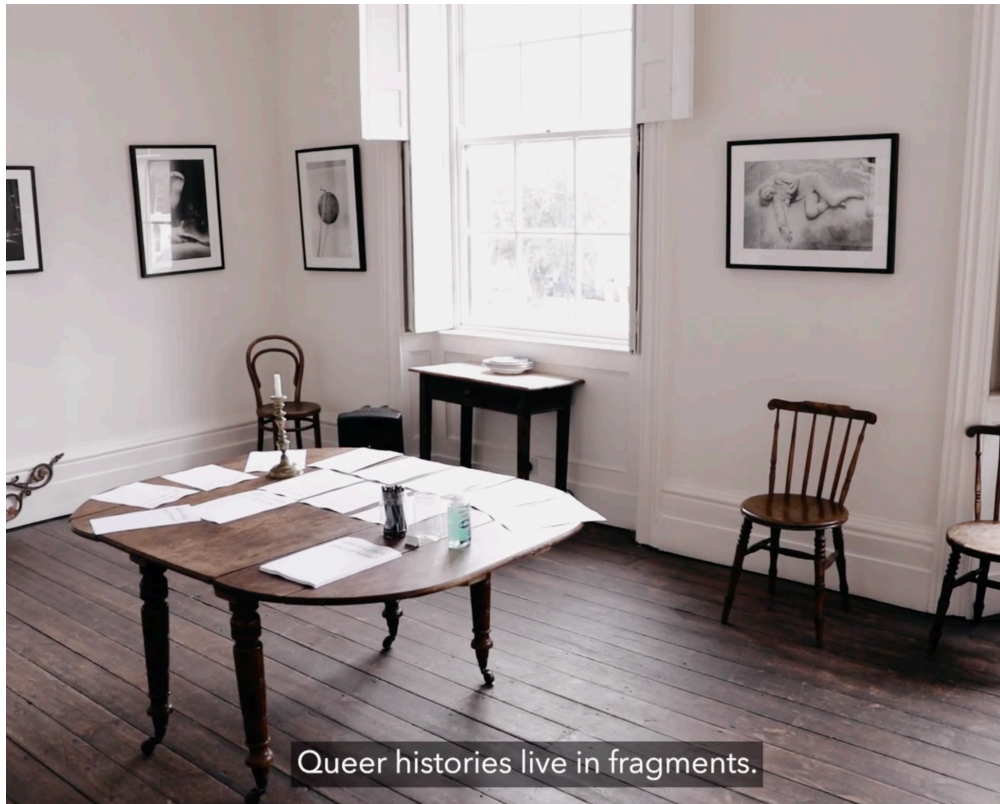


a place to call home

by Alicia Jane Turner



Historic text researched and developed by Alicia Jane Turner & Jo Hauge

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Introduction

Queer spaces have been the most important places to me in my life. In queer spaces I found my community, my chosen family. I found myself. I found all the places that I could call home.

When Spitalfields Music commissioned me to make a project looking at historic queer spaces, I knew I wanted to create something that looked at moments of queer joy rather than just the trauma that fills so much of the historical records. In research and development with my collaborator Jo Hauge, they said "I don't want our history to just be police reports and suicide notes, I want it to be prime smoking area gossip" which we have tried to carry throughout.

One of the difficulties in researching and writing about queer histories is that the language used in the past is vastly different to the language we use now, and much of it is deeply homophobic. We decided to use present day language, as we felt that even if the terminology isn't strictly historically accurate, we wanted it to reflect how far we've come in the language we use to describe ourselves as queer people and not re-traumatise those within the community.

I knew I also wanted to look at current queer spaces also as over the COVID-19 pandemic I, and many others within the queer community, have missed these physical spaces greatly. But it made me rethink what spaces feel like home, and I realised that many of these already live, and can live online as we found over this time. I wanted to capture what so many different types of those online spaces have meant to queer people in their own words and create new oral histories, so that in the future we can look back and see the incredible strength, resilience and joy within the queer community over this difficult time.

It was a very joyful project to create, and it first took the form of a sound and video installation at a flat about The George Tavern in East London over the weekend of the 3rd & 4th July 2021 as part of the Spitalfields Music Festival.

This text is an expanded version of what was presented in the installation, including new sections of historical text we wrote, and more information about the incredible people who created the videos with hyperlinks to their websites and social media, and donation links.

Alicia x

Part 1: The Historical

This text is pre-recorded and spoken by Alicia.

It is accompanied by delicate music, formed of multiple violin lines. It is light, airy and playful, and carries a feeling of closeness and intimacy.

This text was created in collaboration with the brilliant artist Jo Hauge, where we spent time researching historical queer spaces and experiences, focusing on Europe between the 17th to 19th century.

*We really enjoyed this research and finding out about these stories and people from centuries ago and the lives they lead.
I hope you enjoy reading about them too.*

Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments.

The loudest fragments tell us the stories of repression. The punishments. The pillories. The mocking. The condemnations by moral crusaders. The executions. The suicides.

The loudest fragments were spoken by the people who always wanted to stay the loudest. Who needed to be the loudest. Who wanted to wipe out any trace of those past chosen queer families.

Queer histories live in the fragments that were hidden. The quiet ones. The whispered ones. The stories that were drowned out.

Queer histories live in the stories that we don't know. The stories that were destroyed, the lives that were cloaked in conventions. The stories never explored. The stories that never survived because the pages were burnt. The diaries that were found and hidden. The pages no one could find. The pages yet to be found. The pages no one bothered to look for.

The loudest fragments are found in the lives lost. The persecution, the torture, the violence.

I don't just want our queer histories to be drowned in trauma.

I don't just want our queer histories to live in the fragments of police reports, of courtroom proceedings, of suicide notes.

I want to know what those queer spaces were really like, for the people that shared them.

I want to know them as full humans. Full, glorious, complicated humans.

I want the gossip. I want the 18th century smoking area.

I want to know the things that we might never know.

I want to imagine the stories we might never hear.

Stories of joy. Stories of touch. Stories of belonging. Stories of coming together. Loving each other. Fucking each other. The messy stories. The impossible stories. The stories of the queer people before our living memory, that lived in societies almost unrecognisable to us, that might feel impossible to imagine.

But there will always be those experiences shared in the places we could call home. Those profound experiences of being able to be who we are, in a space shared by others like us.

I want to imagine the things we can never know.
I want to imagine those spaces.

Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments. Maybe, these fragmentary stories are the ones that leave the most room for our queer imaginations.

Let's imagine a fragment together. A fragment found back in the 17-1800's, recorded in newspapers, police reports, raids.

Look around the room you're currently in. Think of the rooms that you've moved through. Its dark wooden floors, ceilings, peeling wallpaper. This place was built in the early 1800's. A time in which the Molly Houses of London lived. They lived in taverns, inns, coffee houses and private rooms all over the city, from Moorfields to Covent Garden, to Hackney, to Finsbury Square. They may, have looked a lot like this.

They were secretive meeting places for mollies, a name given to queer men, working class women and sex workers. They were places where they could come together, socialise, have sex, find partners. Where they could express their identities, their sexuality out in the open, where they could find a place to call home, if only for a night.

I want to imagine what it was like in those spaces

I want to know what they smelt like
I want to know what they looked like in the fire and candlelight
I want to know if they were sweaty
I want to know how loud they were
I want to know if they were full of joyous chaos
The kind of chaos you can lose yourself in
I want to know if they had a *really* fucking good night
I want to know all the different kinds of intimacies that were allowed in
that space
I want to know if they greeted their friends by kissing them on the mouth
I want to know how they decided if someone was down to fuck. Was it a
specific look? A lingering eye? A nod?
I want to know all the secret conversations that happened
I want to know if the barman heard *all* of them. If they were confided in.
I want to know about all the inter-community scandals. Who fucked that
person's boyfriend? Who hooked up last night?

They were spaces where the mollies could be what they could not be
outside those walls. Where they could dress in women's clothes, use
different voices, different pronouns, different names. At one of the molly
houses run by Julius Cesar Taylor, a freed Black man, they would enter to
the ritual of having a glass of gin thrown on their face, and being
christened with their new name.

Kitty Cambric
The Duchess Of Devonshire
The Duchess of Camomile
Orange Deb
Nel Guin

Harriet
Plump Nelly
Garter Mary
Primrose Mary
Aunt May
Aunt England
Susan Guzzle

Princess Seraphina was one of the most famous, who carried this name and identity outside of the Molly houses. Her neighbour once spoke of her:

"I have known her Highness a pretty while... I have seen her several times in Women's Cloaths, she commonly us'd to wear a white Gown, and a scarlet Cloak, with her Hair frizzled and curl'd all round her Forehead; and then she would so flutter her Fan, and make such fine Curt'sies, that you would not have known her from a Woman: She takes great Delight in Balls and Masquerades, and always chuses to appear at them in a Female Dress, that she may have the Satisfation of dancing with fine Gentlemen. I never heard that she had any other Name than the Princess Seraphina."

I want to know what her favourite outfit was
Where she got it from
Her favourite way to dance
Her favourite fine Gentleman
Her favourite Balls and Masquerades
Her favourite fan
I want to know how she spoke about herself
The language she used with her friends

The language she used with outsiders

The houses were spaces where the mollies would have ceremonies and rituals. They would have marriages. One was celebrated between Hannover Kate and Queen Irons at the Mint in Southwark in 1728. They had been convicted the previous year for having sex with each other, spent time in a pillory and three months in prison. They got married straight after. At the ceremony, Queen Irons sang 'Among our own selves we'll be free'. The wedding guests included bridesmaids Miss Kitten and Princess Seraphina, and molly couple Madam Blackwell and St Dunstan's Kate, a clerk at St Dunstan's church who might have even performed the marriage.

I want to know if they had vows, and what those vows were.

I want to know what other songs they sang.

I want to know if they had rings.

I want to know if they chose their outfits together.

I want to know what their outfits looked like.

Sometimes the act of marrying took place in the bedrooms, the chapels, the marrying rooms. Those were marriages of consummation, of a euphemism for sex that stuck a middle finger up at the dominant heterosexual order of marriage that marginalised them. Sometimes, they would leave the door open for others to watch. Sometimes, the bridesmaids would join in.

I want to know what the chapels looked like.

How they were decorated.

What the bedsheets were made of.

Did they have signs above the door?

The Molly houses were spaces where there would have ceremonial births, where a molly would deliver a wooden doll baby that was then baptised, held, cherished. They were a place to create a scene of home, a scene of domesticity, when creating that together outside was almost impossible.

I want to know if they were really loud when they delivered the wooden baby.

Did they scream, and wail and shriek?

I want to know how long they cradled the baby after the birth.

How long they looked after it.

If it had little clothes.

If they chose those little clothes very carefully.

I want to know if there was a point when they laughed?

Did you ever find it joyously silly?

The molly houses were spaces where they could dance. Where they could smoke, drink, touch, laugh, gossip. Where they could be raucous. Where they could have sex in whatever way they wanted. Where sex workers worked and socialised.

I want to know if the line between who was a worker and who was a client was constant

Or did it change? Was it fluid?

What parts of your outfit were for them and which parts were for you

I want to know who your friends were

How you warned each other about dodgy clients

How you looked out for each other

What jokes you made

Did it feel like you and your clients were part of the same community?

Or were you just hiding from the same cops

I want to know if the mollies resisted the police raids. What happened to them after the raids. Who got off scot-free. How the ones who didn't, looked after each other.

Where did the mollies go after? Did they have a queer community outside of the brick and mortar buildings? Did they have an afters?

Did reading the raid reports give some queers with no community a sense of belonging? Did knowing that the molly houses existed, that there were others like them out there, that a community was even possible, make them feel less alone?

There were over 30 Molly houses in London when the population of London was only 600,000 at the time. That's the equivalent of there being 450 LGBTQIA+ bars in London right now.

I want to know how diverse that vast community was

If different communities had different spaces

What those overlaps were

What it was like for people of different gender identities, classes, races, ages, professions

What those spaces meant to them

What they could mean

Despite everything stacked against them, the police at the doors, they

found spaces to survive, in or out of London, moving across Europe in Berlin, Paris. Places in which to thrive, to imagine.

Let's imagine another fragment together. The *amor impossibilis*, the apparently impossible love between people who weren't men. The lesbian lives that were thought to never have existed despite all the evidence there. The histories made invisible despite all their visibility.

The queering of the domestic space. The queer intimacies in the spaces of the home.

