identicons

interviews & illustrations about LGBTQ+ identity on the internet

illustrated & edited by Emily Considine

Between fall 2020 and early 2021, I interviewed twenty young LGBTQ+ women in North America* about their joys and frustrations with identity on social media. Some participants appreciated online spaces as a place to feel less alone. Others found online behavioral trends harmful and suffocating. What does it mean for a group with varying levels of confidence and self-understanding to be tasked with projecting themselves online? What happens when we are continuously learning from, performing for and perceiving each other as models of 'queerness' and womanhood through algorithmic interfaces?

In exchange for each interviewee's participation, I created six icon-like illustrations meant to represent some part of their identity or online experience without showing their face. The resulting project, *Identicons*, takes unique information – in this case, interviews – and returns custom images, creating an intentionally diluted outsider's perception of the individual and their experiences. This process mirrors that of real-life identicons, which are unique default profile images for users on social media who have not chosen their own.

Excerpts from eighteen of these interviews made it to print, displayed in the following pages with their six corresponding illustrations preceding them. These images and interviews are also available to read online at **https://emilyeconsidine.wixsite.com/identicons**. If you're reading this, I hope you find something in these words and drawings that resonates with you.

— Emily Considine

**A few participants did not strictly meet this criteria, but had good reason for participation. Any important details are noted in their corresponding interview.*

Emily Considine is an illustrator and cartoonist currently based in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

You can find more of her work online at **emilyconsidine.com** and on Instagram **@econs.art**.

The opinions expressed in these interviews are those of the participants, not necessarily those of the editor.

