

UNSUBSTANTIAL TERRITORY



LAURIE REYNOLDS

WHAT IS CODE-SWITCHING?

For all of us code-switching is a normal part of engaging with different social situations, such as the difference between how we act in formal and informal situations. If you have ever worked in retail, it is the difference between our customer service voice and how we speak to our fellow employees; however, for members of a minority community it has different stakes.

Simply put: code is language, and switching is changing between the type of language that we're using. However, language is more than words and dialect we talk in, it's also how we communicate through body language, facial expressions, clothing etc. Some forms of code-switching can be more effective than others.

Code-switching has become a normality that most LGBTQ+ members develop to simply be. It is a consistent consideration that has become second nature. To truly be ourselves is not a privilege given to us, as our queerness isn't accepted in spaces that are critical for the success and survival dominated by heteronormativity.

This is due to the fact we don't tend to see people in positions of power identifying or adopting queer traits. Representation is key, and queer people in positions of power often adopt straight qualities to fit in, making their queerness more palatable for the straight masses. This reinforces toxic environments and ultimately harms other queer people who are unable to code switch effectively. When a queer person can't effectively code switch, the results can be devastating and potentially harmful. In Plymouth alone there are numerous hate crimes committed on members of

the LGBTQ+ community, often in public places where ineffective code-switching to hide their queerness culminates in serious harm or murder.

Hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community is on the rise. In 2015 - 2016, 137 people reported homophobic hate crimes to the Devon and Cornwall Police, which was an increase of 3% on the previous year. These are only some examples of known and reported cases, often homophobic discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community goes unreported. Code-switching politics and methods don't protect us all the time and, at the end of the day, queer people are still subjected to hate and discrimination.

Code-switching is a divisive topic in the LGBTQ+ community. Code-switching allows queer people to navigate straight cis spaces, but it isn't enough to overcome homophobia.

Is code-switching a necessary survival technique or simply an outdated coping mechanism?

Is code-switching a form of oppression, keeping the LGBTQ+ in place in a heteronormative space, or is it just part of the queer experience?

Within this zine I explore my own experiences of code-switching through photography as well as other members of the LGBTQ+ community's experiences.

