

“Stop. You’re embarrassing yourself.”

Teacher’s words cut through show-and-tell. A room full of ten-year-olds burst into laughter, the snow goggles I’m wearing as a fashion statement conceal my tears. Teacher picks up my Transformer figures that I had been puppeting and throws them into the drawer on her desk.

“But Miss, I’m not finished . . .”

“Yes, you are. What do I tell the class before every presentation?” The smudged corner of her maroon lipstick tries its best to distract me. Usually she wears a brighter red – I don’t know why I know this. I doubt any of the other kids have noticed. She signals toward the back of the classroom – her hand shaky as she does so. Her face is turning cotton candy.

I start to answer her question – words sputtering from my mouth, struggling to match my thoughts, desperate to escape my dry throat.

“It’s a rhetorical question. Go to time out. Think about why you’re so insistent about not doing things the right way.”

*Time out.*

Who gets to decide what is *right* and what is *wrong*? Why doesn’t *right* feel comfortable on me? Who decided something that feels comfortable to me is the *wrong*? My “*unconventional ways*” are often seen as worse than trying at all.

*“You’re embarrassing yourself.”*

Being told to do things the *right* way feels like an attack on my experiences.

They’re saying “*Don’t be yourself.*”

The *right* way is an assault toward those that don’t fill the colouring book as instructed. Colouring outside of the lines is wrong. It means you’re slow. It means you’re defective. It means you’re broken. It means . . .

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Stahp.

Shoot [don’t shoot = work].

Let me [IN] explain myself

—

*{i am a lubly lil fella i swhere}*

EX-PLANE MY-SELF

*(I thought I could fly when I was a kid)*

I am a car with no wheels

moving in slow motion

*I cannot fly*

let me ex-plane

*I could never fly*

[then how can you ex-plane

(I can't)

then how?]

when i was five years old i would pretend that i was Starscream (he was a plane—not a plane, a Transformer – not a Transformer = a Decepticon//villain) and i would spread my arms out wide and i would run in circles pretending that i could fly and when people would say “are you being a plane?” i would reply and say “no, i am Starscream” and my mum would say “but starscream is a bad guy” [put some respect on his name: Starscream] and i would say i would say i would say “Starscream can fly” but Starscream was also a nuisance to everyone around him even his own teammates – they all hated him – i could relate to Starscream [who could transform from a gigantic humanoid robot {in disguise//diss guys} to a jet plane].

I was

very sick

when i was young

they (come for me when it's dark . . . *who comes?* . . . they)

took me to a big dark building called the Hoss Pit Tall

jabbed me with

needles

even

left one in my arm

which i promptly pretended was a gun like Starscream's

– stuck to his forearm –

a permanent weapon.

i struggled with eating

the texture hurt my mouth

i struggled with a lot of things

my actions hurt my mother

i got sick

and it was my fault

when the doctors would//WOOD

WOOD WOOD WOOD WOOD LUMBERJACK AXE YOU A QUESTION

walk by me, i wood pretend to shoot at them

because they wouldn't let me leave.

*you need to eat*

i don't remember how i got there

but

BUTT (hehehehe)

i remember that i hated it there

i hated them

and i hated myself

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In grad(g)e two, my pair-rents attended a cult-like ritual

where villains,

committed to my assimilation,

informed them that I was: too much to handle

out of control

in need of special care.

BeCOZ accordion to them

(multiple thems, it was a ganglike sitchy-aye-shun,

but with struck-chacha – 1 bye 1

[in Smackdown: Know Your Role,

This would be referred to as a

slobberknocker match // now

known as a gauntlet match]

they leckchurred my pear-Ents

about my **FAILURE** to be an

adequate grade twoa/twoer/tooah/2Ah.

“He doesn't listen.”

“Just guesses.”

“Doesn't stay on topic.”

“Ignores instructions.”

“Too quiet.”

“Wonder if he's there at all.”

“Too loud.”

“Needs to use his inside voice.”

“Distracts the other children.”

“Alienates himself.”

“Fiddles too much.”

“Sometimes just stares blankly into nothing.”

“I A M C O N C E R N E D .”

“ I A M C O N C E R N E D .”

“C O N C E R N E D I A M .”

“ C O N C E R N E D I A M .”

~(O>O)~

They said,

my parents that is,

they said . . .

It is O K

O K

Not everyone is good

at school work.

*{they discriminate*

*against our mob}*

Just

try

your

best.

All of the other kids were good

accordion

to the teachers.

“MAYBE WE SHOULD ISOLATE HIM // GET HIM **HELP**”

It took me

a

long

time

to under**OVER**stand how

2

pass as “able-bodyminded”

in most of my day-today encounters

with the n0rM13s that surround me.

Now . . . . .

I

Can(can can you cancan too?)

