

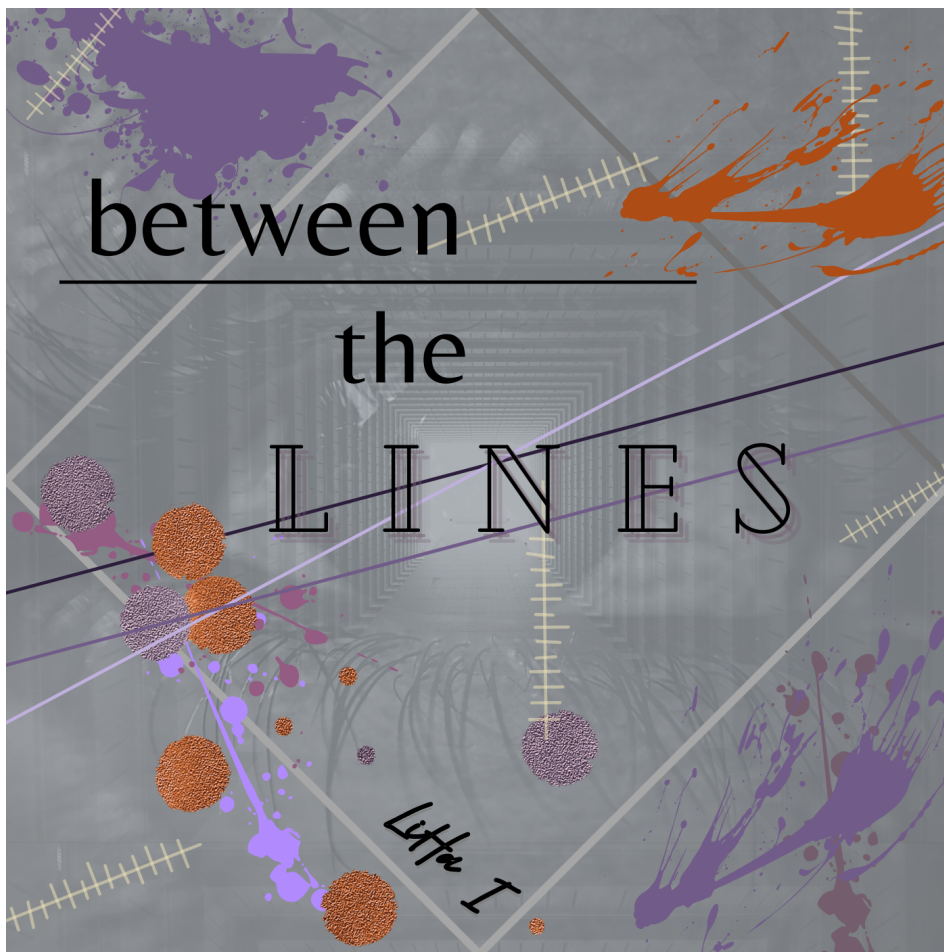
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Between Straight Lines - A Queer Subtext Album



album cover entitled "Between The Lines", for releasing these songs in late April under official artist discography

Subtext - the context behind a creative work which is not made explicit but is understood by observers of the work

Subtext is often used to convey ideas regarding controversial and stigmatized topics which would typically be subject to censorship if spoken explicitly. In a heteronormative, cisnormative society, portrayals of queerness are subject to undue criticism, where creators are forced to walk a balance between expression and palability in order to gain acceptance from the mainstream. Beyond creators, LGBTQ+ individuals are shoved into the metaphorical closet, assumed to be any part of “normal” society until they eventually come out, baring their souls to a world that may or may not accept them. In such a society, there is value in expressing the extremes - normalizing unapologetic-ness and individuality - but there is also a different value in subtlety as well.

I came into a series of admittedly-startling discoveries about myself in freshman year at Brown, learning that not only was I not indifferent towards my parents’ emphasis on arranged marriage and bearing children, but that I, then identifying myself as a cisgendered-woman, was attracted to women. My time at Brown in this respect consists of endless self-exploration, and now realizing my identity as a genderfluid demisexual lesbian, I’m terrified of what’s to come. My circumstance prevents me from being the loud, proud queer person I wish I could be, and seeing others be able to live this kind of life has left me, at some levels, a little envious. Music has been my primary coping mechanism and mode of creative expression for years and years now, and as a fan of the alternative, subversive ends of sonic exploration, I implemented this idea of subtext through this project to create, as my thesis project, an album that integrates and embodies queerness between the lines and between the soundwaves. This project incorporates historical representations of queerness in music along with backing from queer theory and psychology to develop music that flies just under the radar of cisheteronormative society but is understood loud and clear by the community as my (albeit, subtle) coming out.