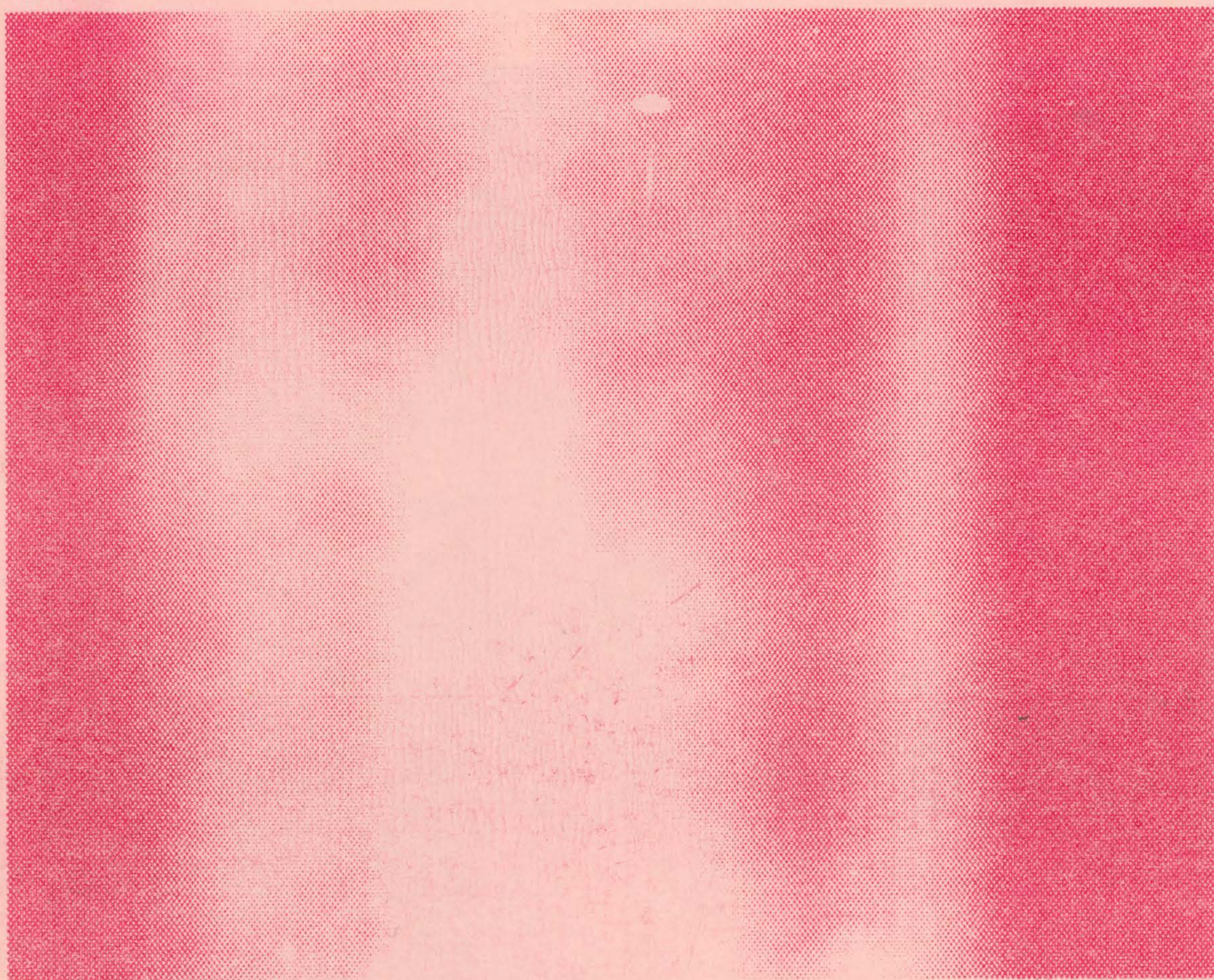
'WE MELT INTO EACH OTHER WITH
PHRASES. WE ARE EDGED WITH MIST.
WE MAKE AN UNSUBSTANTIAL
TERRITORY'