In the 1750's, Sarah Scott and Lady Bab lived together in Bath after Sarah left her husband George Lewis Scott after 1 year of marriage. Her family said it was never consummated, and that Sarah's close relationship with Lady Bab may have been the cause. Lady Bab had even accompanied them on their honeymoon, and Sarah had insisted on her moving into their home. They lived together until Lady Bab's death, and worked together to form a charity for women and children living in poverty.

There were the famous Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who met in 1768 and ran away together, leaving their families to live as a couple, which they did for 53 years. They bought a 5 bedroom house they called Plas Newydd with 13 acres of land, where they entertained and hosted a huge variety of guests, many were very notable, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Walter Scott, Lady Caroline Lamb, and the woman often called the first modern lesbian, Anne Lister. Everyone who lived and worked in the house was female, including their dog, Sapho. They were treated as the "acceptable" kind of female coupling. Just "romantic friends", who didn't have sex. A "sacred

friendship" that was pure. Even when famous diarist Hester Thrale visited, calling them "damned Sapphists", and that no woman would dare spend the night in their home without a man. When Anne Lister visited, she said she couldn't "help thinking that surely it was not platonic. I look within myself and doubt".

I want to know why they're so often called "romantic friendships"
Why is it always gals being pals even when we know they probably
fucked?
How would you feel knowing historians bought that line?
Would you find it fucking hilarious?

There is a fragment of a lesbian space in a home in Paris, distinguished and widely known in the 1780's. The Anandrynes, run by the masculine presenting Madame Furiel, known as the "affectionate Mama" in her home. New attendees would be bathed, perfumed, and dressed in a "*chemise à la tribade*" that had a slit *all* the way up the front. Madame Furiel would give the new women a kiss, and following there would be 2 hours of sex with another woman, or group. The next day, they would be taken to the "Temple of Venus" a room illuminated all around, the walls decorated with labias, that had statues of Vesta, Sappho and Mademoiselle, or Chevalier D'Eon. There would be a ceremony, a banquet, and then an orgy.

There are more fragments in Paris, of queer domestic home spaces spilling out into the streets, of the first recorded lesbian quarters found in the 1880's. Where queer women took over apartment blocks and nearby restaurants and cafes. The Souris and Rat Mort cafes were renowned for being filled at night with loud crowds of women across ages and classes

who defied the expectations of femininity of the time; who stood rather than sat, who didn't wear gloves. Where the only men in attendance were the waiters, who were normally, gay too. One lesbian restaurant on the Rue des Martyrs was found in notes to have up to 150 women and 10 men in attendance on a Friday evening, known as their "smart day". The women all in pairs, kissing on the mouth, coming to have fun, but the wine was pretty undrinkable. Further along the Seine, there was a well-known hotel-restaurant run by a former chorus girl, which was a lesbian oasis; where they could wear trousers, smoke, lean their elbows on the table and find sexual partners. Nearby, small waterside chalets were rented for the summer so they could stay for even longer beyond an evening.

I want to know exactly what the Temple of Venus looked like from the inside

Did it feel like a temple, heightened & holy?

Did it feel campy, horny and super fun?

I want to know *exactly* what they wore on their "smart day"

I *really* want to know what it was like in the chalets

I want to know if putting your elbows on tables was a way of flagging

I want to know all the intricacies of their gender presentations, beyond just trousers

There are the fragments of those that lived outside the binary, that lived in different roles, different presentations.

The fragment in the 18th century, of Mary East and her anonymous friend found in the London Chronicle:

"being intimate, they communicated their minds to each other, and determined to live together ever after; after consulting on the best method of proceeding, they agreed that one should put on man's apparel, and that they would live as man and wife in some part where they were not known; the difficulty now was who was to be the man, which was soon decided by the toss up of a halfpenny, and the lot fell on Mary East... Mary, after purchasing a man's habit, assumed the name of James How..."

They lived together for 34 years as Mr and Mrs How, and ran a series of taverns across East London. They became wealthy, they prospered, they were respected by their neighbours. James served as a foreman of juries, in the parish offices. Mrs How died in 1766, whilst in the countryside.

After his wife's death, a woman, Mrs. B tried to extort James by hiring two men to pretend they would take him into custody, claiming he had committed a fabricated robbery. That they knew his previous identity, demanding the sum of £100 to avoid being hung. James went to his neighbour in distress, the pawnbroker Mr Williams, and told him about his identity. Mr Williams vowed that James would never go to court for the fabricated robbery, that instead, the two men threatening him would go to the bench of justices in which James had been involved before, whilst Mrs How was alive. Whilst Mr Williams went home to change his clothes, James was dragged off by the two men to see Mrs B, forcing him to write a bank draft of £100, which would be collected from James' neighbour, the pawnbroker. When Mrs B and one of the male accomplices took the bank draft to Mr Williams, the police were already there and waiting to take them into custody. Mr Williams had set the trap.

James How attended the hearing with Mr Williams, but this time, presenting as Mary East again, in Mary's dresses. She lived the rest of her life as a woman. When she died, she left her money to her family, her friends, and those in poverty in Poplar.

I want to know what the justice system was like for her as a queer person
I want to know how she was treated by the cops
When they showed up, was she scared?
Did she have faith in them?
I want to know what the rest of her life was like
That's not recorded
When you were just living your life

There are so many fragments of people that demonstrated gender fluidity from the 1600's onwards, that at the time, were described as "female husbands" or passing women. Who travelled away as soldiers or sailors. Who married women who presented as women, while they presented as men.

Miranda Barry

Mary Frith

Mary Hamilton

Christian Davies

Hannah Snell

Ann Marrow

Maria van Antwerpen

Charlotte Charke

Anne Jane Thornton

And so many more...

I want to know what it was like with their partners behind closed doors

Did you fuck with those gender roles?

Did you make it *really* hot?

Did the way that you present outwards become part of how you play?

Was that relationship between how you presented outside, and inside the house really fucking fun?

I *really* want to know what their sex life was like

What toys they had

We know fragments about dildos, strap ons. Those items that signified sexual autonomy when so often women were seen as chaste, asexual, without desires of their own.

Ones made with a "red piece of leather, at the front filled with cotton and with a wooden stick stuck into it, with a hole in the middle, tied in string."

Ones made from ivory that were erect, complete with a device to simulate ejaculation. Ones with hanging testicles made from pig's bladders.

