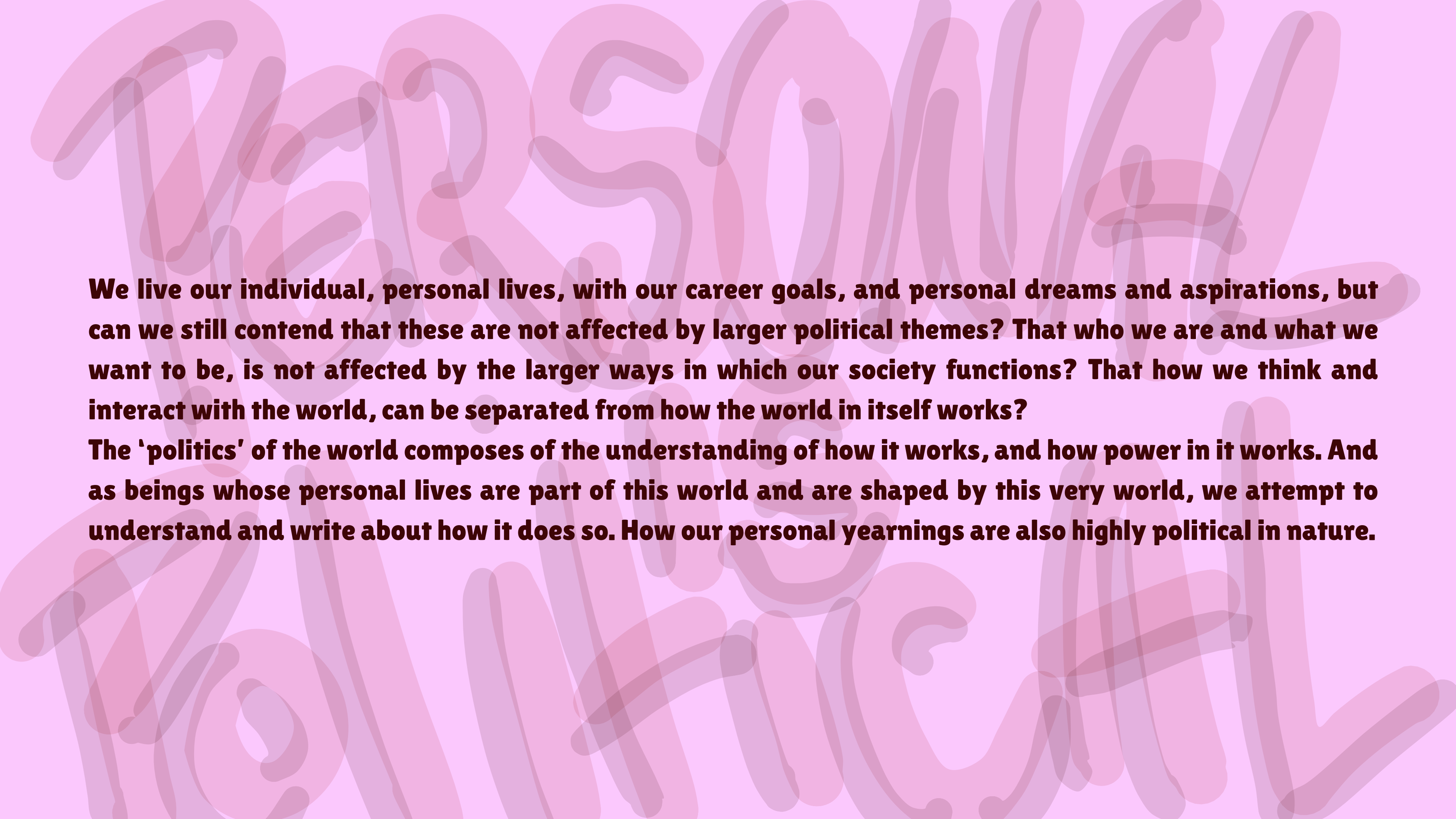




PERSONAL

इस

POLITICAL



We live our individual, personal lives, with our career goals, and personal dreams and aspirations, but can we still contend that these are not affected by larger political themes? That who we are and what we want to be, is not affected by the larger ways in which our society functions? That how we think and interact with the world, can be separated from how the world in itself works?

The 'politics' of the world composes of the understanding of how it works, and how power in it works. And as beings whose personal lives are part of this world and are shaped by this very world, we attempt to understand and write about how it does so. How our personal yearnings are also highly political in nature.



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Freedom and Rebellion

-Eindhoven

I have been wanting to write an essay since quite a while now. An essay, which represents my personal frustrations, which displays the construction of myself in the political ideological sense. I shuffled through various topics and ended up at writing about anarchy and revolution. I started writing some bullshit enlightenment-style treatise about the spirit of revolution but was almost immediately disgusted by it.