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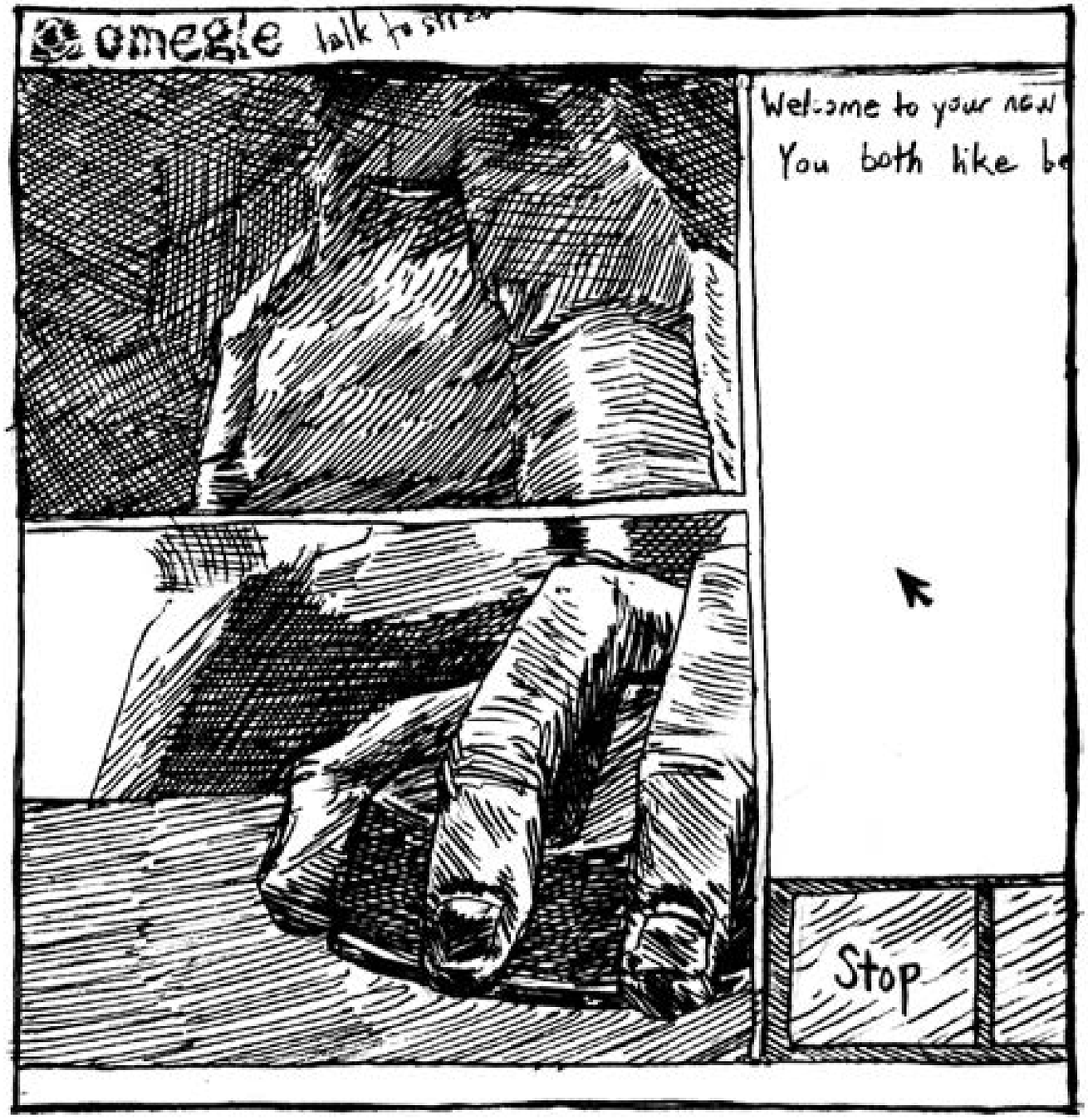
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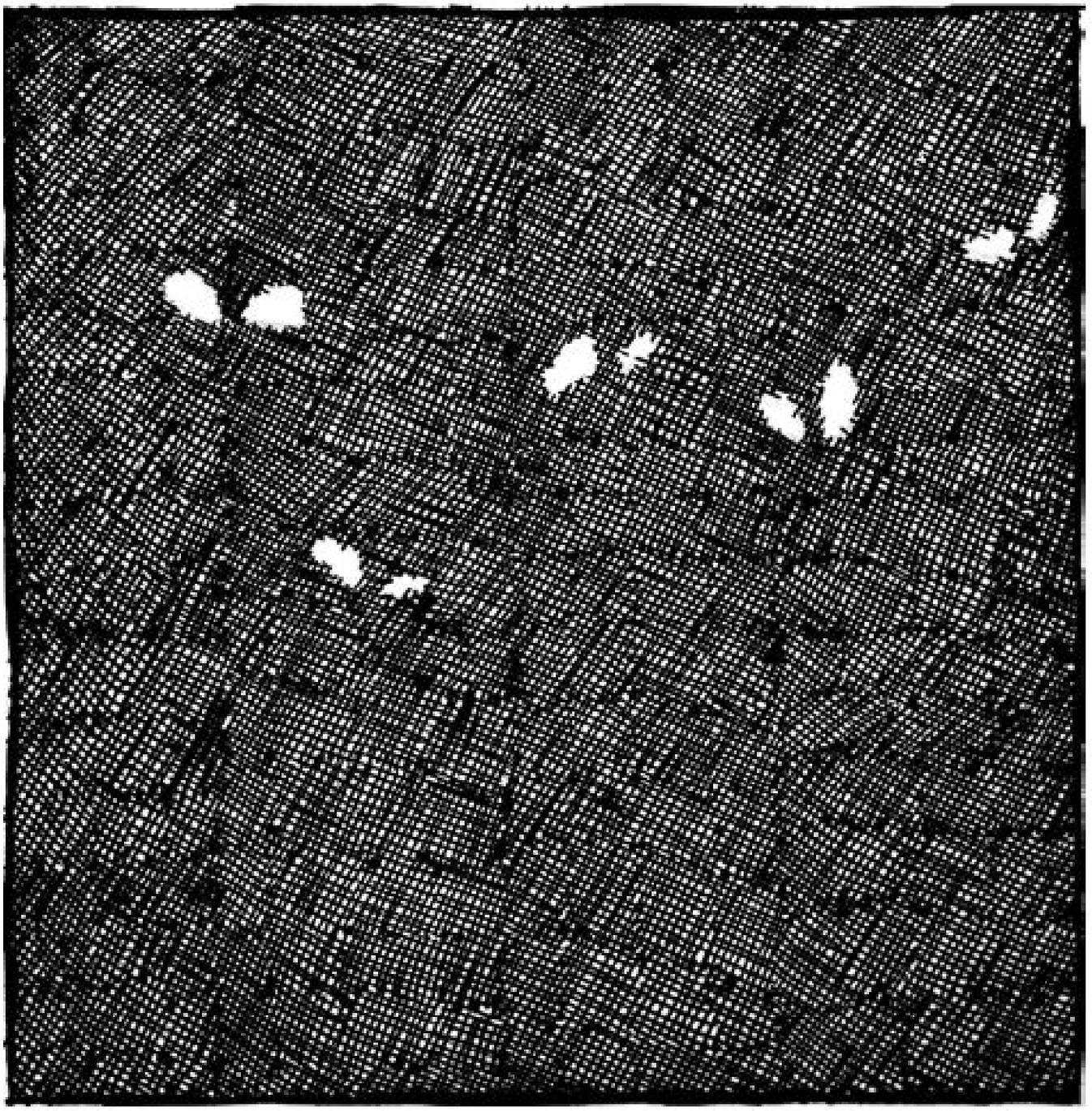
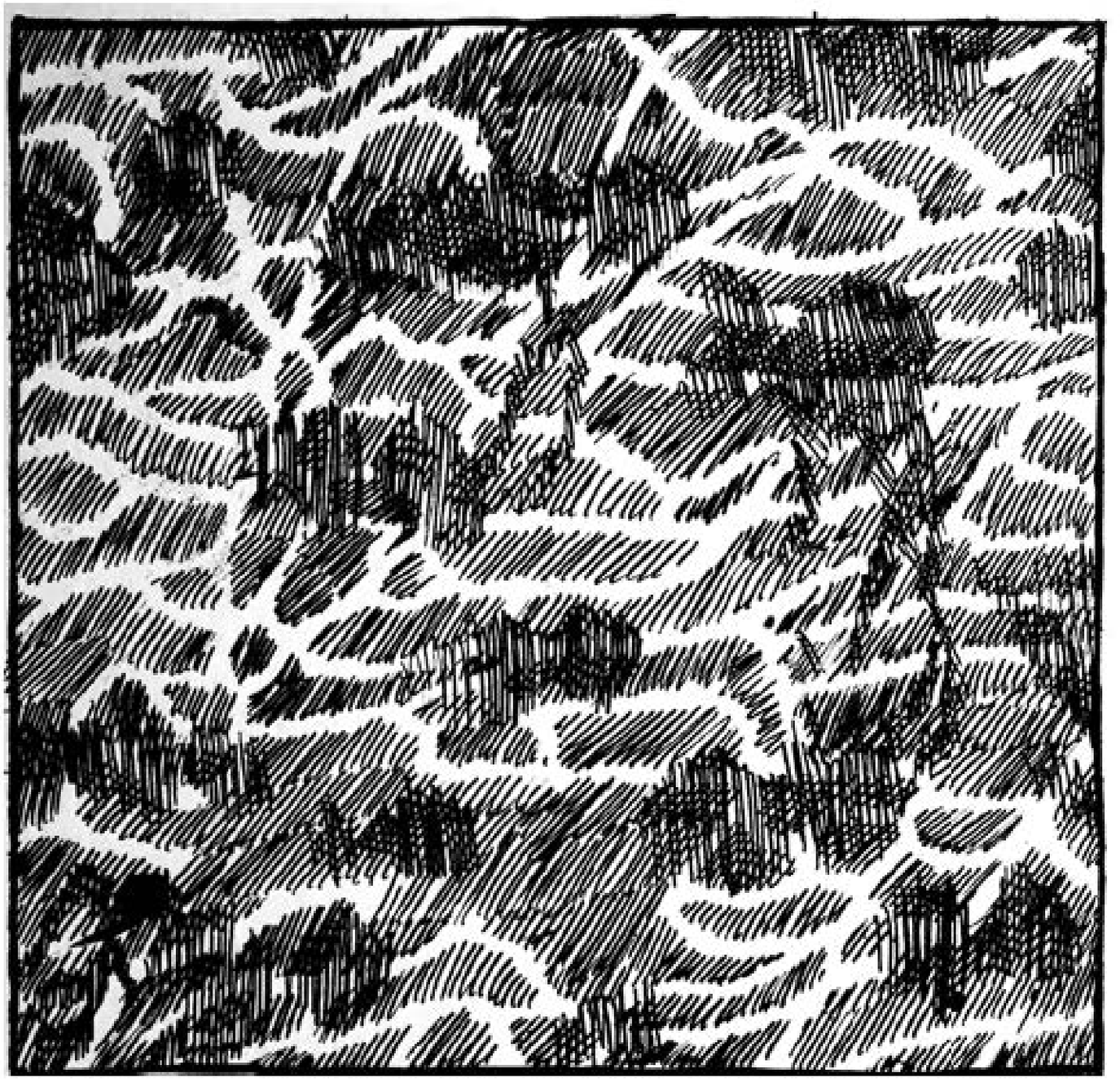