There's the fragment about a couple in 1721, Catherina Margaretha Linck and her wife Catherina Margaretha Mulhahn. Catherina Linck dressed in men's clothing, and took a new name - Anastasius Lagrantinus Beuerlein - and as a young man travelled, preached, joined the army, moving between different troops, and slept with many women with her 'leather instrument' she had made whilst in the army. Linck met Mulhahn whilst working as a stocking-maker, and married her. Linck's wife knew, or found out, about her presenting as a man, of being a "passing woman". She had "torn the leather penis from Linck's body, and was fully aware she was no

man, and let herself be tickled with it and they lived together even more intimately”.

I want to know how long it took them to make the dildos
How much care was taken in making the finer details
If they didn't make them themselves, was there a specific dildo maker?
A go to person everyone knew about
Did everyone want to be pals with them?

There are fragments of queer histories found in the quiet conversations.
The queer spaces of communication that could only be known by some,
in the thinly veiled references.

Anne Lister and her lovers would make their feelings known through references to texts, Juvenal, Martial, Ovid, Petronius, Suetonius. They'd talk about the lesbian rumour of Marie Antoinette, the sex of the moon. In her diary she recalls; "I smiled & said the moon had tried both sexes, like old Tiresias, but that one could not make such an observation to everyone." She also recalls a note she received from another woman;

'I have a question to ask you. Etes-vous Achilles?' I laughed & said she made me blush. She said I was the only one in the house to whom she could have written it, because the only one who would have so soon understood it.'

I want to read all the coded messages secretly passed that were lost, torn up.

I want to know how explicit some were.

I want to know how many maids were involved in their delivery.

Did they read the letters too?

Did they get a thrill out of it?

I want to know what the references were for working class women

And for people who may not have been literate
Not just the references of the middle and upper classes, the Tories

There are the thinly veiled fragments found in the pages of late 1800's
and early 1900's newspapers in Europe. The queer spaces of the
classified adverts, those seeking others like them.

Elderly gentleman, not a ladies' man, seeks acquaintance with like-
minded gentleman.

Young family man, 27, seeks friendly relations with energetic gentleman.

Young man of pleasant appearance conversant with many languages
seeks unpaid position as travelling companion. Offers to 'Uranus'.

Gentleman, 23, seeks friend. Write please to 'Socrates'.

Lady, 36, desires friendly relationships. P.O. 16, 'Plato'

Actress with modern views desires to know rich lady with similar views,
for friendly relations, etc.

"Seeking a friend who, like me, enjoys solitude and shuns company,
especially that of women. Happy indeed the man who suffices unto
himself. Happier still the man who has a like-minded friend. Whoever
understands me should write to 'Mr Nature-Lover' at the newspaper
offices."

There are fragments found in gestures. In patterns of movements and
actions. Inside 4 walls. Outside on the pavements:

"I would hasten after him, pass without a glance (in the hope of not being
noticed), and when I had reached what I considered to be an invisible
distance ahead, turn around to retrace my steps for a head-on collision. If
I got a responsive look, a smile, a backward glance, if he then stopped to
stare after me or to study the goods in the nearest shop-window (the
more incongruous they were the safer I felt) I judged I might act, though
still with caution in case he was luring me into some violent trap. The
elaborateness of this maneuver often lost me the boy, he had gone into a

house or disappeared up some side turning behind my back - and therefore remained in my chagrined thought as the Ideal Friend."

Lincoln's Inn Public Privies

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens

Clapham Common

Hampstead Heath

Brighton Beach

The Achilles statue in Hyde Park

The Egyptian section of the British Museum

The toilets of the Royal Festival Hall

Parson's Pleasure

The Avenue Gabriel tree of love

The foyer of the Comédie Française

The Linden

A Dr who worked hard to pathologize and repress queer identities once received an anonymous letter from someone who'd gone to the known Berlin promenade:

"I was so unhappy because I thought I was the only such strange creature in existence. Many times the pistol lay before me. Only my religious upbringing prevented me from committing such a crime. You may laugh when I say this, but it's the pure truth: often in my sadness I threw myself down in the dust before God - or, if you prefer, the Devil. Yet in my heart a voice spoke so clearly that I thought that someone was in the room. It said 'Go to the Linden!'. A week later, I went back there and formed an acquaintance that has had a huge influence on my life. He was a beautiful young person of the highest society - happily dead now for years! Before long, we loved each other tenderly, and, through him, I came to know

other fellow sufferers.

I went to England; then I buried my love. Later, I spent more time in Paris, Italy and Vienna, and everywhere I found poor creatures like myself! On the Righi, in Palermo, in the Louvre, in the highlands of Scotland, in St Petersburg and at the docks in Barcelona I found people I had never seen before but who became attached to me in an instant, and I to them. Can this really be a crime?"

The Retiro in Madrid

The Docks in Barcelona

The Boulevard Ring in Moscow

The square in front of Copenhagen Town Hall

The boulevard in front of Tortini's restaurant in Paris

Some of the first stirrings of recorded gay resistance were found in France. In a prison in April 1848, the prisoners rioted, attacking wardens, breaking open cells when a young man was separated from his boyfriend. In the 1840's at the central markets in Le Halles, arrests would usually begin at 9pm. But the next evening more and more people would return. When the wood partitions in the nearby toilets were replaced with metal sheets, they drilled new holes. When the police tried to clean up the Champs-Élysées, they were met with armed resistance.

Resistance to the attacks on queer spaces has always been there.

I want to know how the acts of queer resistance within our lifetimes will be looked at in the future

What parts they won't teach in school

The parts that corporations won't be able to use in their adverts

What parts will be lost

What parts will be found

The parts that will mean so much to the queer people that find them

There will always be resistance. Queerness *is* resistance. No matter where we find it.

Maybe queerness doesn't live in a specific space. But it is always spatial. Spaces that live in flux. Spaces that are queered. That are taken over, reclaimed. That are fluid, layered, constantly shifting, distorting, moving in jagged and non-linear ways. That are strategies. That are counterpoints. That disrupt and challenge. That interrogate space. That are laboratories for political futures.

Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments. Queer histories live in fragments. Maybe, these fragmentary stories are the ones that leave the most room for our queer imaginations.

Imagining the queer spaces of the past, the spaces of the present, the spaces of the future. The bricks and mortar spaces. The outdoor spaces. The spaces in between. When you reach for the same book. Spot a badge on a lapel. A nod on a train. A smile.

The ephemeral spaces. The spaces we create in our critical mass. The virtual spaces. The digital spaces. The spaces on our screens. The new queer histories we have created.

