

weeds

a dsc zine about

trauma
messiness
resilience
value
survival
growing
ugliness
beauty

contents

introduction	– 1
my brain & i // elizabeth hopkins	– 2
keep off the grass // caitlin stark	– 5
exhale // ximena barker-huesca	– 6
untitled // anon	– 7
the trash palace // b.r.	– 8
breathe // lauren westwood	– 10
untitled // anon	– 11
am i still ill? // anna ward	– 12
disabled and beautiful // anon	– 13
bindweed // molly o'gorman	– 14
my weeds // charlotte mcdonald	– 16
wildflowers // anon	– 21
sleep scares me // AB	– 22
healing // sarah ashton	– 24
i wonder what it will taste like // claire sosienski smith	– 25
secret garden // matilda o'callaghan	– 26
growing // jess o'brien	– 27
melissa & untitled // work in progress	– 28
leeches and wine // isabella leandersson	– 30
heavy skies // isabella leandersson	– 31
i have weeds in my mind // alex ajioka	– 32

weed, n. any plant regarded as unwanted at the place where, and at the time when it is growing.

this zine was born from contradictions, from a dichotomy, from a dialectic of things not belonging. this zine is a fistfight in my soul, and in our collective existence as disabled people, between carl sandburg:

*'There are laws in the village against weeds.
The law says a weed is wrong and shall be killed.
The weeds say life is a white and lovely thing
And the weeds come on and on in irrepressible
regiments.'*

and marina:

*'But he keeps growing back like weeds
Baby, just open your eyes to see
He's growing from inside me
And I just don't know what I can do
I thought I cut him at the root'*

this zine is a conversation between us and the weeds of our trauma and between us and the world in which we are weeds, between us and ourselves and each other as we walk this garden path between what should be uprooted and what "should be uprooted".

more than anything, I have loved planting and pruning and deadheading and taking root with you. may we always be overgrown.

- emrys travis (disabled students' officer 2018-19)

my brain & i

CN: suicidal ideation, mentions of weapons, description of sensory overload

I am so tired
of the neurons in my brain getting
overfired
overwired
like a plug that's blown a fuse.
Too much current. Bam. Snap.
No more function here.

Do you know what it feels like?
It feels like radio static
like a thousand flashing neon exclamation marks
blaring all at once.
Like that scene in the Big Piglet movie
when they've trapped a load of
angry bees in a pathetic papier-maché hive
that's about to burst.

My brain is a swarm of angry bees.
Why don't you stick your fingers into a plug,
it says,
or, how about you walk in front of a car,
and I go, what the shit brain,
I'm not even depressed anymore,
could you kindly stop staring into the abyss?

But no, my brain is a rogue sniper,
or perhaps one of those cartoon machines
that's lost the plot of what it's doing.
It's a pool of sludge, custard, golden syrup,
a bog I have to wade through to produce
every word, every damn thought even.
Are you alright, Elizabeth, people ask
as I look past them with eyes glazed
like the frosting on a cake,
do you want any help, and I don't know
how to explain that no, I don't want any help,
I don't want your hand on my shoulder, I don't want
your breath in my face, I just want to be on my own,
so in the end I leave.
I have a reputation for leaving things early.

Perhaps you've got the impression from this
that my life is a miserable wasteland
full of failed opportunities.
That'd be wrong.
Picture it this way. My brain is a
garden
and I'm trying to plant all my favourite flowers.
And sure, I've produced a plot
that's a bit wackier than most experts would advise—
I don't know shit about horticulture
and I don't really give a shit either.

But there's these weeds, see,
nettles, thistles, thorns keep creeping
up, choking my garden, choking me.
And no matter how many times I rip
them out of the soil, throw them onto
the bonfire to be burnt,
they come back.

Sometimes weeks, months, pass
undisturbed
but they always come back.

Yeah, it sucks. But I'll deal with it. I know what to do. I'm not
sacrificing the whole plot of myself for a few weeds.

elizabeth hopkins

comic: keep off the grass

two people are pictured walking through recognisable parts of cambridge colleges, talking

“god, I’m sick of all these courtyards.”

“I mean, they’re pretty and all.”

“but cambridge must have more perfect blades of grass than it has tourists in the summer.”

“like ‘oh, look at this beautiful lawn that’s exactly like every other lawn here.’ Give me a break”

“now, give me a bit of forest any day of the week. Nothing is a weed, you know? It’s all at home there.”

“I love how much life you find in forests.”

