

Take Care: Teasing Out Transness and the



‘Homebody’

Fig. 1: Self-portrait of author in bedroom with partner

Senior Capstone for Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

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I know that I should be bold

I know that I have gotten older

I know that I can hold this body down

I could take care of you

— “Take Care” by SASAMI

I realized my body doesn't feel like home and it never has, but it can. It's been tethered to the places where I grew up living a double life pushing a performance of femininity to the limit with a void still in my body. Han and I talked tonight about how I run back to that feeling when I convince myself that I fabricated the sense of self I have now, but my body feels lighter.

When I last talked to Matty, they told me that these photographs are special—images of friends, most of which were shot in bedrooms, reflect the spaces I've experienced a sense of belonging in, my home and my body, for the first time in my life.

Thank you for everything.

With love,

C

Fig. 2: Introduction to Take Care by C Stachura

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I. Introduction: A Self-Study of the Homebody

In spring of 2022, I accepted that I was growing out of my body. Agonizing over my reflection in the mirror not making sense wasn't unfamiliar to me, but trusting myself to act on my dysphoria was. This July, I opted for gender-affirming top surgery slated for December 2022 and set the process of transitioning in motion: my body would feel like home, if not now, then soon. With the prospect of a new chest on the horizon, I felt more alive than I ever had, but as for my parents—my father, in particular—my psychic and physical changes meant the “death” of their daughter. My explanation of my gender identity had taken an emotional toll on my father, one that he spared no details in lamenting to me. This only added to the complicated yet affectionate relationship I had with Maryland, the backdrop for my coming-of-age where my family still resides. The pressure I felt to present myself inauthentically and over-explain myself upon returning to Maryland was holding me back from finding a genuine sense of home, both in relation to the physical spaces I occupied and within myself.

July 2022 didn't just mark a milestone in my journey as a trans person; it also signaled a shift in my relationships as my long-term partner, Ezra, moved in with me. Perhaps it was divine timing that my epiphany around my transness coincided with this step to intentionally build a home with the person I love, but I felt deeply that both of these decisions were intertwined. As we curated a space that functioned as a refuge for ourselves amid contentious relationships with family while we both transitioned, we found that our home was a favorite place for our friends to gather. At the same time, the realization that Maryland could no longer be home for me was

painful. The silver lining was that it enabled me to fully recognize the community I had been building here in New York once I allowed myself to take up space in my home and in my body. With my father's support for my top surgery out of the question in any capacity, my partner, friends and acquaintances grounded me in love, tirelessly scheming up how we could raise the funds for my new chest by December. My chosen family had shown me that they had chosen me.

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At the same time that my understanding of home shifted from a place of discomfort and dissonance in Maryland to a place of possibility and belonging in New York, I began to experience my not-home body *as home* upon taking this step in my transition. Simultaneously, I started taking photographs of primarily queer and trans friends in their homes, ranging from Baltimore apartments to New York City dorm rooms. After conducting more than a dozen of these intimate photoshoots, it became clear to me that for queer and trans people especially, the construction of a particular space as one's own home and a sense of resonance with that space is reflective of body as home/home as body dynamics. I came to understand my photographs as love letters to the people, places, and feelings I cherish, a motif that manifests in my zine *Take Care* through imagery of envelopes, postage, and lined paper.

For queer/trans subjects, home as body/body as home is a privileged experience. The lack of safe and accessible housing options poses a particular threat of transphobic violence for those who cannot pass or afford the exorbitant out-of-pocket costs of medically transitioning. Because trans subjectivity is not purely internal but relational to the space around us, it can be difficult to identify the body as home in the first place without a physical home to ground oneself in. *Take Care*'s title arises out of this understanding as a call for us to reflect on the necessity of care and our relationship to community-building. In underscoring notions of care within my methodology

around producing this body of work, my hope is that home as body/body as home can be recognized as having the potential to incite joy and strengthen our intimate connections with ourselves and those around us.