Part 2: The Virtual

This section is formed of a series of videos created by the wonderful individuals and groups that contributed to this project, who were invited to speak about their experiences facilitating, holding, or engaging with online queer spaces.

The videos are accompanied by electronic music made purely from synthesisers, it is ambient, spacious and emotive and feels futuristic, representing the transition from the historical to the digital.

What follows is a transcript of the content of those videos, including their descriptions of how they appear in the videos in their own words. All apart from CYBERTEASE were delivered facing a phone or computer camera.

You can find out more about them (which I highly recommend you do!) through their website links and social media handles below their names.

Ruby Rare (she/her)

Instagram: rubyrare

Twitter: @_rubyrare

My name is Ruby, I also go by Ruby Rare online. My hair is very bright pink (although it's gone some darker roots now which I need to get sorted out) and I've put it up in little space buns on either side of my head. And I'm wearing these very large dramatic earrings, which have

been painted and some bits are multicoloured, some bits are monochromatic but they're quite large and dangly, they're a real statement piece framing my face right now. I am wearing a big flouncy dress which is super comfortable, and it's got a green background with these massive bright pink flowers all over it so very bright and colourful, which is how I usually am! And the background behind me is quite chaotic, it's got my bookshelf in the back with lots of sex related books, my sewing machine is here which is covered in stickers. I've got my pin board with loads of different strange postcards and photos of loved ones. I've got a postcard from the museum of sex which has got a little pride rainbow. So, overall very colourful, very chaotic. That's my vibe.

I'm a sex educator, primarily, I'm an author. And I run workshops and events, talking about sex in a pleasure focused way, which really ties in with my identity as a queer person. So, very much about empowering people who have been taught that the sex that they are having should be different or should look different, and kind of all about making sure people feel confident and supported to have the sex that they want to have, not the sex that they feel like they should be having. And on top of my kind of sex related stuff, and the stuff that I do on social media, I also talk quite a lot about body positivity. There's that common understanding, there's a shared language there when you are communing with other queer people. And I kind of feel like you don't have to explain yourself as much. People are able to be really vulnerable in those spaces. And I'm so, so grateful for that. I think an interesting thing that I've found over the last year is a lot of the queer spaces that I have found. Well, a lot of the queer spaces I've been in and have called home have been spaces that I've facilitated, rather than I've attended. But in terms of the sex education events that I've run, in terms of Body Loves

Sketch Club, and the queer events that we've done there, and then the work that I do on social media, I'm one of the people who's facilitating the space. And with that comes quite a lot of work and responsibility. But I also have to keep reminding myself that that is such a glorious joy, as well as something that I find really fulfilling, being able to be that person who provides a space that is warm and welcoming and encouraging. And it kind of does the same for me, and there's something about feeling the duty to show up for other queer people. There's also the fickle world of social media and Instagram, which is home in many ways. I love what Instagram can do for my life. The fact that I've met so many people and made loads of my queer friends through Instagram, and through a little bit of work, but also just like seeing each other and being able to hype each other up and form friendships in quite an organic, safe way. And just the variety of different voices and experiences that you that I get to see on my feed, are very queer and are very diverse. And I feel super, super grateful for that. I would love to see an online space with the same recognition and scope as one of the big social media platforms that really genuinely encourages queer people to express themselves in a way that feels right for them. I feel like I have to tone myself down in lots of ways on social media. Queer spaces online, for me in the last year have been a real lifesaver. And I don't say that lightly. I have, I have really struggled with remembering who I am over the last year as we all have, and going into spaces online have has reminded me of kind of the importance of community and how, how connected I feel to myself and to other people when I'm in queer spaces. I think there's an added vulnerability when you are hosting something in your own space, and you're inviting people to come and watch it and participate in it in their own spaces. There's, there's some times that like extra security because you're in your comfort space already.

Mahatma Khandi (he/she/they)

Instagram: @mahatmakhandi

Hi, I'm Mahatma Khandi. I'm a southern Asian drag queen, I'm half Sri Lankan, half Filipino. I'm of a brown tone at the moment, even my makeup is very browned. It's browned and bronze-y, and like brown-zy! And I'm wearing a very 90's looking Rogue from X-Men looking wig which is like brown, dark chocolate brown, but its got really heavy white streaks in it. I'm wearing these lovely little silver earrings, these little hoops, I'm wearing a beautiful dress that's marble effect and it's got taupe and white and green and chartreuse which is my favourite colour. And in the background is actually this lovely foil curtain.

When it comes to queer spaces, it's really tough to do something online that can effectively change the perception of people. As a drag performer, as a drag artisté, I like to think that your voice should travel and should perforate the membrane, the digital membrane. Perforating the digital membrane with Mahatma Khandi, that's my new book. I've just recently joined tik tok, and doing live conversations with people on tik tok, it's been quite tough. Sometimes I get a troll or two who were really rude. But like very recently, I just spoke to someone who didn't want to reveal their age, which is totally fine. But they seem quite young, and they're struggling with their identity, they believe that they're trans, which is totally valid, they are discussing it further with people in their family, but they're not really understanding the whole situation. It's tough, you know, it's a tough thing to go through when you're young, and they came across my tik tok and spoke to me live. And we kinda had a conversation about that, I tried my best to be as supportive and as like, I'd say

informative, from what I know, to help them through their journey. And that was a powerful moment, you know, to share our joint conversations about life and about the gender spectrum, about how society perceives us, and how family can perceive us. You know, you can be at home, but not feel at home. Two years and a half ago, I moved back in with my mother, and I can safely say that's where I think home is, for me anyway, that's how I feel. Like whenever I'm with her, I feel like I'm at home. You know, I just came from a gig today that we're allowed to do gigs again, and one of the things that I love the most about queer spaces is that you feel this organic family, you know, you create these families, these new families that you have you know, which is the same way that when I went back to the stage, when I went back out there, they took me back with open arms, which is just like my mom did. I like to think that home is a place that's not concrete. A place that is more about a feeling and about a situation, and an emotion. Home isn't a concrete place. It's more like a statement, or an emotional value. I think that's what home is really. It's almost like I should start singing Home from The Wiz now. I won't. But I could, I know it, it's in my range. The best thing I can share for anyone, anyone is education, share your knowledge, share your education that you've got. If you know something, share it, put it on social media, put it in a book, put it on, you know, whatever platform you can, and share that because we need to learn more about the things that the system has not been teaching us, you know, just share that information. So we can all collectively learn more and collectively open our minds and our eyes to the truth that society in the world has not been telling us. I'd like to think that we are stronger together than divided. But sometimes that's not the case. And even though we could be in the same sequence of letters in a line, we could still be as divided as where they actually are in the alphabet. But, we persevere.