I did not want to splurge recurring notions about society and rebellion and flaunt words around to try and make it sound masterful. I wanted to understand and articulate my diverse ideological position, and maybe theorize about something while I'm at it. As I realized this, I also figured that as I do this I should start with something that has shaped a lot of what I refer to as 'my character' – rebellion. That was far more important to me, than whatever bullshit I was writing, because it included all the bullshit that I could ever write.

I think a great part of my ideology derives from the lack of acceptance of reality. The foundation of my rebellion, or maybe any resistance, is this rejection of reality. As Jean-Paul Sartre says “We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us” (Sartre & Fanon, 1961). My entire rebellion, my rejection of reality is made on this sentiment of trying to be free. Free from what the world wants me to be, from the million ways of control on each and every aspect of my life and identity, free from what reality is made out to be.

That's also why I find most "realists" funny and pointless. I don't think I can base my ideology on reality, because I know I am basing it on a rejection of reality. This rejection is based on the understanding that systemic reality as it exists now is unjust and oppressive. Thus, arises the need to fight against it, to change it, to reject it.

I do see a point in the pragmatism in the practice of politics, but praxis needs to be rooted in an ideology beyond pragmatism, beyond reality. Politics needs to be rooted in this dream, of a better world, a more liveable universe, that's the only way to come to an existential conclusion of political-ideological thought. Utopianism is necessary when theorizing, because it is necessary while dreaming. I maybe can come to a rational logic of pragmatic politics but I would never be able to find the romantic logic of the same. Utopianism could be described as impossible, but it is necessary.

It cannot be limited to dreams though. We can't all be delusional romantic dreamers that don't touch the flesh of the political world. That's why probably the theorization of dreams is also as necessary. The articulation of the ideas and practices, of what we want to do, of where we are and want to go, of why the world is and why we want it to be, is philosophy. And it is the gap through which we can travel from dreams to praxis.

I link my utopian ideologies to the larger school of anarchism, defined as "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law" which would logically conclude at "the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary." (Goldman, 1910) A lot of my rebellion, my dreams, my hopes and apprehensions revolve around chasing a sense of freedom.

I was talking with a friend, on a day where the acidic air breached through my walls
We were talking about our aspirations, about our damning visions of the infinite future
About how life could have been worth living if only in the mindset of a surreal conspiracy
That was when I realized how scared I am that my fragile dreams will break from articulate words

Words as solid as bricks thrown to break the glasses of the bungalows of the propertarains
Words as rough as pain and suffering faced by the million unfree folk and their unspent rage
Words as sharp as the eyes that glamorously reflect your own fears back on a vacuumed night
Words as heavy as the weight carried by the insects in a lifeless attempt at madness

A madness that consumes hours and hours of eternal torturous nights of maximum boredom
A madness that is beyond any cure that the modern medicinal institutions can infringe upon
A madness that dictates the life and liberty of the possessed sinner inside the individual
A madness that invokes the feeling of unfreedom in a man that has forgotten to feel anything

I take that madness and breathe it deep inside, and find the cluster of thoughts and ideas yet unwritten
I note down whatever I need and discard the rest, throw all the irrelevant opinions in a void that precedes my own creation
I cut off my head and I cut off my limbs, just to prove the validity of my radical philosophical experimentations
I detach myself from anything and everything I have ever felt except for the blind sense of freedom

I am continuing this essay, after a few months, right in the middle of deeply troubled times, times which people are calling an era of polycrisis. We are seeing the world collapse, everything that once felt real break down. The goings-on of a war and all of its disturbing implications. We are seeing the system of peace collapse in real time. Their politics of justifying war is failing, people know about the large scale atrocities in Palestine, in Iran. But yet, we feel doomed.

Maybe, they don't need their system of peace anymore, the system that justifies their every action, their power, their sovereignty. Maybe, its already way too justified in the heads of their supporters, and everyone else is too overwhelmed with information to think. People are losing their rage. And maybe that's what is causing this feeling of doom to settle in. The feeling that there is nothing left to hope for, fight for, dream for.

And as soon as I say that, I know that I'm wrong. However, I do believe it is worth saying. There is so much to fight for, everything that we have ever dreamt of still remains within the reach of our dreams. Freedom, friendship, community, love, peace, mutual aid, anarchy, everything. I know this because I still talk to my friends.

We must remember this because, that's all I see that can keep us alive in these troubled times. The sense of freedom I've been chasing, that chases itself will keep us alive. The point of the rebellion is to probably keep us alive. And living is more than surviving. In times of existential doom, I represent the idea of survival to some of my friends, and I sound unconvincing because I am not convinced myself.

But I still chase my idea of freedom, and I think we need to. The idea that the world does not need to be so cruel, unapproachable or unlivable, and that we can manage to live in and resist reality itself. Maybe to do that, we need to create spaces of freedom, pockets that are open to life, supportive to each other. We need to create these spaces so that, as a friend once told me, "we can prevent our hearts from crumbling".