II. Methods

When it comes to photographing trans subjects in particular, allowing images to speak for themselves—or speaking in place of my subjects on the basis of what I believe is affirming—runs the risk of conveying that transness is merely a set of bodily signs that can be "read" in a diagnostic way. Because the notion of photography as a tool for world-building is central to my use of the medium altogether, I understand that my photography has the capacity to communicate realities that are not neither just nor reparative.

Part of negotiating my use of photography as a medium relies on establishing expectations around consent with my subjects. Before each shoot begins, I make sure the subject I am photographing understands how I intend to use the final images, and I explain that they have full rights of use for these photographs. During the shoots themselves, I check in with the subject as I am photographing: *what do you think about the color of my lights? Is it ok if we move around this piece of furniture? How does this pose feel?* After I take the finished rolls to the lab for processing and receive the scanned images, I retouch any colors to compensate for discrepancies from the digitization process versus what I saw or envisioned while originally photographing. I occasionally struggle with tone-matching, or ensuring that the colors across final images are uniform, skin tone included. In a handful of instances while executing this project, I have asked participants for their feedback on my retouching and explain that I can make additional adjustments. In reflecting upon my positionality as a white photographer making images of subjects across a range of racial identities, I want to ensure that I am attentive to

editing techniques that avoid washing out or lightening darker skin tones and the messaging that conveys. My priority is to ensure that the entire process feels affirming, from the shoot itself to the moment that the subject of my photographs receives the final images. My hope is that the subjects of my photographs don't feel *looked at*, but *seen* so as not to reinscribe photography's violent relationship to queer/trans and non-white racial identities, an issue I explicate further in Part III.

Typically, I do not see the spaces I am to photograph before the shoots themselves, and instead, I bring the bulk of my equipment with me and tailor the set-up to the existing lighting in the room, the self-styled look of the subject I am photographing, and the colors of the accents in the space. I prefer to have the subject guide me around and identify areas they feel excited about being photographed in, or even objects they want to include in the image rather than having preconceived notions of what I like about their space. Placing responsibility on myself to ensure that the process is collaborative is an essential part of my process. Being in control of the camera and therefore becoming a mediator of my subjects' representations places me in a position where I hold power and must be accountable to it.

As an analog photographer, materiality is also at the heart of my process. Because shooting film does not provide immediate results as digital photography and requires additional materials like the costly rolls of film, for starters, I feel the need to be especially intentional about what I'm photographing and *how* I am photographing when I make my images. I appreciate this because it makes me feel as if I can pour more of myself into my images; in part, this has to do with the medium's physicality. My physical touch guides the entire process from when I load the film to sleeve the developed and scanned negatives. Publishing my images in a physical zine honors this materiality. Viewing images of yourself in print, especially images that

feel affirming, is a unique experience I hope the subjects of these photographs can have. I want my loved ones to be excited when they see a familiar face of a mutual friend on the page following a portrait of themselves and to be able to clearly visualize the vast network of chosen family we developed together, or to incite curiosity and ask questions about people they may not know. Another way to articulate this choice for a printed medium is that the zine positions these images not in isolation, but rather in conversation with one another.

The form of the zine also enables me to keep the photographs as the focal point of this project as intended. The appendix at the end of the zine credits subjects in order of appearance and includes excerpts from surveys conducted with subjects on the home as body/body as home dynamic so as to give voice to these images beyond the visual alone. The surveys were distributed to participants who were photographed via Google Forms and asked three open-ended questions: 1) What about your space feels important to you? 2) What do you think of when you think of the word 'home?' and 3) How would you describe the experience of feeling at home in your body? The following message prefaces the survey: "The responses solicited from the questions below are intended to gather bits of your thoughts around home and embodiment to be published in a zine for my senior thesis project. Only brief excerpts will be included in the final zine within an appendix that will credit you for your participation in this project. However, longer responses may be incorporated into the written component which will be submitted to my academic department. Since the zine will be circulated more widely than the written component (which will not be shared publicly), a proof of the appendix along with the photos included in the zine will be sent to you for approval prior to publishing. Be mindful of sharing sensitive information, and respond in whatever length feels OK to you." Despite the deeply collaborative aspect of each of these photoshoots, the fact of the matter is that these final images are predicated