While the discovery of my identity is a journey featuring many personal, out-of-lecture-hall experiences, the conception of this project is rooted in the academic work I've been doing since freshman year. MCM0230, Digital Media, inspired me to start thinking about ways in which the digital is tied with personal identity, and further research with the professor of this class, Teddy Pozo, for an additional three semesters, opened me to the idea of incorporating identity into visual media, which evolved into incorporation into auditory media. Taking User Interfaces and User Experiences (CSCI1300) for my second concentration in computer science allowed me to practice incorporating subtextual intent in website design and keeping an audience in mind with the things I create. Of course, my music concentration lends largely towards this project as well. Music theory classes opened me up to what was possible in music, and essentially taught me the rules so I could break them. Composing with Ableton (MUSC1240M) gave me my primary tool for composition, Ableton Live 10, and gave me the steps I needed to dive headfirst into producing. This was developed further in MUSC1200, Recording Studio as Compositional Tool, where I developed the technique to record and mix my music, greatly enhancing my production ability. Having taken Real-time Systems (MUSC1210) and Digital Performance (MUSC2210), I started working with more experimental music and visual techniques using Max/MSP, and completing an internship with the company that created this software has also given me the confidence to experiment more with the sounds I produce. I also had more of an opportunity to explore more ethnomusicology perspectives in my senior year via Music and Identity (MUSC2200) and Rap as Storytelling (MUSC1240R) last semester and Social Justice and the Musical Afrofuture (MUSC1939) this semester, allowing me to engage more with themes of queerness and societal marginalization within the context of sonic practice.

Similar to the way I stumbled upon understanding my own identity, I approach songwriting in a similar manner, where I will often stumble upon the right combination of notes for a melody, or a

detailed sentence with highlighted rhythms for a lyrics, or a strange concoction of soundwaves binding together for a self-made instrument, or even just the combination of my own emotion and a fitting day leading me to dive headfirst into trying to capture the experience. These happy accidents have already led me towards writing several songs, two of which already exist for wider audiences. They also lead me towards a tendency towards unexpectedness and spontaneity in my music. I openly change up song structures, incorporate weird sounds, and, even from the get-go, produce my songs in a way where there is always something new and unexpected happening or coming up in the track. Embracing everything that gives my music color is something that has largely guided my creative process for this project, such that it offered me just as much as what I offered it.

Ultimately, this project is not only a culmination of what I have learned, but also a source of comfort. I think back to when I was 12, when an ex-friend of mine had pressured me into faking having a crush on a boy, while all I could think about was “how do crushes on boys even work?” I think about my best friend and soulmate, who is bisexual but refuses to date women because “at least sticking to guys means never having to come out to family.” I think about my younger sister, and how many kids at her middle school already know about their queerness but will keep it hidden for years to come. I think about how, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, making music had been my main source of comfort, and how I managed to finally find the strength to release two songs in the year and a half that we’ve been shut indoors. Sometimes it’s comforting to see the grand displays, the colors, and the pride, and to know that it’s okay to be loud and proud. Sometimes it helps to know that even when quiet and hiding in the closet you’re not standing alone.

SCOPE

For the overall project, I composed a short album composed of 7 songs fully composed, produced, written, recorded, mixed, and ready for digital consumption (entailing a music video and album release). Each of these tracks focus on different themes related to a closeted queer experience - ideas of found family, abandonment, digital escapism, physical existence, internalized homophobia - and perceptions of being LGBTQ+ in a larger societal aspect as well. The lyrical content of the songs featured on this album are heavily informed by not only my own experiences, but also by a number of sources featuring queer studies in politics, capitalism, psychology, music and identity. Sonically, I maintain these themes through heavy experimentation of sound, but also capture, as Suzanne G. Cusick puts it in their piece in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, “the transcendent joy of being alive, not dead, and aware of the difference.” Historically, movements rooted in disco and punk have been vessels for social change, offering a platform to amplify voices and display subversiveness through sound, style, and performance. I want to honor these historic roots in the songs I write, but also embrace my own form of the alternative to surpass genre expectations.