So how would you describe yourself at the time?

I think I was just — I don't know — I try to think about why I was doing it and it was probably just exciting. Like, 'oh my god, I don't know these people at all, I can do whatever.' I mean, now that I think about it, it was probably somewhat predatory because they were adults and I was obviously a female child. Even I kept my head above camera so they didn't see my face. I felt like I was being safe in that regard.

How safe did you feel at the time on Omegle?

I don't know, I was a little paranoid at the time because I was like 'oh my god' — like I've heard so many things about people being identified by, like, small unique things in their surroundings. And also, like, they can figure out who you are if you show your face. So I felt like I was being safe in that regard.

I don't know when my first, like, one-on-one interaction was — probably ninth or tenth grade. I ended up dating her, but it was further down the line. This was someone I met on Tumblr. I think what actually happened was — do you remember those blogs that were like, 'post a picture of yourself and a description of, like, who you are' and then people would, like, message?

She messaged me from one of those. And we started talking. That was probably my first one-on-one interaction with an LGBTQ person that I met solely online.

We were like, 'oh, so we're both queer, and we're both Asian, like that's pretty cool.' And then we just started talking like we already knew each other.

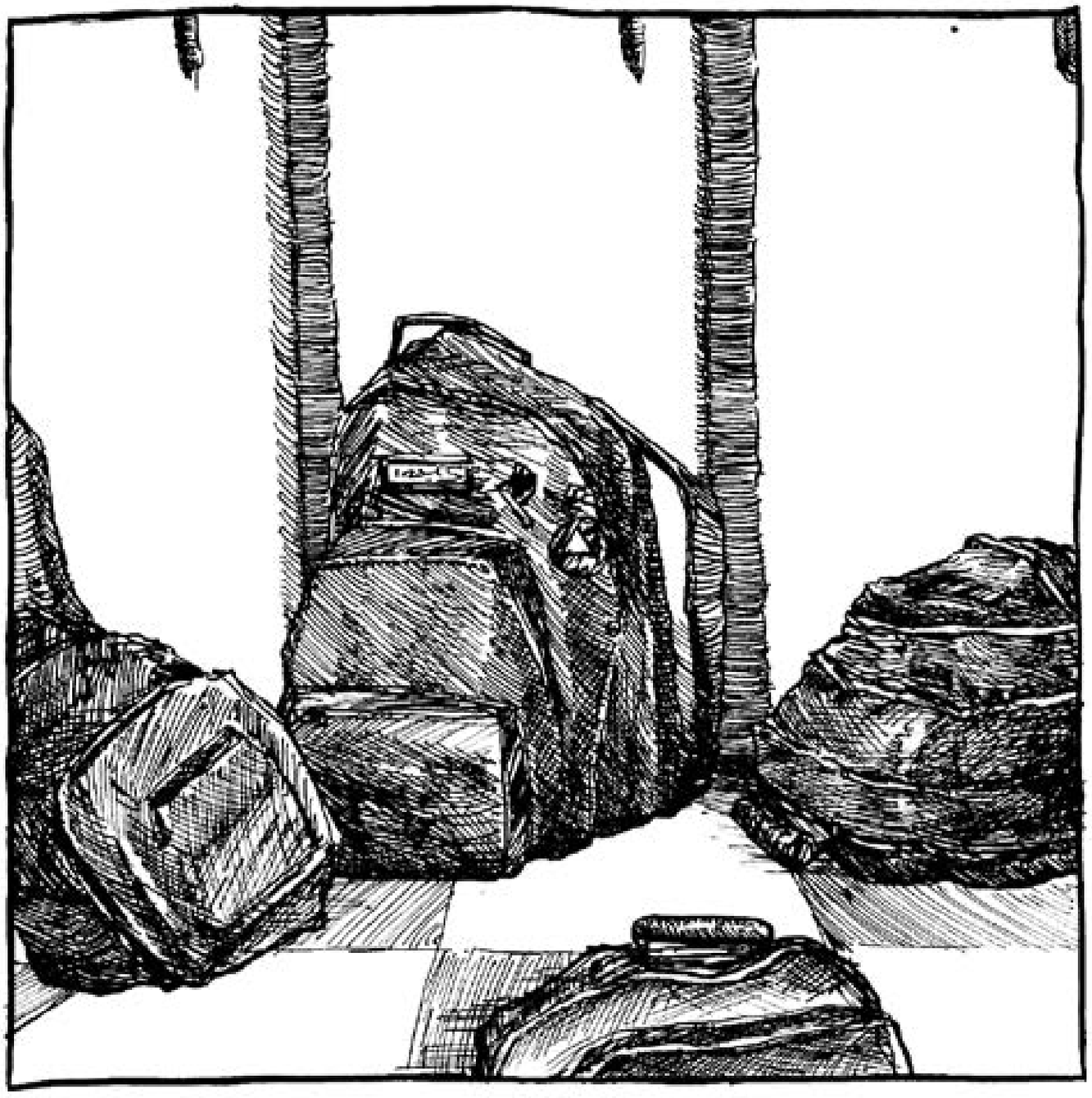
When she came to see me, it was with the added facet that we were also dating, so it was, like, different in that way. But I don't know. I think that our in-person interaction was really in line with how we interacted online. At that point, we had known each other for so long, and, like, we knew pretty much everything about each other. I guess a lot of people would say that and then they're, like, totally caught off-guard by something crazy, but we did tell each other everything. There is nothing that made me feel like I should have to question anything.