“exactly.”

caitlin stark

image: exhale

CN: emetophobia

Digital painted image of a pale skinned person's face with long dark hair. In their hair a number of small pink flowers are scattered. Their mouth is open, and trailing vines with more small pink flowers are being expelled from their nostrils, mouth, ear, and one tear duct.

ximena barker-huesca

untitled

CN: visceral body imagery, pain

My veins crack

Dry riverbed

Where is the rumble of thunder?

The gushing flood?

Silence.

Only

the pain

of one

small

shoot

pushing

green

anon

the trash palace

Francis Bacon had an untidy studio.

*The mess around me is rather like my mind;
it may be a good image of what goes on inside me.*

He said

Clothes, shoes, plates, mugs, Bags, Books,

Bottles, wrappers, letters, papers, Make up.

Strewn across my room

And the medication

That I should have taken it's

Littered across my floor, my desk, my bed,

Scattered across my shelves, my bathroom, my head.

How do you live like this? They ask

- it's a joke.

Missed sleep, missed meals, missed meds,

Missed classes, missed lectures, missed deadlines, missed tests.

Strewn across my room.

And the medication

That I should have taken it's

Littered across my floor, my desk, my bed,

Scattered across my shelves, my bathroom, my head.

Maybe Cambridge isn't right for you They'd said
– it's too much.

It courses through my veins

I take my meds

They dance with my nerve's

Endings, offbeat;

It's a clumsy dance.

It's Tripping, up, down, then round and round and round

It's baby steps forward and then it's a relapse back:

It's messy.

I'm messy.

He was an artist; I am not

Going to let clutter drown me.

- b.r.

breathe

CN: imagery of pain & suffocation

Tiny needles between the fibres of my lungs
mean I'm drowning on nothing.

My throat's attacked by harsh tongues of gasped air.

as I clasp my wheezing frame I wonder
who put them there.

Between the strands that make a man
they're teeming, like a spider span her webs there
bloody silk catching the air before me, leaving me cold
and entwining my lungs in a choke hold.

Or jagged rose thorns on verdant stems
blooms coloured like gems, a sweet gift to receive
but once planted,

I cannot breathe.

Take them back. what's mine restore,
and let me breathe in peace once more.

lauren westwood

image: untitled

CN: self-harm

photograph of four intertwined flowers drawn in felt pen on a person's limb

"It's a doodle of flowers drawn over old scars, I think to show that beauty and hope are always there, and can always be found. Maybe not by ourselves, maybe not all the time. But we persist, we push through, and eventually, we grow and bloom and thrive."

anon

image: am i still ill?

photograph of an embroidery hoop, with the words 'am I still ill?' embroidered in a cursive font in pink thread over a blue flower patterned fabric

anna ward

disabled and beautiful

Disabled and beautiful

Spending my time horizontally

Yes I know my coping techniques are

"Bad for me"

But I'm learning to cope in a world

Where everything is "bad for me"

If I could just not be ill,

Don't you think I would?

I'm growing on a different trajectory

Beautifully, and horizontally

bindweed

If I am a weed,

then I am a **bindweed**.

I enter these spaces

of bright coloured flowers

(systematically arranged flowers)

with their heads craned upwards

begging approval

Spaces

that were not built for **me**.

I do not beg approval.

I fight my way in.

I do not just grow up among them.

(I cannot just grow up among them)

I do not just hope to be ignored.

I do not beg approval.

I fight my way in.

I force them apart and I bind them backwards in their oh-so-pretty rows until there is space

For **Me**.

My fragile petals are splayed,

open,

a megaphone.

Proclaiming **me**.

I am the weed that takes root though they try to stop me
I am the weed that will not be moved
I am the weed you define as a weed
so that the children who dare to love me
learn to hate me.

I do all this,

And still,

I am loudly beautiful.

photograph of a cluster of three white bindweed flowers

molly o'gorman

illuminated handwritten manuscript: my weeds

CN: visceral body imagery, descriptions of pain

“My body is like a garden. All the plants and flowers work together. Inevitably, the body will be infiltrated by weeds. Some make their way in and their presence is positive. Others are not a good sign. They challenge and they attack. These are mine...”

“My first weed was a positive one – in spite of not being planted there, it grew. I was not sporty. University pushed me out of my comfort zone and I became a rower. I became strong. Muscle I never thought I could have I developed. My abdominal muscles strengthened. It was like a pretty, harmless weed – alien to my body but welcome and strong. It wanted to thrive. I was strong, emotionally and physically.”