Hide(and go seek)

That(there-them-the-theirs-they’re-there-thou-thus-think-that-that-that-that)

I

AM(Strawberry Big M)

A(h)

Cr@zZzZzZzZzZzZzyyyy(eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee)

Motherfucker.

~~~~~

I have gotten good at making the crazy invisible

I know when to make my exit

Hide the meltdowns

Obscure the rituals

Camouflage the tics

Withhold the impulses

Live with the confusion

I am smarter than my teachers

gave me credit for.

I am a Transformer.

A robot in disguise—

I diss guys who say that

I am disguised.

~~~~~

I AM DIAGNOSED DIFFERENT.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER

MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER

I AM DISORDERED AT MY CORE

no one can change that because for me

my order has always been dis—

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okay so i have spoken to a lot of professionals that have helped me with ways to get better at being around others from controlling tics and stims to learning the appropriate time to speak in a conversation and even little tips like pausing before saying something so i can take time to consider if what i'm saying might be seen as socially inconsiderate rather than just emotionally curious they also designed exercises for myself to help rein in the qualities that might have me seen as being against the grain because i don't want to be ostracised but when they first said that i just heard "you don't want to be an ostrich" which was both correct and incorrect because i don't mind being a human it is pretty fine but being a big flightless bird with a long neck could also be fun but yeah that wasn't what was said what was said was that you being i you don't want to be ostracised which is true to a degree apparently humans are all social creatures so that makes sense but then i do really like my alone time but i wish i had a longer neck like an ostrich and sometimes a little more social but not always because it tires me out the same way as running long distances which i do a lot because public transport gives me anxiety and if i can avoid it i will anyway the professionals have helped me with fitting in more and my old teachers liked that so did the young ones but the old ones especially they were the king and queenmakers when it came to learning anything in primary school and high school my knowledge was always wrong even when my family said that our way was just as valid i was told that it was wrong the winners write history but winning isn't always fair in fact its mostly not because if you're an insider from a wealthy family with plenty of connections then you get a leg up or a head start both of those phrases bother me but i still use them because others understand what they mean and apparently that's more important than using analogies that actually make sense but people don't understand because they don't know me they're an outsider from my knowledge production like i am an outsider from their knowledge production but i am an outsider almost ninety percent of the time i am not good at maths or numbers or estimating but that is me using all three with wild abandon i often feel like others are cheating when it comes to knowledge because they're working in a format that is designed especially for them to succeed but i have to really think and analyse things so i can translate it into a language that makes more sense to me that's why it takes me so much longer to do things than most people most people being neurotypical or even more socially/financially privileged mad folks i feel like i didn't hear the starting shot from the race gun which is something that scared me in primary school but wouldn't have scared me if i was an ostrich because i could use my big legs and long neck to choke the race starter gun guy out and feel safe again from that disturbing noise maybe others would even thank me.

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I am Wiradjuri.

But

BUTT (hehehehehe)

I have always been put into the educational systems designed under colonisation.

*“we just don’t work the same way as them, you’re still a lubly young man”*

My family never respected these structures so they were never disappointed when I

F A I L E D .

I am disabled.

(don’t use that word)

[but it is true]

(just don’t use it)

[no]

I am mad.

(angry?)

I am crazy.

(intense?)

I am R E T A—

(YOU CAN’T SAY THAT!)

[but the bullies could?]

(they were cruel)

[I want to reclaim it]

(don’t)

[Why?]

(there are politics to reclamation)

I am not good at following directions. Ask my teachers? The ones from primary school that spoke to my parents out of concern. Ask my teachers? The ones from high school that told me my dreams were unrealistic—*“that kind of job isn’t really appropriate for someone like you”*—. Ask my teachers . . . no, not them. The university teachers only know me as an adult. After I had started to untie all of the knots that were made in my *being* through 12-ish//twelve-ish//XII-ish years of {mis}education.

Miss Education did me wrong. She tried to teach me like I was able to be taught in the same way as all the other kids. But the other kids were monkeys, and I was a platypus. Miss Education taught us all to climb trees like monkeys and I couldn't so that meant that  
I F U C K I N G S U C K E D !

I wonder what would've happened if she tried to teach us all how to swim like a platypus does? [oh, but that wouldn't be fair to all of the other children]

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When I am in unfamiliar situations, my skin itches.

All I can think about is tearing it off . . . using my tears – which I have frozen into little icicles – I would cut into my skin to remove it and thus remove the itch. An added bonus? I wouldn't have to worry about all of the whitefellas using my skin to say I am not what I can't help that I am. And if I were to pretend that I wasn't, they would ensure that I remembered that I am because my mob means that I am someone that needs to **NO YOUR PLACE**.

[where is my place?]

[what am i?]

Would you accept me if I play pretend?

Sure. I can't change my insides. But I am awfully good at persuading others that I am

S M A R T .

I can ASS – SIM – A – LATE.

S'long as they don't inspect too closely and look for cracks (I am full of them)

(I am a crackpot).

AHEM:

As a First Nations writer and a disabled/neurodivergent/Mad creator, I proudly embed all of my lived experience and ways of knowing into my work and use it to engage with the complex problems that affect my communities and the wider world we exist in.