on my interpretation of the subject and scene. As I come into my own *body at home* and present this as an integral theme of *Take Care*, it felt necessary to solicit responses surrounding this topic from friends who participated in this project. My intent around doing so was to highlight the multidimensionality surrounding home as body/body as home for my mainly queer/trans subjects.

To reiterate, photography is my medium of choice because of its capacity for world-building. With an eye for composition and lighting, an every-day setting can be transformed into an entirely different scene, one that has the potential to transport the subject and viewer out of the mundane. I created my first cohesive body of work titled *Past Tense* during high school, photographing the antics of friends and more-than-friends during a period of time when I wanted to be anywhere but where I was then. Photography was my way out; it was a means of reorienting myself in suburban Maryland, a place that once incited boredom and anger but that I realized could also contain a semblance of intrigue and perhaps even beauty. I photographed what was painfully familiar to me: my friends smoking in parks, hanging out in cars, and killing time wherever and however we could, images which would eventually end up in my first self-published zine. It is still a special experience to witness—and physically hold in my hands—the visual culmination of four years of my coming-of-age paired alongside snippets of journal entries I had written over that period. Looking back at my first foray into this kind of documentation, I realize now that I was informally archiving my teenage years. Without consciously doing so, the photographs I would make of my friends in the spur of the moment were indicative of my orientations to my subjects. I aspired to be as effortlessly glamorous as Fai, who I'd habitually find myself photographing dressed up before we'd head off to a party. I photographed Chloe, the first self-identified dyke I'd ever met, with a different kind of reverence; my favorite photo

depicts them with arms stretched towards the night sky with a cigarette in their hand. This project, *Take Care*, builds on my earlier intuitive experiences of photographing my friends, albeit with more intention. I am choosing to see my friends in particular ways that we collectively consent to as we build worlds together in their bedrooms. I articulate this visually through the photographs we create collaboratively, a process that instills a deep sense of love and belonging in me. My goal is that they share in this sentiment, too.



Fig. 3: excerpt from Past Tense (2015-2019)

Archiving my relationships with the subjects of these photographs and my surroundings enables me to think of time as malleable rather than linear. By both documenting these moments and reflecting on them months or years later, I can better embody my past selves rather than viewing my history linearly or the past as disposable, no matter how much hurt those selves

might have held. The evolution of my trans body has no clear beginning nor end, and producing photographs while looking back at past works as my style has evolved enables me to take ownership of all parts of myself. Engaging with my photography in this archival context allows for me in a sense to queer time, settling into my trans body further. I view this function of my photography in alignment with Gayatri Gopinath's claim that "queer visual aesthetic practices function as archival practices that excavate and memorialize queer modes of desire, affiliation, and embodiment obscured and deemed without value by conventional methods of recording and retrieving the past" (169). I view this as another articulation of photography as world-building.

Granted, I recognize that the stakes differ from *Past Tense* as I am setting my focus on photographing trans/gender-non conforming subjects for *Take Care*. Because this project is situated in the contexts of queerness/transness and home (which can invoke a range of emotions for subjects), my approach to documentation needs to adopt a critical, nuanced approach. In order to articulate how I photograph trans subjects, context around the paradox of trans visibility and the history of trans photography specifically within the context of early U.S. gender clinics is necessary to making my claims.