SONG BREAKDOWNS

1. Blood//Water

I just wonder if you hear me
Do I.. still exist in your heart beating?
Well there's no way I could know now, how much you wanna keep me:
Would you give me one of your kidneys? Did you remove me through your kidneys?
Carried me within your ocean
Showered me with your devotion,
But in this barren land, is the water safe for drinking?
Will it sink me while I'm sleeping? Can you deal with all the weeping?

I smell blood and I need to know, is it me? Is it me?
Pouring warmth and it feels like home, is it real? Is it real?
Reach for light and it leaves me dried, I am here, I am here
All my fear, all in here, and I keep walking on

The darkest moments are so bright, the truth stuck between my eyes
My body feels all heavy, my throat it got all dried
What rises up within me, no water that I need
I've got my blood within me and I know that I'll still be

My palms sweating, shaking, fingers that'll feel
Like they're traitors pointing arrows right at me
Point me out as the colored blot among the sheep
Throw me to the desert, turn around and leave
What's this blood that's running through me?
Was it... in me since I was your baby?
I'll dry up into a husk - do I need new blood within me?
What's the water that I'm needing?
A new thirst for someone to love me

The darkest moments are so bright, the truth struck within my eyes
My chest it weighs so heavy, my veins they got all dried
What rises up within me, that blood I'd never need
I've got water within me and I know that I'll still be

Blood keeps flowing down between my thighs
Water carries all those little lies
Hormones flowing down between my eyes

What's inside oh ...

The darkest moments are so bright, the truth right in front (of) my eyes
My head no longer heavy after all those tears I cried
What rises up within me, fluids rushing all through me
I've got something within me and I know that I'll still be

My experience with queerness was made easier as a result of the few people in my life who I know will always support me; my best friends and my twelve year old sister have been my strongest allies since before I even came out to them. The notion of “found family” is one that dominates queer media and portrayals in media, the comforting notion of finding a home after having lost a different one as a result of coming out. The implication of a found family, however, is detachment and complete loss of one’s “blood” family, one that isn’t always true - my “found” family consists of people both outside and inside of the family I grew up with.

In engaging with the notion of found family and blood relations, I found myself playing around with the common saying “blood is thicker than water”. This phrase has long been debunked as being a shortened, misleading version of “the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.” Regardless, both circulating at equal popularity speaks to the prevalence of both sayings, complicating the ideas of what water and blood are in the context of metaphorical analysis. Both are essential to survival, but in what ways do nuclear family and the so-called “covenant” converge, and how does that change the way in which I exist in the world? In engaging with blood and water, I also played with ideas of biology because they create a very essentialist notion of queerness and identity that I was also interested in debunking. The idea of being “born this way”, of hormones and chromosomal makeup, and of the emphasis of a blood lineage as the only valid form of family are incredibly ignorant perspectives. Candice L. Bain, in their research article entitled “Toward a queer music therapy: The implications of queer theory for radically inclusive music therapy”, discusses

therapy methods tailored towards queer folks, discussing how a medicalized approach would be unhelpful, as the “medicalization and pathologization of sexuality operates as a system of power” (24-25).

I engage with these above themes lyrically and sonically by referencing the physical body and medicalization and actively subverting the ways in which they are viewed. Lyrically, I create existence through the heart as an emotion-based reason for survival and abandonment through the kidney, both referencing common ideas of removing a second, unnecessary kidney (me) as well as passing off unusable material as waste (me). I continuously switch out blood and water as necessities for existence, questioning what fluid it is that is keeping me going until I finally deemphasize the “what” and consider what it does instead. Sonically, the piece uses the sound of a heart monitor as a melodic backdrop to reroute the medical, allowing the reframing of one’s biological existence as a part of the art of life experience rather than as reality. I play around with glitchy effects as well to subvert notions of unnaturalness, with glitching sounds appearing wildly when the speaker submits to their existence as a fact and appearing tamed and controlled when the speaker moves beyond the body.

