QUEER TEMPORALITY; VATICAN AND GAY RIGHTS; PHOTOGRAPHY; INTERNATIONAL QUEER POLITICS; POETRY; LGBT-ONLY SAFE SPACES; POETRY; NOT BEING POLITICALLY CORRECT; FISCAL CONSERVATIVES AS ALLIES; INTERVIEW WITH MOA SVAN; POLITICAL SEX; TEASPOON POLITICS.
Welcome to [no definition], the magazine of CUSU’s LGBT campaign. I’m Jack, and this is the last time I’ll be your editor; so I hope I’ve gone out with a bang to be remembered for years to come. In that spirit, this term’s issue is on ‘politics’. We’ve got people writing on the importance of queering time; whether the church should have political power; if ‘queer’ is a global politic; the importance of LGBT+ safe spaces; what it means to be ‘politically correct’; whether conservatives can be allies; and the importance of separating politics from sex. Alongside all that is our usual stunning poetry & artwork, and an interview with Swedish comedian Moa Svan talking about feminism, gender and the arts. We’re also always looking for contributors, articles, fiction, art, reviews, anything you can think of – get in touch at: lgbt-editor@cusu.cam.ac.uk or facebook.com/cusuND to be a part of next term’s issue. Finally, as ever, a huge thank you to S.T. for all their help.

Editor’s Note

Cover artwork courtesy of Tanya Wischerath. The views or opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, CUSU LGBT, or CUSU LGBT’s sponsors. No responsibility is taken for the content of websites linked to in the magazine.

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After over a year as editor, this is my last issue before graduating and being spat out into the real world. I consider myself really lucky to have received such marvellous submissions from the likes of you: from beautiful to heart-wrenching, inspiring to contentious, I hope my readership would agree that the issues raised by our lovely contributors have been anything but dull. I’d like to thank everyone who’s submitted art, poetry or writing to [no definition] over the past year - but to finish, let me draw your attention to a few pieces that really stood out to me.

> ‘Alone in the crowd’ (L’12, p8) This felt like coming home. A piece on the alienation and distancing one experiences as a queer person.
> ‘Interview: Andrea Gibson’ (L’12, p18). Andrea Gibson will always be one of my favourite poets, and I whole-heartedly recommend her to everyone who wants some beauty in their life.
> ‘Queer: discuss’ (L’12, p20). The question ‘what is queer’ never stops fascinating me; the range of opinions here was a joy to be a part of.
> ‘LGBTQ cultural icons’ (E’12, p8). I think it’s so important to feel part of something culture-wise, and discovering all the amazing queers making amazing things in the world was so inspiring.
> ‘Compulsory sexuality’ (E’12, p12). A radical, thought-provoking piece on who, how and why we fuck.
> ‘Trans-formative’ (M’12, p9). I love this: on disability, being genderqueer, and making peace with your body.
> ‘Saturdays & cowboy hats’ (M’12, p26). I think I can now retire in peace, knowing there exists ‘gay rodeo’ in the world.
> And finally, if anyone hadn’t noticed, I remain ever in love with the artwork of Cindy Segura & Karl Dmitri Bishop, and hope they never stop creating it.

If you want to check any of these out, all past issues are available in PDF format on CUSU LGBT’s website (www.lgbt.cusu.cam.ac.uk), and in print format at our very own LGBT+ library (in the Central Sciences Library, New Museums site). Best of all the library is accessible and anyone can borrow from there for free, anonymously – so do have a look at all our books, CDs and DVDs.
One can neglect anyone's unique characteristics due to framing a relationship on the basis of their gender identity and the behaviours/preferences one assumes to be attached. It is an archaic principle, and while it does exist, it doesn't have to hinder us. Flexibility can conversely legitimise its usefulness. As a friend once said “sometimes it is useful to say ‘these people are boys and these people are girls’…other times these distinctions are irrelevant or even harmful”. Once you've used these roles as a crutch to help you negotiate the biggest, most generalised stumbling blocks of social interaction, there ought to be room within the framework for you to talk to on a ‘personal’ level, and change the way you behave to incorporate what you 'know' about the person, not just what 'societal roles' suggest they should be like.

