Foreword

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They would walk, stop, dance, laugh, fuck, fuck again, sleep, run and leave, in an eternal organic cabaret. Spaces had no purpose because all was constantly moving, changing, flowing. Some days the streets would appear vertically, or curve around to become loopy bridges. In the cracks of Rome would bloom temporary utopias, orgiastic ephemeral moments intensely burning before disappearing into ashes. (SasaHara)

How does one write about sex? Like eating, sleeping, and breathing, sex is part of the "eternal organic cabaret" of our lives. The "orgiastic ephemeral moments," as SasaHara calls them, enfold themselves within time and space, flowing into each other, repeating themselves throughout days, years, centuries, never the same but always alike. In fact, sex permeates the world far beyond, before, and outside of the perimeters of human experience. Sex, if understood to comprise reproduction and thus the creation of all life, forms the very basis of existence: from the creation and evolution of species to the process of pollination.

While sex is omnipresent, permeating our private and public lives, our entertainment and politics, staring down at us from commercial billboards, singing to us through music, often merely talking about the subject leads to a wide array of reactions. Ranging from shy giggles to shushing to lewd grins and to flushed faces, talking about sex and its many facets also results in outright sanitisation of speech, rejection, or even charges with obscenity. When and why did something so central to human experience become difficult to talk about? Did it start when Victorian society confined sex to the utilitarian parents' bedroom and made silence the primary rule (Foucault 6)? Or did these difficulties already originate with the rise of Christianity, whose doctrine prescribes silence and suppression regarding the needs and desires of one's worldly body as the only ticket to redemption from the original sin? Yet, carried globally by and through cultures, faiths, and values, a silence around sex is found across a vaiety of religious contexts across the world, originating both as a result of and separate from Western colonialism. While there is slightly more transparency regarding sex as an act—that is, once people are deemed to be of an 'appropriate age,' mainly to ensure no teenage pregnancies arise—the felt impossibility to communicate openly about desires and sexual preferences runs as a red thread through sex education programs (if they, in fact, exist), the 'birds and the bees' talk, and even extends into our bedrooms. Many people struggle to pronounce the sentence 'I like it more when you move your hand like this,' but in the meantime our phone conversations are brimming with voluptuous peaches and aubergines, strawberries and bananas.

How is it possible that sex is everywhere all the time, but remains a somewhat taboo topic in our day-to-day conversations?

The taboo on sex has not always existed: seen as a primal force that "permeated all life in the cosmos, from gods to mortals, to the animal world" (Johnson 1), *ēros* was extensively discussed in ancient Greek literature. Lust and love were central to drama, love poetry, philosophical works, and epics (Johnson 1), through which ancient Greek writers provide us with an insight into the role and practices of sex in Ancient Greece. Cultural historian Marguerite Johnson adds, however, that the primary mode in which representations of sex in Greek literature are conveyed to us is through the perspective of the elite man (1). This has remained the case, more or less, for thousands of years: experienced and expressed in "thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships" (Chakraborty and Thakurata 250), human sexuality has been intrinsically shaped in and by the patriarchy.

Against the Silencing of Pleasure

To start shifting this focus, swarms of writers and decades-long, unforgettable efforts of feminist theorists and activists in challenging the silence surrounding (female) sexuality were necessary (Tripathi 181). Today, words like rappers Cardi B's and Megan Thee Stallion's in "WAP" (2020), earning both wide-ranging critique and accolades, assertively push awareness of the inability to speak about female pleasure into the open:

> Spit in my mouth, look at my eyes
> This pussy is wet, come take a dive
> [...]
> I want you to park that big Mack truck right in this little garage
> Make it cream, make me scream
> Out in public, make a scene
> [...]