2. Not a Friend

A glint of neon color that makes the world look a bit fuller
They stare on in wonder, asking “yo how should I understand her”
Weaving through the world down under, booming thunder rage above her
Got no mother, nor no father, made to feel like the other
Folks around her mutter, her existence sending shudders
She’s forced into undercover, mono-toning down the color
Only... ever unmasked when you want advantage of her
And you tell us to avert our eyes, as she cries
Tell us those lies, while the wider world is bent with eyes on the prize
What is behind, that shiny world you want to advertise
“Everything’s fine,” you say while bringing in shadows to hide her inside
Pull it to light, let her feel alive

She’s a moneybag to you, she’s a moneybag to you
Pick it up, store it away, bury down the truth
Slap some flags up on everything, they’re all the same to you
Our world has gotten older, but you, you never grew
She’s a moneybag to you, she’s a moneybag for you
Ignore her pain, “it’s okay,” it’s never anything new
Put her colors up and draw her in, kill her with no clues
Our world is great and shiny but you’re still ugly and cruel

Colors taking over every corner, from the ceiling to the window, in the skyscrapers above us,
no one from the underground though
Giving merchandise and branding, a lack of understanding
Reveal your colors and stick the landing
Cause we live in a world of exploitation
No matter how “equal” the situation
You hide her truth, dismiss her through “education”
And send the blame over to the next generation
It’s an aesthetic, the flash of color among black and white
Beat her down put up flashy displays among the daylight
But refuse to step into the depths of her world at night
You use those symbols full of life, but they send you in a fright
Underground is the retreat, step inside, 6 feet deep
Smells of dirt and poisons, but here, while you sleep,
The colors of the world celebrate and weep
As they unearth their livelihood through the motions of their feet
An air of normalcy where the light doesn’t hit

Where all the colors are the same, there's no semblance of a split
A resistance to the world above where everything is...

It's a moneybag to you, it's a moneybag to you
Pick it up, store it away, bury down the truth
Slap some flags up on everything, they're all the same to you
Our world has gotten older, but you, you never grew
She's a moneybag to you, she's a moneybag for you
Ignore her pain, "it's okay," it's never anything new
Put her colors up and draw her in, kill her with no clues
Our world is great and shiny but you're still ugly and cruel

You're shooting down the cyborgs after hearing their roars
Bringing a gun to a fight that they forged by sword
"The world's moving forward" yo that bullshit makes me bored
We're shooting down the cyborgs and their blood is still ignored
Blood money from their କାମ (lash = corpses) stained red with social death
With passion and love, and a marker for the end
The market value placed on lives, a truth you won't contend
Stop lying, you're the enemy, you're not a friend

You're the enemy, you're not a friend
You're the enemy, you're not a friend
You're the enemy, you're not a friend
But you bitches on your pedestals - yeah you like to pretend

We're moving towards a future in which rights hinge on if the rich serve to benefit - if pain and real-life experiences of the socially marginalized can be commodifiable as an act of performative acceptance, despite the realities of non-acceptance. This song was written with engagement with the concept of "rainbow capitalism," the idea of corporations co-opting symbols of the rainbow flag as a quick way of allyship without legitimately showing support towards LGBTQ+ folks.

This song features some worldbuilding through the lyrical and sonic content, painting a picture of a cyberpunk dystopian society, marrying the realities of technological advancement and (colonial) modernization while still being stuck in the past with folks still on the margins. I introduce

queerness as a unified feminine figure, or rather a direct counter to the dominant masculine hegemonies. I transition this “she” pronoun into an “it”, resembling the objectification of identities rather than acknowledgement as people. Along the lines of feminism, I engaged with some of the concepts of Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto”, thinking about the cyborg as a means of existence rejecting boundaries, and with concepts of wholes and parts dissecting the human body to incorporate technology as well. Beyond the lyrical contents of the bridge with its ideas of shooting down the cyborgs (both idiomatically and literally), I engage with the cyborg in the heavy-handed use of autotune to change the human voice into a bass, synths, and even simply doing extreme amounts of modulation to sound more alien in nature.

3. White Lie

They wanna tell me what to be but it won't stop reality
Finding strength to make that choice for me after everything
Picking both roles I'm the king and the queen of my destiny
I'm in the hot seat, I look up to me, in a kingdom made for me

I'm doing fine, what's a little white lie?
A blank sheet that'll ruffle this life
A simple lie, I'll try to believe
A little white lie and no one has to grieve

No more anger all around, no more banging walls
Soar above, ignore the world, a bird above it all
Span my wings like a parakeet, with feathers like brands all over me
Every thought and memory
Weighing on top of me
Am I even free?

