



COLLECTIVE



CLOSE



READING

a *Beyond Gender* zine



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Lastly, we were also joined by members of the BEYOND GENDER RESEARCH COLLECTIVE, who articulated what is possible with SF and what possible worlds can exist in the genre. From their manifesto:

"WE HAVE LOOKED TO SF FOR NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND FEELING ABOUT GENDER. WE HAVE LOOKED TO IT FOR CYBORGS AND ALIENS, FOR CREATURES WHOSE STRANGENESS SHOWS US THE STRANGENESS IN OURSELVES. WE HAVE LOOKED BEYOND THE BINARY, BEYOND NATURE, BEYOND GENDER. WE HAVE LOOKED FOR SF THAT IS TRANS-INCLUSIVE, THAT IS ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AND ADOPTS AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS. WE HAVE LOOKED FOR SF THAT EMBRACES A UTOPIAN PERSPECTIVE THAT OPENS UP SPACE FOR RADICAL CHANGE. WE HAVE LOOKED FOR SF THAT REJECTS EUROCENTRISM AND MOVES BEYOND ITS OWN WHITE WESTERN

CANON, AND WE HAVE FOUND WONDERFUL THINGS, FANTASTIC NEW WORLDS, AND FORGOTTEN WAYS OF BEING, BUT [...] NOT UNAPOLOGETICALLY ENOUGH.

THIS IS WHAT WE EXPECT FROM SCIENCE FICTION. WE EXPECT SF TO PROVIDE US WITH MORE THAN A SEAT AT THE TABLE. WE EXPECT IT TO OVERTURN THE TABLE, TO TRANSFORM IT INTO A BARRICADE, TO SET THE TABLE ON FIRE.

[...] WE EXPECT A GREAT DEAL FROM SF BECAUSE THIS IS WHAT IT IS FOR: ONE IMPOSSIBLE CALLS TO THE OTHERS, IMAGINING ONE ANOTHER INTO BEING."

'The Beyond Gender Manifesto' published in *Building + Breaking: 8 Conversations about spatial justice*, ed. AAA Diversity Collaborative (2024)

We are beyond gender.

We came together in 2018 in the crumbling edifice of the British university system.

Together, we tried to find our way through what remained of academia.

The path we followed was well trodden.

We ran reading groups, presented at conferences, taught seminars, wrote book chapters.

But this path was built

for individuals, not for the messy multiplicity that we had become.

Almost a decade later we find ourselves, now more outside of the university than within it,

wanting to look back.

We want to excavate the treasures that we have found and forged over the years

- treasures which for too long

have been guarded by paywalls or hidden in the pages of too expensive books.

We want to share these treasures

and we want to continue our journey, moving now down stranger paths but still together,

still into the beyond.

We begin, as we must, with our way of being together, with collective close reading.

COLLECTIVE CLOSE READING IS our way of bringing together our different disciplines, fields of expertise and knowledge of being in the world in our collective reading practice. We seek to analyse the texts we read but also to imagine alongside them, and braid them together in new, startling combinations.

from the Beyond Gender Collective Bio  
(1/?)

to us, it is deeply meaningful that delivering our panel at Unfair Cities the day after the UK general election in 2019 was the venue at which a conference attendee Dr. Hanna Musiol suggested "collective close reading" as a way of conceptualizing the persistent utopianism of our work in the face of collective dismay.

*Collective Close Reading: Queer SF and the Methodology of the Many*

1. Collective - No one creates anything alone
2. Close - We are bound, not by blood, but by shared commitment and friendship
3. Reading - Interpretation always involves creation

1. Collective

- No one creates anything alone

*Collective:* we choose messy multiplicity over the illusory unity of the sole authoritative voice, the single story. Together we fight. The academy's demand for definitive individual scholarship; modernity's fetishization of the single male genius; neoliberalism's untenable valorization of unending competition: these threefold pressures conspire against us, trying to separate us, to turn us against each other. But we refuse to capitulate to these atomizing demands.