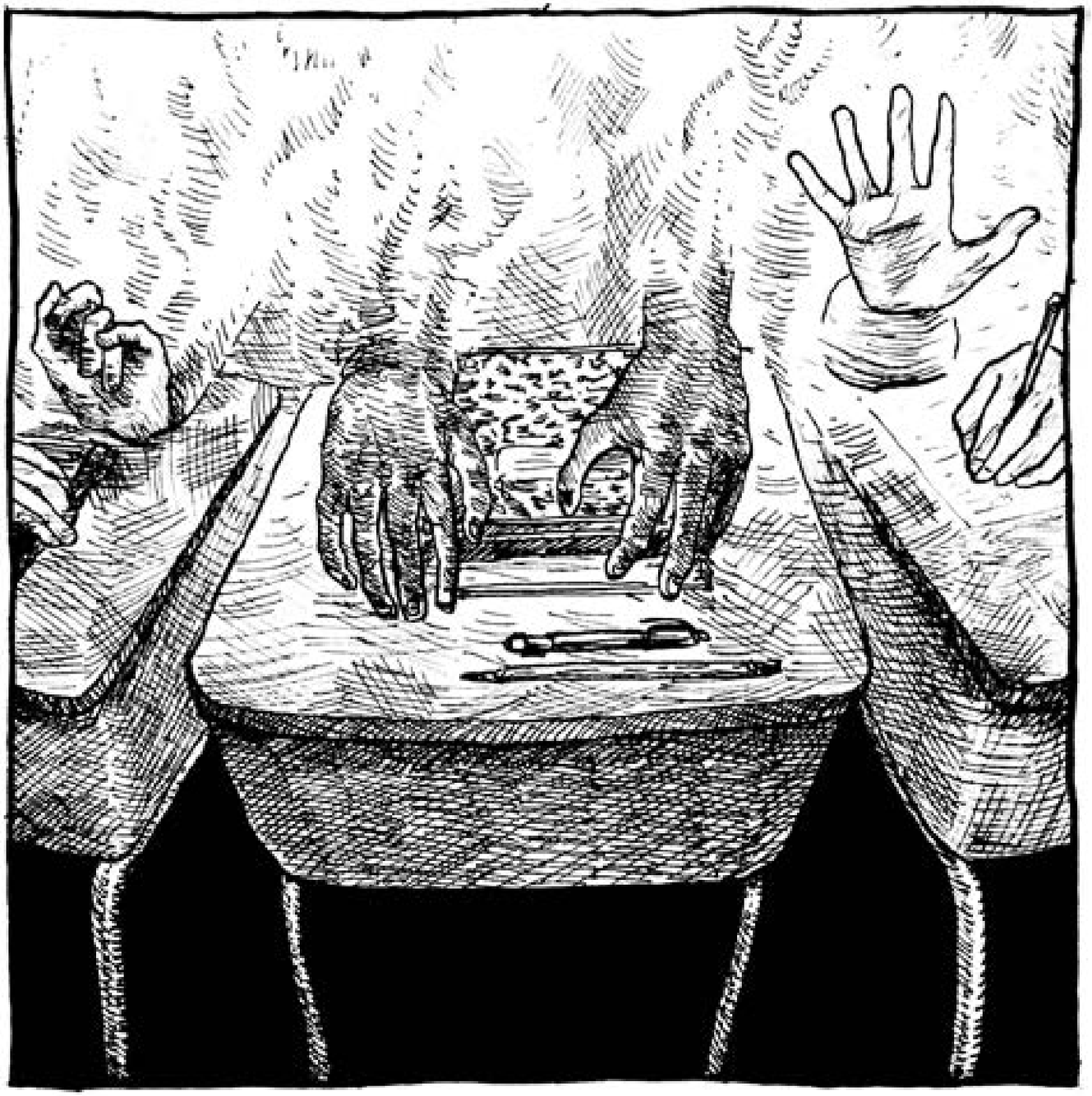
Do you think you would handle that kind of situation differently now?