I wanna say I'm free, I really think I'm free... but could that ever be?
Could I be lying to me?

I'm thinking about those times when mind and body are in one
I'm losing consciousness as I become someone
Ignoring every call, every siren calling out to me
Screaming "we aren't free, you aren't free, you still can't be"
Waking nights where I'm worried that everything's gonna end
Like I'm choking, desperate to call out to a friend
But my throat is swelling shut as I drown within non acceptance
People reaching out in reluctance

I'm doing fine, what's a little white lie?
A blank canvas to show off this life
Is this a lie that I can believe?
A little white lie and no one has to grieve
And no one has to grieve... but I'll never be free

Tell me, is this bound to be my destiny?
Sinking and sinking instead of flying over the sea
Everything I'm gonna lose if I play out what's to be
I can always leave but

Would I be free from this waking up crying about what's coming for me?
I sat here hoping I'd soar with my wings, but I cut off my limbs to fulfill what I need

I wanna say that I was free, I really thought that I was free
There's too much going on inside me, is it better in secrecy?

This song was written after I woke up at 4am from a recurring nightmare of suffocating to death and not being able to escape death. This, as my therapist pointed out, was likely in response to my anxieties around the pressure I had been putting on myself from the idea of coming out. The song starts with a very upbeat major key in an image of pretending that everything is okay, only to shed the layer in the second half of the song, exposing the underbelly of insecurity and worry that lines even the positive. The process of writing lyrics for this song was a stream of consciousness, with much of the words I had originally written in the middle of night being preserved in the song, lending towards the very raw quality of the contents.

Despite the tonal shift, the first and second half of the song still lend towards an underlying darkness. The first verse speaks towards very personal experiences of having been a shell of a person, being told by the people around me and by society what I'm supposed to be, versus the reality which I know internally that will still prevail. The "blank sheet" mentioned in the chorus entails that, while my queerness is not something physically manifested, it is still there creating ruffles within the world I have built around me. The second verse speaks about a delightful ignorance - maybe if I don't confront this part of myself, or I can pretend it can't touch me, I can continue flying free - yet every part of my life is colored by the very thing I'm ignoring.

The second half comes in alongside an organ, a very grand instrument creating this sense of a self I cannot control. I often associate the sound of the organ with gradious perception of organized

religion, which has contributed to a lot of my doubts around sexuality. I switch into a rap/spoken-word verse, words flowing in a stream of panic. The second chorus, in this section, turns the idea of the blank sheet into a blank canvas, reflecting inwards as I realize I am the blank canvas with nothing of worth to show. The end of the song is a deliberation on if my sexuality is something better kept a secret, as voices whisper around me and drown out my doubts, a pessimistic sense of doom and hiding forever.

4. interlude: eggs

[all instrumental]

This song engages with ideas of found sound and moving through the motions to create a barebones, borderline-camp aesthetic. This aesthetic was inspired by a fellow student's thesis musical engaging with queer aesthetics of sound, which I had the honor of becoming a part of. I wanted a very goofy nod to a hook-up/morning-after scenario, and found myself (immaturely) giggling at the one pickup line "how do you like your eggs in the morning?" This, of course, prompted me to use sounds from me making eggs in the morning. I had fun with some sound samples of slime and chewing, as well as other loud or crackly sounds, to intentionally create an almost-uncomfortable, somewhat-aesthetic soundscape full of busyness, and then decided to give the listener a break in the middle, creating rhythmic breath to allow the listener to sync up with the breathing before continuing with eggs. The exaggeration of the panning of the tracks, as well as the general loudness of displeasurable sounds, is informed by Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp", in which she notes usages of exaggeration, sensation, and failed seriousness.

