

Title: Where Did Everyone Go?
Artist: Em Farquhar-Barrie

Zine Printing Details: Screen printed and digital printing on paper, staple bound
12 pages, 5.5 inches by 8.5 inches
2020-21

Texture: This small zine is printed on white paper that is smooth, similar to a magazine. Some of the images and text are printed with a wax-like sparkly texture.

Cover Page

A silhouette of a person on the right side of the cover follows black footprints through an empty, white expanse. A detached group of stars float high above the figure, as if only pieces of the night sky remain. Below, wiry branches of a black, leafless tree stretch out to the right against a white background. At the bottom of the tree, bark melts and twists to the left. On the left, a second lifeless tree is harshly lit against the dark background. Within its tangled branches is a spiral moon and one lone star.

Page 1: Alone in the City

A swirly, black ink drawing depicts a twisted, distorted, deserted city. Sketches of several buildings jut and tilt together and apart, densely crammed into a never-ending cityscape. A lone human silhouette bends towards a spiral vortex at the centre of the drawing. Few stars are visible.

Page 2: Zoom

A dense and visually complex collage of digitally altered ink drawings depicts multiple Zoom screens—blank screens, upside-down screens, screens with faces, screens with TV static or digital icons. Faces are indistinguishable. They are speaking, it appears, without features or mouths.

Page 3: Meltdown

An outline of a human figure walks in a swirly landscape. Slanted stars move above a collection of jagged, melting clouds, each swallowed by shaky lines that seem to buzz and bellow. Below them, long raindrops fall behind the person like tears falling down the cheeks of the sky. Clustered lines sweep and roll under the figure, then charge upward, slanted and uncontained. It is as if the ground under the figure's feet is unstable, threatening to spill off the page.

Page 4: Mind Map: Learning DBT in May

The “Meltdown” image from page 3 of the zine appears again, but corrupted, and somehow denser. The colours are inverted and out of place, and lines from the ground and raindrops are cut from the page in a gruesome way. Two lines of inscrutable human-like silhouettes, translucent and groundless, haunt the space by the main figure's feet. A mass of text bubbles fills the page, so numerous that many are too small to even read. The middle bubble, in bold, reads “DBT group.” The surrounding

thoughts—such as “No accommodations (sick),” “Reminded of the toxic school system,” “Queer and trans reality not understood or acknowledged,” “I’m always the one who doesn’t get it... while others make it look so easy,” “Needing to use all my resources to process and cope with the group,” “Something is wrong with me,” “Waste of time,” “Confusing language,” and “Why aren’t the skills working?”—invite viewers into the artist’s experiences with a prescribed DBT group as harmful.

Page 5: I am so overwhelmed

The artwork on this page imports and distorts the drawing, “Meltdown,” from page 5. The image appears shredded into thin horizontal strips; each strip has been moved left or right. The world, it seems, is incomprehensible: erratic, failing, and falling apart. Confusion, anxiety, dissociation, and panic emanate from the page.

Page 6: Dismissed and Forgotten

A drawing using black pen on white paper depicts a dark silhouette of a human-like figure at the end of a long tunnel. The beholder of the zine is oriented by the artist to stare into the tunnel. Interchanging circular layers build outward toward the beholder. Some layers are nearly solid black, but full of bumps and distortions; others appear checkered yet slanted and distorted too. Near the bottom of the page, the lines become straight, solid, and vertical, as if the tunnel is being pulled by an unseen force. The swirling lines of the tunnel evoke a sense of isolation and feeling stuck at the mercy of circumstance.

Page 7: Living in the Hospital

Dark, firmly sketched silhouettes of four small human-like cut out figures are arranged stiffly on the left-middle of the page. To the right is a larger human-like cut out figure appearing to face the smaller as if providing them instruction. Behind the figures, the background is dense and overpowering: squarish sketch marks seem to crawl forcefully along the walls and ceiling, while disjointed and thick-lined rectangles seem to form a frightful hospital machine and one lone window. Further to the right is another lone cut out human-like silhouette who limply floats—as if to be swallowed by—a sea of thick and swirling circles. This does not feel like a place for healing: it dehumanizes, isolates, and consumes the beholder.

Page 8: Distress, Trauma, Distress

A drawing using black pen on white paper depicts a chaotic scene in which two police cars—each with bright red and blue lights, and one with a passenger seat window crossed out with a large, black X—are parked next to a tall, brick building with square windows. Towards the bottom of the building, the bricks form into a wall; just above this, and difficult to make out atop the building’s pen shading, the word DISMANTLE is written in green. Behind the police cars, black flames spread left to right across the scene, reaching into the sky. Despite the black night, no stars are visible: rather, an ocean of thick, black lines swirl and cover the sky, some forming clouds, some circles, while others simply flow, abstract and directionless. Centred on the largest circular swirl is a startling red and orange shape: a hand, perhaps? Or a red flame?

Page 9: Goodbye City

Although displaying similar features to the previous artwork in this zine, this piece is visually balanced and evokes a sense of stability: the high-contrast checkerboard windows that dot the foreground and background are relatively straight and clear; a thick and layered spiral floats between clouds as more of a peaceful moon and less of a force; and the multi-outlined, almost moving clouds seem to dance more than struggle, unbothered by the moon. The abstract, firm, stark, and sketchy quality of the drawing remains, but signs of life flourishing appear: two white circles filled with live trees, one set evergreen and one deciduous, break through the black midground. The overall effect of the drawing remains consistent with the other artwork in the zine—dark and concerned—but comprehensible, manageable, with a touch of hope to be found in the distance.

Inside Back Cover: Artist's Statement

Text Reads: This series of pen and paper drawings was created during the COVID-19 pandemic and is expressive of my lived experiences. Some of the drawings have been digitally edited to further emphasize my thoughts and feelings.

The pandemic has been very difficult and caused my already poor mental health to decline. Over the course of approximately three months, I lost all my resources. My social worker, my community development and housing worker, peer supports, doctors, chronic illness specialists, psychiatrists, and most importantly to me, my therapist of two years. They all disappeared, and I was devastated.

I used to get help going places: stores, appointments, community services, etc. I used to have help navigating the city and figuring out transit. I used to see these supports in-person multiple times a week. I benefited from those meetings on my calendar and seeing their friendly faces was helpful and provided enough hope each time to get to the next time. I depended on my familiar schedule more than anything and having that changed was a huge trigger.

When I lost a lot of my resources and there was nothing else available, I was pushed into groups with all new people I had never met. I was another number in the system. I tried a DBT Group (dialectical behavior therapy) on Zoom because it was made out to be the only option for me. Rather than seeing and communicating with a real person one-on-one, I got pushed into places that I didn't belong and that didn't work for me. The DBT group seemed as though it was created with the thought that everyone was the same and it felt so fake. Marginalized realities were forgotten, and access needs were not considered, meaning different ways of learning were also not considered. Because of this I really struggled with relating, understanding, and processing the content. I experienced brain fog, meltdown, and complete shutdown.

It all happened so fast. I cried after every group if I even made it through without leaving the meeting. After a few Zoom sessions causing huge breakdowns and spiraling into crisis, I had to stop going. I didn't have any help. I was isolated and left to my own unhealthy coping. I experienced huge amounts of distress and trauma, each one escalating the other.

Without the regular resources I had prior to COVID-19, I was unable to live independently. My health and well-being were at risk, resulting in multiple longer-term hospitalizations. It was when I came to the big decision of moving that I began to see a new-found hope and thus I left the overstimulating and isolating city.