VIRGINIA WOOLF - THE WAVES

BERNARD



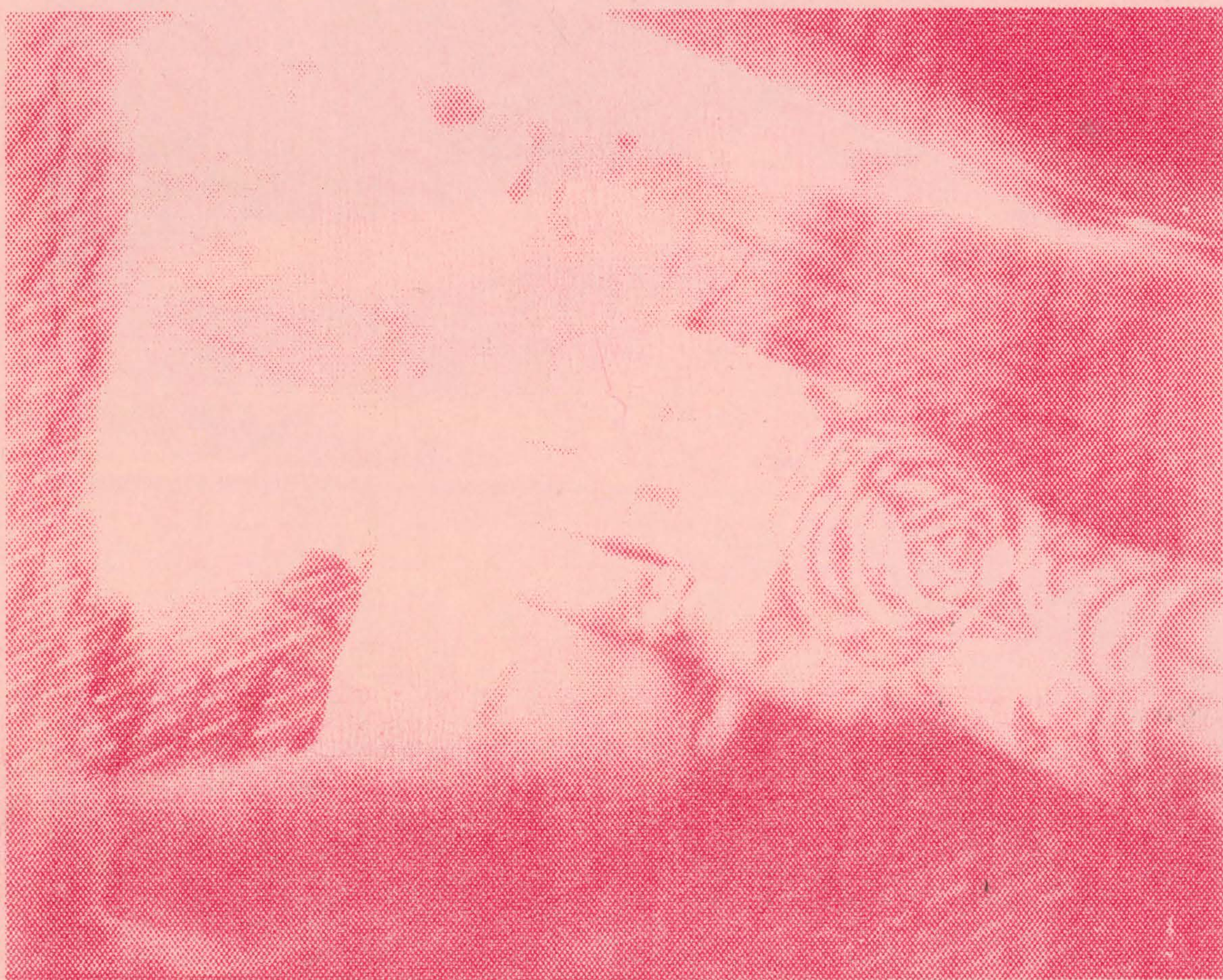
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