5. Archives of Water

water governed everything

mobility met with water's resistance
a hard day met with embrace
inflicted pain, eased by empathy
inflicted pain, remind us of disgrace
our movements antithetical to science
anti-osmosis, away from salt and taste
perhaps she turned cold in defiance
of cutting ourselves out of our place?

water governed everything

finding ourselves underground entrenched in things to fear
but away from those from home that we already feared
relics buried deep in us that lasted years and years
suddenly torn away but it never disappears
the roots they call to me, tempt me with history
soft beds and oaken tables, hard work and seasoning
i'm another loved one lost, in buried memory
my nightmares have been turned into a thing of eulogy

water governed everything

thrown into the depths of the sea
cold pallor of skin going icy
i struggle and struggle until i learn how to breathe
what's the use of lungs if they have no need
i'm one with the ocean blue
where i rest, new life could bloom
air bubbles flow out, water bubbles flow in
the cycle it returns, i've given it all in

water governs everything

"they began to pity the rooted ones, because they did not understand"
the loss of my roots leaving snow strewn across barren land
no growth among the snow, ache in marrowless bone
salt, we used for ice, now my tongue is feeling sore

i miss the taste of home, i'm alone with company
and a kiss is still a kiss and it's meant to let me breath
they say breathing is burning, burn the roots of the tree
but they still remain intact and i'm feeling lonely

is a life underground better than having this with me?
is truth and identity something better off burying?
did i choose wrong in living (and leaving) authentically?
now the water's turned cold and my hands are freezing

water governs everything
so i'll sink deeper into my tub
let the water wash out my pain
and stretch new branches high up above

This song is an adaptation of the chapter “Snowfall” from Deesha Philyaw’s *The Secret Lives of Church Girls*, telling the story of a black woman named Leelee feeling doubt and desirium having moved away from her home in the south to the snowy northeast to be able to be with her wife Rhonda. The presence of ice and snow comes up as a main factor in her missing home, where she would not have been allowed to be with Rhonda. Although her disconnection from her roots is forced, water as the bearer of memory still does not hold back, inflicting pain and allowing Leelee’s memories of home to resurface.

The idea of water as a bearer of memory is informed by Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s speculative fiction novel *M Archive*, where Gumbs portrays a return to water as a moment of reflection upon one’s past. I put these two texts in conversation to create an extended metaphor of water and nature as a connection to the body and memory, personifying water as something looking for the repayment of debt with pain and healing and the remembrance of one’s roots. In doing so, I connect the queer POC body and concepts of diaspora through rhythm and sound.

Sonically, I keep water as a moving element throughout the song, giving it animation and life. The line “water governed everything” echoes across the track as a reminder and an almost-haunting reminder within Leelee’s mind. Singing alongside spoken word poetry creates the sense of seeking desperate comfort with thoughts echoing across the mind. Melodically, the third verse continues to move up in pitch, removing space to breathe as a sense of panic and loneliness heightens. The song overall creates a nostalgic storybook feeling, but with only a sense of incompleteness rather than a traditional happy ending.

6. Patchwork Art(ist)

A needle pushing in and pulling out of its skin
Stitching fabrics of which no one knows
That stretch of pink is all they see
Until they come up close
Memories ironed until they're smooth
Filled with pain, if you look close
All the shame sewn skin deep
With ribbons and flowing bows

Don't rip it apart
Don't wanna go back to the start
Don't rip me apart
All I've got is this work of art

One little tear, just here and there
They all will stare
As I try to mend what I've got
Torn apart and ended, splendid
Told me I've done enough, it's not quite there yet
My fabric's turning tough but my skin isn't

Memory shows up like olive green
My worth silken purple like royalty
Facade that filled my head with dread
Gone as needles dig through red
My history, synthetic neon pink
Blue linen in new security
Brown that's wrapped around my head
Strings hold together until I'm dead

I'm an entity
You don't want to see.
I'll tear and stitch on every inch
Become this new thing

One little tear, just here and there
They all will stare
As I try to mend what I've got
Torn apart and ended, splendid

Told me I've done enough, it's not quite there yet
My fabric's turning tough but my skin isn't

Stitches like wounds that can't heal on their own
Stitches like holes driven in through my bones
Stitches draw blood, the remainders of home
Stitches of thoughts that I bear all alone
Patches of skin that you never wanna see
The fabric of desire etched into memory
Patches all fitted and stitched perfectly
Pieces of a whole to make a new being

Stitches like veins running under my skin
Stitches that show where my pain begins
Stitches that hold what doesn't fit in
Stitches display the truth from within
Patches all colored and rended to shreds
This safety that hangs by a loose thread
Patches reflect all that's in my head
A new patch on my skin, the old me is dead

Stitches like wounds that can't heal on their own
Stitches like holes driven in through my bones
Stitches draw blood, the remainders of home
Stitches of thoughts that I bear all alone

Despite the seemingly dark lyrics, this song is both a desperate plea and an expression of happiness and self-determination. In thinking about my experience with being trans, I found myself thinking about fabric, mixing and matching what feels right on any given day, presenting myself as pieces of gender aesthetics, emotions, and memories that make up who I am. I use the concept of stitch very literally in this song, drawing from micha cárdenas's "Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms" where she discusses stitch as "an operation of trans of color poetics that can be used to create algorithmic methods for challenging surveillance technologies and contributing to the survival of trans people of color." She also talks about the act of stitching as opposed to cutting; while both are somewhat violent, stitching intends for an end result of unity and creation.