My work interrogates approaches to knowing and sharing, how we do so, and what gives individual voices power – especially when those voices come from marginalised communities. I engage with these themes through experimental creative practice as the dominant status quo can sometimes feel oppressive and exclusionary in who it allows to easily walk through its barriers. But—

BUTT (hehehehehe)

I hate



the  
status quo

because

the status  
is  
not  
QUO.

The status is a primary school teacher that thinks I'm an idiot.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT IT MUST FEEL LIKE TO HAVE SOMANY THOUGHT  
SGOING ON IN YOUR HEAD THAT YOU CANT HOLD ONE FOR LONG ENOUGH TO SHAR  
E IT AND YOU CANT HELP BUT JUST THINK ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MAKE SENSE TO  
YOU LIKE PROWRESTLING? this is my head

My head is KNOT a good head fOr sharing in TELLigent infoMATEion.

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I always thought i was stupid  
because that is what i was always positioned as.  
I was someone that didn't do things the same way  
and yet my way would yield results  
samesamebutdifferent.

I was an ostrich.

No, I was to be pointed-and-laughed at. A toy for the other kids to diss—toss into the lake  
with no row boat and one paddle. The teachers made sure the other kids knew that I was  
different. They'd announce it all the time. *"It is time for you to go to your special education."*  
And the kids had been led to believe that special was a bad thing. Not to me. Me, special was  
good. Special meant that it made sense that I didn't fit in with the other chill-dread. Until I  
would see them at morning tea and lunchtime and they would throw sticks and stones at me  
(I've never broken a bone) and yell R E T A —

DON'T USE THAT WORD!

But it happened . . . it happened to me . . . and it hurt.

YOU ARE NOT SMART ENOUGH TO REALISE WHY IT HURT.

One time when I was in grade four, another kid touched me – lightly with his fingers – and my whole body went into shock. The sensory discomfort flushed through me like elecTRICity. I started crying and a teacher came running.

“Alex, did you hurt him?”

“No, I barely even touched him.”

“Well, why is he crying?”

“I swear I only touched him.”

“It’s true Miss.”

“I saw it too.”

“Alex just touched him and he started crying.”

The teacher looked at me and then told me to stop being a baby. “You’re nine years old, stop embarrassing yourself. If you act like a kindergartener then we may as well put you back into kindergarten.”

The next day, Alex tried to touch me again – I kicked him, with all my force, right in the dick. Alex started crying and I said:

“You’re nine years old, stop embarrassing yourself. If you act like a kindergartener then we may as well put you back into kindergarten.”

The teacher saw me and screamed “Principal’s office, NOW!”

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I am a forgetful person. My mind moves too fast to keep up with. So fast that it slows me down. So slow that people call me slow – in a way that is meant to be an insult. When my head moves so fast and my mouth matches it so slow, I struggle to catch the thoughts and my words come out wrong and then I forget and . . .

I A M A F U C K I N G I D I O T ! ! !

I hated myself for a very long time.

It took a lot of assisted self-reflection to learn how to like myself.  
A lot of forgetting what was pushed into me through my schooling.

[RET@—H@LFC@—F@GG—small]

It took me figuring out

how

to

write myself

to  
under **OVER** stand  
that  
i  
quite  
liked  
myself.

It was the other people that—no, no, no . . . it was the pre-built world I live in that designated me defective.

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sometimes words and phrases get caught in the nets of my head and then they repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat and re-pea-TA . . . like, for instance:

STARSCREAM  
STARSCREAM  
STAR’S SCREAM  
STAR’S CREAM  
STAR’S DREAM  
STAIR’S DREAM  
STAIR’S DREAM OF A WAY TO REACH ME.

*I am a star,  
I take meteor showers.*

i am a robot in disguise shooting everyone at the Hoss Pit Tall with the needle embedded in my arm that i have made into a gun because i am a screaming star, yes, i am a nightmare, i am a robot in disguise, a robot in disguise, a row bot in diss guise, a row boat in diss guys—I know what it’s like to be dissed, guys. I do. It’s a feeling that has followed me my entire life. I live in a lake of diss guys, no row boat to find land. This doesn’t even hurt much anymore. What hurts is when I think about the deeper reasons why I am being dissed, guys. It’s because that is how it has always been done. That is how it’s supposed to be done. They said so and they know best. Why? Because they succeeded in the system that their grandpappy designed and you didn’t. You failed. You’re a failure. You’re one of them row boats in diss guys.

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They say:

“You can just do it normally, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

No, but I do though because I can’t draw a proper wheel. My wheel is a tangled squiggle. When I *be* a proper wheel – no one fucking cares. No one sees, no one listens. I can’t wheel well enough to convince anyone that I know what I’m doing. The only way I can get anyone to hear me is by *being* a tangled squiggle in a sea of wheels. I must take pride in playing the strange sideshow that people like me have been traditionally cast in. I have to be big, and loud, and find a way to sincerely embed myself in the text in a way that people have to take notice, even though I am different//disordered.

[YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU ARE DOING!]

I know exactly what I am doing:

*I’m embarrassing myself.*