“I was able to push myself. Then it all went wrong. Out of nowhere the weed was cut in half. Torn. No explanation. No fix. No solution. The strength was gone. And my body felt broken. Maybe that plant will grow again one day. But it will take time.”

Single-line drawing of a human figure, with coloured red lips, holding their side with one hand. In the space of their abdomen is a red, thorny flower, with its stem being cut by a pair of scissors.

“My second weed is one I fear. The thorns in my side. The severe pain. Sometimes they can be kept at bay. Sometimes they can't. And sometimes they take over. They are painful and unrelenting. Sharp and smothering. As I write they are at their worst. The pain came first time. My appendix was taken. The pain came again. My hip was inflamed. The pain is back. And there's currently no explanation. It's worse. It's unknown. And right now, there's no immediate end. This pain is my weed. My curling wire of thorns. Taking over my abdomen. Taking over my feelings. Controlling my life.”

Single-line drawing of a human figure, with coloured red lips, holding their neck with one hand. On one side of their abdomen is a twisting red cluster of thorns.

“But above all, the weed that can be both powerful but damaging and forgotten or ignored is the one that grows in my mind. Every time a good weed grows elsewhere, I nurture it. When a bad weed grows elsewhere, I try to tackle it. But when one starts to slowly grow in my mind, I ignore it. And there that is a Bad weed, it can spread and be damaging more than I even realise. And when pain exists elsewhere, it is too easy to focus on that and forget the effect on the mind. It’s okay to have some weeds there; there’s no shame in an imperfect garden. But it is important that it doesn’t take over. It isn’t who I am and it shouldn’t be all encompassing – I’ll try and keep them at bay and let any positives ones that want to grow grow. I’ve let these positives thrive elsewhere. I can do the same in my head.”

Single-line drawing of a human figure, with coloured red lips, holding the side of their face with one hand. In the space at the top of their head is a curling red vine.

“What I have learnt from my weeds is that the battle I have with them is my own. Each person’s is their own. It may be a battle to nurture positives. It may be a battle to defeat the thorns, the pain and the bad weeds. Don’t look over a fence and see a neighbour’s garden and see that it is full of thorns and worse than your own – it does not diminish your own. It’s okay not to have that perfect garden as a body. When you can cut down the bad or build up the good, it’s okay to celebrate that personal achievement.”

Watercolour painting of two faces in profile, back to back, with pale skin and long dark hair, and the tops of their heads cut off. The head on the left is looking upward and painted in colour, and a group of red and yellow flowers with green leaves is growing from the top of their head. The head on the right is looking downward with their eyes closed and is painted in black and white, with a tangle of black thorns growing from the top of their head.

“Where you can, cut down those thorns.
Where you can, let the good flowers grow.
Whatever you do, keep that garden thriving”

charlotte mcdonald

wildflowers – anon

You loved us as Aspirin in your meadow, sweet
dreaming of quiet. But then you took our leaves
and you called it progress. Sweet poppies ground
into the foreign tongue which called us weeds.

enriched by the something that you never respected,
you shamed our survival, yet somehow rose higher
on the love that we made you. Bodies for wishes
to blow out of history. No longer desired.

But, still We are dancing.

Alive at the borders of your landscaped living
whilst you try to erase us, just to let Them grow
into the seeds that were planted
with the water you gave them
the maker's design

But still We grow

too, in the rain and in the dry weather.

Never

where planted. and never 'in need'
of attention.

our own

moonlit desires have fuelled our power
simply to Be.

Defiant.

Beautiful.

Enough.

I may never be something that you wanted to see.
But I was always a wildflower, never a weed.

sleep scares me

CN: descriptions of panic, anxiety, anger

Sleep scares me

The restlessness, panic and anxiety

I don't know how to explain this

'Sleep', people say: 'you're trying too hard. Just relax.'

Relax.

What does that mean though?

Relaxing for me means thinking about people.

People I like and those I don't

I talk to them, as if in the day.

How slowly the night passes

I don't know how to do it

It's a strange thing being awake at this time of the day

Above all, I can't hear anything

My deafness envelops me

She affects me more than I can explain

My brain is constantly figuring out a puzzle that other people

take for granted

I can't hear

No

That's wrong

I can hear the voices in my head

Daring me to sleep

It's too late

You only have 5 hours left

What an important day tomorrow is

What if I collapse in the exam

I am also angry

At all the little things keeping me awake

I'm angry at myself and the world and my weaknesses

I'm angry that time just slips away and I can't control it

I don't know how to do this

I don't know how to explain this

All I want is to no longer be seen as a weed among the daisies

image: healing

CN: mention of trauma

mixed media collage. The central image is a watercolour line drawing of a naked body without a head, hands, or feet, on lined paper. Around this are watercolour flowers and stems of leaves also painted on lined paper. Biro written sentences are cut and pasted around this, some with arrows pointing to the image of the body:

“YOU GOT THIS!”