Maybe, the magic we call 'life' or 'freedom' is magical in nature. Magical because of the impossibility they present, even in our imaginations. It might be my privilege speaking, but imagining a utopia seems impossible to me, and maybe its because I am still too grounded in reality. Its all a mysticism at the end of the day, and that's probably why it still holds ground, and keeps us running, gives me the juice to write this.

‘Naam ko aadhar, tere naam ko aadhar...’

Cosmos flowers, sunset inferno, like tongues of fire and stormwaves

The chant rises from the renovated mandir in the gully,

Screaming crowds surging forward like bright ghosts reaching for the sun

So loudly that I think one day they will drown the whole world.

‘Naam ko aadhar, tere naam ko aadhar...’

Green shadows and minarets, marigold rain, lamb nailed to a cross,

Vagabond godless youth, aspiring messiah hanging from a ceiling fan,

Look, look, the mosque is burning —

The ashes of the promised land are spinning circles around the sky.

‘Naam ko aadhar, tere naam ko aadhar...’

God, my God, I screamed your name to the constellations until something broke inside my lungs

And all you could do was stare back into the ages, silently, silently, so silently

That I prayed by the legs of the bedside table, running nose to the floor, and begged you

Kill me, kill me, kill me please, say something and then kill me, kill me —

‘Naam ko aadhar, tere naam ko aadhar...’

And there’s blood on the temple floor again,

Bodies stacked tall and quiet on the altar, rotting hands still frozen in prayer,

The heavens are darkening, there are mynas flitting about the pillars.

You can still hear the song faintly in the night, drifting on the moonwinds,

‘Naam ko aadhar, tere naam ko aadhar...’

तेरे नाम को आधार

- Maya

They have been learning to watch
In silence for a thousand years now,
To mold anemone and deer-horn and octopus hearts
From sea foam and cloud water,
And they have learnt, most importantly,
To let the monsters roam wild
From the moment they are cut free at birth,
Let them scream till the blood spills
From their throats and down unto the earth,
Chase the the winds until they run into the heart
Of the hurricane and throw themselves upon the rocks,
Make music of gunfire until all the children
Come to howl like wolves in the street.

The New Gods

- **Maya**

They have been taught to let the poets die slowly,
Pale and greyfaced as the sea,
The lovers search, search, search from across the room
For each other, for anybody at all,
As all around them lights tumble sadly around the night,
‘It is what they are wont to do, you know.’
Let them reach out their hands so that their fingers can brush the planets,
Only to see, upon their return,
Their families scattered around the living room sofa
With bombs for eyes and debris underneath their fingernails,
Let them sing, let them sing, let them sing and in the background
The birds, the buildings, the gutter all go up in flames,
And the sun has burnt itself to popcorn
But there is still someone’s old mother wailing in the rubble.
And the new gods will say to each other,
‘Get the snacks, let the comedy begin!’

On the reclamation of slurs; “My Friend Called Me Tranny and I Liked It?”

–Abrdoot

Content Warning:

This article addresses sensitive issues and discusses the use of racial and transphobic slurs, including potentially offensive language and the reclamation of such terms within marginalized communities.

Secondly, we are taught to be confident and undoubting in our writing but I have much to learn and discover. If you find me second guessing myself in this essay and yourself judging the validity of this essay due to that, second guess yourself.

Naive Semanticism

During my fourth semester as a philosophy major, I took a course called Language and the World. As a part of this course, we had multiple discussions regarding the use of racial epithets, more commonly known as slurs. We discussed many different perspectives, and how they approach the use of slurs. At that point in time, I was just coming to terms with my trans-ness and my gender dysphoria and my experience as a genderqueer person threw a different light on the course. And as the title suggests this essay talks about the specific term – tranny and my experience with the slur. This essay was originally written for an assessment but below is an edited version for public viewing.

Quick rundown for those of us not cursed with having taken this course in the particular university and suffering that particular professor, Semantics is the area of study that concerns itself with the meaning of a word and the different ways it can be understood. When being concerned with understanding the meaning of words, several issues are raised, to name one - Is writing down a definition of any word the most effective way to understand and agree on the meaning of a word? That creates various different schools of semantics as often happens in disciplines. Naive Semanticism as the name suggests is the semantic theory which presumes the most simple, everyday meaning of words and phrases.

Now as we would have it when it comes to slurs and derogatory content, Naive Semantics says that the derogatory content is inherently a part of the semantic meaning of a slur, regardless of any context. If the slur is uttered, it's derogatory. Naive Semanticism claims that the meaning of a slur is 'possessing a property and being despicable because of it'. In this paper, I will use the example of 'Tranny' which is a transphobic slur that has been used all over the world, throughout the ages to refer to anyone who doesn't fit in the binary of societal gender roles, though it's largely targeted to transfemme people (anyone who wasn't assigned female at birth but their presentation leans towards). In this case, the naive semantic would say that the meaning of 'tranny' is 'transgender person and despicable because of the quality of being trans '. And no matter what the context, this meaning would hold.