He got a beard, well, I'm tryna wet it
I let him taste it, and now he diabetic
I don't wanna spit, I wanna gulp
I wanna gag, I wanna choke
[...]
Now get a bucket and a mop, that's some wet ass pussy
[...]
Macaroni in a pot, that's some wet ass pussy, huh

Today, texts like "WAP" are becoming more commonplace, and many would agree that these are energetic steps towards a world that values and speaks freely about non-male, non-cishet pleasure. Yet, even texts like WAP make clear: when female sexuality is discussed, it is often discussed in playful or ironic terms. While this is a strength on the one hand, it also shows on the other hand that a serious discussion of female pleasure is far from self-evident. We are nowhere close to a queer-feminist world in which the non-male is no longer oppressed and seen as the inferior sex, and in which diverse sexual preferences and practices are normalised alongside heterosexual behaviour. Instead, patriarchal structures, which silence alternative forms of pleasure, are held in place through heteronormativity. Judith Butler explains that "heterosexual privilege operates in many ways, and two ways in which it operates include naturalizing itself and rendering itself as the original and the norm" (125-6).

To counter the naturalisation of heterosexual privilege Butler refers to, and to create space for sex in a world where sex is always implied but never discussed, this issue of *FRAME* wants to provide the space to write sex seriously. Seven authors discuss sexual practices, orientations, identities, and desires as they are portrayed in literature, and consider how these portrayals reflect and challenge our lived experience of sex and the sexual.

In our Masterclass section, Jennifer Jasmine White suggests that parts of Angela Carter's work might be regarded as 'auto-orientated,' understood alongside an increasingly popular mode in literature and

philosophy that privileges embodiment, hybrid-genres, and an emphasis on the self in the production of texts and concepts. Her article "'The nature of flesh, which is to say, the world': Reading Sex in the Angela Carter Papers" claims that Carter's own embodied sexuality and the connection to her work have largely been neglected. White proves this by looking at the short story "Flesh and the Mirror" as being auto-orientated; as being inspired by Carter's own sexuality and as an example of how Carter questioned the autofictional process itself.

In "Sex and the Sanskrit Classics: Untranslatability, Code-Switching, and Sexed-up Translations" in our main section, Maddalena Italia explores the (un)translatability of sex as represented in Sanskrit classical poetry. By examining two translated erotic stanzas of the *Śṛṅgāraśataka* by Bhartṛhari (ca. fifth-seventh century) that deal with sexual pleasure, Italia discusses, in a Foucauldian vein, the way in which translators and readers have a multi-faceted and often contradictory relationship with sex—especially sex in textual works with a "classical" status. Focussing particularly on translations in French and Latin by Hippolyte Fauche, and in Hindi and English by Purohit Gopinath, Italia complicates the intermingled traditional narratives and receptions of Bhartṛhari's work, particularly by deconstructing silence and expression, as well as repression and obsession. As such, Italia powerfully moves beyond the narratives of obfuscation and censorship in Sanskrit classical poetry, and instead reveals some unconventional and hidden layers of sexual pleasure as experienced by women in the nineteenth century.

Against Heteronormative State Ideology

Moving on, censorship is still a recurring theme in the sexual sphere. If sex is part of an organic, eternal cycle, what exactly about it is censored, and why? Does the designation of a set of practices, identities, and fantasies as forbidden not merely fuel the flames of desire, as secrecy does to curiosity? Michel Foucault's point, in Butler's eyes, is an even stronger one:

> In the case of sexuality [...] the prohibitive law runs the risk of eroticizing the very practices that come under the scrutiny of the law. The enumeration of prohibited practices not only brings such practices into a public, discursive domain, but it thereby produces them as potential erotic enterprises and so invests erotically in those practices, even if in a negative mode. Further, prohibitions can themselves become objects of eroticization, such that coming under the censure of the law becomes what Freud called a necessary condition for love. (Butler 109)

