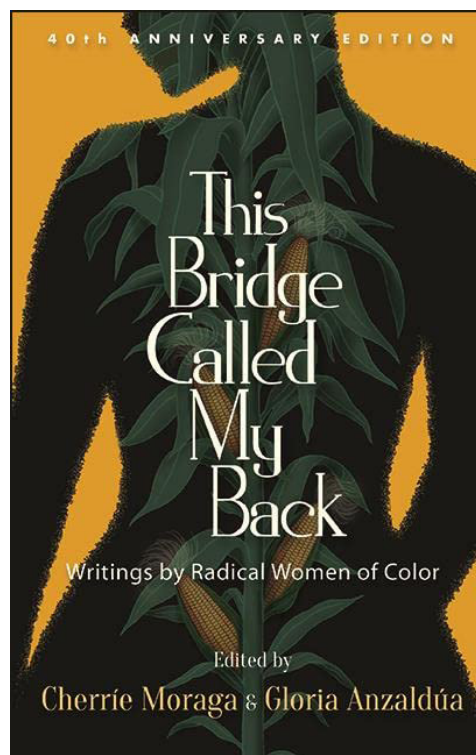
police or surveil one’s sexual desires, to mark some as legitimate and others as deviant. Larger conversations about consent and agency guard against harm, not by imposing one particular version of morality, but by recognizing the agency of all people to determine how and when and with whom they will, or won’t, engage in sexual behavior. When the Americans with Disabilities Act passed, it not only made our society easier for a specific population to engage with the larger community; it also made allowances for a variety of folks who need accommodations, temporarily or permanently. Universal design benefits everyone; creating access for differently abled bodies allows everyone to acknowledge their own limitations and need for accommodation. Embracing nonbinary and trans and genderqueer identities frees all of us from the prison of the gender binary. Celebrating multiple forms of embodiment liberates our own.

One learns to imagine otherwise outside of the mainstream. That is why *Our Bodies, Ourselves* began life as mimeographed, stapled pages, and why the Women in Print Movement sought to create an autonomous print ecology outside of corporate control. Early feminist bookwomen referred

and transform their bodies as they wish, as seen by a deluge of anti-trans bills across the nation. People of color are denied certain neighborhoods and certain clothing and certain ways of expression; the license for police to damage their bodies seems without limit, despite the intense awareness campaigns of Black Lives Matter. Even learning about that history has been made illegal across the nation, part of an anti-Critical Race Theory campaign.

And yet, embodiment is not simply a cautionary tale. If the body is a site of trauma and punishment, it is also, potentially, the site of liberation. Early women’s liberation focused on embodied knowledge and embodied theory, rejecting the notion that the body is inferior and positing that bodies have their own kind of knowledge and wisdom. The slogan “the personal is the political” went beyond individual experience to the embodied specificity of raced, gendered, and sexualized bodies. Early anthologies, like *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, framed the experiences of women of color within culture and community, and that insistence on particular embodiment continued in the queer of color critique in queer studies.

At the core of this theory is an understanding of the ways we experience reality through our bodies; any system or theory that devalues or humiliates particular bodies is harmful. Our culture accepts and recognizes only certain kinds of bodies, in particular places, and demands disidentification, deformation, and denunciation from those who are accepted by the mainstream. Resisting that cultural hegemony is central to any liberation politics. It is central to standpoint epistemology in Gender Studies