RODENT (they/them)

Instagram: _rodent_

Twitter: @rodentxo

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/xrodentx>

Hi! My name is Rodent, I'm a 27 year old non-binary person. I'm white, with blue eyes and black hair cut into a mullet, and I'm wearing a little peakless black cap. I'm wearing a vest top with horizontal black and white stripes and a black pair of dungarees. I'm sat in the makeup corner of my studio flat, in front of a grey and silver wardrobe.

So my relationship with online spaces is pretty vast. I grew up with internet access all my life, and have used it in many different ways to find communities and subcultures. The internet was a really vital tool for me as a very lonely and confused queer adolescent, as most queer adolescents are. But I particularly want to talk about my experience in online gaming spaces. From the age of about 15 to 19, World of Warcraft was my game of choice. I had a character called Alasania who was a female Night Elf Druid, a character called Avriel who was a female Night Elf Death Knight and Ramiel, who was my male human Warlock, and Ilrail, who was my female Draenei Shadow Priestess. Warcraft was, as to be fair with most online gaming spaces, not hugely queer friendly, it wasn't woman friendly, it wasn't friendly to people of colour. But there were so many cracks and fissures in the surface of what seemed and was a very toxic community. It was my first real experience of playing with gender and gender nonconformity, to be a man playing a woman, there was just a lot of acceptance of people playing a character different than the gender that they lived in. And an acceptance that isn't afforded to actual gender

variant and gender nonconforming people and trans folk. Although at the time I still identified with my assigned gender, there was something so electrifyingly liberating about having the incongruence between my URL and IRL personas, just flatly accepted. From teens in Norway serving compulsory military service to Irish landowning farmers, I met and bonded with such a broad intersection of different kinds of people who were all engaged in some level in this weird gender play.

There was a lot of cyber sex going on in Warcraft too, especially on the role playing servers where I used to hang out every possible permutation of men playing women cybering with women playing men, or men playing men with men playing women. Cyber, as we called it, was already a taboo within online gaming communities, but within the taboo was so many profoundly queer and gender transgressive interactions that were just treated very normally. So while on the one hand, there was an aspect of my time playing Warcraft that was really fantastical and escapist and exploratory, I don't have particularly fond memories of those years. And the reason I threw myself so compulsively into playing Warcraft was because I was so desperately lonely. As a queer teen with undiagnosed mental health complexities, I felt so isolated from my peers at school, I didn't socialise really, unless I was at school. Home was for Warcraft and forgetting the week entirely. I went to a Catholic school and struggled to connect with anybody. I was full of doubts about myself, but also full of assurance that I was fundamentally unlikable and unlovable. But with Warcraft, I was allowed to be a different person and found a micro community with my guild mates. But I wish I hadn't needed to use that kind of space as my sanctuary. I'm really glad that I don't have the time or the energy for it anymore because, you know, I feel so blessed and grateful to now be surrounded by the most amazing, beautiful, inspiring

trans queer weirdos. That for all of its gender variant, weird, transgressive, cross gender, sexy naughtiness that does not compare to the actual weird, gender transgressive sexiness that I now get to actually live with my friends and my real world community.

CYBERTEASE

Website: www.cybertease.co.uk

Patreon: www.patreon.com/cybertease_/

Instagram: [cybertease_](https://www.instagram.com/cybertease_)

Twitter: [@Cybertease_](https://twitter.com/Cybertease_)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Cybertease

For CYBERTEASE'S video, it displayed a series of short videos edited together of their online events on the video conferencing software Zoom, featuring performers dancing, talking, stripping, their DJ's Queer House Party, and at one wonderful point, spanking someone with a mask of Boris Johnson. Their names and pronouns were displayed underneath their camera feeds. The following was a recorded voiceover that accompanied these videos.

LUNA - Welcome to CYBERTEASE, a virtual strip club by organised sex workers. We're feminist, queer, socialist strippers with a platform that fights for increased labour rights within our industry. A place to call home, amongst our community, is incredibly important to us as marginalised workers, activists, and queer people. We invite you to watch us in action as we consider our journey creating a virtual co-operative strip club.

CHARLOTTE - So many people do not feel able to be themselves in their real life, for many reasons such as safety and confidentiality. Having a safe space online allows people to express themselves without fear of judgement, harassment and violence and also gives them the option to hide their identity too.

LUNA - As many of us are queer within the collective I think creating a space for sex workers to perform for queer audiences, but also celebrate and perform as queer people was very high on our agenda. We believe there is no queer liberation without sex worker liberation and that solidarity between these two communities who share many grievances is essential.

VICTORIA - It is important for us to come together in solidarity from both communities and create a space where we all feel safe, welcomed and appreciated.

ALICE - I think there's a difference here between a safe online space for queer workers to work, and a safe space for queer workers to be in community with each other. Such spaces for work are important so we can earn money online in ways that place us at minimal risk (e.g. in relation to privacy, harassment and abuse). And in terms of community, we need such spaces because society as a whole can be hostile to queer people and to sex workers.

AVERI - Having a group of sex workers that chose to come together to create our own workplace has been a saving grace, financially, emotionally and interpersonally, especially over the past year. But the fact that we've been able to create a community of sex workers who share

similar experiences and share the same politics is really special. We've done 20+ shows and have been able to invite near 100 other sex workers to perform with us and earn money.

VICTORIA - CYBERTEASE means so much to me and I am so proud we have created this sex worker/queer heaven for everyone to come and join.

ALICE - CYBERTEASE is a community that I treasure because through starting a workers' co-op together, we have fostered a source of collective care, solidarity and mutual aid for us all.

CHARLOTTE - For me CYBERTEASE means inclusivity of everyone, sex workers and audience members. When the government turned their back on sex workers at the start of the pandemic, we came together to create something. As well as providing a financial platform for out of work sex workers, we also wanted to break the stereotypical narrative of many adult entertainment establishments and give everyone a safe place to perform

LUNA - As a workers cooperative CYBERTEASE practices collective care and collective profit sharing so no worker is left behind. I think this is really special. Having the solidarity of our collective during the pandemic has been a life-line. As sex workers, COVID created an immediate need for mutual aid within the community as many of us were left in incredibly precarious situations with little or no government support.