Of course, throughout recent years, more liberal values have taken root in some countries, and practices once prosecuted and censored widely, such as oral sex, anal sex, queer sex, and group sex have now acquired a legal, yet taboo status in some countries. In the literary sphere, while erotic novels like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) were only openly published thirty years after writing, novels like the popular BDSM-romance *50 Shades of Grey* (2011) reached cult status immediately. Yet, the fact that one is allowed to write about the subject of sex more freely in some spheres in the present does not mean these writings will necessarily be good sex writing. Since 1993, Literary Review's Bad Sex in Fiction Award honours each year's scene of outstandingly poorly written, cringeworthy sexual descriptions in otherwise commendable novels. But as Tina Horn exclaims in her interview, paraphrasing Annie Sprinkle: "the solution to bad sex writing is not no sex writing—it's better sex writing!" (126). This issue of *FRAME*, therefore, discusses some "good sex writing": it wanders between the literary loci of sex, its absence, presence, normalisation to sensationalisation, exposal, and suppression. In "Writing Sex," several authors touch on the issue of state censorship specifically, amongst them Müge Özoğlu and Anna Ziering in conversation with Tina Horn.

In our main section, Müge Özoğlu explores in "Writing non-Turkish Subjectivities, Writing Contradictions: Twentieth-Century Istanbul in *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*" encyclopaedia entries of queer figures of Istanbul nightlife that go beyond the regulatory state discourses of the Turkish

nation-state in the twentieth century. The encyclopaedia, written by historian Reşad Ekrem Koçu and published between 1944 and 1973, is known as a queer archive of the Ottoman Empire, brimming with nostalgia. Here, it is examined with a focus on more recent history: the article scrutinises the entries about twentieth-century Istanbul, entries that frequently include contradictions, especially concerning gender and sexuality. Diving into the histories of foreign and queer individuals, Özoğlu traces the ways in which Koçu "employed non-Turkish subjectivities as convenient tools to express his fascination for different sexualities, all the while avoiding conflict with the state ideology and the heteronormative identity promoted by the state" (70).

In our Miscellaneous section, the interview "'I Want Them To Feel Everything': A Conversation with *SfSx* Creator Tina Horn" by Anna Ziering considers *SfSx*, Horn's dystopian graphic novel series on sex work, censorship, coercion and radical queer pleasure, as a kinky and subcultural text that participates in the literary discussion on sex, race, and power. Contributing to the field of Kink Studies, the work asks questions about the visual, artistic, and literary representation of sex, the purpose of the texts within and outside the kink community, and how these texts reflect the state of our world today. Ziering concludes that "*SfSx* de-sensationalizes kink without reducing its eroticism, and along the way, it offers a vision of the new worlds these complex intimacies might allow us to build" (123).

Against the Standardisation of Bodies and Identities

With the ubiquity of sex in the media comes the idea that sex needs to be available anywhere, all the time. Porn has become the most profitable market on the web (Preciado 38). Meanwhile, the components of the pill are the most used pharmaceutical molecules in history (Preciado 28), signalling the importance of sex as a heterosexual recreational practice. Furthermore, living in today's social climate, which is governed by 'normative beauty's' iron fist, many people feel pressured to be sexy and ready for sex at any given moment. Always ready to consume,

and always ready to be consumed, the sexual body is central to an economy of exploitation. For Paul B. Preciado, "sex is the corollary of capitalism and war, the mirror of production. The dependent and sexual body and sex and all its semiotechnical derivations are henceforth the principal resource of post-Fordist capitalism" (40). Additionally, Preciado explains, "sex has become such a part of plans for power that the discourse on masculinity and femininity, as well as techniques of normalising sexual identity, have turned into governmental agents on the control and standardization of life" (69).