*Collective Close Reading: Queer SF and the Methodology of the Many*

CCR on the page

# THE DEEP

# RIVERS SOLOMON

with **DAVEED DIGGS, WILLIAM  
HUTSON, and JONATHAN SNIPES**

THE BOOK YOU CURRENTLY HOLD IN YOUR HANDS—  
and are likely upset that you read too quickly and that is  
now over—is only one step in what its editor, Navah Wolfe,  
described as a game of artistic Telephone. You know how  
the game works: A phrase is whispered from ear to ear, and  
as it's misheard by each participant, the cumulative errors  
transform the phrase into something new and unexpected.

**AFTERWORD**  
*by clipping.*

The Deep is a novella by Rivers Solomon. It follows the story of the wajinru (or, chorus of the deep) - a sea dwelling people whose ancestors were thrown overboard by slavers during the Middle Passage. The wajinru are descended from the people who were pregnant when they were murdered in this way and who, so the story goes, then gave birth to children who could breathe underwater. Solomon did not invent the wajinru. Rather, she reimagined previous iterations of these zoti aleyu (or, strange fish) who first appeared in the musical world of electro duo Drexciya and then in the hip hop group clipping.'s song 'The Deep'. We read The Deep together and have been deeply influenced by the vision of connection across difference that we see in this chorus of strange fish.

Drexciya, clipping. and Solomon have collectively built an underwater world across media, inviting audience participation through its fractious nature and multiple authors, and equally deferring narrative closure through this invitation. The degrees of transformation that characterise each iteration of *The Deep* are not a failure; rather, they gesture towards the open possibility of this story 'continu[ing] indefinitely, happily taking on the adaptations of each new interpreter, into the future' (158). We are invited to join this game of telephone, to transform the story - and possibly, the world - once again.

Queer and trans theory



"The thing that most surprised me about Beyond Gender, is that I think before I came to it, I wanted to hold onto my ideas this is my little field, very un-commons. But then, as I started interacting with Beyond Gender, I started realizing <sup>I couldn't remember</sup> which of us had said what. And that was really, really liberating. That's what's been so wonderful is about letting go of that need to control and master knowledge and having it flow between us in a really lovely way."

"Every piece of academic work we create, even if it is a single authored piece, is never a single authored piece. We ourselves are not singly authored beings in any way, at all. Beyond Gender really is just a way of making that a bit more explicit. All our work is co-created and is produced through these kinds of conversations and collaborations we have."

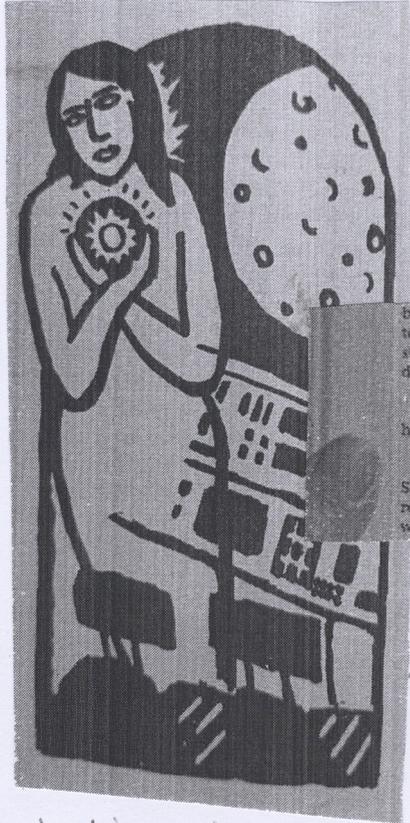




"I think that the reading group scenario can often become just a place in which you can see all of these different versions of precarity and insecurity and arrogance that are conjured by the very particular thing that academia is. I think that the way that we organise and talk is somewhat of an antidote to that. Even the notion of collective close reading is that we're not in competition. I think that, at the core, along with just, the larks and the fun."



"To speak very, very plainly, I find the process of working collectively somewhat more scary, somewhat scarier than working alone, because it really plays with my sense of control. I have this fear of the moment you put your thoughts into the clouds, and they become part of the clouds, you lose your grasp over them. And there is something very, very beautiful about this act of sharing and this openness. But there is something scary too."



