

FISTS ARE FOR FUCKING NOT FIGHTING

an open letter to all the lovers, kin and mentors I
have picked up at sex conferences around the world

zahra stardust
UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

TO ALL THE LOVERS, KIN AND MENTORS I have picked up at sex conferences
around the world, ours is an intimacy soaked in politics.

Here I am, here with you, in slow motion. I am tying a red hanky around your left wrist as you are looking intently into my eyes. You are tying a red hanky around my right wrist and I am smiling/delirious/breathing. It sounds clichéd to describe this as a ritual but this is exactly how it feels. We are on a stage surrounded by a collective of queer women, wrestling, flogging and piercing, and this feels so normalised to me. As I open up to your giant fist I do not feel violence, or domination, or power. As I envelop your hand I am trusting, lubricating, switching off my rational mind. And each time I feel my vaginal walls expand to open and invite you in, we are resignifying the fist from an instrument of war to an instrument of pleasure.

§

Jetlagged, at airport security. Searching through the contents at the bottom of my bag for liquids that may be over 100ml. Nail clippings. The butt of an aeroplane boarding pass with your note scribbled in felt pen. There it is—a zip lock bag stuffed with black nitrile gloves and 90mls of organic lube. Sideways glances from other passengers.

§

I came home from days of banging my head against a brick wall. Writing policy on

sex industry law reform, whores had been having the same depressing fights with governments for the last two decades. My inbox was full of sensationalist neoliberal media garbage. Constant vehement attacks from 'anti-raunch culture' feminists were debilitating and relentless.

Media told me that I was a traitor, sell out, slut, whore. I was a victim, object, commodity. I was damaging women and complicit in oppression. "Feminist striptease. Give me a break"; "It's an oxymoron, porn is not a feminist act"; "How can you call yourself queer if you have sex with men for money?" We bore the brunt of scrutiny as a place where social fears about consumer culture, objectification and sex acutely intersect.

Our bodies and work were fetishised, trivialised or pathologised. University students wanted to interview us. Politicians said they would save us with more police, law and order crackdowns, and gay marriage.

This oppressive political framework left me in constant defence mode, grappling with internalised stigma, madly formulating means to justify our existence and leaving no room to actually dream new ways of being in the world.

§

Spreading love around the world from upside down had been my motto as a pole dancer, but now it had a whole new meaning. I wore my heart on my sleeve and you wore your cunt on yours.

§

Workers and lovers, hustlers and queers...

We organised, networked and rioted. We collaborated to create shows for queer strip clubs. We had dinner parties where we talked theory then lined up to give each other lap dances. We planned telematics webcam art gallery projects where I fucked you in the ass with a remote control dildo across the world via Skype. We put Barbie dolls up our cunts and sent photos to our local dyke magazine. We participated in genital show-and-tell circles and sat by fires in teepees. We ate balsamic mushrooms and marked undergraduate gender studies essays. We compared surgical scars and made out at BDSM events. We grew succulents in the base of 6-inch stripper heels, shared articles, nail polish and lovers. You reached in and grabbed me from the inside. I bled all over your hands and did not feel ashamed.

The gay and lesbian rights movement monopolised queer campaigns by lobbying

for marriage, superannuation and tax benefits: we fucked anonymously in public toilets. State governments proposed to fingerprint sex workers, introduce brothel police and record our names on a government database: we took nude photos in front of Parliament house. The Classification Board banned the depiction of fetishes in adult films, thought female ejaculation could only be urination and required our vulvas to be airbrushed: we engaged in public demonstrations of rope suspension, fisting and squirting technique.

I learned about trust, when you tied me to a cross and poured hot wax down my body and a stranger cut it off with a knife. I learned about euphoria when you hit me with every instrument in your collection until my ass was so raw I had to go to the needle exchange for bruise cream before my shift. I learned about responsibility when I strung you up blindfolded in a sling and caressed your frilled stockings and corset, before I tied your balls in gaffer tape and fucked your ass with a glass dildo. I learned about healing when you fucked me with that giant cock hard and rough and I cried in vulnerability/grief/relief.

§

It wasn't all peaches and cream. People arrived at the ghetto hurting. We all had our own stories, different triggers. There were tensions between non-conformity and homogeneity, infiltration and selling out, representation and exclusion, resistance and assimilation. There was pain and hierarchy and mistakes. There were hard discussions and contradictory strategies for activism. There was conflict, division and growth.

We wrote fierce papers, performed extravagant shows, produced rigorous research, and still: our lobbying letters got shredded and ignored. Our street demonstrations received minimal media. Our conference abstracts were declined. Documentary filmmakers wanted to show that we were "normal... just like them". The Mardi Gras bureaucracy wanted to veto our parade signs.

§

In the meantime, I was learning new ways of fucking, loving, and existing in my body. I listened as you spoke poetically about piercing as fucking the skin through its thousands of orifices that open and close with heat and cold, and relocating orgasm to the elbow. We had study days where we cooked organic vegan feasts and read queer theory with our hands inside each other, filling our bodies and minds to the brim with nutrients and body parts. I read out loud while you fucked me from behind, and every time my voice quivered you would stop and make me

start again. This is how I learned queer theory.