III. Photography and The Paradox of Trans Visibility

The paradox of trans visibility refers to "the way of being/doing trans that exacerbates the policing of gender outliers. [It] erases identities that do not embody a hyperreal performance of 'ideal' gender established in and through the binary, thus furthering the aims and consequences of heteronormativity" (Berberick 128). Riley M. Snorton explains how this ideal gendered performance or 'realness' is situated in schemas of race: "Where one locates a 'transsexual real' whether phenomenologically, in the practices (social, medical, legal, and so on) of transition (...) shifts in relation to racial blackness" (175). The mainstream's depiction of

trans ‘realness’/passability hinges on the ways in which Blackness is specifically gendered. As a result, white trans bodies and material realities are what are inscribed as legible. Che Gossett makes an analogous claim to Berberick in their essay titled “Blackness and the Trouble of Trans Visibility.” They write, “One of the traps of trans visibility is that it is premised on invisibility: to bring a select few into view, others must disappear into the background, and this is always a political project that reinforces oppression” (183). Trans people, especially those who are Black and transfeminine, understand that the material realities of their lives (including their physical safety walking down the street) are largely contingent upon how they are seen—how their bodies are read—“within the optic lens of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy” (Bailey 379).

In an interview with Gossett, artist Juliana Huxtable explains the phenomenon of trans visibility as a mode of surveillance, that there exists a “toxic assumption that one would transition to be in the spotlight (...) [to be] visible to sell an idea,” and that this requires monetization to maximize capital gains. She elaborates, saying that “(...) visibility just fits into an ideal of where we would be at this moment (...) But it’s an empty gesture in a lot of ways. And it’s a gesture that I’m always questioning. Are they—meaning the audiences obsessed with and consuming media about transness—tapping into a derivative pornographic obsession with transgender bodies? Or are they putting me on display as a circus freak show, in a ‘We’re all secretly laughing at you’ sort of way?” (42). Huxtable demonstrates here that visibility is impossible to extract from the fetishistic byproducts of racial capitalism; it requires negotiation grounded in what Gossett refers to as “politics of evasion and refusal” (48).

The paradox of trans visibility has the potential to be exacerbated by dominant claims made about photography as a neutral site of truth and knowledge production, despite a violent history dating back to its invention during the European colonization of Africa. Photography was

not only used to document atrocities against enslaved peoples, but it was implemented as a device of colonial power. Consent to photograph was rarely ever asked for by European colonizers and photographs using Black bodies were staged to support the colonial project (Maynard), while photographic evidence of sexually ‘deviant’ bodies served as justification for their regulation and punishment. Photography served as visual evidence that Blackness—namely non-European physical features—were antithetical to ‘proper’ white masculinity and femininity predicated upon the colonial regime’s standards of what constituted personhood, implicating the gender binary in the racial project of colonization.

An observation made by Joynt et. al. is especially useful in understanding the connection between photography’s use as a device for colonization and its role in regulating white gendered bodies in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries within U.S. gender clinics. Not only did photography form an important part of American national and imperial projects, but it helped secure the growth of scientific and medical knowledge that established the institutions of the state’s new apparatus Joynt et. al. describe the typical imagery that these clinics produced: “Patients were often posed against a blank wall, with their faces obscured or covered by a black bar. Occasionally, the hand of a doctor would intervene in the photographic plane, pointing to particular qualities on the body or holding them up on display” (2). Photographic evidence played an essential role in the efforts of early twentieth-century sexual scientists to establish their discipline as what Michel Foucault describes as ‘legitimate knowledge’ (Sutton 422). Photography was portrayed as kind of a neutral site to produce "scientific" knowledge about gender, but existed within a colonial and white-supremacist framework that fetishised transness and erased the lived experiences of trans people.

In particular, the post-transition glamor shot exemplifies this relationship between trans visibility and legibility within photography. Taken by sexologists, the doctors responsible for assigning gender ‘diagnoses,’ this type of photography was used as evidence to validate the success of treatment and attest to trans* patients’ capacity to assimilate (Joynt et. al. 7). This archetypal gendered imagery that is predominant in the archive is heavily reliant upon class privilege and white femininity. The heteropatriarchal male gaze becomes materialized within the photographic archive due to the sexologists’ role behind the camera and the function of these photographs. This attests to how photographing trans subjects, namely when the paradox of trans visibility dominates representations of trans subjectivity, can be a means of reinscribing epistemological violence. This is why attentiveness to my process throughout every stage is so crucial to the ethical execution of *Take Care*.