The light moves before her like a star among the stars through darkness to the room full of books, where the fire burned in the stone hearth. "Hello, children," Lidi said. "What are we doing here?"

"Telling stories," Sweet Today replied.

Shan had a little voice-recorder notebook in his hand.

"Does it work?" Lidi inquired.

"Seems to. We thought we'd tell . . . what happened," Shan said, squinting the narrow black eyes in his narrow black face at the firelight. "Each of us. What we—what it seemed like, seems like, to us. So that . . ."

## The Shobies' Story

by

Ursula K. Le Guin

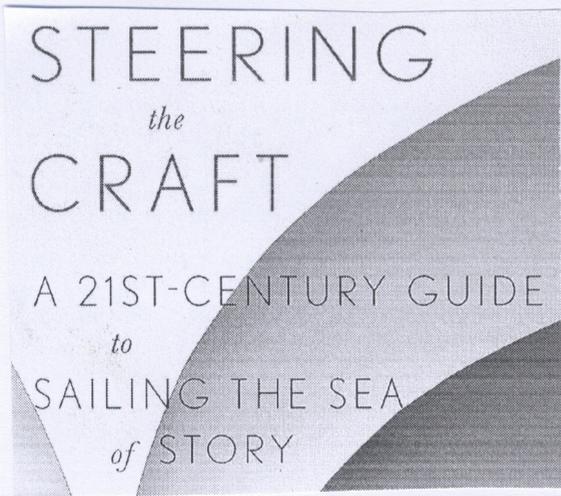
illustrations by Michael Storrings

2. Close - We are bound, not by blood, but by shared commitment and friendship

At the beginning of Ursula K. Le Guin's novelette, "The Shobies' Story," we are introduced to a group of people from across the Ekumen who have gathered together to test an experimental mode of instantaneous space travel. We meet them in their "iseye," a word that, in the dominant language of this fictional universe, means "'making a beginning together,' or 'beginning to be together,'"—a period in which a number of individuals consciously and consensually coalesce to form a group ("The Shobies' Story" 75). However, as both characters and readers learn, the process of group formation is never truly over;

Collective Close Reading: Queer SF and the Methodology of the Many

The Shobies discover that they each had an entirely distinct experience after the completion of their faster-than-light journey. Each of them remembers their short visit to the planet M-60-340-nolo differently—some crew member will swear that they went down to the surface while another remembers them all staying firmly in the ship. The disorientation of these competing narratives threatens to tear them apart. However, by drawing on the skills they developed in their iseye they are able to come back together. They each share their memories, not in the hope of finding the one true account, but rather so that they can better understand one another through the act of collective storytelling. Like the Shobies, our goal is not to speak with one voice, it is to be able to speak to one another even when our experiences feel like they directly conflict.