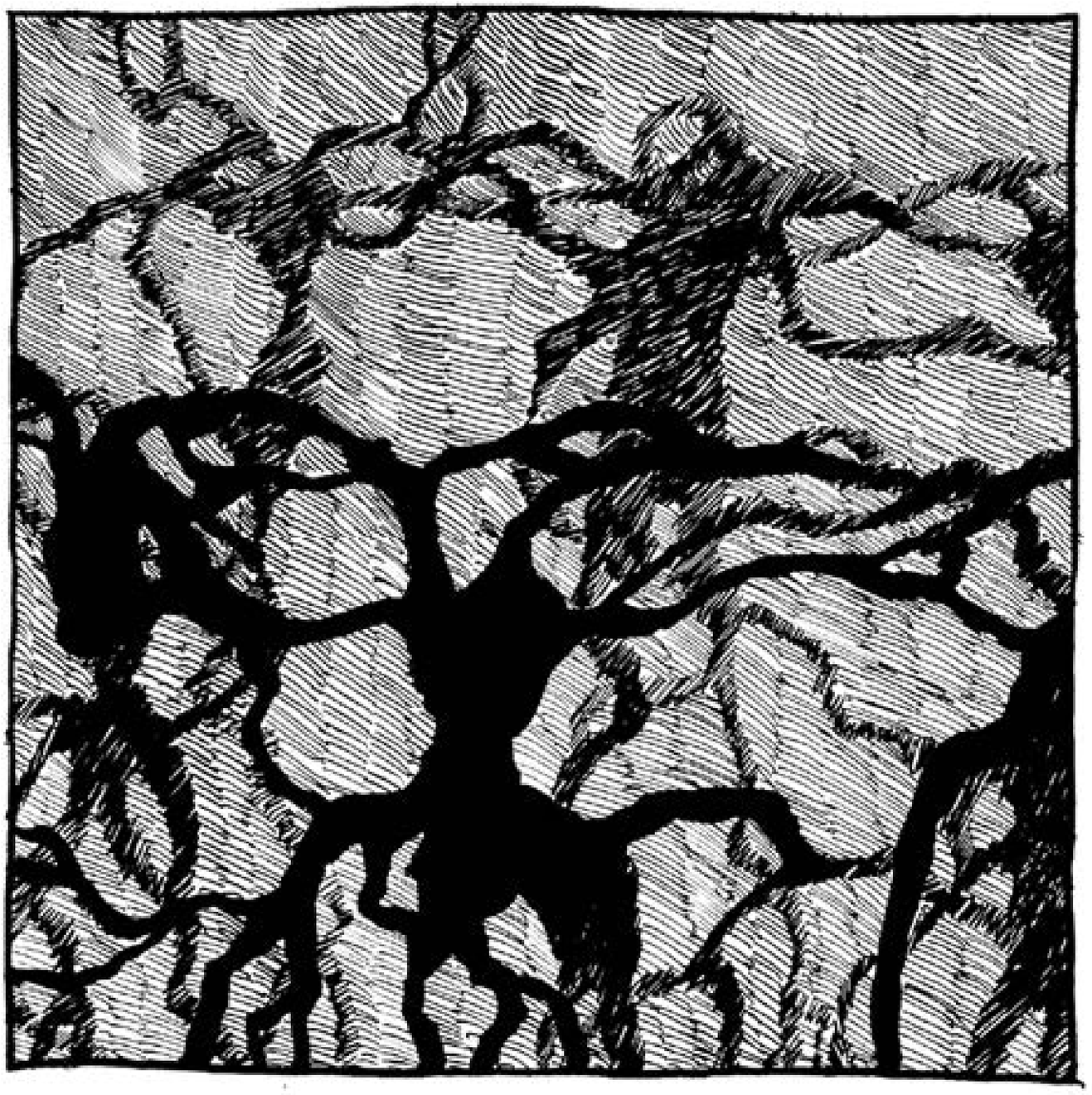
Yeah, I probably wouldn't get into a thing with a person online. I feel like that kind of thing, like that relationship with her, I don't think that would ever happen again, honestly.