Maybe you thought I was a little forward when I approached you in the workshop and asked if you'd care to touch my g-spot. But I had learned by now that some of the most intensely intimate experiences can be with complete strangers. I had learned that love could be spread around the world through torrid ravenous encounters. And so when you pressed me up against that cold concrete wall at the back of the classroom, in nothing but a hot pink string bikini top pulled to the sides, your gloved hand in my cunt and breath on my neck, we were relocating intimacies out of the bedroom and into public space. As we engaged in this political practice I was juicing down your sleeve.

§

I liked my love affairs served with a side dish of politics. I would sit in your lap in my schoolgirl outfit and tell you about debates on mandatory condom-use in porn as we watched Tristan Taormino's *Rough Sex* (2009). I put condoms on your lilac cock with my lips as I told you about street-based sex workers leading Australia's HIV response. We talked feminism on-set as the first political candidates in Australia to film a porn scene together. We discussed appropriation and performance as you pulled my knickers to the side in the sauna; compared university supervisors as I licked your stiletto heels in the gutter; drank post-orgasmic tea while you told me about protesting uranium mines in the desert. We repositioned sites of discourse outside the academy—to strip clubs, cafes and knitting circles.

§

Sex work and queerness was not isolating, as people warned me. I found belonging, refuge and family. In the straight world I lost so many friends. I don't know at what point they started dropping off, or when my politics became too much for them. They began to look at me with a mix of bemusement, fear and disgust, and then they were not there at all. Was it the veganism, queer politics, polyamory, feminism, or the sex worker rights activism? Was it my make-up, my shamelessness?

§

Our encounters both rejuvenated and exhausted me. I was greedy and relentless. I wanted to absorb your mind, dip it in rice malt syrup and consume it with raw chocolate. Our rapid affairs and fierce political conversations made me melt and cry and internally combust. I was both passionate and disillusioned at the state of the

world. I was starry-eyed and deeply cynical. Our loverships and political exchanges brought me back to life and broke my heart.

§

What I learned from you was the insatiable unfathomable power of receiving.

“They” told us receiving was passive. Violent, even. They told us that being penetrated was weak. Even academics distinguished between the penetrator and the penetrated like the latter was passive, submissive, docile, or what seemed to be the dirtiest word around, *feminised*.

They never told us how brave you need to be to open up and invite a hand into your body. They never told us that vaginal muscles and sphincters were so powerful they could potentially break someone’s wrist. They never told us how active you need to be to breathe, relax, and envelope a body part into your warmth. They never told us how strong you need to be to let yourself love fiercely, cry deeply and open greedily.

§

If you don’t believe this is queer feminist activism, here it is upfront:

There are thirty drunk sweaty shirtless men standing over me with beer in one hand in somebody’s garage in western Sydney. Legs spread, lips open, clit piercing sparkling in the fluorescent lights. I am hot from the delicious sleaze of it all. Here is where I learn about hypoallergenic lube, phthalate free sex toys, how to use seas sponges, remedies for menstrual cramps, preventing urinary tract infections, and finding non-latex condoms. This is the sex education of Australia.

Here is where I borrow strategies from fellow dancers on how to confront cis/sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, misogyny, classism, fat-phobia, ageism and ableism. Here is where we invert sex/gender norms, defy stereotypes of passivity, engage in sex acts which are queer, become skilled in negotiating boundaries, employ camp/drag/masquerade, reclaim and resignify femininity, build enormous biceps, engage in inter-class contact, share skills and strategies, direct our own scripts/fantasies, expose the performativity of hegemonic beauty, present diverse bodies onstage and teach safer sex practice. I absorb these ideas through osmosis when my body and mind are most open, and share them liberally with customers, audiences, strangers.

Here we are—a direct threat to marriage, monogamy and the nuclear family—making up for the deficiencies of the state. Here it was that I learned to be unapologetic,

unashamed and unrepentant.

§

I want to thank you.

I needed badly to be fucked out of my emotional limbo of work-productivity-direction. You looked so distastefully at my list of plans for the coming year and next to the dot point about working for the UN scrawled, “have lots of dirty, perverted sex with hot babes”. You opened me up like a wet sea clam, and reoriented what I thought of as un/productive, and I needed that desperately.

Thank you for helping me get glow paint out of my hair; building me giant cages; letting me bite the callouses off your palms. Thank you for supporting me when I wanted to fuck other girls every Saturday for cash. Thank you for supporting me when I fell in love and infatuation with other people. Thank you for your pretty words scribbled on pink cardboard, messages in the front of books, and notes left under my front door. These words are written on my body, under my skin, in pastels and watercolours.

§

It is late at night as I drive home. I am sweaty with lube, sticky with carpet lint, smudged with mascara and trawling fingers through my knotty hair. What I am left with is a kinaesthetic awareness of my body, an unrelenting faith in the extraordinary potential of the receiving, and a renewed craving for what is possible—physically and politically. What I am left with is violent passion, sheer exhaustion, fifty dollar notes in my socks and bruises on my hip bones.

Bibliography

Taormino, Tristan. 2009. *Tristan Taormino’s Rough Sex*, Los Angeles: Vivid Entertainment.

Biography

ZAHRA STARDUST, BA (History), LLB (Honours), MA (Gender and Cultural Studies), is a queer feminist porn star, Penthouse Pet, stripper, centrefold and pole dance instructor. She is currently writing her PhD on the legal regulation of pornography in Australia. She has run for Senate, House of Representatives and Lord Mayor for the Australian Sex Party, advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work.