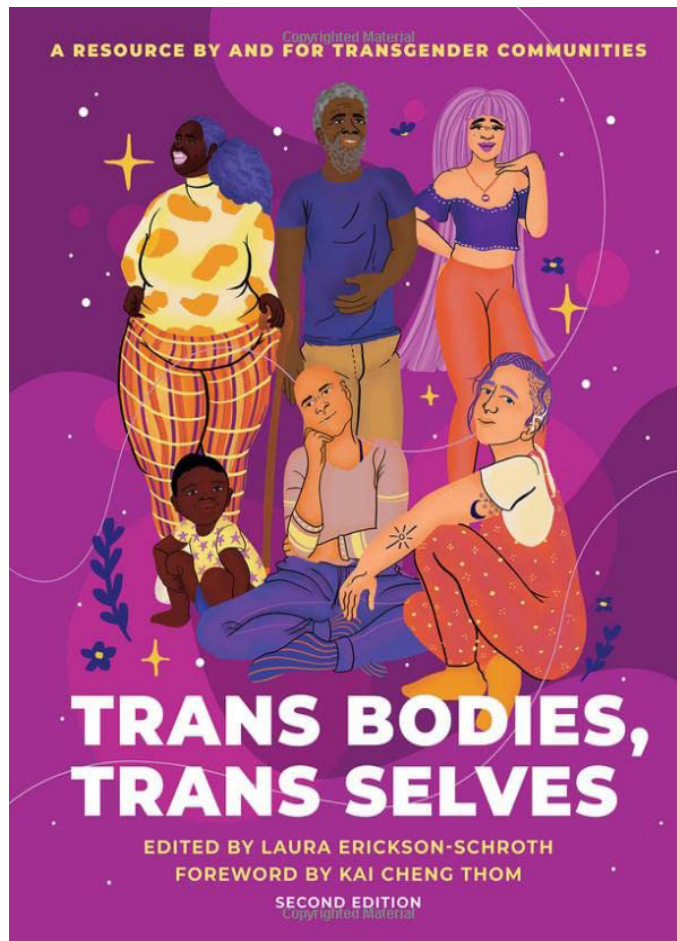
to New York publishers as LICE (Literary Industrial Corporate Establishment), and they understood that publishing corporations were more invested in maintaining the status quo than in transforming culture and economics. Radical ideas, empowering counter-narratives, essential and suppressed knowledge—all of these were too important to let corporate gatekeepers decide on the boundaries of knowledge.

We are in a similar moment today, when the state and the marketplace attempt to regulate knowledge as they discipline and punish certain bodies. In the 1970s, feminists used do-it-yourself technologies to create new networks and forms of embodied knowledge. In the challenge of the current moment, the Gen Z will create its own networks of knowledge and resistance. Some may include social media; immediately after the Dobbs ruling came out, for example social media posts about “camping” and deleting period tracking apps were notable. Whatever the means, new grassroots systems of resistance and support will doubtless emerge.

We may also update and expand some of those early strategies of women’s liberation. In 2022, the second edition of *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* was published by Oxford University Press. Like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, this book is published by a collective, which in both title and mission builds on the legacy of that ground-breaking publication.

MISSION: The mission of the Trans

Bodies, Trans Selves organization is to improve the world for trans, non-binary, and gender expansive people in all our diversity through offering reliable information and education, connection and discussion, visibility about the diversity of our community



and our issues, and activism about needs of our community.

As a project by trans and gender nonconforming people for trans, non-binary, and gender expansive people, we hope to empower us and give us the tools we need to be experts on our own lives. We also recognize that our world is improved by educating those outside our community, and so we hope to be a resource for educators, medical and mental health providers, academia, legislators, family members, partners, and everyone else.

VISION: The Trans Bodies, Trans Selves organization is devoted to creating a world in which all gender

identities and expressions are embraced and where all trans, non-binary, & gender expansive people can safely and happily be themselves.

By trans people, for trans people—it is a simple formulation, as essential a concept now as it was

over fifty years over. Questions of embodiment can easily veer into essentialism and anti-trans rhetoric, but they don’t have to, as *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* demonstrates; recognizing particularity, agency, and context is essential.

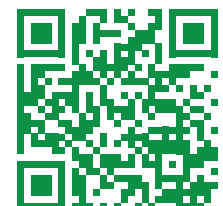
This year, through our programming, we want to explore this question of embodiment—not only how others discipline and shame bodies, but also how embodiment becomes a site of resistance, of renewal, and of joy. We will investigate the ways that embodiment provides us both new language and expansive empathy, allowing us to imagine a world in which our embodied selves are embraced, supported, and celebrated. In a time when respect for bodily autonomy is

under direct assault, this conversation has never been more important.