Sexual identity is a key concept in this discussion. Different sexual identities can be turned against each other as a resource in the strive for power. With this purpose in mind, claims Preciado, "[h]etero and homosexual identities were invented in 1868" (69). This practice extends to the politics of gendered bodies, with cis bodies opposing trans bodies, waging one identity against the other. Striving for a "standardization of life" to guide humanity into more comfortable waters, we often limit our understanding of gender and sexual identities to the feminine and the masculine, privileging these manifestations over the many other multifaceted, rich, and blurred interpretations that are lived everywhere. Butler aptly states that "'being a man' and [...] 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely" (126-7). It would be more useful, and more true, to move away from binary modes of identification that dictate we can be one thing but never another, and let alone simultaneously. Perhaps comfortable waters are those in which we realise, accept, and give full expression to our multifaceted, complex identities.

Recent political identification processes have created a third stream out of queerness, rather than leading the separated rivers of the masculine and the feminine into an ocean of entangled identities. Now, the "sex-gender-industrial complex" (28), as Preciado calls the system that commercially exploits our sexual practices and expressions, has reached

its finale. Continuing the practice of separating and establishing hierarchies of the sexes and sexual identities, today, anything queer has been added as a spicy, rainbow-coloured condiment to heteronormative ways of being:

> Indeed, we can glimpse the willful jettisoning of queerer politics in the privatization of a public sex culture, the commodification of queerness into a market niche, and the drive for LGBT inclusion within nationalist citizenship, symbolized by efforts to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and legalizing gay marriage. In short, "homonormative" policies—to use Lisa Duggan's term—have become the endgame of sexual politics. (Bradway, n.p.)

How, then, do we flow into a society that embraces sexual wellbeing and pleasure for every adult? How can we achieve a state of being in which we are able to speak, write, and act out gender identities and consensual sex freely, while decommodifying queer practices? Historically, the utopia has functioned as a literary device to imagine such better futures: in as far back as the early nineteenth century, utopian 'feminist-at-the-time' socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) was scorned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for wanting to "rehabilitate the flesh by valuing its pleasure and incentives" in order to "improve the status of all members of society through peaceful means" (Poldervaart 41). To enable people to live a life more in line with their needs, his philosophy was "open toward all expressions of and experiments with sexual preference, and maintained a critical attitude vis-à-vis the self-evidence of heterosexual monogamy" (60). Fourier called for a "radical change in the position of women" (48), which would then lead to an "appreciation of sexuality, love, and the distribution of domestic chores as political issues" (59). Reminiscent of Fourier's early flirtations with (proto-) queer-feminist utopian fantasies, *FRAME*'s next two authors dive into young adolescent Latino literature and lesbian feminist magazines to discuss their own understanding of queer-feminist utopias.

In main section article "No Shame in this Queer Thang: Sex, Place, and Belonging in Charles Rice-González's *Chulito*," Robert LaRue offers a contrarian reading of queer sex as being rooted in shame. Through his careful analysis of queer Latino characters in Rice-González's novel, LaRue not only makes visible and reaffirms the presence of sex and desire in the lives of young Latinos, but also grounds this presence in the context of the actors' personal spaces and neighbourhoods. As a result, sex "must be messy and explicit, because this is the context in which [Chulito] exists" (LaRue 31). LaRue's contribution, then, is a movement towards a realistic representation and acknowledgment of queer sex, one that seeks to contribute to José Esteban Muñoz's imagining of a *queer utopia*.

Through speculative reader-response analysis, Sam Forrey explores, in our masterclass section, how pornographic stories in the lesbian-feminist masochist magazine *On Our Backs* (1984-2006), subvert expectations of lesbian sexuality through reader's affective responses—corporal sensations such as arousal, disgust, excitement, and shame. Forrey argues that through the utilisation of fantasy and queer joy, the editors and contributors of *OOB* used pornography as a feminist praxis and as a way to challenge the anti-sex paradigm of second-wave feminism, thus paving the way for the third-wave feminist movement, which also focused on the celebration of sexual difference and on putting a stop to the policing of female bodies.