IV. Home as Body/Body as Home: A Theoretical Approach

The term ‘homebody’ denotes finding pleasure in the home. To be a homebody requires these conditions: firstly (and most obviously), access to shelter must be in place, and there must be a sense of comfort and security around such a space that enables one to *prefer* being home. When I refer to my analytical process of understanding the connection between transness and the homebody as a ‘teasing out,’ I intend to convey that there is an interiority within the home and the body, respectively, that is actively cultivated. To tease out requires a degree of restraint and craft. This means welcoming refusal that can take place during the process of curating the photo-based zine, collecting interviews, and writing about them, all of which are, again, predicated on consent. Tuck and Yang describe refusal as follows: “First, refusal turns the gaze back upon power, specifically the colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be differentially counted, violated, saved, and put to work. It makes transparent the metanarrative of knowledge

production—its spectatorship for pain and its preoccupation for documenting and ruling over [difference]” (19). Photography is not a neutral mediator, especially when it comes to documenting gendered and racialized bodies. “[Turning] the gaze back upon power” within my methodology at-large by encouraging reciprocal transparency throughout each stage of the process while welcoming dissent ensures that *Take Care* prioritizes care for the subjects who comprise it.

To understand the relationship between transness and home as body/body as home, I draw heavily from queer critical geographies. While critical geographies center the relationships between space and embodiment overall, such theories hold that the expectations and practices of the inhabitants within certain places influence how queer/trans subjects are deemed legible as their authentic selves (Nash 587). Nash notes that trans people experience shifting, flexible realities in terms of self-presentation, relationship to place, and the ‘readability’ of their bodies in public. Therefore, this necessitates an analysis of the spaces that trans people inhabit due to, again, trans subjectivity relational—rather than solely interior—nature. In response to this need, I situate Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling’s (2006) ‘critical geographies of home’ from their book *Home* in conversation with theories of queer temporalities to contextualize my choice to photograph trans people in their spaces for my zine *Take Care*.

Blunt and Dowling identify three components of a critical geography of home: “home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar” (22). Katherine Brickell writes that the ‘material and imaginative’ evokes home not only as a physical location in which people reside but also as an imaginative and metaphorical space of emotion and belonging. She continues, stating that the second facet, “home, power and identity,” “ties into debates concerning the domestic as a locus of personality,

belonging and meaning to which people are differently positioned, and differentially experience according to age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class,” in other words, how identity influences experiences of the domestic (228). Finally, the third—‘multi-scalar’—component emphasizes home as a site of personal relations that transect public and political worlds. Home as a site of knowing oneself complicates its purpose as a solely domestic space. For queer people who have had to live both public and private lives, these spheres intersect within home as body/body as home because of the intimacy that home can provide.

Dana Kaplan and Mark Andrucki’s 2017 study builds off Blunt and Dowling’s critical geography of home, providing insight into the relationship between the materiality of the home and queer temporalities. Orienting their claims around the analysis of an array of unique objects found in transmasculine participants’ homes, Kaplan and Andrucki argue that trans domesticity emerges from “queerly material relationships (...) materialized as and embedded in these hybrid types of objects that encompass both past and present” (794). These objects reflect the concept of queer temporalities in which time “is not regulated by ‘clock’ time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting,” but rather enfolds “the more-than-linear ways that queers experience, live against, and creatively reconstruct” the organization of our lives against dominant frameworks of power (784). Kaplan and Andrucki note that objects’ physical presence as well as their arrivals and disappearances are tethered to the performance of domesticity within the home as a social space, “suspending the home-dweller in a kind of horizontal temporality which enfolds the past and is open to the potential of the future” (785). Objects not only play a role in constituting individual identities, but they also “cohere and orient” trans bodies to space and time (786). They can direct our orientations to the space as a whole through the emotional responses they incite when we see and/or interact with them. Home is a site of reinvention that

the changing displays we build in our spaces versus what we store away reflect, whether that be walls decorated with posters or shelves laden with trinkets.