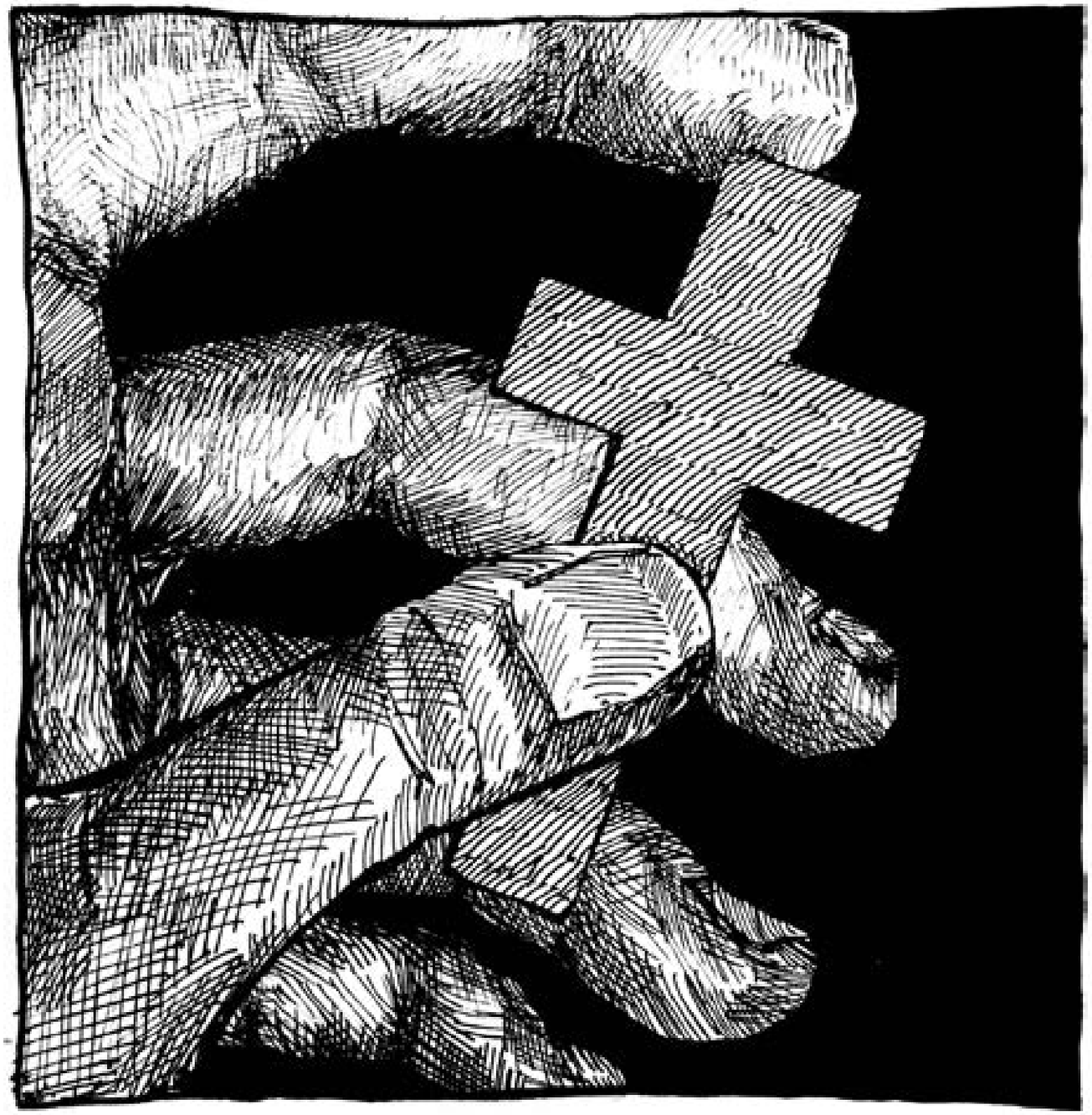
But also, I wouldn't want to put in the effort of talking to someone and then not ever really getting to, like, hang out with them. Not saying that face timing and online interactions aren't like really hanging out, but there's something different about meeting face-to-face and body language and all that.

I think the Tumblr culture that was around when we were using it was pretty, pretty bad. I don't ever really feel a need to go back to it anymore.









Oh my god, I thought I was a weirdo for so long.

Like, for a while I thought I was gay and then I was like, 'but I'm also attracted to men. But then I'm also attracted to people who look androgynous' — because there was no one in my high school that identified as nonbinary so I did not know that was a thing. There were maybe three gay kids and they were all guys and they were very stereotypically gay — like that's how they always acted. And so I just didn't understand it at all. And I didn't really understand myself at all because of it.

I really just kept my head down in high school and just tried to fit in because I was not willing to deal with everything. I remember most of all my female friends except for one in high school were white. And that had a big role to play in it because I would act very white and dress very white and like didn't really have or want to pursue my own identity.

Now that's totally changed, and I'm just like 'forget all of that,' I do whatever I want and wear whatever I want.

As far as, like, my personal Instagram goes, I don't really post any pictures of myself anymore. It's like my platform to talk about activist work, especially like Black

Lives Matter, stuff that's been happening in Armenia, and then, like, queer rights.

I was, for a hot sec, contemplating whether or not I should come out on social media and then decided against it just because I fully just didn't want to deal with the backlash that was gonna happen. I'm extremely uncomfortable when I get a message — like whenever I get it on, you know, my personal account. I always get scared, like every single time, because I'm just like, 'yeah, I'm gonna hear some racism right now.'