The Problem

However, sometimes the slurs don't seem to carry derogatory content. To illustrate this, let us together consider the following example:

Reclaiming The Slurs

The reclaiming of slurs is not a new phenomenon for anyone who listens to rap music or is part of the queer community. In these contexts, slurs that are typically used as derogatory terms are often reappropriated within the community, by using them to refer to other members of the community. Through reclamation, 'Tranny' now becomes a term of endearment, celebration, and appreciation. I have observed people saying 'it's giving tranny' (loosely translated to 'your outfit embodies the tranny aesthetic', intended to be a compliment) when somebody asks about their outfit or even using 'trannylicious' as a positive adjective. Very often trans people also refer to themselves as 'trannies'. For example, I have heard multiple people in my circle say something similar to 'I am just a pretty 'tranny' trying to live and then the electricity goes out.' or something like 'I was just daydreaming in my delusional 'tranny' head about the summer breaks completely forgetting Delhi summers are going to suck.'

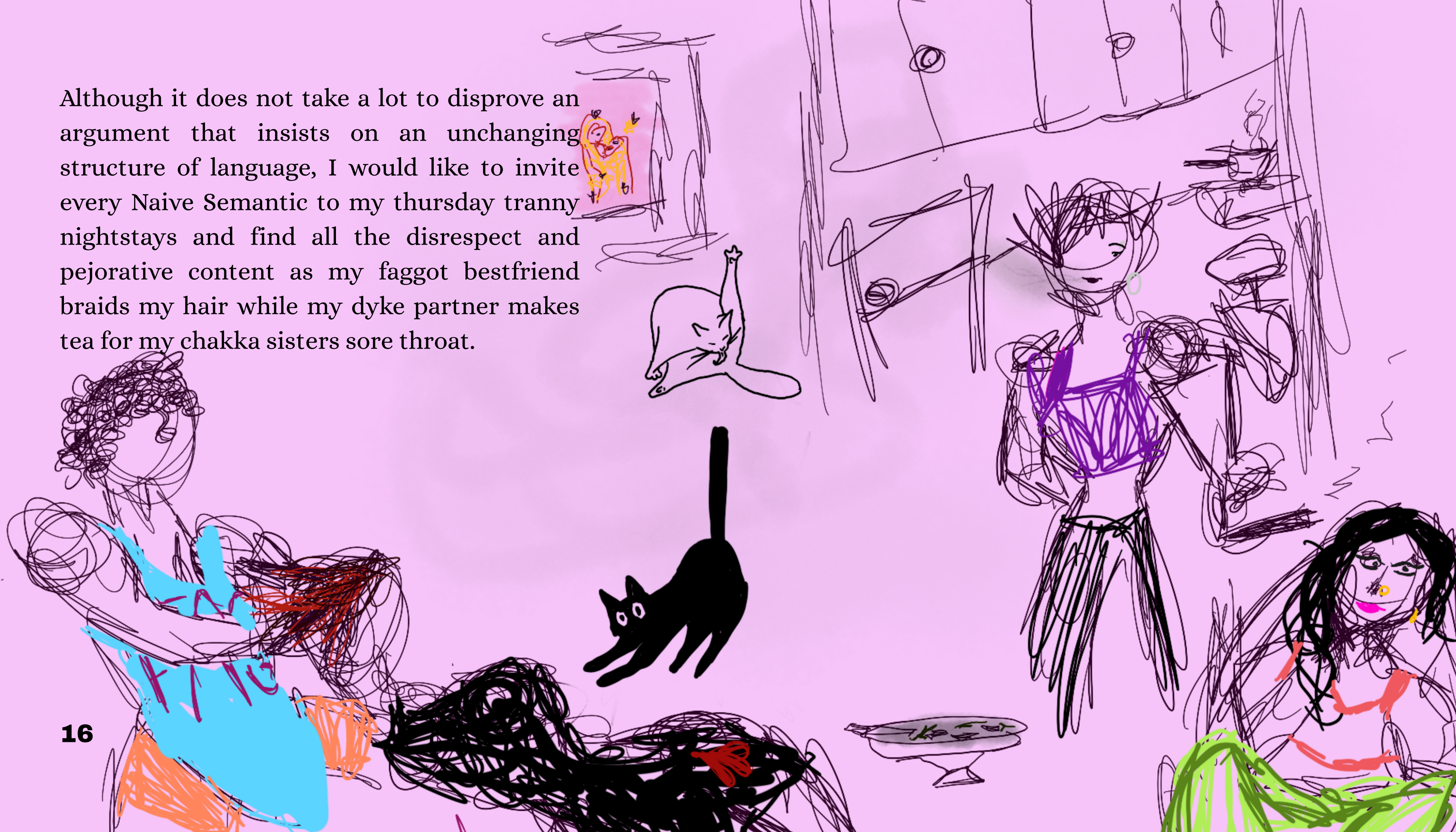


So How is this a Problem?