For more information about Our Bodies, Our Selves, visit: <https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/>

For more information about Trans Bodies, Trans Selves, visit: <http://transbodies.com/>

Many of the books highlighted in this article are available in our lending library. To see what is available, scan the QR code or visit <https://www.libib.com/u/sarahisomcenter>



SARAHFEST SNAPSHOT:

2022 HIGHLIGHTS THE POWER OF THE 5 P'S: PUNK, PIANO, PAINT, PHOTOGRAPHY, & PROCESS

BY THERESA STARKEY

Sarahfest kicks off our line-up for events this fall and we are looking forward to what is in store. Here is a snapshot of our forthcoming Sarahfest calendar of events.

Sarahfest's annual art show runs for the month of September at the Powerhouse Community Arts Center and will contain three mini exhibits. The first features archival pieces from the 309 Punk Project, curated by Christopher Satterwhite. In the late 1990s, Pensacola, Florida, was the hub of a thriving punk subculture and 309 Sixth Avenue was the address called home by our featured artists during this time. The 309 House is now an artist-run nonprofit collective, museum, and residency program. Satterwhite is a former resident of the 309 house and one of the founders of 309 Punk Project, which seeks to draw attention to and preserve the house's history and connection to DIY movements and aesthetics. Satterwhite's curated exhibit complicates narratives of the South and a movement that is often viewed as happening elsewhere, in places like Los Angeles and New York.

The second exhibit features the creative work of graduate students who participated in a special topics course offered through the Sarah Isom Center in spring 2022. The class examined what it means to uncover a queer,



Above: A recent image of the 309 Punk House in Pensacola, FL.

Left: An image from the 309 Punk Project's archives

Below: Elaine Tomlin poses with unknown man at one of the many events she covered during her career.



avant-garde punk South, to wrestle with it, archive it, and to participate in it through DIY projects. The final projects

by the students pair well with Satterwhite's exhibit. There will be an opening reception at the Powerhouse on September 8th at 5 PM with Satterwhite and these students.

For the last mini exhibit, Isom Affiliate and Associate Professor of Journalism Alysia Steele delves into the archive to uncover the story and photography of Elaine Tomlin. Tomlin captured the Civil Rights Movement with her lens, as the only Black woman staff photographer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The curated images are part of Steele's dissertation project

that seeks to bring Tomlin's dynamic career and contributions into focus.

A closing reception will feature a short panel discussion with Steele and Tomlin's son on September 27th at 6 PM at the Powerhouse.





From Left: Price Walden, Alice Anne Light, and Kristy Kristinek

October begins with a very special Club Sarahfest featuring Price Walden (composer), Alice Anne Light (mezzo), and Kristy Kristinek (artist) as they pair music and visual art for a performance experience entitled hours. Price and Light will perform a melodrama for mezzo and piano that defies the traditional "song cycle" as Kristinek creates a visual triptych of three large canvases.

From the artists:

This idea was born through feelings of hopelessness, loss, loneliness, and exhaustion. This work is our response to living as young adults in the South in the 21st century: our roots run deep, yet we see that tradition is no longer serving us. We experience this throughout almost every facet of our existence: family, love, sexuality, religion, politics, war, and survival. Many feel the need to reassess who we are and where we are going. This piece endeavors to give voice to this

new reality.

The collaborative aspect of this project and original paintings embrace the avant-garde spirit we hope to celebrate this fall. This will take place on October 2nd at 6 PM.

October will also mark the return of the Sarahfest episode of Thacker Mountain Radio. The line-up is still being finalized, the episode will take place on October 13th.

Lastly, Sarahfest's artist-in-residence program welcomes visual artist Valerie George to campus in November. Her residency will focus on "The Art of Process in Creating" and will give a small cohort of students an invaluable opportunity to engage with visual art, sound, experimentation, and acts of collaboration in a truly integrated way. She will also be delivering a public talk

followed by a reception on November 6th at 6 PM.

George received her MFA from the University of California, Davis. She worked closely with mentors Lynn Hershman-Leeson and Mary Lucier. She is a Full Professor of Art at the University of West Florida, the Arts Editor of *Panhandler Magazine: A Journal of Art and Literature*, and

a Co-Founder of the 309 Punk Project.

All Sarahfest events are free and open to the public. To learn more about Sarahfest, go to sarahfest.rocks.



Above: 2022 Sarahfest Artist-in-Residence Valerie George.



