



MEETING THE PAST

I was entering the short corridor I had traversed so many times, a formerly quotidian action was now, as it was then, the beginning of a moment long anticipated. With accelerated heartbeats, I took off my shoes and went into the living room. The space looked wider without the toys and children's books, but to my comfort, the window's view remained as in my memory, gifting me the same warm feeling it had eleven years prior. A few minutes later, she was standing in front of me, a young woman now taller than myself. I recognized the child features in her new, adult face. With awkwardness and curiosity, we hugged each other. The day unfolded as we traced memories, looking at old pictures and digging in the attic. By then, my other "baby," her younger sister, had joined us.

More than a decade ago I left home for the first time to land in another continent. I was picked up from the airport by a recent widower and his older child. As we exited the parking lot, the five year-old offered me her hand to hold. That was the moment I was born into a nanny. After those years as a caregiver, I found myself assembled to this family, and despite the lack of blood ties, I felt I had earned two kids, another dad and two grannies, which made my later departure—due to legal migrant status—particularly hard.

I'm still surprised by how caregiving dynamics and economical transactions can produce new ways of becoming family. A labor done with love, not removed from the tensions of socioeconomic dynamics, while sharing the same roof with your employers. I'm also amazed by the comm-

-unity of nannies that are there to hold each other. Between playdates and meals, a liminal space for comfort, legal advice or whatever is needed emerges in playgrounds, backyards, kitchens and basements, all while we make our charges laugh, dance and eat their snacks. After countless playdates, many of my colleagues have become my chosen family, with whom I share stories of home and of my little ones. Today the list of children I help to care for keeps expanding, and as the years pass, bonds are sustained. Nevertheless, being a migrant nanny often means that starting over is a constant. Each new country, city, and family represents the challenge of adaptation, even assimilation.

As a moving migrant body there is an ongoing negotiation between dislocation and relocation. New beginnings tend to be plural in many aspects of life--professional, social, emotional and so on--which translates in a reinvention of the self. This should not be romanticised; it's not that I seek to constantly reinvent myself, but that I must in order to thrive. These restarts break with the linearity of a commonly expected lifestyle, where studies, work, marriage, and even travel have a "proper" time and age to be ticked off the list. A refusal to abide by such chronology – and the heteronormative roles it assigns – evokes another way of doing/being, a queer time that shows us "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing" (Halberstam, 2004). Though, most of the time the pressure to follow the normative path makes many people feel like there is either an asynchrony in their lives, or no place for their individual rhythms. In that sense, time as commonly understood is not meant to hold us, so the challenge to carry out our "unscripted" lives can turn into an arduous task of reaffirmation, our ways of being and existing, manifestation of queer time.

Queer not only as a noun but as a verb as in QUEERING

The meeting with my first charges after a period of disconnection has had a great impact on me. For them, the space between our time together has been long, basically most of their lives. For me, as I age, that gap shortens. A decade is not so long anymore. They barely remember those years, it comes to their minds in memories of songs I used to sing, and through stories they hear from others. To me, it comes in flashes of past daily rituals and a vague recollection of their former high-pitch voices. How we chose each other as a temporal family was driven by specific needs, coming from both sides. Between their grief and my search for independence, we found ways to nurture a newfound sense of home.

Caregiving is no longer my main profession, but it's an enormous part of who I am. While keeping in mind the gendered and racialized weight that falls on care labor in so-called developed countries, I must recognize that this role allowed me to bend the conventions of who and where I was supposed to be. As I try to walk forwards with eyes on my back, I realize just how much a life of queering it has been, where roles and checklists collapse while relations expand.

Halberstam, Jack.
*In a Queer Time and Place, Transgender Bodies,
Subcultural Life.*
New York University Press, 2004.

Karina Roman Justo is an emerging curator, writer and researcher based in Montreal. She holds a BA in Visual and Critical Studies from OCAD University, where she was the recipient of the Graduation Award in 2020 and the VCS Writing Awards for best essay during three consecutive years. There she also led the Journal of Visual and Critical Studies. She has published reviews in diverse publications like C Magazine and the Senses and Society Journal. Karina coordinated the Mentorship Program at Sur Gallery (2019-2020) and curated the Making Spaces exhibitions as part of the program's culmination. She was also the education assistant at the Textile Museum of Canada (2020-2021). With a background in Early Childhood Education, she focuses on inclusive educational programming within art spaces. Karina's research covers a wide range of interests like decolonial theory, textiles, as well as collaborative art practices. She is currently an Art History MA candidate at Concordia University. Karina was Oxygen's *Digital Writer-in-Residence* in Spring 2022 through the Author Reading Series program. This essay responds to the topics and discussions from the online workshop series, *freezer cheese: Queerer Time*.