CHARLOTTE - Home for me means safety, familiarity and feeling in control of yourself and feeling supported. My main club that I have

worked in for so long (currently closed because of COVID) has always and will probably always feel like my 'home' in this industry. I have worked there for so long, it is familiar, reliable and I feel safe and listened to there. I have great relationships there and for me, it highlights how important it is to create a solid and safe environment for sex workers.

My actual home is my ultimate 'home.' Away from clients, and 'Charlotte'. Having a safe place of work and a safe home is something that everyone should have, but so many do not. This is something that with CYBERTEASE we wanted to be more than just an online show. We have our group Whatsapp chat that our performers can join so we can all stay in touch, and I hope that people feel like they can always reach out if they need any help or support with anything.

ALICE - Home to me means many things, and certainly CYBERTEASE as a community brings one sense of home, in that it offers friendship with people who have shared identities, experiences and politics, where normative culture may reject, oppress or instrumentalise us.

VICTORIA - I have always felt isolated from the sex worker community as I normally worked alone, same as many workers. CYBERTEASE is now my home with my chosen family, friends and colleagues which I never thought I would of had.

AVERI - We can come as we are, we can bring our creative ideas to life, we don't have to completely censor ourselves and we can embrace our sensuality without fear or shame

LUNA - At the beginning of the pandemic we were nine strangers, today we are comrades in arms! Collectively we channeled our rage into creating a sustainable alternative model for our industry. One that puts the power back in the hands of the workers. I hope we can inspire others to do the same and organise to fight for their labour rights.

Vijay Patel (he/him)

Website: www.vijaypateltheatre.co.uk/

Instagram: vijayrajpatel92

Twitter: @vijayrajpatel92

I'm Vijay Patel, my pronouns are he/him. I'm a brown, autistic, dyspraxic person, clean shaven, I'm wearing a black baseball cap on my head backwards, a white t-shirt which has a large colourful logo in the centre, with a couple of toucans and some floral patterns in the middle. In the background is a mirror mounted to the wall, a clothes rail with clothes on it and an armchair.

I'm an artist, theatre-maker, writer and neurodivergent access consultant. I make work which stems from cultural identity, making autobiographical political work around being queer, British Indian, and neurodivergent. With everything I do it is my intention to use my lived experiences to uplift and advocate for people who feel marginalised and provide spaces for them to feel seen, and ones that they can relate to. Over the pandemic, I've mostly worked in access consultancy capacities and facilitated neurodivergent spaces. These spaces can be to think and reflect, to write and make, to listen and come together. One of the most important things for me over the past year is to lead spaces like that. For a visibly queer, brown, neurodivergent person to lead spaces like that can

also be incredibly empowering for others. It's also an important reminder for me to put myself in those positions of leadership as a person with intersectional lived experiences of marginalisation. These online spaces are all about creating safe, warm and caring environments for neurodivergent people to be in. Whether that's through workshops, talks, one to one chats over a tea. The value in that is being mindful of how various neurodivergent people engage with online spaces and centring their access. Access has been a big chat before going into any online space. Knowing that if people need to have their cameras off, that's okay. If people need to take breaks every 10 minutes, that's okay. Whatever their requirements are in that online space, that's okay. The purpose for these spaces are about supporting others to develop ways to have conversations about their access, so they can be supported better in aspects of their work or life in general. It's about removing barriers disabled neurodivergent people face in society, which I frame from the social model of disability. I aim for my work to have an intersectional approach as a brown, queer, neurodivergent person. It means a lot for me to be able to provide these spaces where no one feels ashamed to ask for what they need. It's so heartwarming when another disabled or neurodivergent person feels open to tell me what their requirements are, because I know the weight of that. It takes a lot for a person with access requirements to be that open quite often. So if they can tell me, then that for me is the most important thing, aside from the work, the productivity. Access is work, it requires a lot of work to provide it online. But it also requires a massive amount of work if you are the one requiring access to be in that room. For me, a place that I call home is being with other people who get me, get my brain and can relate. Being surrounded by other disabled, neurodivergent, queer, Black or brown folk are my dream spaces, they're where I feel most comfortable. I was already making shifts

to be in those types of spaces pre COVID, it continued gently through the pandemic, and it's the way I want to live my life beyond this time.

Jo Hauge (they/them)

Website: <http://johauge.com/>

Instagram: jo_hauge

Twitter: @jo_hauge

I'm Jo Marius, I'm a white, non-binary person with short brown hair and blue eyes, I've got a stripy silver and black shirt on and a crystal necklace, a HUGE crystal necklace on my chest. I'm sitting in my living room in front of my bookcase which has loads of weird heads and stuff on it like books and plants. And also a cardboard cut-out of a figure skater and my synth.

Sometimes I like to ask people of my generation where they grew up on the internet, like what corner of the internet raised you. And my answer to that is mid 2000s LiveJournal, specifically fan communities on LiveJournal in all their fucked up, in fighting, hugely problematic glory. Like that's where I'm from. It can be a space where fans who are often women, queers, people of colour, who are not represented in the sort of broader fandom or in the thing that they are a fan of in itself. And they use fan spaces to like, carve a space for themselves inside of that thing. And also, in my case, fandom did make me realise I was trans. I think that was like a big part of like, I would have realised it anyway, hopefully, but the fact that I was, you know, there was somewhere I could go and be really gay and trans on the internet. And somewhere I could go and have intergenerational friendships with queer adults and talk to other trans people. Even if we didn't, you know, explicitly talk about that, then I do

think that those things that can come out of any online community, I do, or like any online space. I think those things are really, really important. But I think sometimes in these conversations about fandom and about queer spaces more broadly, there's this almost like respectability thing that goes on where it's like, this thing is good, because it does this thing. But I think the thing that is super, super cool about fandom as a queer space is also that it's a space that is for pleasure. And I think that a really like very queer joy of those spaces is that there's no editor, there's no marketing team that bans anyone from writing, like partly really fucked up, weird, disturbing shit, and also like super self indulgent, super sloppy, horny shit that's just like, clearly just for the person who wrote it. And I think there's like a huge pleasure in that in like, actually consuming fan works that someone else has written not because you know it will sell but because they're like, I want to write about this member of this boy band being a cow hybrid and needing to be milked. I'm like, Yes, I love that you wanted to write that and put that on the internet. And I just think there's something really joyous and really, really important, actually, about queer communities that don't have to, that don't have to *do* anything. Like obviously, fandom in a sense is hugely productive, in the literal sense of so much stuff is produced. But I think there's something really amazing about this online space that is about loads of other things as well. It is about making friends with people who care about the thing that you care about, it's about representation, but it is also like, sometimes it is just you know, like making your two ken dolls kiss each other. And I think that's delightful, I think that's really great. And I think that it's really important to not just have you know, like spaces where we organise and spaces where we, you know, like, support each other and make friends but also spaces where we can just be like really nasty and horny and like, really seek out pleasure.