Taking into account the linguistic data above, I critique the idea that the derogatory element of the slur is part of its semantic meaning. Obviously Naive Semanticism is not the only semantic theory out there engaging with the question of slurs and verbal degradation and there are many theories and opinions about slurs. Often people (whom we know all too well) have made arguments about racial slurs like the n-word being devoid of derogatory content in India since there are neither Black people nor White people in relevant amounts. Even today if you step out into the streets of our country before you hit the one hour mark you would have heard several casteist, misogynistic and anti queer slurs. The desensitisation runs rampant in our blood. And I would like to remind and reestablish the difference in my argument and this attitude. It is untrue that any slur has no derogatory content, it is untrue that if it is no longer in use/the population degraded by it is not present then it is harmless and I would also be unsure of claiming that it is completely in the hand of the community to redefine the slur.

Looking at the examples above clearly, the term does not mean ‘transgender and despicable because of it’. Rather than being used to degrade people of the community it is used by these people to validate and celebrate their identities. This means that there is a context in which the slurs can be used where they are not derogatory. Which leads me to believe that the process in which a slur is reclaimed has much to do with the semantic content of a word or phrase but not at all with the derogatoriness of it. Slurs are inherently derogatory because their genesis is rooted in hatred and contempt, but words and language do not stop growing at birth. What sets apart terms like tranny, faggot and dyke from the varying casteist and racial pejoratives that have not been reclaimed like ‘greaser’ or ‘chinky’ or the mistake a Naive Semantic might make in understanding this is that it is not what the speaker conveys as derogatory but what the subject perceive as derogatory. When I am called a tranny and the speaker semantically is conveying that I am “a trans person and despicable because of it” it is what he means not what I think. The narrative of reclamation is often the reassertion that yes I am trans, a tranny and I pride in it and it does not make me despicable. Even despite being a dirty tranny with no decency, that is an identity I rejoice in. My identity is meant to transgress your puritan culture and create discomfort in you and I choose to celebrate that. It is not about your derogation but about my identity

Although it does not take a lot to disprove an argument that insists on an unchanging structure of language, I would like to invite every Naive Semantic to my thursday tranny nightstays and find all the disrespect and pejorative content as my faggot bestfriend braids my hair while my dyke partner makes tea for my chakka sisters sore throat.



Now What?

This however does not mean that our lexicon is thrown into chaos, everybody starts using slurs and we degrade to a society of lawlessness, no rules and no consideration. A linguistic purge, if you will! This begs the question: How do we uphold the gravity of the slur's derogatory content, whilst also separating this content from its semantic meaning? This leads me to a question I would like to pose to all of you, my reader.

Are rules and structure the foundational pillars of language? Are they the defining feature of language? Are they the only way of preventing a linguistic purge?

In my understanding it is not so. Language is the manifestation of the fundamental human desire to connect and communicate on a deeper level with other humans and thus its foundation is based in humanity. It is the soul of language to understand each other and be understanding of each other.

I would not be so filled with hubris as to prescribe what is the true foundation of language but if i was to take a guess it would be radical empathy and that same consideration. It is the tugging of your heartstrings when you are moved to speak out or write about something and in the same breath the silence that fills the room as an audience is moved to silence by a stellar performance. It is not just the right words of advice to your best friend but also the hug to your mother when she complains and laments about your life, for which you have no imagination. So the only real way in my conception of upholding the gravity of a slur's derogatory content is by consideration. In my original essay, due to the demands of an essay for schoolwork, i had to give a solution to my argument, and i could make as many lists prescribing behaviours to navigate this linguistic knot but none will work as well as understanding the community, understanding their history with the word and understanding their lives.

In conclusion, the reclamation of slurs is a complex process as is any other process in our modern world, that relies on the last shreds of humanity that remain within us. The communitarian struggling to stay alive in you, the flame of companionship and radical, revolutionary friendships.



The Breathing of Icarus

A breath flows
A trembling of the crowns
Our utter uselessness combined into a massive mediocre beast
That was the hope that was given to us but the visions that lingered were more

An eye that saw the sun, and burned itself inside out
It sees Icarus and relates to the boy whose wings were burned by the world
It realizes what ambition truly means, the power of dreams
It is the eye of the eye of the eye of the remaining butchered parts of that
massive mediocre beast