Left: The TMR house band, the Yalobushwhackers, perform at a previous TMR @ Rowan Oak event. Sarahfest will return to Rowan Oak in 2023.

ISOM & CICCE HOST JOINT LECTURE: WRITER JOSHUA WHITEHEAD TO DELIVER JOINT QUEER STUDIES & NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH LECTURE

BY JAIME HARKER

Joshua Whitehead is a vibrant, challenging, brilliant voice in contemporary letters. He is a Two-Spirit, Oji-nêhiyaw member of Peguis First Nation. His two published books are models of moxie and, simultaneously, represent a careful and principled use of language, a refusal to have particular cultural identities be appropriated, and a thoughtful engagement with other writers and thinkers.

Take, for example, Mr. Whitehead's first book of poetry, *full-metal indigiqueer*. The collection was shortlisted for the inaugural Indigenous Voices Award and the Stephan G. Stephanson Award for Poetry. It was also shortlisted for a Lambda Literary Award for trans poetry, but Mr. Whitehead withdrew the book from consideration, because he didn't want to collapse "Two-Spirit" into "trans," believing them to be distinct cultural identities. His explanation of this is a model of careful engagement and kind dissent (full letter to right).

Joshua Whitehead's first novel, *Johnny Appleseed*, is similarly nuanced, exploring the life of an Indigenous sex worker while insisting on the full humanity of his first-person narrator and the

many, messy loves he experiences. As Alicia Elliot wrote in her review,

Love, in all its forms, permeates this novel. Complicated love, messy love, nourishing love, platonic love,

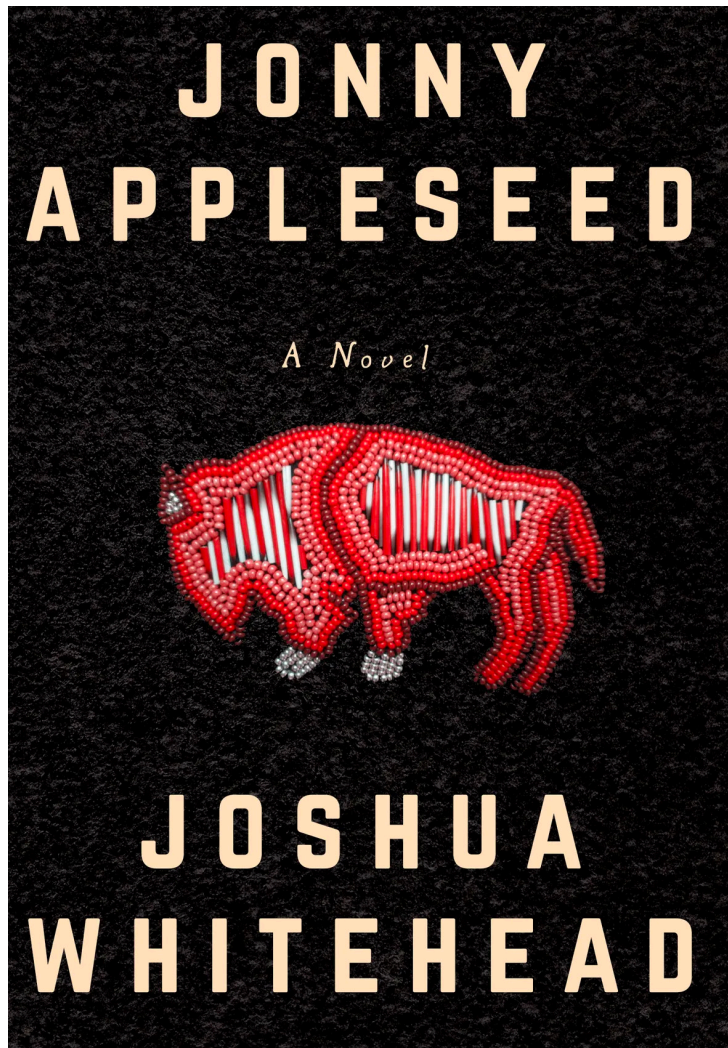
complicated, dealing with their own traumas in various ways, but they're never only their traumas, which is important. Each character has hopes, dreams, vulnerabilities, regrets. Each one laughs and jokes. In other words, they feel like real people. . . .