This song embodies ideas of stitch both lyrically and sonically. I continuously use the metaphor of fabric and weaving together melodic lines to stitch together and bring to life the character of the Patchwork Child. The lyrics start off from an outside perspective of surveillance upon their body, with the patches that others are able to see and others which the Patchwork Child knows are there but no one on the outside knows about. I then embody the character as they continue stitching themselves together even under prying, critical eyes until they are happy with what they have. Stitches and fabric reveal the child's emotions, memories, traumas, and happinesses like a work of art they have worked to create, and despite feeling somewhat safe, they are also satisfied with the self they have created. Sonically, the instruments constantly switch out, with new instruments playing chords and melodies embodying patches, callbacks to previous instruments as the holes left behind by needles, and longer chord progression as a prolonged resolution.

7. Violet Petals

Something calls to me as we dance by the ocean
Quick to devotion, filled with emotion
The waves and our bodies in synchronous motion
Time was frozen, the moment unbroken
Haven't left in days, I know we're not joking
Words left unspoken, I'm out here hoping
Trust me with your heart and I'll keep on holding
My door's always open, door's always open

And you're with me through the night
We're moving back and forth with the sight of no light
But it's you that's shining bright
A pocket full of petals as the time goes by

Petals of violet in your eyes
You hesitate to take my hand
Blooms of violet in the skies
As we dream of a Neverland
Petals fall as worlds collide
Like rain, like rain
I remember in the purple sky
Sun and moon crossing before night

The depth of those moments I feel
No way to deny those when they feel so real
My stomach's turning wheels
An aura of teal, resolve of steel
This deeper pull within me, crossing the borders of where I should be
Unlocking this fear inside me
But they bring me forward to you

Won't be alone through the night
We're moving back and forth hoping for some light
When it's us that's shining bright
Two hearts full of petals as the time goes by

Petals of violet in your eyes
You hesitate to take my hand
Blooms of violet in the skies

As we dream of a Neverland
Petals fall as worlds collide
Like rain, like rain
I... remember in the purple sky
Sun and moon crossing before night

Arms intertwined in the moonlight, gentle and kind
Low buzz in the back as we close our eyes, you in my mind
A vision of truth after all the lies we left behind
An island of our own where our love can arise, oh my my

Petals of violet in your eyes
You hesitate to take my hand
Blooms of violet in the skies
As we dream of a Neverland
Petals fall as worlds collide
Like rain, like rain
I remember in the purple sky
Sun and moon crossing before night

A few years ago, 2018 romantic comedy-drama film “Love, Simon” received critical acclaim for its depiction of normalcy - all I remembered after watching this movie was anger. The movie intends for its main character, Simon, to go through an emotional arc wherein he learns to trust the people around him and come to terms with his queerness. However, the movie’s rising action and climax center on Simon completing undesirable actions while being blackmailed, under threat of being outed without his consent. Later in the movie when he is outed, he is framed as having been in the wrong for his desperation in keeping his queerness hidden. My main thought at the time was, “Is it too much to ask for a queer romantic-comedy where the main plot point isn’t about needing to come out?” In Barbara Christian’s “The Race for Theory” she writes, “the literature of blacks, women of South America and Africa, etc., as overtly ‘political’ literature was being preempted by a new Western concept which proclaimed that reality does not exist, that everything is relative, and

that every text is silent about something - which indeed it must necessarily be.” In other words, there is a prevalent oversaturation of academic theorizing of every piece of media created by someone of a non-normative identity. While the notion of art being political is not necessarily a bad thing, Christian speaks to the idea of existence itself being a valid form of theory, and movement of theory away from an academic context. “Violet Petals” intends to engage with this form of simplicity and pure existence as a means of adding to the subject of queerness.

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