Common Sense

Some people move through social situations with ease, both acknowledging and adapting the gender template in their social/world view: this may be down to innate empathy, upbringing or simply the mature application of common sense. Yet others imagine they need these templates. As suggested, we are not born treating people in certain frameworks – it is a learned behaviour, and the more rigid the system, in fact the more fallible it is. One may contradictorily argue that people have the ‘right’ to maintain certain beliefs and prejudices, to choose what they legitimise ‘in their world’ even if, arguably, those beliefs are not really chosen but ‘assimilated’. We base our systems of behaviour on the best information we have available. One cannot simply prescribe the cause of dysfunction as the inconvenient existence of an ‘un-usual’ human being. As such, if we consider that a good person may have natural empathy, yet a fear of stepping into unfamiliar social territory in which they imagine they will be ‘judged’, this could conceivably cause conflict between someone’s interest/curiosity and the pressure of social expectation to behave within and enforce the stereotypical roles they have ‘learned’. This is difficult and threatening for some people, whose reaction can be to blindly defend the systems of categorisation, even if they would lose nothing and have everything to gain. Realistically, we must acknowledge that the person experiencing something ‘different’ may need to seek advice and emotional support to negotiate this new encounter. However, poor advice (from people with an equally limited understanding) can be extremely counter-productive. One of the most damaging reactions is to alienate the ‘challenging’ person(s) when feeling like there is no other option. The resulting emotional and social damage can have a lasting negative impact on
What did you do for New Year’s Eve? Attend a massive party? Enjoy a social gathering with family? Or did you do as we did – contemplate the inevitable forward-bound movement of heteronormative time while planning how to subvert various dominant paradigms (we kid you not)?

As queers perched in a heteronormative world we’re perfectly placed to observe that a celebration of the passing of the year and the approach of the next one is a nod towards the acceptance of every-march-ing-future-bound-time. Have we been addled by stacks of holiday snacks and time with our relations? You might well think so – but why should we accept normative time when we could queer it and interrupt everybody’s time frame with a little queer temporality?

**The normative assumption is that time moves ever onwards and follows a linear path. A baby is born, they grow into a child, suck through their teenage years and emerge as an adult. They then get themselves a job, marry a nice opposite sex partner and fire out a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids. These children are then raised, before Mr and Mrs Hetero a few kids.**

**“viewing time as queer provides us with the ability to extend the concept of queer so it encompasses more than just a discussion of sexualities and gender.”**

Longevity, when death is inevitable and the last few years of our natural lives are likely to be riddled with illness and increasing isolation? Because if we remove the assumption that we will bring forth a new generation, then we must also accept that we will leave little of ourselves when we go. In this case, what difference does it make if we should live another ten, twenty or fifty years?

Within the gay community, the ongoing AIDS crisis has opened up various sites of potential for reworking and queering the concept of time. An example of this is the practice of barebacking. Barebacking, the deliberate choice to not use a condom during sexual intercourse, is a queer consequence of the AIDS crisis, as subjects consciously choose the potential for disease and a lack of future as they contract and transmit diseases including HIV. Communities are formed ‘in relation to risk, disease, infection, and death’ as barebacking queers heteronormative ideals of family and time together through sex without thought to an extended future. This refusal of a conventional temporal framework makes it impossible to reproduce and extend life beyond one’s self is just one way in which queer people can refuse to live within the heteronormative time frames imposed by wider society.

Another, less morbid, tactic for the obliteration of normativity is a sheer refusal to age gracefully, or at least to conform to the age-linked expectations which society sets upon us. This could include perseverance in activities considered to be unacceptable for someone of advanced years or embracing on a romantic relationship that crosses generations. Think Eileen Myles – a kick-ass poet in her sixties, who continues to queer society’s expectations of her, running for US President in 1992, and now dating another female writer at least thirty years her junior.

Let’s consider how queer temporality relates to a current favoured topic of discussion – same-sex marriage. As the newspapers inform us: this is a controversial issue within wider society. Yet there is also disagreement within queer spaces as to whether the very institution of marriage is desirable, taken as it must be with its legacy of discrimination and control. Sure, everyone deserves the choice to make that commitment; but if we wish to keep our distance from heteronormative assumptions and behaviour – should we be screwing from the inside or avoiding it altogether? If the ultimate aim (as ours is) is to resist the dominant paradigm and refuse to be assimilated, why should we dress up in the established garb and walk through a tidy family-friendly routine of church-choreographed steps? But, more specifically, why should we buy into this standardising rite of passage on the expected linear time line of our lives?

And now to drag you down and return to death. Another solid example of how we can queer time is through the choice of voluntary euthanasia. In a sense, this is the ultimate queering of time as for an individual to elect to end their life is to remove the possibility of future, irrevocably disrupting the time line of their existence. As Virginia Woolf noted in her diary early in 1941: ‘we live without a future. That’s what’s queer.’