Perhaps the most refreshing part of this book is the frankness with which Whitehead writes about sex – particularly queer sex. As soon as the book opens, he lets readers know what they're in for: "I figured out I was gay when I was eight. I liked to stay up late after everyone went to bed and watch Queer as Folk on my kokum's TV. She had a satellite and all the channels, pirated of course.

Joshua Whitehead is an ideal person to deliver our annual Queer Studies lecture, as someone who engages in the diversity of gender and sexual identity with precision while also embodying the flamboyant resistance that "queer" meant to bring to the academy. We are delighted to, once again, partner with the Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engage-

ment, as Whitehead will also be the featured speaker for Native American Heritage Month.

To read the full review, visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/joshuawhitehead-review>



sexual love, familial love, secret love. Every character in this book is portrayed with empathy and understanding – from Jonny's Momma, to his kokum (or grandmother), to his best friend/lover Tias, to Tias's girlfriend (and, eventually, Jonny's good friend) Jordan. All of them are

Letter to Lambda Literary Awards Committee:

Tânisi otôtênimâwak,

I am writing this letter in regards to my recent Lambda nomination for *full-metal indigiqueer* within the Trans Poetry categorization. May I first say, ninanâskomitin, thank you—I am humbled, honoured, and most importantly overwhelmingly touched by your recognition of my work, voice, stories, heart. As a caveat, I want to note I speak for myself as a 2SQ (Two-Spirit, queer Indigenous) person and

not on the behalf of any of my kin. When I woke up on Monday, March 5th, and saw that I had been nominated I was overcome with emotion, small queer prairie NDNs like me never dream of being seen on such a large scale—ay hay. I recognize the difficulty of categorizing Two-Spirit (2SQ) within Western conceptualizations of sex, sexuality, and gender. I cling to Two-Spirit because it became an honour song that sung me back into myself as an Indigenous person, a nehiyaw (Cree), an Oji-Cree; I have placed it into my maskihkîwiwat, my medicine bag, because it has healed and nourished me whenever I needed it. To be Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer, for me, is a celebration of the fluidity of gender, sex, sexuality, and identities, one that is firmly grounded within nehiyawewin (the Cree language) and nehiyaw world-views. I think of myself like I think of my home, manitowapow, the strait that isn't straight, fluid as the water, as vicious as the rapids on my reservation, as vivacious as a pickerel scale. I come from a nation that has survived because of sex and sexuality, as post-contact nations that deploy sex ceremonially. My gender, sexuality, and my identities supersede Western categorizations of LGBTQ+ because Two-Spirit is a home-calling, it is a home-coming. I note that it may be easy from an outside vantage point to read



Two-Spirit as a conflation of feminine and masculine spirits and to easily, although wrongfully, categorize it as trans; I also note the appropriation of Two-Spirit genealogies by settler queerness to mark it as a reminder that Western conceptions of “queerness” have always lived due in part to the stealing of third, fourth, fifth, and fluid genders from many, although not all, Indigenous worldviews.

My work has aimed to remove queer, non-binary, trans, and intersexed Indigeneity from the ethnographic and anthropologic “was” of the Americas’ categorizations of Indigenous identities and to place it firmly into the “is” of our contemporary

moments—but, furthermore, zoa, my cybernetic 2S trickster aims to propel us into a future unobscured and untouched by settler colonialism, to project us into a “to come” or a “to be,” into a world of our own making, a world wrought by Wovoka’s ghost dance, interconnected by Iktomi’s world-wide kinship web, and fluid as Nanabush’s augmentations. *full-metal indigiqueer* is a viral song, is a round dance, is a jingle dress, is maskihkîy (medicine).