The queer/trans home reflects the trans/itioning body in that both reject linearity, invoking a sense of synchronicity within oneself and resisting psychiatric narratives that mark a clear beginning and end to transitioning. Kaplan and Andrucki reference Andrew Gorman-Murray's analysis of gay men's homes in which Gorman-Murray notes "that the juxtaposition of cherished objects at home 'not only (re)unites these diverse identity fragments, but materially embeds a "whole" self within domestic space'" (785). Kaplan and Andrucki draw attention how this is especially applicable to queers and other marginalized subjects "whose complex identities are not 'affirmed or easily performed in the public sphere'" (785). The authors conclude that the home constitutes a space where trans bodies are not simply constructed as "passing or non-passing objects" as they are in public; rather, home enables trans subjects to recognize the multiplicities embedded within trans identities.

V. Writing Home: Interpreting Survey Responses and Photographs

Across the survey responses I received from all 19 friends who participated in *Take Care*, there appeared to be a consensus that "home" is unable to grapple with its own complexity; in one respondent's words, "home is a non-word." Even if respondents identified a specific place or person(s) as their definition of home, the sentiment that home is tethered to *feeling* was either implicitly or explicitly expressed throughout each of the three questions I posed in the survey. For example, "Home is an emotional response to true unconditional love." Respondents expressed gratitude for experiencing "freedom" in their body, or synchronicity between internal desires and the functions their bodies can enact: "I'm just grateful for such a strong body that handles all of this crazy shit I put it through;" "I feel most in sync with my body when my

conscious choices are aligned with my corporeal capabilities.” Simultaneously, a majority of respondents alluded to or explicitly discussed a feeling of disembodiment around the self-perception of their bodies, whether that translates into the dysphoria that accompanies seeing a stranger in the mirror, or anxiety about adhering to beauty standards. Bodily autonomy, psychic and physical, or a reprieve from the “*heaviness*” of external perception was frequently named as an identifier of home across respondents’ answers to the prompts. This could mean “feeling something new and familiar [when I look into the mirror] at the same time;” “feeling like your body is really yours, like it’s an extension of yourself in the same way a space could be or a really close relationship could be;” or “just [*being*], (...) [moving] throughout the world lightly.” For some, experiencing ‘body as home’ was not a state that could be actively identified by its presence alone, but rather the absence of stressors: the bustle of city life, the gaze of people on the street, or critical self-perception. Several respondents noted their resistance to an understanding that “the self is contained to or belongs to the body,” which I found reflected their thinking around what about their spaces was important to them.

Similar to responses around how ‘body as home’ fluctuate depending on the circumstances respondents may find themselves in, survey responses indicate that conceptions of home as a physical space are fluid as functions and appearances shift. The ability to “curate” a space was repeatedly mentioned across responses, highlighting the role that objects play in establishing home. As one respondent noted, “My space is a collection of all the things I’ve wanted to take with me. A lot of the time, being queer and trans has involved leaving people and places that couldn’t support the person I was becoming. My room is the opposite of that: it contains the good memories, the reminders of communities I have built for myself, and the remaining things from my past that still support me.” Another respondent replied, “Whenever I

curate my space, I usually try to bring pieces that existed in my previous spaces. I have a hard time letting go of objects, especially if they carry sentimental feelings, so my current space actually has mementos from previous spaces.” In these instances, home is about addressing individual needs within a particular moment, broadly speaking (i.e., identifying with your space, and in turn, realizing that that’s truly yours). Home also refers to a connectedness to our personal histories and, in turn, our communities. It draws us into an embrace with the sentimentality we experience in the first because of the relationships we forge with our social worlds.