Viewing time as a concept to be queered provides us with the ability to extend the concept of queer so that it encompasses much more than just discussions of sexualities and gender identities and may also include non-normative living in a broader sense. This enables us to ‘re-imagine “queer” as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, [and] see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities’.

Put simply, the queering of time enables us to queer almost anything, and that begins to sound a bit like a world domination plan to us.

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**BY ROB HART**

The Pope, this week, has issued yet another statement condemning gay marriage. It is hardly surprising, and it is but one comment in a long history of the Holy See’s vocal opposition to gay equality, but it is one that finally seems to be falling on deaf ears. And about time! The US has seen record advances in gay equality, with three states legalising gay marriage this year, and several looking to follow suit. This is coupled with advances seen in Europe, with Spain, a predominantly Roman Catholic country, standing by its gay rights laws, and Britain and France looking set to introduce laws legalising gay marriage next year. It seems that the Vatican’s influence is finally waning.

For far too long the Vatican has meddled in the politics of the world, trying to force its beliefs on us, no matter the consequences. Afforded a position above that of any other religion, the Roman Catholic Church has considerable global influence through the Vatican being an observer state of the UN, a position that it uses to weigh in on a multitude of issues, such as homosexuality, abortion and contraception. It is also a position that the Roman Catholic Church uses to undermine global human rights efforts on a frequent basis.

Sexists everywhere must delight in the Church’s obvious treatment of women as second-class to men, exemplified by their attitudes towards female members of the religious hierarchy. That delight, however, must be nothing compared to that felt by homophobes worldwide, somehow feeling justified in their behaviour by the teachings of the Church on homosexuality, trans issues, and indeed any identity that dares to stray from the conventional ‘man/woman/marriage/children’, as being a mental disorder, being ‘contrary to natural law’ and an ‘aberrant deviation’. The Papal stance of homosexuality posing a threat to world peace is nothing short of discriminatory, and whilst it does not condone ‘unjust’ discrimination, it believes that some form of discrimination is ‘obligatory’. With around 80 countries still treating homosexuality as an illegal act and the Vatican approving international gay rights movements proposed by the UN (although it is by no means alone in doing so), it is clear that something must be done in order to protect and uphold human rights internationally. The solution is clear: the Vatican must be removed from its position of unwarranted influence and power in international politics. We will never be able to remove religion from politics completely, especially with religious leaders preaching on who people should vote for, and nor should we (so long as it doesn’t interfere with fundamental human rights), but we can’t allow the Roman Catholic...
Church its unique position of power any longer.

We may have come a long way from the Papal Inquisition's burning of 'abominable sodomites' at the stake, but the Vatican is still persecuting gays, and it shows no sign of stopping anytime soon. In order to see gay equality become a global right, we need to remove the Vatican from its political vantage point, and until we do so, unnecessary suffering will be felt worldwide. It is by no means a solution to the current problems members of the LGBT community face globally, but it would be a step in the direction of equality for all.

Matthew McGuire
I'm worried about queer. Sometimes it seems to subjugate race, render women's experience identical to men's and place us in a dichotomic relationship to an undifferentiated heterosexuality. At other times it seems to absorb individual narratives into a homogenous mass named 'queer experience'. However, I worry about something else. In reading I come across references to an emergent 'queer Asia', the idea that hybrid local/global gay and lesbian subjectivities are a by-product of globalization in the cultural mode. Supposedly, creative forms of sexuality are emerging in places that previously defined sexual activity in gendered terms.

How can we call this queer? This suggests that an Asia that was already queer is becoming less so by the imposition of Western subjectivity, does it not? Perhaps, but then again we may need to take a step back and look at the tools we have ready for analysis. Queer theory, in my view, is based on the distinction between queer and 'straight', deviant and hegemonic. Can we assume that these divides will hold on a global scale, is this a line drawn prior to culture as an embedded quality of human social life? Have we forgotten that Foucault tells us how the heterosexual, conjugal couple came to "function as a norm, one that was stricter... but quieter" (1981: 38)?

This can feed our politics, but it can also offer a caveat against applying too glibly a universal queer consciousness where one may not apply.

Kyle James-Keen
To quote another, I have a dream. I dream about a world where education, public safety and health are no longer a matter of political debate. A world where race is just a word. A world where religion is only what you believe; not a cause of war. And on a more personal note, a world where who you sleep with, who you fall in love with and what is under your clothes is entirely a personal issue, no longer dictated and judged by the masses.