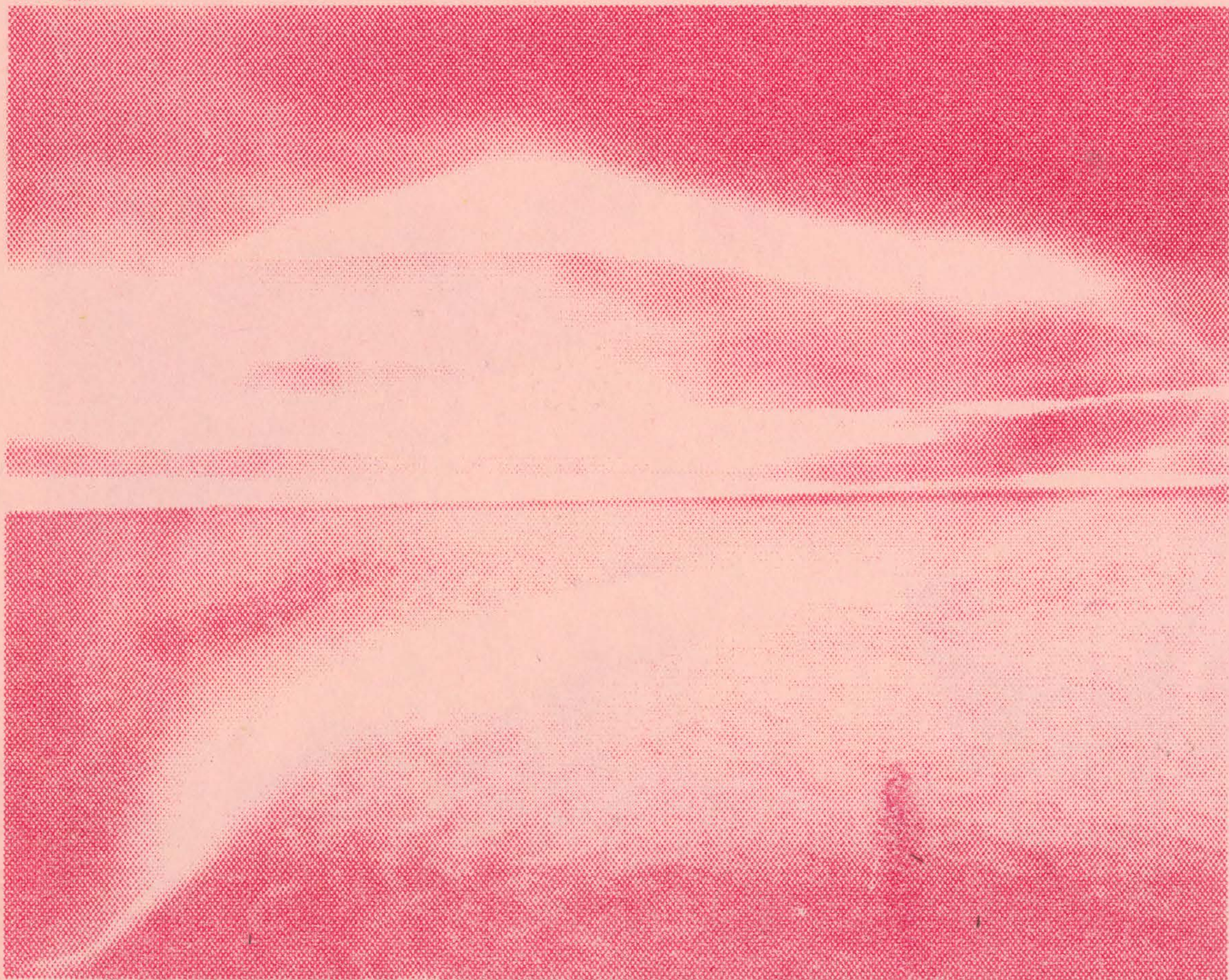
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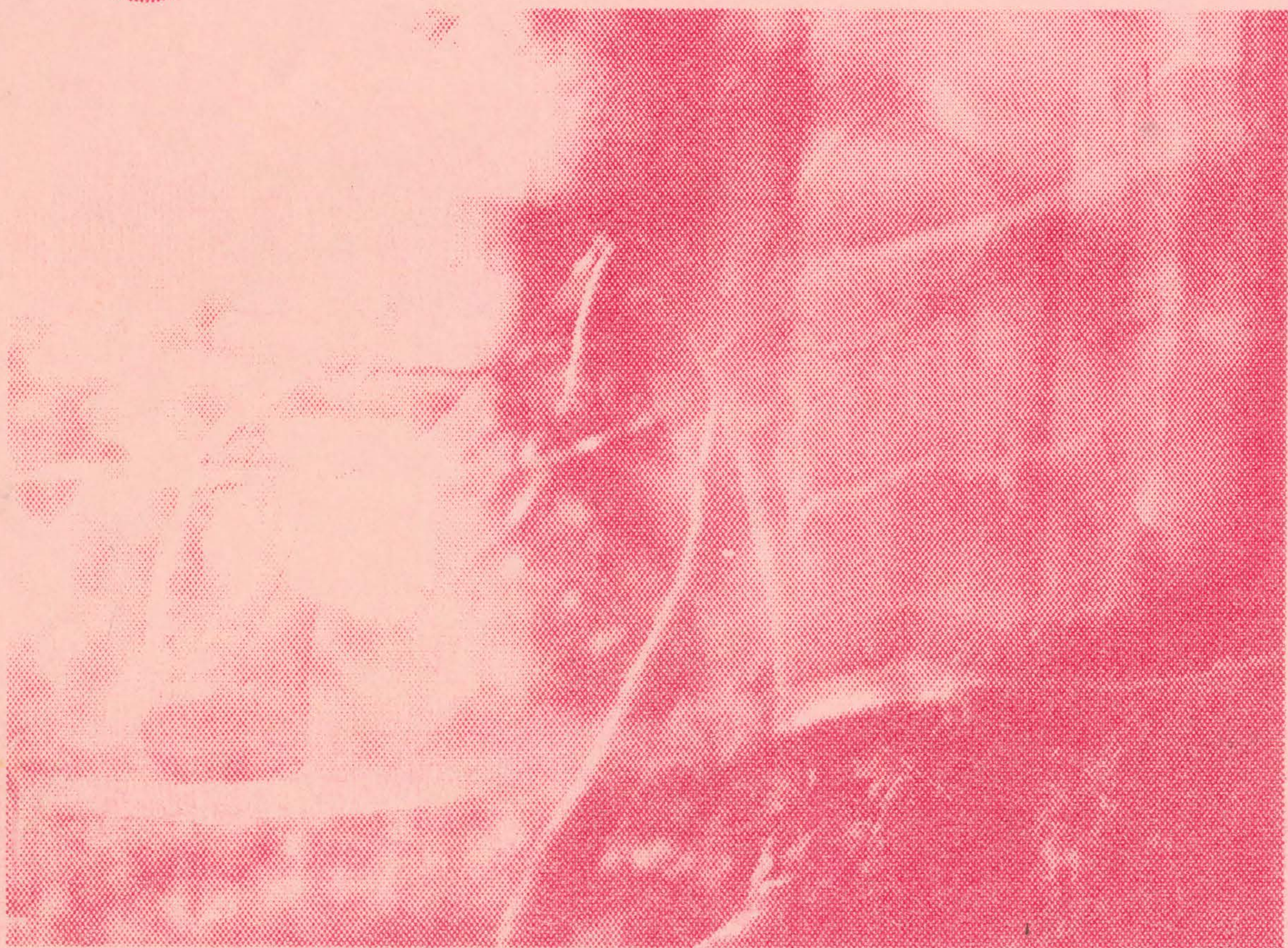
NEVILLE