“empathy for my body – it holds, and does an awful lot.”

“processing a lot of **trauma.**”

“fighting to try and **reclaim** my body.”

“proud of myself”

“I am mine.”

two magazine clippings of text are interspersed with these; one reads, “you must put yourself first this week or risk losing the ground you’ve covered.” The other, in large, bold, all caps font, reads “BE BRAVE.”

sarah ashton

I wonder what it will taste like

It was january and there i was wearing nothing under my dungarees thinking to myself how you need other people to nourish your ideas so please take this chewed up bic biro and trace a line around my cranium as if you could open my skull and take the part of my dumb brain that wants to be held by you and hold it, plant it like a seed and watch it grow, nudge it along and one day it will bear a single fruit in a colour that we cannot yet name

claire sosienski smith

secret garden

CN: visceral body & pain imagery, death mention

And so it grows through my bones
Eating through my muscles
Wearing them all away
Thick overgrowth smothers
So I'm left sleeping on gorse
Needles piercing inside
Roots strangling my mind
Yet still I wear flowers outside
A beautiful garden it seems
Yet hidden deep within
Wild, torment pervades and spears
Pleading self destruction with my tears
These weeds are killing me I do fear
But could there be something
I don't yet know
Despite uncontrollable weather thriving this heather
And weeds that can never go
I could be my own Gardner
Embracing the pain for some gain
For some days just to stand up and walk about
Is something to really shout about
To lose the invisibility of this disability
Is worth all my garden and more

matilda o'callaghan

growing

Weeds are beautiful flowers
you plant but did not mean to
People fear that they will hurt
other flowers which somehow
matter more

But weeds are flowers too
and if left along and not hurt
might grow to be
the most beautiful flowers of all –
Love all your flowers

drawing of a flower with petals, a leaf, and roots under the soil

photograph: melissa

square crop of a photograph of a green leafy plant on a windowsill by an open window, with sunlight bathing some of the leaves

work in progress

photograph: untitled

square crop of a photograph of a hand with chipped red fingernail polish holding a green clipper lighter, lighting a small stick stuck into the grass on fire

work in progress

leeches and wine

I just wanted you to take it
the pain. I wanted you,
the brutal medieval medicine-man of my
emotional state my trauma my dirty pond-water state
I wanted you to bleed me of it my letting me speak

.
I want you to know I never meant for my bleeding
to stain you. Splatter like wine onto your clothing that
I know you keep so pristine. I just wanted to expel it
and in my need I grew too keen, and I infected you
for that I am truly sorry.

.
I will extract myself, sooth-sayer,
I will extract my infection from you and yours,
and whatever I leave behind I beg, I beg you forgive
and forget, soon after.

heavy skies

The sky is holding the
rain in,
swollen and blue,
refusing to part her lips
for anything.

.

The steel prongs they
use to pin pigeons to
rooftops,
stand out darkly and form
a skyline.

.

Soon the leaves will
fall again and glue to,
the ground,
autumn again recurring.

.

Again, darker,
Again, colder,
but I'll put up lights this year,
this year, I'll put lights up.

annotated drawing: i have weeds in my mind

Thick green veins of ivy,
Dandelions dotted round,
Grasses growing fast and strong,
Daisies pushing up the ground.

The weeds are usually just fine,
Their expansion kept under control,
Prevention plans are set in place
To protect the life they stole.

I never really asked for them,
Creeping in where they're not wanted,
Suffocating all around,
And inevitably leave me haunted.

one half of a line drawing of a brain, where the internal lines are plant stems, interspersed with leaves and flowers ---

--- the other half of a line drawing of a brain, where the internal lines are plant stems, interspersed with leaves and flowers

I take my meds every single day,
To keep the weeds in check,
I treat them and restrain them,
Else I'll be a living wreck.

I love my mind, I accept the weeds,
As I know they're part of me,
And through it all I strive to thrive,
These weeds, they set me free.

alex ajioka

doodles of diamond-shaped sparkles

disabled.cusu.cam.ac.uk

doodles of diamond-shaped sparkles