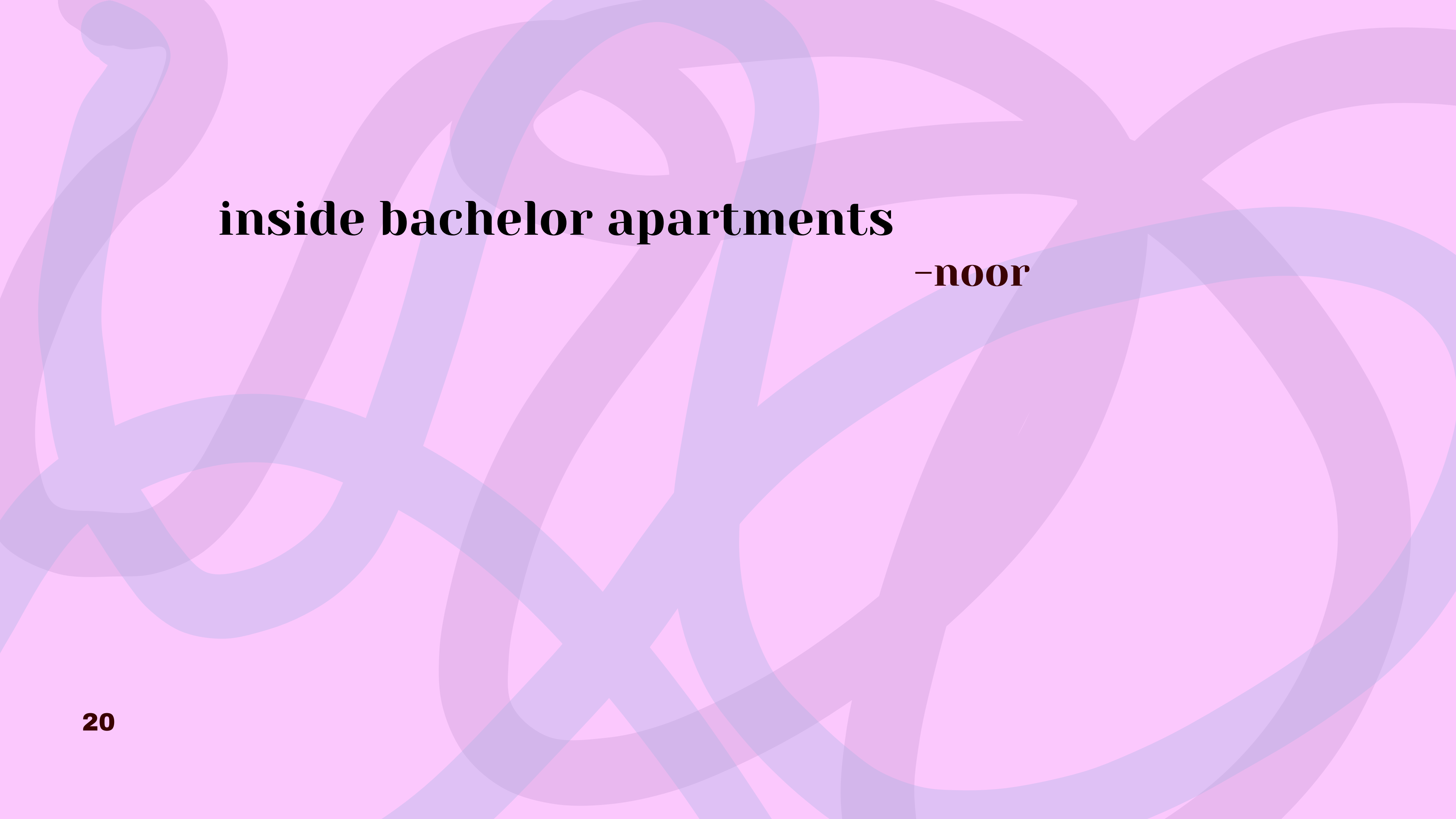


-Eindhoven



Death didn't scare them anymore, which was scary
Subservience could be overcome by courage, by a whiff of the scent of freedom
We were all blind, I knew, but we suffered through blindness together
I saw a billion people wake up that day to dreams

They heard chants of freedom, revolution, a hitherto undreamt of world
They were given songs that gave them love, and gave their love my politics
Hope I did, as hope I do, that there's truth in these billion new found eyes
And their eyes could see the sun, just as well as Icarus did.



inside bachelor apartments

–noor

One night, as I walked past a building in my society, I heard laughter. I could hear their laughter over the sufficiently loud music that was playing through my headphones. It was loud enough for me to look back at the balcony, decorated with pink fairy lights, which was the only part of their house I could see. This means that it was probably loud enough for cranky, older neighbours, or passers-by, to contort their faces to display their disapproval, not that I witnessed any such activity that particular night. However, I imagine it a very real possibility, especially if said older neighbour or passer-by knew if the group was a bunch of tenants, or worse—bachelors. Laughter of multiple people, all of whom were probably in their 20s. I imagined them rocking back and forth, sitting on the floor in a circle, maybe playing a game of some sort, under moody yellow-orange lighting. Maybe they were roommates, or

21 maybe just friends whose schedules finally aligned enough for a night in together.

Or maybe they were relatives, and I'm simply projecting. In my attempt to find papers relevant to this piece, I did stumble across many papers about 'bachelor pads', all of which made awfully clear how gendered the term "bachelor" is, and the kind of context it carries. This made me realise that 'bachelor' is perhaps not the term I want to use, or maybe I mean something completely different when using it. My idea of "bachelor" in this piece is unmarried individuals (regardless of their gender identity), who might be studying or working, or doing something in between, who are living together in a flat, away from their families. And considering this is based on my personal observations, I suppose these individuals are also of a particular class that can afford flats in areas such as Delhi NCR.