This world is a beautiful place. No longer are love stories about vampires and werewolves more widely accepted than an advert with two men in love. No longer the automatic screams of public outcry when they see two people in love, kissing on a pre-watershed television show, of the same gender at least. And no longer does a person feel safe no matter where they choose to live. This resplendent world features a homogenous mass named "queer".

I will end by briefly alluding to a controversial article by Massad (2002), who warns against the work of the so-called 'Gay International', LGBT(QI?) activist movements based in Europe. Through extensive raising of Middle Eastern gay consciousness, Massad argues that these groups have rendered indigenous sexual practices problematic. Male-male sex was commonplace in many contexts, but this politics has forced men to choose one path or another. Concurrently, this has lead to an incitement of discourse from governmental and religious bodies across the region. Massad warns that, "it is not the Gay International or its upper-class supporters in the Arab diaspora who will be persecuted but rather the poor and non-urban men who practice same-sex contact and who do not identify as homosexual or gay (384)". I worry that if queer theory is internationalized in the wrong way, we could see similar results.

“Sexuality as a hegemonic discourse supposes to know it is not universal.”

Can we export queer politics internationally?
No fast food restaurants denying jobs and service to people for absolutely no valid reason. And absolutely no segregation between the LGBT groups themselves.

Schools in this world teach all forms of history. Religious education is not biased toward Christianity. All backgrounds are celebrated, for we are all the same. Festivals are held in every town for every possible reason: pride events welcome all and are no longer labelled as pink. Life is celebrated, not just certain aspects of the spectrum.

This world has only one message to pass on to future generations. Underneath it all, the homogenous upbringing, the colour of our skin, who we happen to fall in love with and what letter appears on our birth certificates: we are not toys to be played with for political gain, we are human. Every one of us. We all have the right to fall in love with and what letter of our skin, who we happen to be, how we happen to grow our hair, what colour is our clothing, who we happen to be attracted to, and who we happen to be attracted to in the future. Underneath it all, we are human.

In my first year at university, I heard people talking about queer-only spaces. I was confused. I asked friends: why should people need a space to themselves? After all, we live in a society that is more accepting than ever, with pride parades, LGBTQ+ clubs, and acceptance of queer identities. And yet, there are queer-only spaces. Why are they necessary? I asked. Are they not enough?

In a queer-only space ‘dyke’ can be a term of affiliation; it’s just a vital that we should have access. In a queer-only space people can explore their identities without fear or ridicule. You aren’t the token queer in the room; you are amongst fellow queers and to be able to be ourselves without having to educate anyone.

“Should we really still have to take people by the hand and explain why not to call someone a dyke?”

Amo Rex & K Bodd

During a recent argument with a lovely but misguided friend of the heterosexual persuasion I was horrified by their complete inability to register the importance of something I consider desirable and even essential: queer-only spaces. At the time I consoled myself with the notion that they merely lacked the insight that comes as a natural result from interacting with minority groups; however, more and more I find myself hearing similar views expressed by my fellow LGBTQ+ students. The general view is that in this day and age we no longer need separate spaces for minority groups, and anyway, can’t we all play together nicely?

That’s okay in an ideal world, but unfortunately we don’t live in one (yet). While the argument that sideling minorities such as the queer community prevents the rest of society from interacting with queers is partly true, it isn’t as if the majority of LGBTQ+ people don’t go out and do their shopping, don’t go to uni or school or interact with the rest of society in some other way. Plus everyone knows about the existence of the queers anyway – be that from seeing your local gay bar in town, to watching an episode of Doctor Who, or being encouraged to ‘nicely integrate’ your identities that you feel are most socially acceptable. Having queer-only spaces gives a platform to an under-represented minority who otherwise may not have their voices heard. Queer subculture is lacklustre; it needs to be appreciated without being watered down for mainstream consumption. We need a strong culture which reflects us all, with all of our individual nuances of sexuality or gender presentation, not a watered down mum-and-TV-friendly version. And part of fortifying that culture is to maintain safe environments in which we can, if we wish, express ourselves without concern for how the rugby boys prop up the bar are going to feel about it.

Another virtue of queer-only spaces is simply the opportunity which they provide for us to get to know one another, and as we get to know one another we are on the way to building ourselves a queer community. I think we can never over-emphasise the importance of community and our need for it, because through community comes a sense of belonging and a support network. As a minority group we have an opportunity to utilise our similarities as well as our differences and kick-start the queer revolution!