RHOVA



SUSAN



Inspired by Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* I have identified traits and situations that Woolf's characters exhibit through their struggle to define themselves. Within Woolf's experimental novel, the characters may not be separate characters at all, but facets of a larger personal construct. Just as the different code switches I navigate are, in fact, all part of my queer identity and experience.

The photographs were made with film using analogue methods and English Channel waters to create a natural photographic developer. This allowed for the metaphor that Woolf deploys as a method to soften and merge the codes formed in a visual manner. The film was then processed in a makeshift darkroom, a cupboard under the stairs.

"I AM MADE AND REMADE
CONTINUALLY. DIFFERENT PEOPLE
DRAW DIFFERENT WORDS FROM ME."

VIRGINIA WOOLF - THE WAVES



ROB

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

My pronouns were he/him but this has recently begun to change since starting therapy and I am exploring the depths of my own identity and what that means to me. So I find that they can fluctuate between he/they now. I don't know what this means for my actual identity but I know that some days I don't feel just like a him. When I am my performing drag persona, Roberta, they are she/her.

CAN YOU TELL ME A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU BEHAVE OR SPEAK TO FIT IN?

I had an interview once for a pub chain in Newton Abbot, in the summer break before returning to my second year at university. At this interview, I was made aware that I am camp and that I come across as gay. The interviewer said that they are a family pub and that the way I act wouldn't be appropriate for their patrons. Aside from this they offered me the job. I was completely broke; I had just got back from a six-week holiday in Australia and I had zero money so I needed the job. I turned up on my first day and was immediately greeted with a "remember what we talked about" and "try to tone it down". I went to put my coat in the staff room and then realised that I was not at all comfortable with being there so I just walked out without saying anything to anyone. No one should have to alter who they are fundamentally just because they need something. From that day I promised myself that who I am is my greatest strength and that I will never tone it down for anyone.