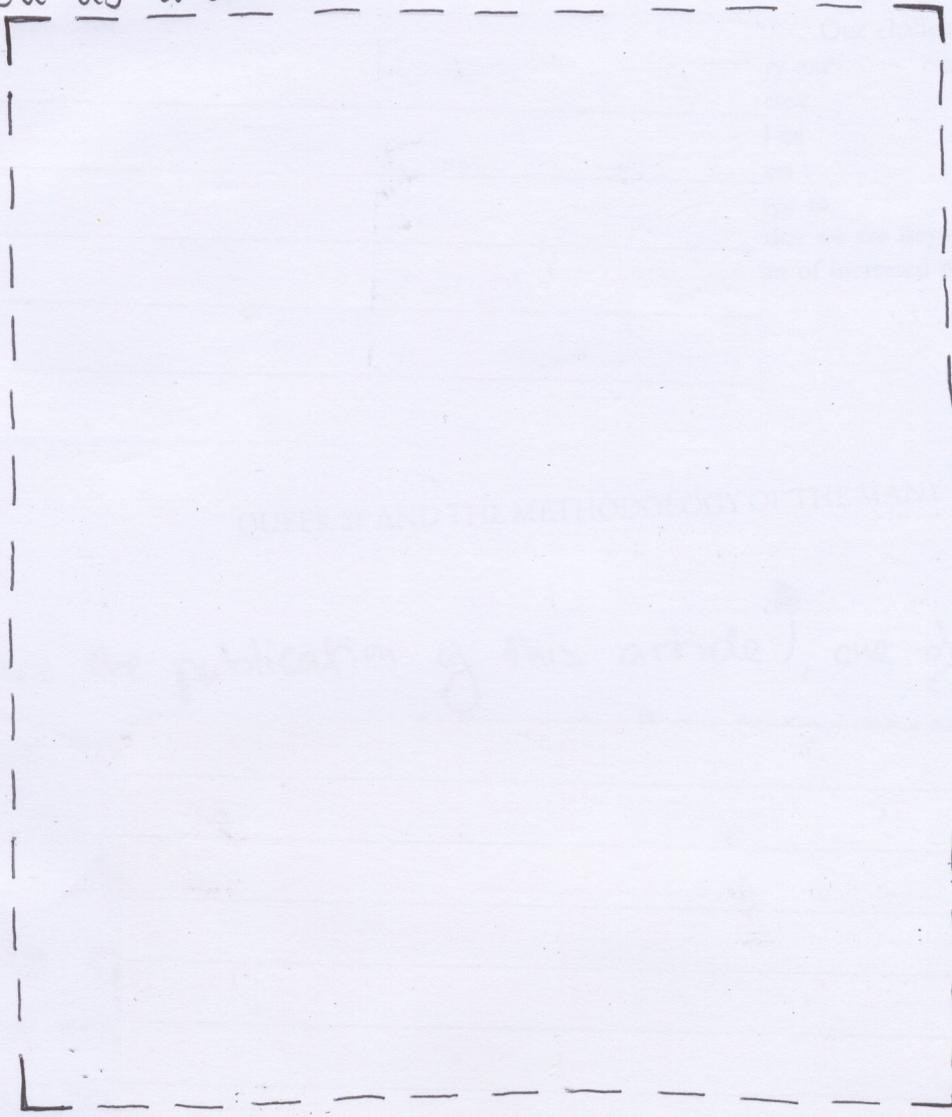


I read through *Steering the Craft* and I thought we could adapt Exercise 8 called Changing Voices (where you have to write a situation from a number of different positions/voices). I thought it would be good to have everyone write a few sentences describing something - for example, we are on a spaceship and an unknown entity suddenly appears in the middle of the bridge, or something space related - everyone shares then shares their writing in the chat box. We take turns reading from our stories and from the chat box (or people can read their contributions if they want to). The idea is to replicate the Shobies story - where everyone has a different experience of the same phenomena. I thought we could read everyone's contributions out loud and then collectively decide what the entity is. (So again, here I'm suggesting we use a creative writing exercise to performatively engage with the text and its process of collective formation.) Does this make sense?

URSULA K.  
LE GUIN

An alien has landed in front of you.

Tell us about it



Now find someone else and ask them about the alien

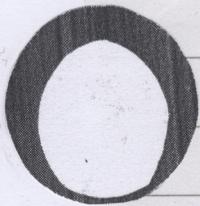


"There is extreme importance in thinking through care and not seeing it as entirely captured by capitalist operations. So I would always return to care and I think the community that we are in, in *Beyond Gender* is inherently about care."

"The manifesto is what we feel about science fiction. And anyone who agrees with that and wants to do that in their work can be beyond gender. If someone else tomorrow set up another group and called it *Beyond Gender* and stole all our stuff, I just wouldn't care. They can clone it, mutate it, whatever. I think that's the answer."



"I think that the fun of it is a really important part of it. The fact that we like doing it is kind of crucial to what it's like."

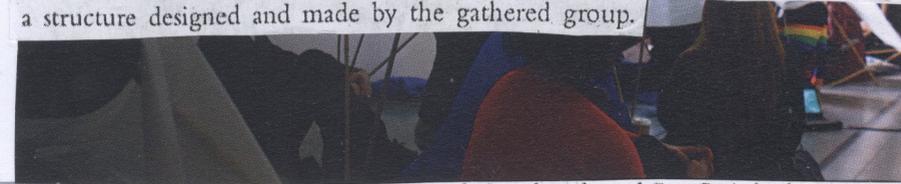


"Another way that beyond gender has shaped my research is through discomfort, or resistance. I realized that the resistance came from the discomfort of acknowledging my place within a system of oppression, both as a victim and as an oppressor. It's like seeing in HD for the first time."