Finally – a lot of the counter-arguments against queer-only spaces make the assumption that underlying our rainbow accessories and alternative lifestyle haircuts we are actually the same as everyone else. Generally (but not always) yes, but years of oppression both experienced and historical mean that many queer people, myself included, feel frustrated by the idea of being encouraged to ‘nicely integrate’ with mainstream society. While I fight for equality and do eagerly await a day when my rights aren’t impinged by my identity, I do not necessarily wish to live a lifestyle that even vaguely resembles that of Straightly McStraight. All we want is understanding and compassion without the need to conform – and acknowledging the need for queer spaces is one way that society can begin to give us just that.
not be violated upon entry to a straight club, or that gay clubs and gay club nights are parochial places where female bodies are out of reach of these sorts of hands; they don’t, and they’re not. But in my experience, these interactions are less frequent at LGBT nights. And in my very personal experience, for some reason when people try to posit the existence of grooveable girls at these club nights, I feel, I dunno, freer to likewise follow in a similar vein of creativity and posit the existence of kickin’theballable guys.

Another thing that sometimes happens when I’m out at straight nights is that people punch me. Like being groped, the lack of clear motivating reasons make being punched uncomfortable. (Maybe also the violence.) It would be one thing if I were to get punched for doing gay things (for example, scissoring, knitting, or engaging in that favorite of lesbian pastimes: trying to convert your straight girlfriend) and thereby understandably inciting gay panic. But it’s not even my bad behavior; I’m just standing there, being queer. Sometimes the punchers helpfully shout things like “faggot,” but usually there’s no explanation. Silence is always awkward, and in this case it’s compounded by not knowing whether I’m being read as a taggot and therefore punished on the grounds of sexuality for being a homo and on the grounds of gender for doing “boy” wrong, or whether I’m being read as a dyke and therefore punished for doing “girl” doubly wrong: first by not being available to men, and second by being that kind of female homo whose sucking face in public is never going to be mistaken as exhibitionism for the benefit of that certain subspecies of men who fervently believe that lesbianism is god’s gift to them. In either case, though, I’m being mistaken for a hittable girl, and hittable girls, like grooveable girls, don’t exist. And as we’ve discussed, spending time with people who aren’t under the age of seven and still believe in made-up creatures is upsetting.

This is what I find at straight club nights and what I’m avoiding when I go to gay club nights. But what is it that I want, and why does this require LGBT club nights? I just want to be a poorly-behaved drunken queermo, without that entailing vulnerability. Liability, sure: I get that while I was born a wormer, I don’t have the right to be all in-your-face about it with the general public. But not vulnerability. And after a long week out in the murky, grey landscape of our heteronormative cissexist patriarchal society, I crave the straightforward space of a gay club night where people see me and accept me for what I am: really fucking hot. Sometimes this isn’t clear to everyone, and so to make it painfully obvious that I’m not failing at doing “girl” but really something this isn’t clear to everyone, and so to make it painfully obvious that I’m not failing at doing “girl” but really.

The books that challenged me most were by Kate Bonniste – Aunty Kate. I found reading her books an interesting experience: she seems to alternate between saying things I disagree with profoundly, and single sentences that sort out problems I’ve been having for years.

Today I want to talk about something that falls into the second category. In the book ‘Gender Outlaw: on men, women, and the rest of us’ Kate says: “This culture attacks people on the basis of being or not being correctly gendered (having a politically correct body).” And I thought: yes. My queer body is not politically correct. I am white, I am thin. I am middle class. To that extent, yes, I am politically correct.

But I’m not male, and I’m not female, and there’s no way to get legal recognition of this, for all the progress we’ve made in the last twelve months on little things like getting HESA to recognise genderqueer students, or persuading the NHS and the Co-op to offer “Mx” as a standard title. Things are only marginally easier for trans* people whose genders do fall within widely-recognised categories.

I spent the summer of 2011 in southern California, soaking up sunshine and science and – to my shock – every single book in the university’s GLBTQ library that I could lay my hands on. It was the first time I’d ever been at an institute with a dedicated library for People Like Me, and it was mind-blowing (and it’s the reason we’ve got an LGBT+ library in Cambridge today).