HOW REGULARLY DO YOU FIND YOURSELF CODE SWITCHING IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE?

Ever since receiving blatant homophobia and discrimination I have realised that, whilst no one has ever explicitly told me to tone it down since then,

ROBERTA



there have been times where I am met with certain resistance in the way I am or act in 'normal' day to day. Working in retail is especially hard as you are constantly meeting different people and just the very nature of your being can set them off. I find that I moderate a lot more these days so that I can get a feel for what the person is going to be like before I let my personality out. It's really quite a hard thing to do as whilst I come across as outgoing and gregarious I have so much inner turmoil and pain that can get triggered quite easily.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A TIME WHERE YOU EXAGGERATED YOUR QUEERNESS?

This happens generally when I am in a new situation and acts as a defence mechanism. In my head being queer is non-threatening which presents me in a fun way. I struggle with new situations and suffer with social anxiety but I have gotten very good at being outgoing and gregarious to hide those feelings. My queerness helps me to survive and thrive in every interaction I am in. I dread to think what it would be like if I couldn't use it to protect myself.

DO YOU THINK CODE SWITCHING IS A COPING MECHANISM, PART OF THE QUEER EXPERIENCE, OR IS IT A FORM OF OPPRESSION?

I 100% believe it is a coping mechanism which has been thrust upon us through oppression but also it is a part of the queer experience so that we can figure out our place in the world. I know that I have been through a lot and through therapy am able to identify what has been homophobia, prejudice, discrimination, assumptions made about me and all the rest, however, it has made me who I am today. I massively regret things that I have done in relation to oppressing myself but I have learnt and am continuing to learn that I am the only one who can bring me to the party and that I have a duty to the people around me to show up and be proud.



JAC

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

This is actually difficult to describe. I am lesbian but I am not out. I don't really express myself in that way. I use the pronouns she/her, but I feel more non-binary and would like to use the pronouns they/them. I would like to dress more to reflect this but am worried it would put me. I have a hard time figuring out my identity because I don't feel I am in the right mental and physical space to explore it.

CAN YOU TELL ME A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU BEHAVE OR SPEAK TO FIT IN?

I constantly feel I am not myself in everyday situations. I still live my parents who are pretty traditional and conservative. I am living inside the closet out of fear that they will reject me so I have to be really careful about the things I say or do. One really good thing about being in lockdown due to Covid pandemic is that I don't have to make excuses on why I don't have a boyfriend. Nobody is dating right now. I have always had a Tomboy aesthetic, wearing jeans and shirts, but I would like to explore my gender more than can but doing so would raise more questions than I would care to answer. I often find myself second-guessing decisions and action I take when I am around anyone else which can be very exhausting. Playing straight every day and living hasn't become second nature to me yet, no matter how much practice I have had.

HOW REGULARLY DO YOU FIND YOURSELF CODE SWITCHING IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE?

I don't code switch that much, I find myself playing the same role each day, that of a straight female. I do act more conservative around my parents; I

don't express those conservative views but conform to them to fit in. I do work in a professional space, where I have to dress more corporately, there is an unspoken rule that if you