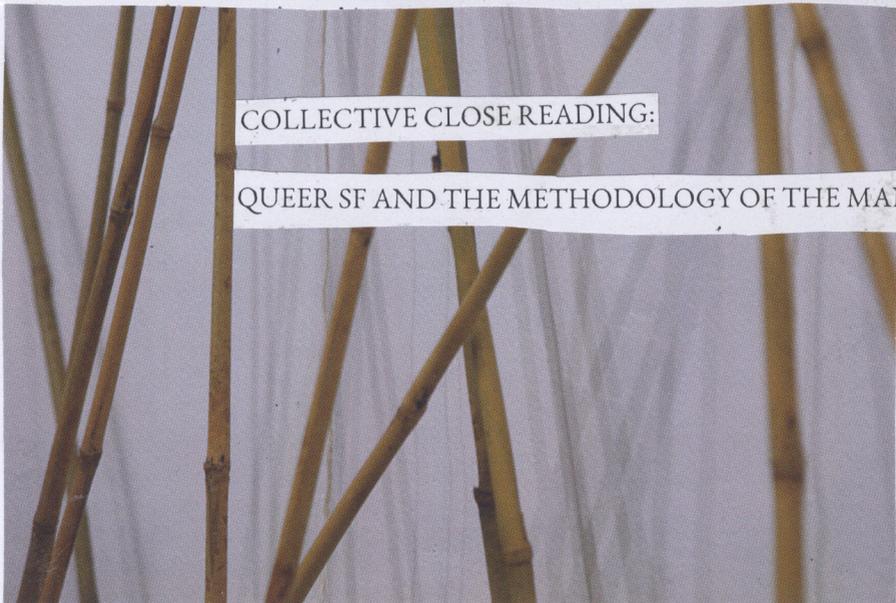
### 3. Reading - Interpretation always involves creation



"Future Impermanent," a workshop and exhibition which saw artists discuss their work within a structure designed and made by the gathered group.



Within this shelter, members of Beyond Gender shared Le Guin's short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." The story had been cut into fragments and those present each took a scrap of paper and read aloud in turn. In doing so it became a story told in multiple voices, dismantling the "I" of the reader into conflicting and contradictory voices made apparent in the variations of each speaker's tone. As an act of CCR, huddled within a single shelter and allowing our voices to move into one another, it seemed to demand that we take responsibility for the world created by the act of telling (Stone 16). Much like the Shobies, we performed an act of calling into being through polyvocal performance.



COLLECTIVE CLOSE READING:

QUEER SF AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE MANY

CCR on the front cover

They did not feel as if they were just transmitting what was already written, but rather that they must take on the responsibility of bringing this world into being.

**Collective Reading:  
The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas**

**Katie Stone  
on behalf of  
Beyond Gender**



## CCK on the front lines

An account by Lyu Guangzhao who, along with several Beyond Gender members, is a former co-director of the London Science Fiction Research Community

On a freezing evening in early March 2020, just before the world was swept into the turmoil of the COVID pandemic, the London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC) gathered for a special monthly reading group: a teach-out on the picket line, outside the main building of Birkbeck College, in solidarity with the ongoing strike among UK higher education staff. The story we read, Han Song's 'Submarine' (2014), felt both timely and hauntingly apt.

In his blend of the eerie and the uncanny (cf. Suoranta 2023), Han Song presents a flotilla of submarines in the Yangtze River, home to tens of thousands of peasant labourers who, having been forced off their land by rapid urbanisation, 'come to our city to seek work' (Han 2019: 116).