For a Non-Hierarchical, Amorous World Beyond the Human

So how can we then, in Fourier's terms, enter a "new amorous world" (Poldervaart 28)? Literature will not infuse the world with new types of morality and appreciation for gender and sex diversity overnight, but it can argue against the naturalisation of heteronormativity, against the regulation of sexual desires, and for intimacy in all its shapes and forms. By portraying a multitude of sexualities and identities, which are different, which empower, which are all extraordinary and everyday, clean and filthy, taboo and fetish, queer and straight, pleasurable and free from

shame, literature can help us envision a society that embraces everyone's pleasure instead of shunning it. After all, as LaRue writes, "it is for this right to live a pleasurable—not simply pleasant—life that [we] fight" (22).

As was established at the beginning of this foreword, sex does not belong to humans alone, and neither should our understanding of a pleasurable, utopian life exist in a vacuum that separates the human from the environment we are embedded in. As Anohni's, singer of *Anohni and the Johnsons*, first of "13 Tenets of Future Feminism" in her exhibition at Amsterdam's Holland Festival reads: "The subjugation of women and the earth is one and the same" (Holland Festival). This does not just refer to the way in which women became biologically essentialised to their emotional and nurturing qualities under capitalism and the patriarchy, but also to how these systems have subjugated nonhuman animals and entities.

Dismantling these systems therefore calls for embracing sex in all its facets, practices, orientations, identities, desires, and actors, both human and nonhuman. A society based on relationality rather than hierarchy, on feeling as well as reason, forms the basis of a utopian outlook that could elucidate how it might feel to live in a world in which everyone can embrace pleasure, an eco-erotic world that does not subjugate women or any other living being, that goes beyond the "limitations of Western ontologies that uphold human/nonhuman divides" (Contreras Ruiz 109). *FRAME*'s final masterclass article's author discusses just such a utopia.

In her article "Relating Otherwise: Erotic Power, Indigenous Relationality, and More-Than-Human Entanglements in Natalia Diaz's 'The First Water is the Body,'" Constanza Contreras Ruiz reads Diaz's rejection of the metaphorical label assigned to her equation of her body with the Colorado River as an eco-erotic poetics of the body that signals the importance of experiencing the world through one's senses. Contreras Ruiz argues that this serves as an act of individual liberation, as a decolonial tool, and paves the way to a non-hierarchical world in which human-nonhuman relations proliferate. Engaging with Diaz's poetry through the lenses of ecocriticism, Indigenous relationality, and new materialism, Contreras Ruiz makes this argument by combining insights about Lorde's erotic power and Lorena Cabnal's

body-land territory in particular. Ultimately, her close reading shows that Diaz's poem serves to transgress the Western human/nature divide, which Contreras Ruiz argues is a necessary first step to developing the eco-erotics of the body and to moving toward an entangled human-nonhuman future.

Through the articles included in this issue, "Writing Sex" invites readers to imagine an anti-speciest, anti-racist, queer-feminist utopia "where the erotic and poetic power enable new possibilities of existing and relating with and along [human and] non-human entities in non-hierarchical and non-possessive engagements" (Contreras Ruiz 109). Hopefully, this issue serves as the first glance at such a utopia, whose ripple effect inspires us to be more motivated and committed to work towards a more equal, pleasurable, and entangled future.

To conclude this foreword, *FRAME* would like to thank the authors who contributed to this issue. We would also like to thank our newly founded advisory board, because of whom *FRAME* is now a fully peer-reviewed journal, for their invaluable advice. We owe a very big and very special thank you to NICA, the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis, without whose generous donation the publication of this issue would not have been possible. We are immensely grateful for your support and hope you can take as much pride in this issue as we do. *FRAME* would also like to thank Selma Hoitink, our designer, for seven years of incredible collaboration and fifteen colourful issues. You have been wonderful to work with. Finally, thank you, dear reader of *FRAME*, for supporting us throughout all these years: *FRAME* is turning 40 next year and we are extremely excited to share our upcoming anniversary issue with you in the Spring of 2024. Without you, our readership, none of this would have been possible.

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