For respondents, home—whether an entire apartment or a bedroom alone—can be less about a fixed location, and more about the ability to use whatever space they occupy as a site of self-expression, “an extension of myself, a hug.” Despite the attentiveness to the self that cultivating a home may necessitate, it is a process influenced by our socialization. Our spaces typically reflect the relationships we hold close, both in the ways that we might arrange our spaces to accommodate company, or how we remind ourselves of our loved ones through trinkets, photographs, or posters.



Fig. 4: Noa in his room

My shoot with Noa exemplifies the curation of home spaces as reflecting our internal and external worlds where the lines between the two are blurred. Prior to setting up this shot per Noa's direction, I asked Noa about the artwork on his walls. He pointed out the postcards lining the side of his mirror, the middle being a thank-you card he commissioned an artist to design for his friends who supported him during a major part of his transition. Whether or not the choice to place this next to his mirror was intentional is uncertain. Nonetheless, Noa's request to be photographed alongside this piece and the ease with which we were able to set up this composition (his relaxed, unposed body language included) indicates a sense of belonging in his space and in his body. Noa's eyes are not pointed back at his own gaze, but rather directed to the tattoo on his arm. While I am wary of speaking for Noa, I recognize his look when I glance in the mirror at my own tattoos on my trans body, visible reminders that my body is *actually* mine. This photograph reads to me as a testament to the active cultivation of one's space and body and

the tangledness of the two, where both are indicative of our relationships with ourselves and our communities.

IV. Conclusion: Homecoming

Developing *Take Care* has made me consider what my body as home is and can be.

Understanding my body as home is remembering the soreness I'd feel after kneeling in Mass when I was little, feeling guilty for inhabiting an intrinsically sinful body without even knowing what that really meant; it's soaring and diving as I dance now, glittering with sweat in the dark. Body as home is understanding that time will stretch beyond me and *to dust I shall return*, but my body is still sacred and worthy of love and worthy of giving it, too. It's knowing that I can hold my body down and opening myself up to how I can get there. Recognizing that I can feel at home in my body means taking ownership of the histories and possibilities this body of mine contains while being receptive to my own desire for change. Taking action towards this state of embodiment enables me to better take care of the people I love while recognizing the love I receive. On my worst days, my dysphoria sends me spiraling: I doubt that I can love my body as it is now, or that my transitioning body can be loved even when I reach a sense of bodily synchronicity between what I want to be and how the world sees me. Embracing euphoric

moments on better days enables me to imagine future possibilities for myself, and in turn, my relationships. If I tend to myself, I can tend to you, and together, we can find home in each other. In my personal definition, this is what underscores *home as body* and tethers it to *body as home*.

I began photographing for this project six months ago amid overwhelming uncertainty around the future of my transition: namely, how and if my biological family would accept me now that I was out, and how I would afford the out-of-pocket costs for my top surgery. I write this now with less than a week until surgery, my fundraising goal fully met because of the support of my friends and community at large. Mourning the loss of my relationship with my family and, by proxy, the Maryland that I grew up with was a heartbreak worse than I've ever experienced before, but being in this body has taught me that I don't have to settle for what's familiar. Orienting my relationships around the definitions of care my partner, my friends, and myself have established—both in allowing myself to be cared for and to care for them, too—has enabled me to be “less and less willing to inhabit a world where we don't show up, and where whole systems fail to show up for us” (Malatino 72). When beginning my transition was a desire I had yet to articulate in the spring of this year, I described a short film I had produced during that period about my family in Maryland as reflective of “carving out a space for a home amidst upheaval.” Returning to the idea that trans subjectivity is relational rather than purely internal, I think that this sentiment is characteristically trans as we continue to navigate a social world with constantly fluctuating parameters. Caring for each other is how we survive these shifts. It's also how we find our way home.

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