During the teach-out, standing in a loose circle, we took turns reading aloud small sections of the story and, as noted in our report published on the LSFRC website, 'by some miracle there were exactly as many sections as participants so that we worked our way around a complete circuit.' The section I read one that has lingered vividly in my mind over the past few years, centred on the theme of dreams. In the evenings, as Han Song writes, the submarine would have already dived, 'as if the peasants couldn't sleep soundly without the comfort of being covered by water', because only by submerging their families

and homes 'could they leave their worries behind on the surface, hold danger and uncertainty at bay, and dream sweet dreams without being bothered by the city-dwellers' (Han 2019: 116-7).

**The Chinese (Un)Dream: Chinese Nationalism and Political Narrative in Han Song's 'My Country Does Not Dream'**

Lyu Guangzhao (Fudan University, Shanghai)

## Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

Volume 54.2, number 151, 2025

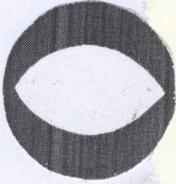
Our challenge to those who consider it impossible and unnatural to move beyond binary and essentialized understandings of gender is not just one of literary representations but of resource distribution and workplace conditions. We read collectively both in seminar rooms and on the picket line. For us, coming together with university and college union (UCU) strikers and distributing scraps of SF to read as a group was a way to demonstrate that a challenge to one form of impossibility is a challenge to the boundaries of possibility itself.<sup>2</sup> To say that we are Beyond Gender is thus to join in solidarity with those who refuse the designation of increased pay, secure contracts, and manageable workloads as "impossible."

### COLLECTIVE CLOSE READING:

### QUEER SF AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE MANY

Since the publication of this article<sup>↑</sup>, one of us ran a CCR workshop at the encampment at the University of Liverpool, organised in solidarity with the people of Palestine during the latest escalation of the genocide. The story they read was 'Digital Nation' by Emad El-Din Aysha (2019)

We invite you to join us on the picket line, at the encampment, in the streets. What will you choose to read?



"I'm very interested in - not only critique but what comes after critique. Purely critical work is important and useful in its own ways, but I think I'm more interested in this active co-creation that we're engaged in."



## Key terms:

### a queer assemblage

This chapter should thus be understood as what Jasbir Puar (2007, 211-212) calls a queer assemblage, "a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks [...] that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency."

Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

### OF the Multitude

CCR

might best be understood using Hardt and Negri's (2004, 100) concept of the "Multitude," in which individuals act for a common interest while rejecting hierarchy and sovereignty: "rather than a political body with one that commands and one that obeys, the multitude is *living flesh* that rules itself."

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Caring Labour

"David Graeber before he died, I listened to an interview that he gave, he was saying that the dialectic that he was interested in (I've never really understood what dialectics are) is between care and freedom. So instead of thinking about freedom as this very individualised sense that you are free to do whatever you want, in fact, we're never really free to do what we want to because we always need someone else to help us with it. And that is the care part. All the freedom that you have is produced and allowed by other people. As Graeber said: 'Caring labour could be redefined as labour that is primarily aimed at maintaining and augmenting another person's freedom'."

# JOYOUS CHATS

- zoom chat from a Beyond Gender online reading group session.
- Can't remember when
- Can't remember what text

From Me to Everyone: 07:49 PM

Omg everyone listen to this Absolute Tune when you got the chance, its got me vibing

From Me to Everyone: 07:51 PM

This is an utterly awesome open access curriculum we could perhaps use as a model / inspiration

That sounds so good!

From Me to Everyone: 07:55 PM

The evergreen struggle ugh

From Me to Everyone: 07:58 PM

I think there was talk at some point about beyond gender being a secret society with rings

From Me to Everyone: 08:05 PM

There is no line

From Me to Everyone: 08:06PM

Pitch pitch pitch!

From Me to Everyone: 08:07 PM

Over and over like tides!

From Me to Everyone: 08:07 PM

My next tattoo is going to be a marine animal in honour of our watery work and collectivity <3

From Me to Everyone: 08:08 PM

My goodness I think I already know what I'd write

From Me to Everyone: 08:09 PM

MANTA RAYS IN SPAAAACEEEE

Yeceees

From Me to Everyone: 08:10 PM

YES

I WAS GOING TO ASK IF WE COULD TALK ABOUT THAT

From Me to Everyone: 08:15 PM

I love this. I had literally just reorganised my bookshelves,

and put all the watery texts together as a little act of

BG love. So excited for this!

