

QUEER THE PIER

GENDER & NON-CONFORMITY

COMPLICATED HISTORIES

(unpacking some local trans, non-binary, and intersex histories)

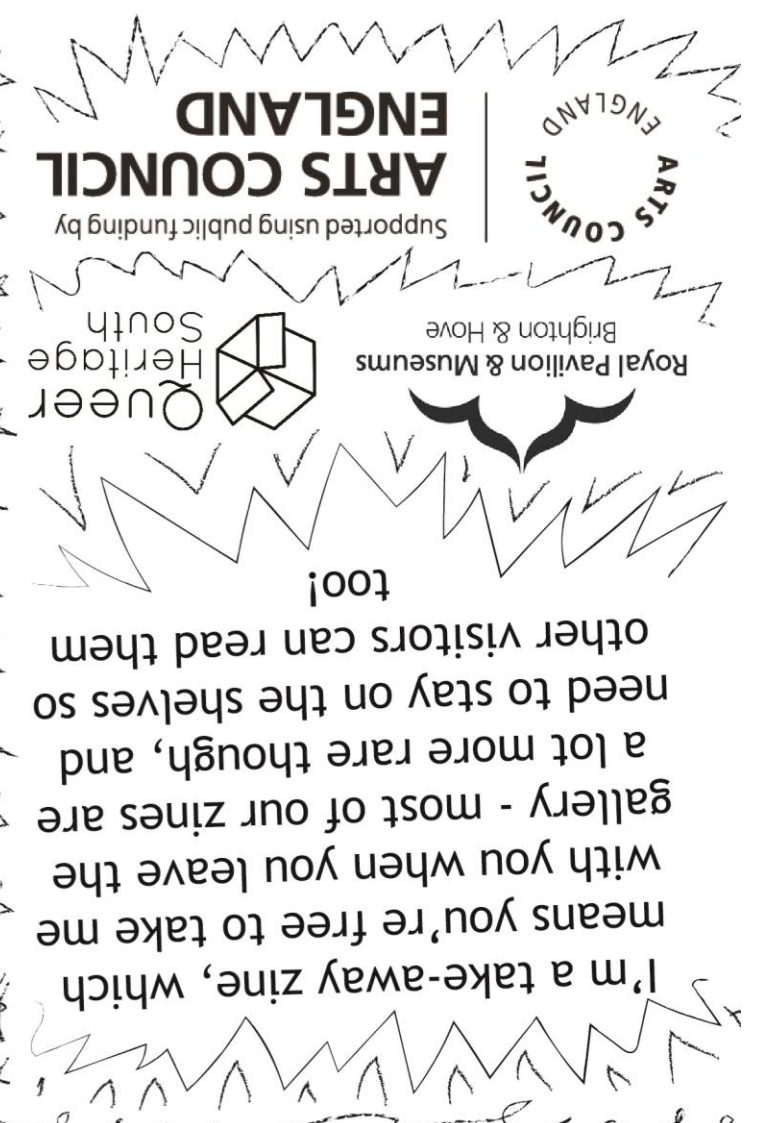
Adrian S. Devaney

Non-binary people aren't binary

To understand the artist Gluck, we need to accommodate a historical understanding of gender that is complicated by sexuality.

The final history we'll be discussing in this zine is that of Gluck (1895-1978), an artist who lived in East Sussex and preferred to be referred to only as Gluck - "no prefix, suffix, or quotes". Although a variety of genders outside the man/woman binary have existed in some form for as long as we can trace gender itself back, it is unclear whether Gluck was aware of any of these identities, or the language used to describe them. Perhaps starting from scratch, then, Gluck carved out a space to exist on Gluck's own terms, between the two binary options widely acknowledged in the UK at this time. Gluck's self-identification within gender speaks to the way gender and sexuality have been historically intertwined: when heterosexuality is considered a primary tenet of womanhood, many people who are not men feel that an attraction to women disqualifies them from conventional, binary womanhood. Whilst this logic stems from a patriarchal attempt to control and limit women, it can be, and has been, reclaimed as a rejection of those very limitations, as a refusal to perform womanhood or heterosexuality, but to assert one's personhood and place in society regardless. Although neither term may be totally accurate, it is therefore possible to understand Gluck as simultaneously a butch lesbian, and a non-binary person, placing Gluck in a rich history of gender non-conformity and lesbian groundbreakers. As historians, the best we can do is respect Gluck's self-identification - as simply Gluck.

To learn more about non-binary trans butches, read Leslie Feinberg's 1993 book *Stone Butch Blues*, available online for free at lesliefeinberg.net.



Trans history is intersex history, is gender history, is gay history, is bi history, is complicated history!!

When we talk about trans people in the past, we need to talk about sex and gender in the past - with binary sex and gender, as we understand them today, being a relatively recent invention: a product of Western colonialism and a complicated interaction of interlocking systems of violence. The same is true for sexuality - the notion that sexuality is something you *are*, as opposed to something you *do*, is equally recent, and equally complex.

Can we distinguish between a trans person and a gay person if the society they lived in considered heterosexuality an intrinsic part of womanhood, or manhood?

As such, when we look at people from the past, we need to question our own assumptions - of what gender (non-)conformity looks, acts, and feels like; of the language we use and the language *they* used; and of the ways gender is informed and complicated by other factors across time and culture.

How do we separate intersex history from the history of racist, misogynist, homophobic and transphobic science that continues to enable violence against intersex communities to this day?

And how do we understand a history of gender non-conformity primarily written by those who *did* conform, or by those whose race or class afforded them positions of power despite their gender transgressions?

For example: does it make sense to call someone transgender if they lived in a culture where gender wasn't rigid, mandatory, or tied to an inaccurate notion of binary biological sex?

In this zine, we'll unpacking a few of the more complicated histories in *Queer the Pier*, and asking how histories of gender non-conforming individuals can become histories of the societies they lived in, and the ideologies that built them.