There are words for people like me within nehiyawewin, words like napêw iskwêwisêhot (a man who dresses as a woman), iskwêw ka napêwayat (a woman who dresses as a man), ayahkwêw (a man dressed/living/accepted as a woman), înahpîkasoh (a woman dressed/living/accepted as a man), iskwêhkân (one who acts/lives as a woman), and napêhkân (one who acts/lives as a man). These, of course, may not be all the terminologies for what you may call “queerness” within Indigenous worldviews, but they are the ones I have been gifted and storied from folks such as Chelsea Vowel and storytelling

with my kin—if there are more, or if I have these wrong, I apologize, settler colonialism has taken so much from our mother tongues. Within nehiyawewin we divide language into categorizations of animate and inanimate rather than masculine and feminine and it is through this that we hold ourselves accountable to all of our relations (of which we include things deemed “inanimate” by Western ways of being and knowing). *full-metal indigiqueer* is borne with that language in mind, my narrator, zoa, is a cybernetic virus that is agender, asexual, asexed because “queerness” is not a word we know, we know relationships and accountability and are birthed into our communities knowing our role and how it is we must contribute. I am an otâcimow, a storyteller, and I am making space for Indigenous folx whose language and identities do not fit within those paradigms; my narrator embraces fully the fluidity that 2SQ allows but doesn’t fully embody either/or and nor do I. To put it in the easiest terms for Western languages to understand, I live my life as a gay-femme and not as a trans Indigenous person.

I see my trans brethren and sistren who have paved the way for the trans categorizations to be included, recognized, honoured, and valued within Lambda, and only recently may I add, and I love them all the more for it. To be a trans woman, and furthermore to be an Indigenous trans woman, is a fight I do not know, cannot know, and do not seek to further violate and delimit. I stand by my trans kin fully and I, having lived through the intergenerational trauma of MMIWG2S (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit folx), the Sixties Scoop, day schools, and transracial adoption, know in my heart and spirits that I am not a proper candidate for this award. After much talk with my communities and kin I have come to the conclusion that I must withdraw my name and stories from this wonderful nomination because it is not my space to occupy—occupation being a story I know all too well. And while I am fully aware that Lambda’s categorizations do not require storytellers to self identify and instead base their nomination on content, this is not something I feel comfortable with. I need to walk through the world in a good way, to work towards miyopimatisowin, the good life, a good way of living. My stories are not written within a vacuum, I am simply an animated avatar, my stories are communal, reciprocal, gifted, pained, and healing.

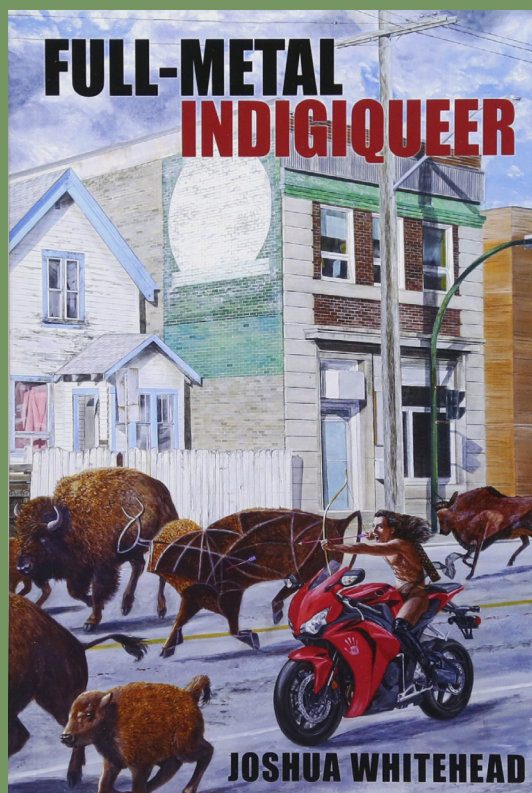
I need to walk my path as an otâcimow in this light, to be ethical, respectable, and most importantly, to give back to those who have supported, raised, and nurtured my voice—many of whom are trans women.

Instead, I dream of the day when award cultures, especially settler queer award institutions, etch out space for 2SQ capacities and oratories. So in nehiyawewin fashion, I animate myself: nehiyaw iskwewayi-napew, Cree femme-man, one who works like nîpiy, like water, because I come from the land of straits—I take a lesson from the land, manitowapow, and learn to eddy and etch, learn to break rocks and get them off, learn to carve out space from boulders that may consolidate in the wake. I remind myself that sometimes inclusivity can be spelled as accountability, sometimes literature sounds like “letting go.” I hear Beth Brant when I write this speaking to me, that “we do our work with love,” as much as I hear Chrystos’ cry that we are “not vanishing.”