From what I have observed, many, mostly married and “settled” people view such individuals living together as a nuisance. Why? Because they are loud, party at night, call their friends from outside into their homes, engage in substance abuse of some sort, and are generally seen as inconveniences to the rest of the “civilised society”.

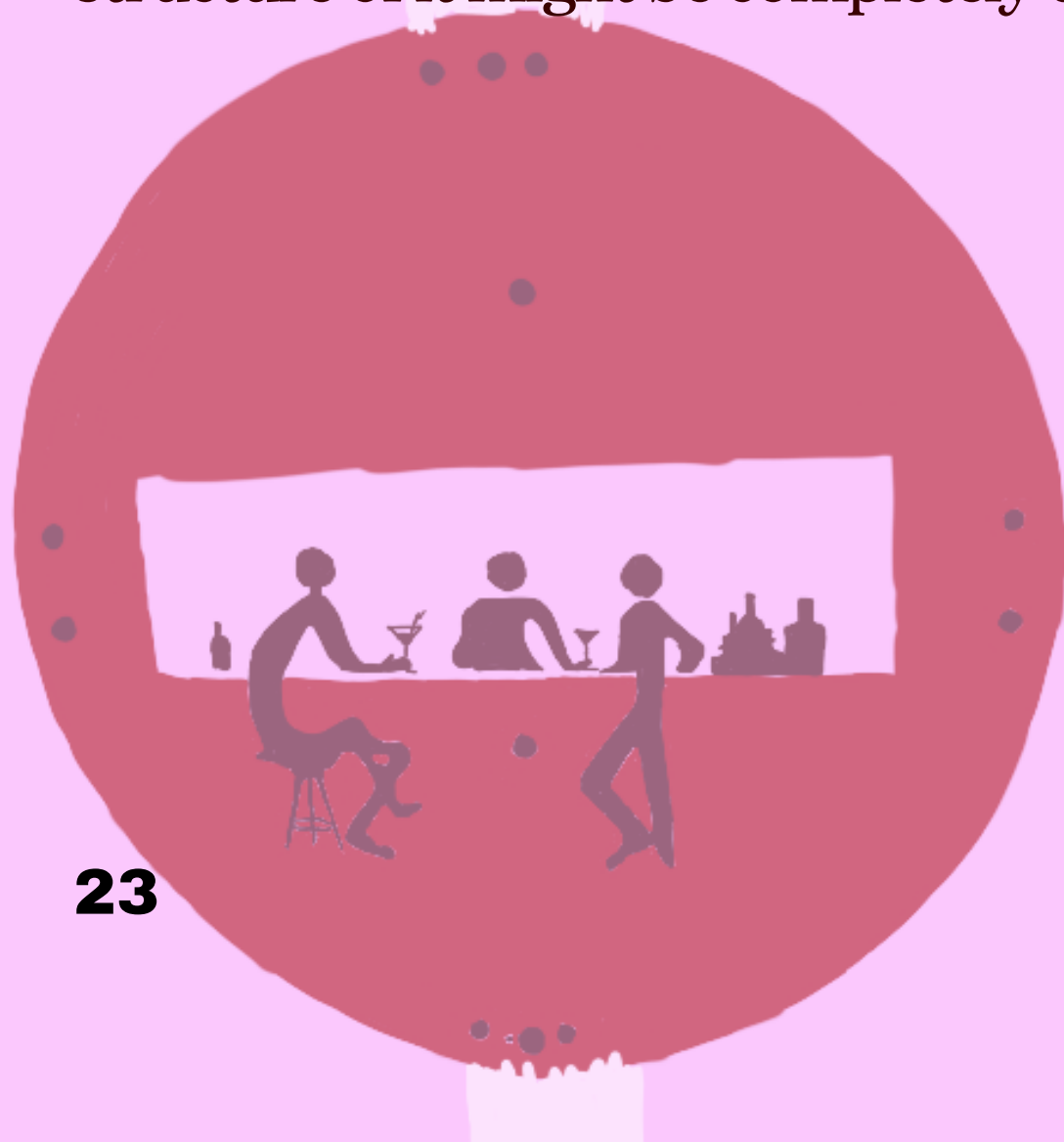
In recent years, where I have been exposed to shared living spaces, such as hostels, and homes of friends, I have become more aware of the one-dimensionality of this perspective. Before having experienced such spaces myself, I had always viewed “bachelors” as an object of curiosity. Now that I have had the joy of experiencing these spaces, I suppose my argument is that these spaces are more than just a haven for relentless substance abuse and loud laughter or altercations, though all of that can definitely be a part of it sometimes.

Unlike shared spaces with family, love, care, respect, dialogue, arguments and disagreements, all function very differently in shared spaces with friends. Where familial love for many might not exist, or might feel obligatory, friendship only stems from love for whom used to be a random stranger– friendship is, often, a choice. This is not to create a hierarchy between friendship and family, because the experiences vary for different people. However, the way that these relationships function in shared spaces do differ greatly.