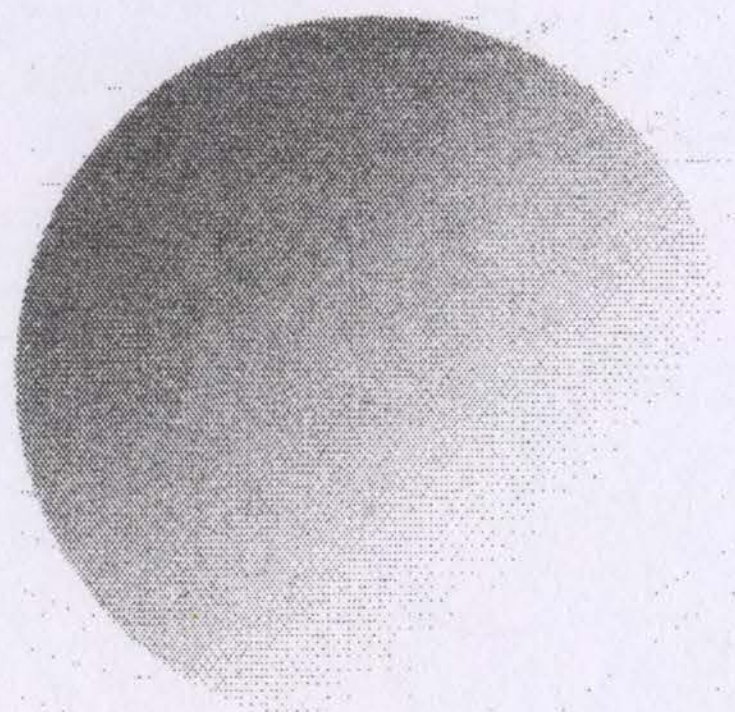
are women then you have to wear heels. I find them super uncomfortable but I remember one time I wore flats; a colleague made a lesbian joke and I was mortified. The only benefit is I get to wear trousers and separates, which my parents find odd, but I can blame the dress code at work. At work I find myself speaking differently more professionally.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A TIME WHERE YOU EXAGGERATED YOUR QUEERNESS?

I don't really exaggerate at all, the only time I can be myself is online. I am part of groups on Reddit and Twitter. Of course, this is all anonymous, but it feels good to be part of a community that I can explore myself. Although because I haven't got the most experiences so I find myself being more elaborate and queer to prove that I am actually gay. It's a double-edged sword because I feel like I can be more of myself but it's an exaggerated example of myself which doesn't completely feel like me.

DO YOU THINK CODE SWITCHING IS A COPING MECHANISM, PART OF THE QUEER EXPERIENCE, OR IS IT A FORM OF OPPRESSION?

For me, it is a coping mechanism, I can't be myself right now, so I have to pretend to be straight to keep my love ones in my life. I wish my family would be more accepting. I have always wondered if they actually know I am a lesbian and they intentionally kept me in the closet. But it's a conversation I really don't want to have right now.



NO NAME

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

Cisgendered male. Married. Bisexual. Kinky. Polyamorous. He/him.

CAN YOU TELL ME A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU BEHAVE OR SPEAK TO FIT IN?

I realised from an early age it was more appropriate to speak in different ways to different types/groups of people. I'm much older now and I feel that I don't have to change how I speak to fit in, I code switch by choice. I'm just me and I'm really happy with who I am. If I'm going out with my LGBTQ+ friends I might dress differently, brighter colours, flower pattern shirts, wear wings, wear horns, wear latex, wear leather or wear something smart/elegant! I might also talk about more intimate, personal subjects, something I may not do with other groups/family. I remember being at a Pride Event a few years ago. I didn't dress up for the occasion and was really happy just being me. I held on to the Pride flag, walked along waving, chatting and smiling at everyone. I didn't feel out of place, I felt accepted.

HOW REGULARLY DO YOU FIND YOURSELF CODE SWITCHING IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE?

I code switch a lot at work with colleagues who know I'm bisexual and those that don't. I enjoy this a lot. The rest of the time it depends whose company I'm sharing. I also enjoy my privacy.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A TIME WHERE YOU EXAGGERATED YOUR QUEERNESS?

No.

DO YOU THINK CODE SWITCHING IS A COPING MECHANISM, PART OF THE QUEER EXPERIENCE, OR IS IT A FORM OF OPPRESSION?

For me it is definitely a choice. I guess for others it could be a combination of any or all of scenarios posed in the question. If any of them had any negative feelings that seriously impacted on my life I would seek help from close friends, possibly even find professional help.

I think this is a great way to encourage very important conversations. Thank you for the opportunity to share and be part of this.



ERIN

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?