And I’m not straight. I don’t have marriage equality: historically it’s not been politically expedient – and while the Lib Dems and Labour have both expressed support, dissent within the Tory ranks is, well, striking. I’m not taught about in schools: Section 28 was repealed while I was in secondary school, and yet there was not even a whisper about queer sexualities during sex-ed. The closest we came was a deputy head making brief embarrassingly mention of anal sex to another class, and expressing his relief when he was interrupted by a fire alarm. My work in sex education makes it pretty clear that however much I might hope otherwise, that situation isn’t improving.

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I had no words for it back then. She was a girl and sex was about penetration and my friends would have said “gross” if I’d told them that we’d been naked listening to ‘keep your girls dancing’ music beating out of sync. With February cold outside we were girls dancing on Russian Malibu, blue sheets and body in the hotel rooms. Yours and mine were all drunk and booze flowed in linen and out of us and into us. Russian rising domes under my hands, Volga between our legs and hot drips of alcohol on our backs as we moved drunkenly together into sleep. You moved a bit as you reached out for my hand.

I remember thinking proudly of the depthness I discovered that night. But then we woke and hanging over us was repulsion as we rode on the snow tipped coach from sight to sight with parents’ voices reprimanding in our separate heads. Self loathingly I ate gherkins all that day to take the taste away and we stopped being friends and you were erased for self preservation.

Miryam, I want to say now: I’m sorry I didn’t talk to you and just ate gherkins. So you know, I was touched by our touches and our night was better than seeing Lenin’s tomb cause that was just cold and dead and you were warm and real.

School left me wordless so I left you wordlessly but I’ve got older and wiser now and left school behind. So I want to say to you and to them that the first time I had sex was with Miryam in a Russian Hotel.
The recent approval of plans to legalise “gay marriages” by the Tory government has led to a re-affirmation to many people that you can be a fiscal conservative without being a “social” conservative – that you can pursue neo-liberal economic policies without necessarily wishing for non-majorities to have a disproportionately hard time compared to majorities, especially when it comes to the queer (“queer” as in “I’d like to avoid a three-foot acronym”) community. (When I refer to non-majorities having a harder time compared to majorities, I refer to a generalised mistreatment of such members of minorities to the effect of their never doing as well, on average, as members of majorities – if you will, systematic oppression.) Fiscal and social conservatism, it is commonly claimed, are distinct from one another – you can be all for the rights of queer people, all for their acceptance, all for “legalising love”. You’re not a bigot. You just believe that benefits don’t need to be as “generous” as they are, and that the mentally and physically disabled can be placed back into the care of their families. Big Society and all that. It’s a nice picture.

However, in the reality of many queer people, this pleasant disconnect doesn’t exist. Cuts to benefits and the NHS disproportionately affect queer people and populations. A hard-nosed government has led to a re-affirmation to many people that you can be a fiscal conservative without being a “social” conservative – that you can pursue neo-liberal economic policies without necessarily wishing for non-majorities to have a disproportionately hard time compared to majorities, especially when it comes to the queer (“queer” as in “I’d like to avoid a three-foot acronym”) community. (When I refer to non-majorities having a harder time compared to majorities, I refer to a generalised mistreatment of such members of minorities to the effect of their never doing as well, on average, as members of majorities – if you will, systematic oppression.) Fiscal and social conservatism, it is commonly claimed, are distinct from one another – you can be all for the rights of queer people, all for their acceptance, all for “legalising love”. You’re not a bigot. You just believe that benefits don’t need to be as “generous” as they are, and that the mentally and physically disabled can be placed back into the care of their families. Big Society and all that. It’s a nice picture.

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19

birth gender in order to access vital
treatment, with no guarantee that they
can restore these legal ties once their
transition is complete. Societies can
load the dice such that gay or trans* people
have a harder time getting by, and
then, when they fail or give up or
break down, legislators can argue that
they are clearly more fragile, less well-
adjusted, than ‘normal’ people – and
therefore less able to cope with, less
deserving of, the rights which they are
denied.

But once we realise that our personal
problems are so bound up in a
wider political framework, we might
ask ourselves: what can we do to
ameliorate them? After all, electoral
politics can seem impossible to change.
There might be a hundred “political”
issues we feel strongly about (whether
clearly within the remit of politicians,
such as who has the legal right to
marry, or more subtle matters of power
relations, such as how bisexual people
are treated in society and culture at
large). But when electoral politics is
presented as the only way of making a
“political” difference, we feel that we
have to delegate our voice in all of
these issues to just one person who,
out of a mere handful of choices, looks
like ey might do the least worst job of
handling them. Thus it’s easy to fall
into apathy, feeling as though we have
no power.