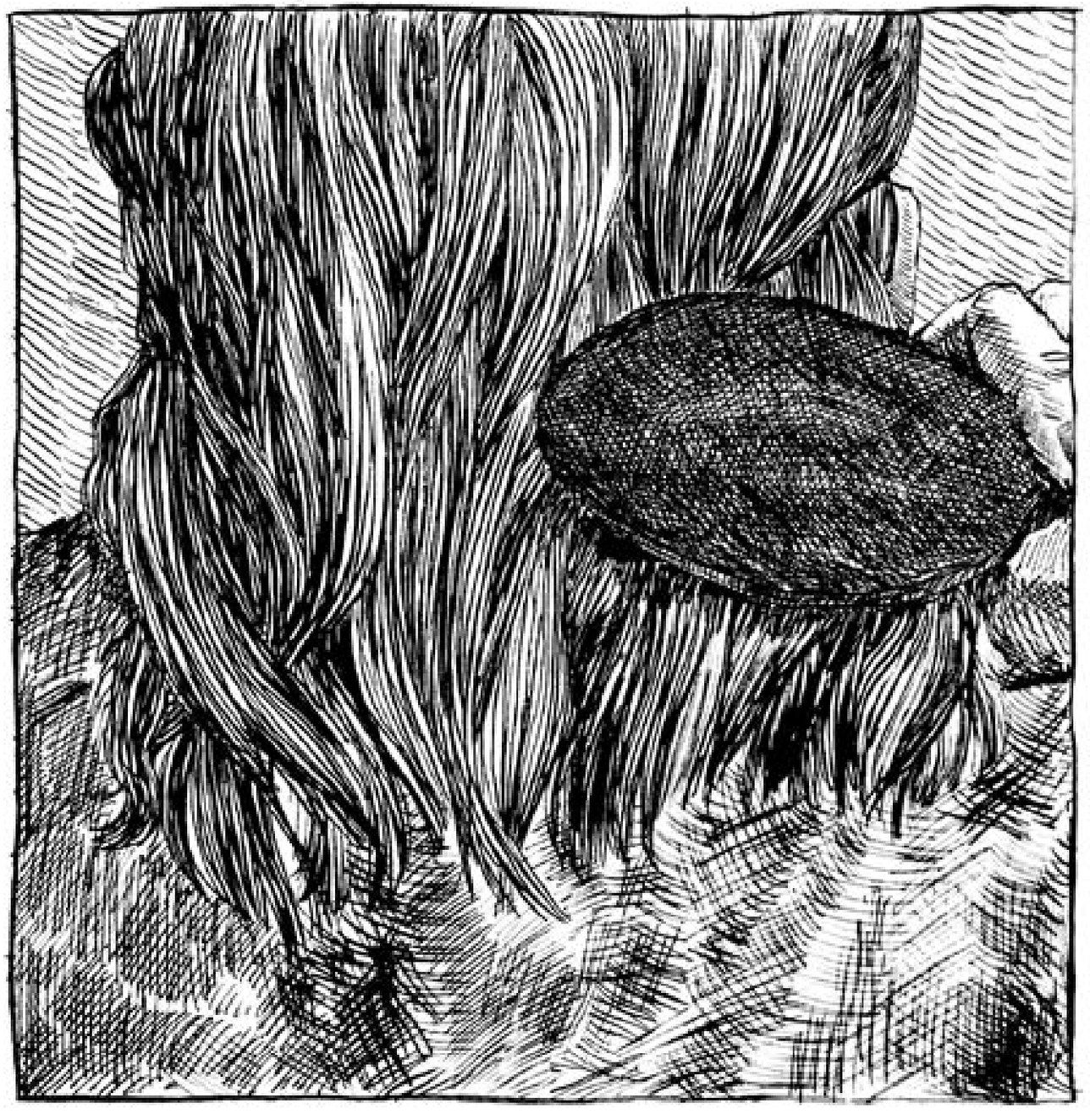
And, you know, sometimes it's bad and most of the time it's not. It just still always makes me anxious.

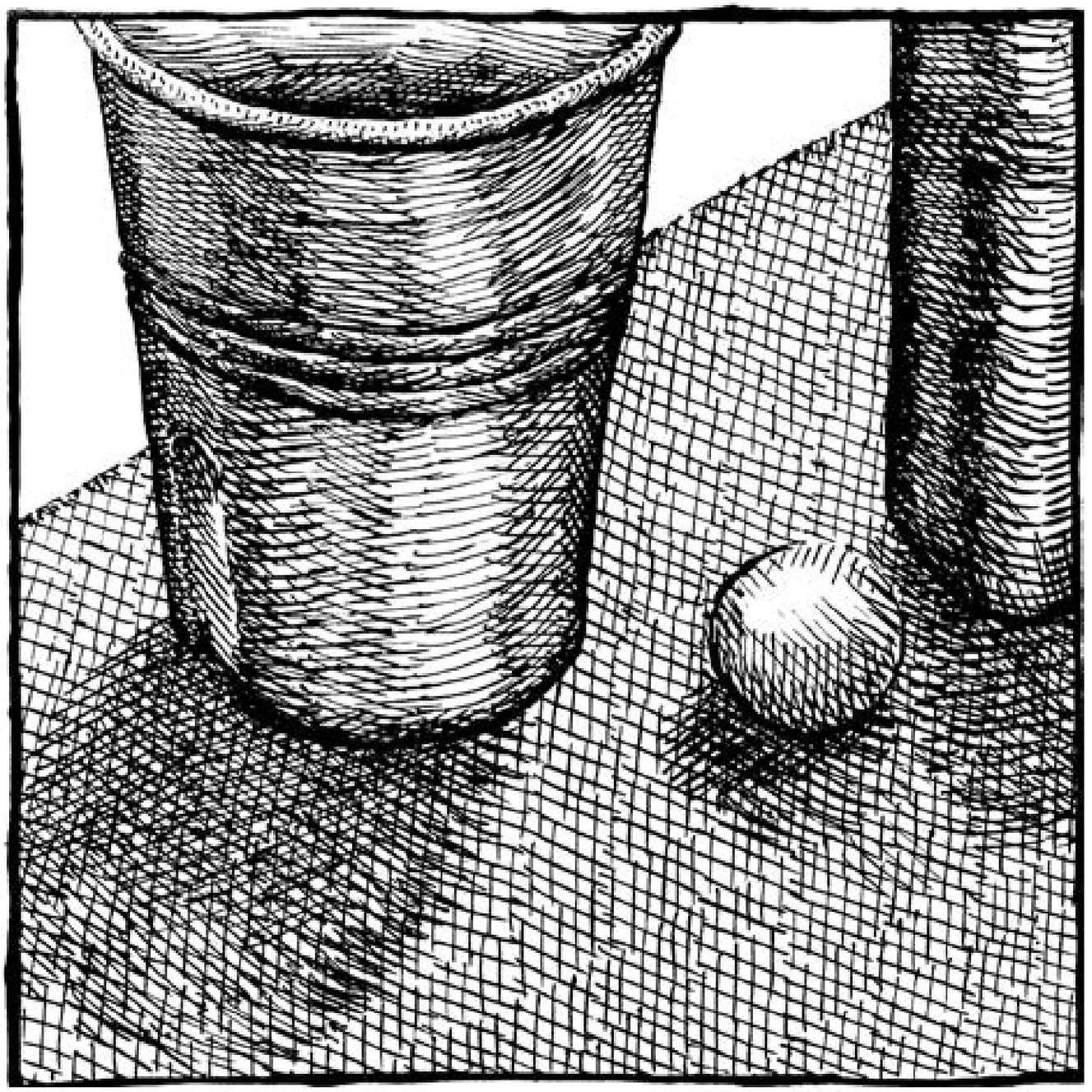
I think the gravity that race has when it comes to coming out is often ignored and shouldn't be just because certain communities are far more likely to stigmatize you and not understand who you are or your sexuality.