Much like bell hooks' argument in 'all about love: new visions', I too, believe that familial love can sometimes feel obligatory, or, in some cases, be confused with care. She argues that love and care are not the same thing. Care can be a part of loving somebody, but loving somebody is not restricted to caring for them, it also requires other "ingredients", such as, "affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication." (pg 5) Thus, when you find an alternative community, apart from family, the structure of it might be completely different from a familial one.

Dialogue and Disagreement

The most evident contrast I have seen between these two settings is that of dialogue. I live in a nuclear and (mostly) functional family. What I mean by "functional" is that we work well together, in terms of providing for each other, caring for each other, listening to each other, and even fighting with each other. I have also had full support from my parents, financially and emotionally, in pursuing what I want, travelling around with friends, going away from home to study, etc. And I have felt loved in this space too. I have had enriching conversations, and spent meaningful time with them.



The first and most obvious difference to me is that we're almost never out of things to talk about. In fact, there is a certain charm in rehashing things we have already talked about multiple times, and re-analysing them. Also, since most of our political views align, I often find myself verbalising the spiral of things I keep noticing at home, or in larger society, which my friends often relate to, and add to. And since all of us are not from the same familial, socio-economic, and even geographical, backgrounds, I do get insights from a variety of perspectives. This almost never happens at home. At some point, we do run out of things to talk about, due to the invisible boundaries that have been drawn and cannot be crossed– the children cannot be told about this, I can't tell my parents this, how do I say this to my sibling without sounding this way? Of course, this is no blanket statement for how these spaces function, but it is a way for me to mark a dissimilarity in these two spaces using my own experiences.

Just the other day, my friend and I found ourselves standing at the corner of a metro station for forty-five minutes, talking about all things under the sun, when we were supposed to go home. This was after we already sat and talked for at least an hour on a ledge outside said metro station. And maybe it was because we met after a while, but it was also because we felt extremely comfortable sharing these experiences with each other. We talked about all the little things we noticed around us that irked us, but which we could not discuss with anyone nearby, and it felt like the conversation could go on forever. It was only that we had to get back home in time, and that we had been standing for 45 minutes that we broke the conversation off. Had this been in college, we would have shut our laptops down, gotten chai at the tapri, and sat on the floor in some corridor, or the corner of a classroom, and just talked away for hours on end. From funny incidents, to ones that boiled our blood, revolution would bubble up in that corner of the classroom for as long as we continued to speak to each other about everything wrong and right with the world. Those nights, I would go back to my room at 4 am, with a smile on my face, while also dreading the mere four hours I had left before classes began.

Dialogue, however, is not only conversations all the sides agree with. It will, inevitably, lead to conflict, and after college, I have come to realise the importance of conflict too. At home, conflict is something I am scared of, mostly because of how it is dealt with usually, or rather not dealt with. Depending on the gravity of the subject, a disagreement can go from a joking matter, to a serious argument, which might involve screaming, shouting, forced closing of doors, stomping of feet, and wide-eyed horror at what is being said. And more often than not, we either do not articulate ourselves well, or we do not intend to listen to the other person sincerely. This, I think, also happened because families often take each other for granted, so if I scream at my sibling one day, maybe a week later, we will be alright because we have to be alright, because we are related by blood.

This way of social organisation does take a very conscious effort to be disillusioned from, at least personally, because the concept of choice does get lost in the midst of this societal curation of familial duty, love, and whatnot. In friendships, however, whichever conflicts I did have, made me realise how much it takes to truly mend a relationship that you cherish. Though everyone is understanding of off-handed annoyance, and general frustration sometimes, my conflicts in friendships made me aware of how much for-granted family can take each other. But living with a community taught me how though these bonds might not be built by blood, they still do mean a lot, and people do not simply leave, most of the time. I learned how to sit in discomfort with the fact that I might have hurt someone I love, and that they might not be ready to talk to me about it yet. I also learned how to navigate larger group dynamics when this conflict occurs within a friend group.

Again, putting aside this romanticisation of a shared space with friends, I understood better how to navigate conflict, instead of wanting to run away from it. There were many conversations that made me want to crawl out of my skin and completely disengage from the world, but I realised that they were really important to have. Once such confrontations were had, I also hated the period of thawing, where there would be slight tension and awkwardness. But whenever we did make it through that, it felt all the more worthwhile, and I felt the warmth of friendship and community even more brightly.

Though this might not be a revelation to many, I believe the existence of such alternative spaces is something which we should recognise, and more importantly, actively work towards building. Not only do they become pockets of discourse and dialect, they become spaces that exist outside of an “ideal” way of inhabiting a place— where disquiet persists over decorum.



This is why when I pass by homes that echo laughter, blaring music, clinking of beer mugs, and the scent of cigarettes, I imagine a group of friends having the time of their lives, switching from fighting about who cheated in UNO, to talking about the state of the world, all in one night.