From Me to Everyone: 08:21 PM

Haha technological chaos soz

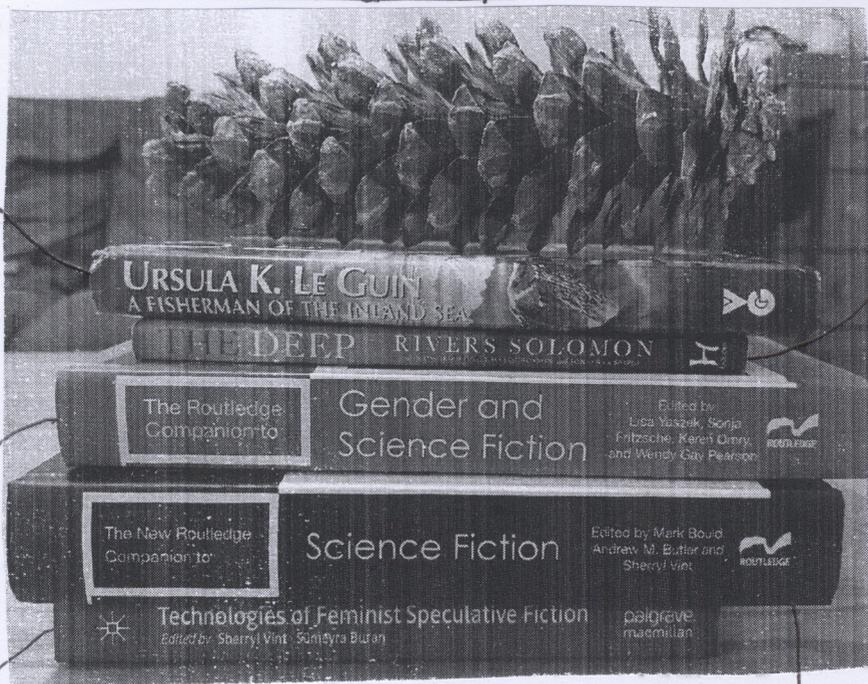
From Me to Everyone: 08:24 PM

That sounds amazing <3

'The Shobies Story' (1990) by Ursula K. Le Guin

The Deep (2019) by Rivers Solomon with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson and Jonathan Spires

Select Bibliography:



Beyond Gender Research Collective:

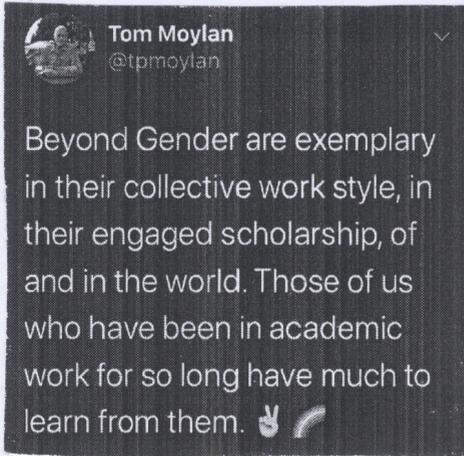
Collective Close Reading: Queer SF and the Methodology of the Many (2023)

Queer and Trans Theory (2024)

Drowning in the Cloud: Water, the Digital and the Queer Potential of Feminist Science Fiction (2022)

\* We wanted to call this chapter 'Wires Dipped in Water' but we put one change in too late for publication

from our lovers:

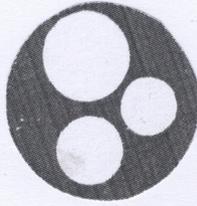


and our haters:

I do not feel that an essay with a thin patina of SF references, enthusiastically advocating a controversial political program, is an appropriate thing for a science fiction magazine to publish.

XO

P.S. abolish the family



This, perhaps, is the role of science fiction.

investigate the impossible.

be beyond gender.



← .mp3 file containing a recording of one of us reading this zine to you.