I am a bisexual woman. I use she/her pronouns. I am transgender. These things describe one dimension of me and do not define me. I am also a scientist, an educator, a sister, proud auntie, daughter, founder of a trans and non-binary support group, an outdoors enthusiast, learning musician and all the other things that make us individuals.

CAN YOU TELL ME A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU BEHAVE OR SPEAK TO FIT IN?

Growing up I was aware I was transgender from my earliest memories (although I didn't have a word for how I felt until I was much older). I spent many years adapting mannerisms and behaviour to blend in with boys my age, to try and hide that I felt I was meant to be a girl. I was deeply ashamed of how I felt and frightened of people finding out. Looking back, it was like I was undercover for my first twenty years, observing boys and men around me and copying their behaviours to fit in. I was wearing a mask.

This kept me safe in a time where LGBT identities and people were not spoken about in school. Homophobic and transphobic bullying was the norm, a consequence of Section 28. Occasionally the mask would slip, and I would invariably be bullied or ridiculed for it. Over time however, that mask became so deeply embedded that I lost connection with the person behind it. It took many years to build up the courage to even admit out loud that I was transgender, and many more to lift that mask off and rediscover the person beneath.

HOW REGULARLY DO YOU FIND YOURSELF CODE SWITCHING IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE?

In terms of my trans and LGBT identity, I made an unspoken conviction that I would never go behind a mask to hide my identity again. This was helped in some ways because I stayed in the same area that I had transitioned and worked with many of the same people. They knew my history, were supportive, and I was able to be myself around them. I became relatively well known in the local community for leading a local trans and non-binary support group. In that respect, I count myself lucky.

I recently moved to a new area where I am not known in the community. With my new housemates, I found myself in a situation where my LGBT identity was unknown and I had yet to come out to them. This was a strange time during the winter Covid lockdowns where I found myself code-switching between virtual conversations with friends and family back home and face-to-face conversations with my housemates where I was being cautious until I felt safe to come out to them.

More recently, I don't think I code-switch much in relation to my queer identity. I acknowledge the privilege in that and try to leverage that privilege to support trans and non-binary people in Plymouth through Not Alone. I think my current code-switching experience comes between work, academia, friends, and family. There are times where I code-switch because of my working-class roots: I am a first-generation university graduate, scientist and academic in my family which comes with its own challenges.



ERIN

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A TIME WHERE YOU EXAGGERATED YOUR QUEERNESS?

I think I am still unpicking the survival instinct to hide my queerness in some ways. I have been in situations in the past, when I was only just coming out, where I felt like perhaps I wasn't "queer enough" and felt some self-directed pressure to exaggerate my queerness. I have more recently engaged in some great queer spaces which helped me to feel safe and open that part of my identity in a comfortable way. It is a work in progress, I never expected to undo 20 years of hiding my identity in a couple of years.

DO YOU THINK CODE SWITCHING IS A COPING MECHANISM, PART OF THE QUEER EXPERIENCE, OR IS IT A FORM OF OPPRESSION?

I think code-switching is a safety mechanism. It is a means of self-preservation and self-protection in a society with inherent risks to being perceived as LGBT (or another minority). These risks are not just in the form of risk to physical safety, they include risks to employment, financial security, social acceptance (e.g. from friends, family and colleagues), and risks to emotional wellbeing. Code-switching may be a response to an oppressive environment, and I wouldn't suggest it is oppression in and of itself. I wouldn't shame anyone for using code-switching to get by in such an environment. I hope we can all strive to make such an environment more equitable





Laurie Reynolds is an artist and researcher who works with camera and landscape with a focus on the progress of collaboration with the materials that comprise the landscape.

Their work explores indeterminacy and what it means to collaborate/create with it through practice-led process work, the expanded field of photography, and an engagement with landscape. Photography is used as the artists entry point for exploration, however with the intervention of the landscape throughout various stages of the photographic process to create collaborative pieces of work that compose and build that allow land to create its own mark on the images. Recent work includes site-specific post industrial landscapes such as cooper and iron mines within Devon and Cornwall.

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