So I conclude this letter with the highest of gratitude for Lambda, its judges, and to my publishers at Talonbooks both for seeing the tiny revolutions that weave maskihkîy within *full-metal indigiqueer*. I am deeply honoured that you have taken the time to recognize my work, ay hay. To my fellow nominees I wish you nothing but the best and I celebrate your successes with love and pride—you are the resistance I always dream of. And I will exit this letter saying kihtwâm, a following, an again, a once more, because we never say goodbye in nehiyawewin—wâpwin nîkânihk, see you in the future, when queerness makes a little room for 2SQ folx to thrive and survive within. It is my hope that we can begin to have these much needed conversations about the state of 2SQ-ness within, beside, and sometimes beyond, settler queerness, a story of emergence that has many times misguided, misrepresented, and failed 2SQ Indigenous folx at many turns throughout history—this is a ceremonial fire that has been burning since the docking of literature on Turtle Island and one I intend to keep alight.

Kihtwâm,
Joshua Whitehead

Copied from Tiahouse: tinyurl.com/joshuawhiteheadletter



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: ISOM STUDENT GENDER CONFERENCE EXPLORES THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT

The Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies at The University of Mississippi is pleased to announce its 23rd Annual Isom Student Gender Conference (ISGC). The conference is scheduled for March 22-24, 2023, in Oxford, MS.

This year's conference theme is **The Body and Embodiment**. The topic is timely with the end of *Roe v. Wade* and the recent push of anti-gay and anti-trans legislation seeking to deny the lived experience and subjectivity of queer individuals. Susan Bordo's ground-

breaking book, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, explores embodiment in feminist theorizing and analyzes how ideology and popular culture discipline and shape actual bodies. Heteropatriarchy, she argues, constructs women's bodies as deviant and other, in need of 'improvement' and correction, based on abstract ideologies and distinctive cultural norms.

What is the relation of gender to this dualism? As feminists have shown, the scheme is frequently gendered, with woman cast in the role of the body, "weighted down," in Beauvoir's words, "by everything peculiar to it." In contrast, man casts himself as the "inevitable, like a pure idea, like the One, the All, the Absolute Spirit." . . . The cost of such projections to women is obvious. For it, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from

knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death. (Unbearable Weight 5)

And yet, embodiment is not simply a cautionary tale. If the body is a site of trauma and punishment, it is also, potentially, the site of liberation. Early women's

particular places, and demands disidentification, deformation, and denunciation from those who are accepted by the mainstream. Resisting that cultural hegemony is central to any liberation politics. It is central to standpoint epistemology in Gender Studies research.

At the ISGC this year, we want to situate the body and embodiment at the intersections; to contemplate the past, the moment, and the future through a myriad contexts and theoretical lenses. Potential areas for exploration are social movements, immigration, climate change, war, education, public policy, public health, economics, and popular culture.

The Center's interdisciplinary conference is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. Students are welcome to submit papers from all disciplines, along with creative writing projects such as fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Additionally, we are seeking submissions of student films that will be part of an evening event on Thursday during the conference.

Lastly, proposals for roundtable discussions that center on community building, advocacy, and social change both on and off the campus through the arts, social media, and student engagement with broader communities are encouraged. A small number of domestic travel grants will be made available to non-UM students.

Submission deadline is February 7, 2023. To learn more, visit isomstudentgenderconference.org.



Photo credit: AP Photo/Martha Asencio-Rhine

liberation focused on embodied knowledge and embodied theory, rejecting the notion that the body is inferior and positing that bodies had their own kind of knowledge and wisdom. The slogan "the personal is the political" went beyond individual experience to the embodied specificity of raced, gendered, and sexualized bodies. Early anthologies, like *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, framed the experiences of women of color within culture and community, and that insistence on particular embodiment continued in the queer of color critique in queer studies.

At the core of this theory is an understanding of the ways we experience reality through our bodies, and any system or theory that devalues or humiliates particular bodies is harmful. Our culture accepts and recognizes only certain kinds of bodies, in

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