Liv Wynter (they/them)

Liv's website: www.livwynterartist.co.uk/

Liv's Instagram: @livwynter

Liv's Twitter: @livwynter

The Outside Project's website: <https://lgbtiqoutside.org/>

Donate to The Outside Project: <https://www.goldengiving.com/wall/the-outside-project>

Star Refuge's website: <https://lgbtiqoutside.org/star/>

My name is Liv Wynter and I'm a queer, non-binary, working class performer, writer, community organiser, support worker and a notorious club host.

The last year and a half has made us all completely reconsider what queer community is, or even what it could be. During COVID-19 I was working at The Outside Project, which is an LGBTQ+ homeless shelter, and the only one of its kind in the UK. I would argue it was pretty much left behind by the government in terms of supporting that building. We also had a community centre, which obviously had to close, which was really sad, because the waves of community that were always flooding through this space suddenly just stopped, and so did the ability to move people in and out of the shelter because of safety. And it was really hard watching people come to you in the peak of a personal crisis, and not being able to be close to them and reach out to them. And I learned so much about how I as a queer person really rely on closeness and how hard it was to have that taken away.

During this time, I was also part of the collective that opened Star Refuge, the UK's first LGBTQIA+ domestic violence refuge. And I wanted to bring these spaces up in terms of queer space, because I think we often think about that in terms of nightlife, but actually, when I think about what my community needs, I'm thinking about community centres, homeless shelters, refuges, fucking libraries, kitchens, food banks, spaces of care that feed and nurture our souls. We need housing co-ops, we need spaces that exist outside of the ones that we're forced into. Because so often we think of queer space as only existing at night, in the dark, in the periphery of the world that we're not actually allowed to be part of. So we in turn are condemned to the basement. And obviously, we turn the basement out, no one's disputing, but we are pushed to the outskirts into these kind of liminal spaces. Working in the shelter and refuge made me realise that we're sold a really shit deal because we're sold survival. And I don't want that, I want much more than survival. I want like a life that is inherently radical, driven by pleasure and love that never descends into selfishness and greed. And I want community and safety.

So what is the purpose of a community? I think a lot of it is to do with not feeling lonely, which of course hit us all like a tonne of bricks when lockdown happened. And so I was absolutely blessed to have my genius best friend, comrade, coconspirator, organiser legend, Harry Gay in my ranks, and Harry came up with Queer House Party, which was an online party that took place on zoom in the Outside Project's digital community centre that was opened in response to COVID. And we had no idea what we were doing. And it was chaos. But chaos reigns. And before long, we had 1000s of people logging in on a Friday night to listen to some of the dodgiest and most deeply iconic remixes anyone could ever imagine.

And if someone had told me on a Friday night I would be locked in my bedroom, delivering myself bottles of Prosecco and trying to get hold of poppers wearing a tiny outfit and dancing on my own, I would have been like, no way. But that's where we found ourselves. And you would think in itself, it would be isolating, but it just meant we could build communities in ways we hadn't really considered or understood before. For example, we could decentralise London, we could revolutionise access to parties, we could work with BSL with captioning with audio description, and this inaccessible basement that we were always forced to be in that our disabled peers could never come to suddenly disappeared. That two hour night bus from Hackney Wick, gone. Performers with mental health issues that were pulling out of gigs suddenly could roll out of bed five minutes before, turn on their computer, perform and then go back to bed and get paid and not have to worry about the hideous anxiety that can come from having a bad mental health day in the club.

And now we're in this most beautiful dichotomy of having URL and IRL parties and we've blown the possibilities open, like queers always do when we are stuck. When homeless queers were being harassed and hate crimed in shelters we opened a queer shelter. When domestic violence was peaking against queer people, we opened a refuge. And when the clubs closed, we built our own from the ground up. Because we are queer. We are unstoppable. We are resilient and we will do so much more than just survive.

Romy Iris Conroy (they/them)

Instagram: ricimagines

Romy Iris Conroy sits face front to the camera. They are a queer, non-binary performer with a black t-shirt saying "It ain't safe" in white. They have shoulder length brown hair, and pink eyebrows.

When I was young, I didn't want to dress like the girls.

Had no interest in baby dolls. My sister would cradle hers so gently and with such grace, whilst mine would be dragging behind, my hands tethered to its ankle. Me, blissfully unaware that I hit her head on every step on staircase. I've never felt that maternal instinct that all women supposedly feel. Well, not about children at least. Frogs, mice, snails, beasts. Everyone called me a boy in high school. I wasn't particularly pretty or cool. I wore mostly trousers and chunky kickers. The only thing girly about me was my cat print knickers. I remember this one day in year seven, where the register actually had me down as male. I cried so much whilst my classmates laughed, chest clutched. I knew I wasn't a boy, but I didn't feel like a girl either. I was floating in the ether. I didn't know all the spaces between and beyond existed yet so my identity posed itself as a threat. I struggled with my body image and whether I was pretty enough. Nobody ever fancied me, only weirdos who would like to take advantage of me. See, I'm getting back to square one. But when I went to uni, I met some unapologetically queer peers, but was still too scared to truly accept that this is me. My friends and family saw right through me. When I eventually came out as queer and non binary the overwhelming response was, we know we don't care! But I care. I've got my whole life to catch up on. There's so much I've been dying to dip myself in always watching

from the diving board too scared to jump in. I feel like I'm finally finding my place in these queer spaces. Navigating my way slowly going at my own pace. My transness is breathtaking. And I'm finding my wings. These Safe Communities, Raze, Sappho NYT, they're just the beginning.

I want to be bold, be brave and inspiring. Tell young kids like me it's okay to be non-binary. We are stunning, kind and fucking courageous. Here's the mic. Let me show you where the stage is.



Romy's closing shot