But we have to remember that although
very few of us have power in vast
quantities, such that we could change
our situation at the flick of a switch,
we all have some power. Every day,
in every situation, we’re negotiating a
matrix of power relations – of politics –
where we can exercise an influence,
some influence, however small. Where
we can take out our teaspoons and
bail out a few millilitres from the sea
of inequalities in which so many of our
LGBT+ companions are uncomfortably
submerged.

For me, being openly transsexual
is a political act. Power relations
are inevitably tilted in favour of the
‘normal’, and when we as trans* people
buy into the idea that being trans* –
or ‘not normal’ – is something to be
ashamed of, disguised, hidden, we
reinforce that power relation within the
culture. I’m certainly not denying that
some situations are actively dangerous
if you don’t try to disguise your trans*
status. But boldly and shamelessly
standing up and being counted at
times when you’re expected to stay
humbly silent – when acquaintances
are making transphobic ‘jokes’, for
example – can act as a reclamation of
power.

The balance of power demands that we
meekly and uncomfortably sit through
these situations, because this is the fate
we have earned by being ‘not normal’.
But when we refuse, it makes people
think twice about what they can get
away with – about how stable the power
they derive from being ‘normal’ actually
is. Suddenly it gives a personality to
the faceless mass of ‘otherness’ that they
or their companions or the media they
consume make jokes or comments or
accusations about. And bit by bit,
thought by thought, person by person,
the “accepted” power hierarchy
of ‘normal > not-normal’ changes.
Teaspoon by teaspoon, the political
landscape changes.

“I will stand up and be
counted: I will never
stop believing in the
cumulative influence of
each action I commit.”

And when a society (which starts from
a person, which starts from a thought)
accepts a minority group as legitimate,
full, equal, well-rounded members,
that’s when electoral politics are
likely to change in their favour. One
day, if our society gradually grows to
view transsexualism as no big deal,
just one of those quirks of human
variation, a personal handicap easily
resolved by simple procedures, then
the pathologizing hoops we have to
jump through to access treatment will
start to look unsuitable and outdated.
It will seem only common sense to
allow all trans* people the right to
boldly autonomy, rather than only
permitting it to those who have been
psychologically assessed, who have
survived a stressful and potentially
life-endangering extended period of living
(and therefore dressing, and ideally also
finding employment) as their chosen
gender, who happen not to transgress
their clinicians’ (sometimes simplistic,
sometimes binary) ideas of what makes
someone a man or a woman or neither.
After all, it seems only common sense,
these days, to allow gay couples
autonomy over whom they legally bind
their lives to.

This is my manifesto: I will cling
fervently to my teaspoon, and I will try
to use it whenever I have the strength.
I will stand up and be counted. I will
never stop believing in the cumulative
influence of the infinitesimal power
of each action I commit.

And when a society (which starts from
a person, which starts from a thought)
accepts a minority group as legitimate,
INTERVIEW: MOA SVAN

Winner of the 2012 award for ‘Best Light in the Darkness’, presenter of Stockholm Pride and host of ‘Humour Mafia’, Swedish stand-up comedian and TV-presenter Moa Svan talks to [nd].

BY JACK DUNN

Who/what are some of your biggest influences? I like Eddie Izzard and Ricky Gervais when it comes to comedy. Huge fan of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler when it comes to TV comedy. 30 Rock and Parks And Recreation are great.

What got you into it? I always liked to perform and talk to people. I wanted to say things, and I love to tell jokes, and do fun things. So stand-up-comedy was the first real thing I did in order to make money when I was 16. I did that for the Stockholm pride festival where I started making contact with people working on national radio. So at 20 I had my first job in the media, as presenter of a gay radio show.

What have been some of the best and worst moments of your career to date? Worst things you forget. I just hate doing stand-up when people don’t listen. So that’s the worst. Best thing is what I’m doing now: presenting a quiz show on TV in a suit.

How would you say it impacts you, being female & queer in comedy? Makes me feel grounded. I know who I am, and know that I am not another copy of Eddie Izzard or Ricky Gervais. But I also know that a lot of venues are not made for me, so if I want to do comedy I’ve got to be driven and do my own thing. Makes me into more than someone who counts on everyone else to make my dream possible.

How would you describe the work you do? I work as a TV presenter and a stand-up-comedian. That is what I do, but I’m generally motivated by doing things I like and think are important: for example I think it’s important to be out and proud; don’t let anyone boss you around. I’m the only out lesbian TV presenter.

For context – tell us a bit more about the general comedy scene in Sweden: who’s performing, about what, for whom? It’s much the same as in the UK: a lot of stand-up and TV comedy. Only here we call The Office “kontoret” and it is not nearly as fun. There are a lot of great female comedians, but generally the bookers act like there are none.

How would you describe the work you do? Parks And Recreation are great. I huge fan of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler when it comes to TV comedy. Only here we call The Office “kontoret” and it is not nearly as fun. There are a lot of great female comedians, but generally the bookers act like there are none.

What have been some of the best and worst moments of your career to date? Worst things you forget. I just hate doing stand-up when people don’t listen. So that’s the worst. Best thing is what I’m doing now: presenting a quiz show on TV in a suit.

What’s local/particular to place about your comedy? It’s in Swedish. Also I don’t write jokes; I talk about things. I tell stories, not jokes. I talk about me, and about politics.

How do you find doing comedy in Stockholm? It’s in Swedish. Also I don’t write jokes; I talk about things. I tell stories, not jokes. I talk about me, and about politics.

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How do you find doing comedy in English – what changes? A lot. I don’t have my own accent. I tend to imitate a lot of others. Like I did in the beginning with my comedy. It’s like you go back a few years. And I lack a lot of words.

Who would you say your audience is – real and/or ideal? You never know. You think you know, and then it turns out that you don’t. They are great. That’s all I can say.

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I do not want who I have sex with to be a political issue. I don’t want it to be an issue for anyone else apart from me and whoever else might be directly involved. Call me a prude, but once I take my clothes off in the company of someone, nobody else is invited. I do not want to feel scrutinized when I am expressing my most intimate feelings. I do not want to be introduced to people as someone who does certain things with my body. Most of all, however, I do not want to know what other people might do in their bedrooms. By and large, I can decide whether or not I feel the need to declare to people precisely how I get my kicks, but I cannot decide not to know what other people might do in their bedrooms. By and large, I can decide whether or not I feel the need to declare to people precisely how I get my kicks, but I cannot decide not to know what other people might do in their bedrooms.

“Why is it ok for what we do in bed to be the topic of such casual scrutiny?”

At our most vulnerable and our most trusting, we reveal ourselves, not as doctors, office workers, fork-lift truck drivers or beauticians, but as human beings in all our fleshy, hairy glory. This brings us to the perennial question: why is it okay for what we do in bed to be the topic of such casual scrutiny if we call ourselves “gay”, but not if we call ourselves “straight”? And this in turn leads to a much more pressing set of questions: why have we not answered this yet? Why are we so intent on telling the world what we do in bed, precisely in order to get the world to stop telling us that we can’t do it? What we might loosely describe as the “queer movement” goes some way towards addressing these issues by deciding not to reveal exactly how someone might deviate from the bedroom activity norm. But it is still the case that “queer” means “not-straight”, and I still reveal more about my intimate self if I say I am queer than if I say nothing at all. I do of course understand that I situate my argument very firmly within a society in which I am unlikely to get killed for who I sleep with, but this illustrates my point: we, in the UK, do not have to keep telling people. Let us not forget that “sexuality” is about sex, after all, and sex should be as private as we want it to be.

To my mind, much of British society has moved beyond having to have it explained that gay people exist. The most helpful thing we can do now is recognise and stop this compulsive need to define people by their sexual activities. We need to start telling people to mind their own Ps and Qs, rather than reveal to them what we do with our bodies. Let’s not sustain this system by which I am free to do what I like as long as I declare it; it’s time to reverse the logic: I am free to do what I like and therefore I do not have to declare it. To say to a Member of Parliament “we don’t mind what you do” is one thing, but to say “we don’t mind that you like to get naked with other women and all that that entails” is quite another.
He didn’t listen
Because he had no stake,
Nothing to gain
Nothing to lose,
I am just some
random
hysterical
woman.
He’s in his tower
While I’m
in the line of fire.
The game is rigged
And I’m the only
One who can lose.
Maybe one day
The world will be different.
Maybe one day
The tables will turn
And I’ll be the one
in the tower.
Watching the field.
Taking the shot.
Maybe one day
The world will be different
And I pray that
Even if I had no stake,
Nothing to gain.
Nothing to lose,
I would not take that shot.
I pray that
I would bash apart the towers
That divide us.
That I would run into the field
Even if I was safe
and warm in my tower.
Even if I had no stake.
Because none of us win,
Unless we all win.
And I have no stake
but my soul.