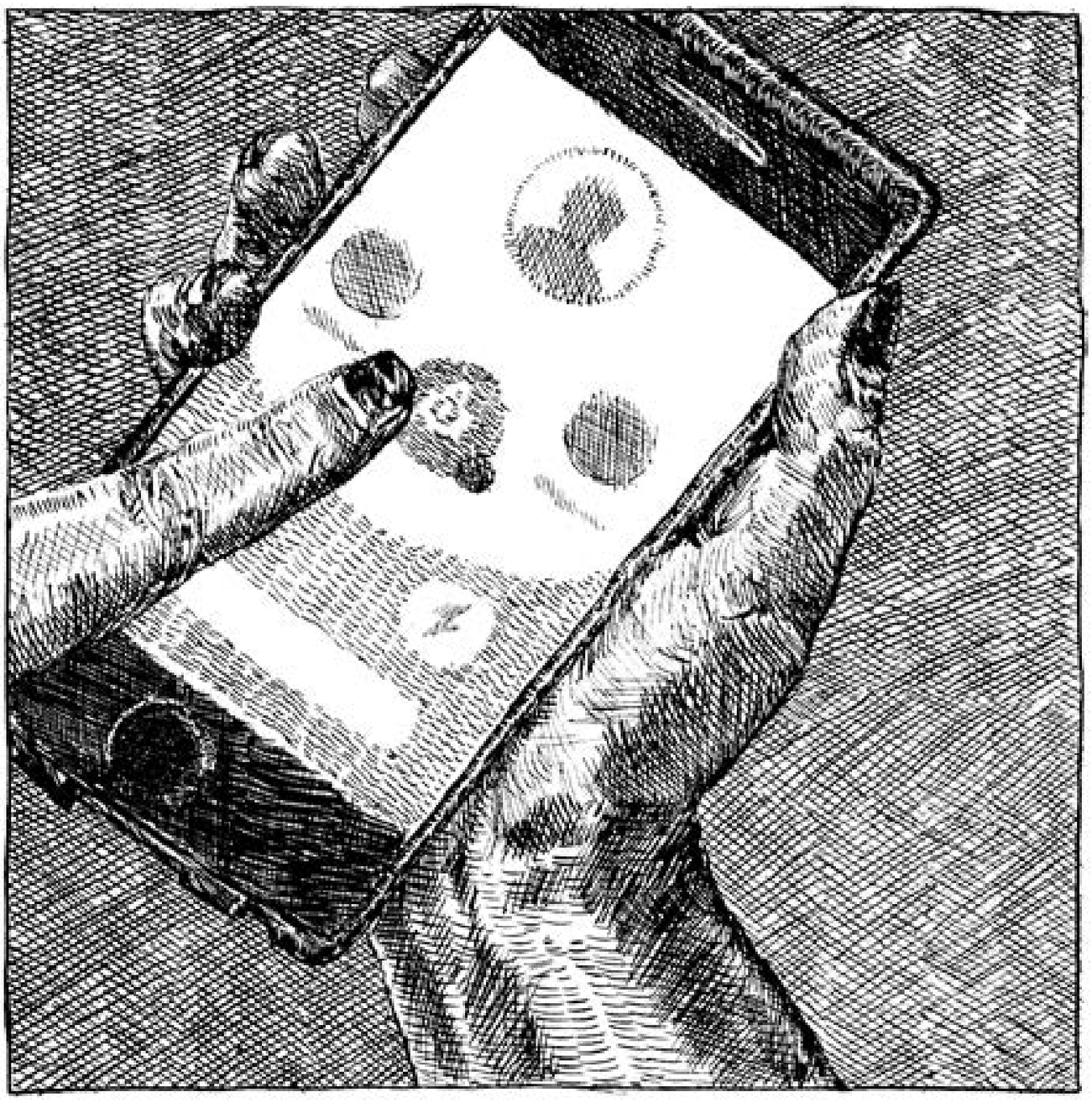
Like I'm Christian and my church is, like, really messed up. Which is not okay. But I still value that and it's a really important part of who I am. And I fully, do not believe that what the church, or at least the Armenian church, and often most other churches preach is accurate as far as LGBT rights go.

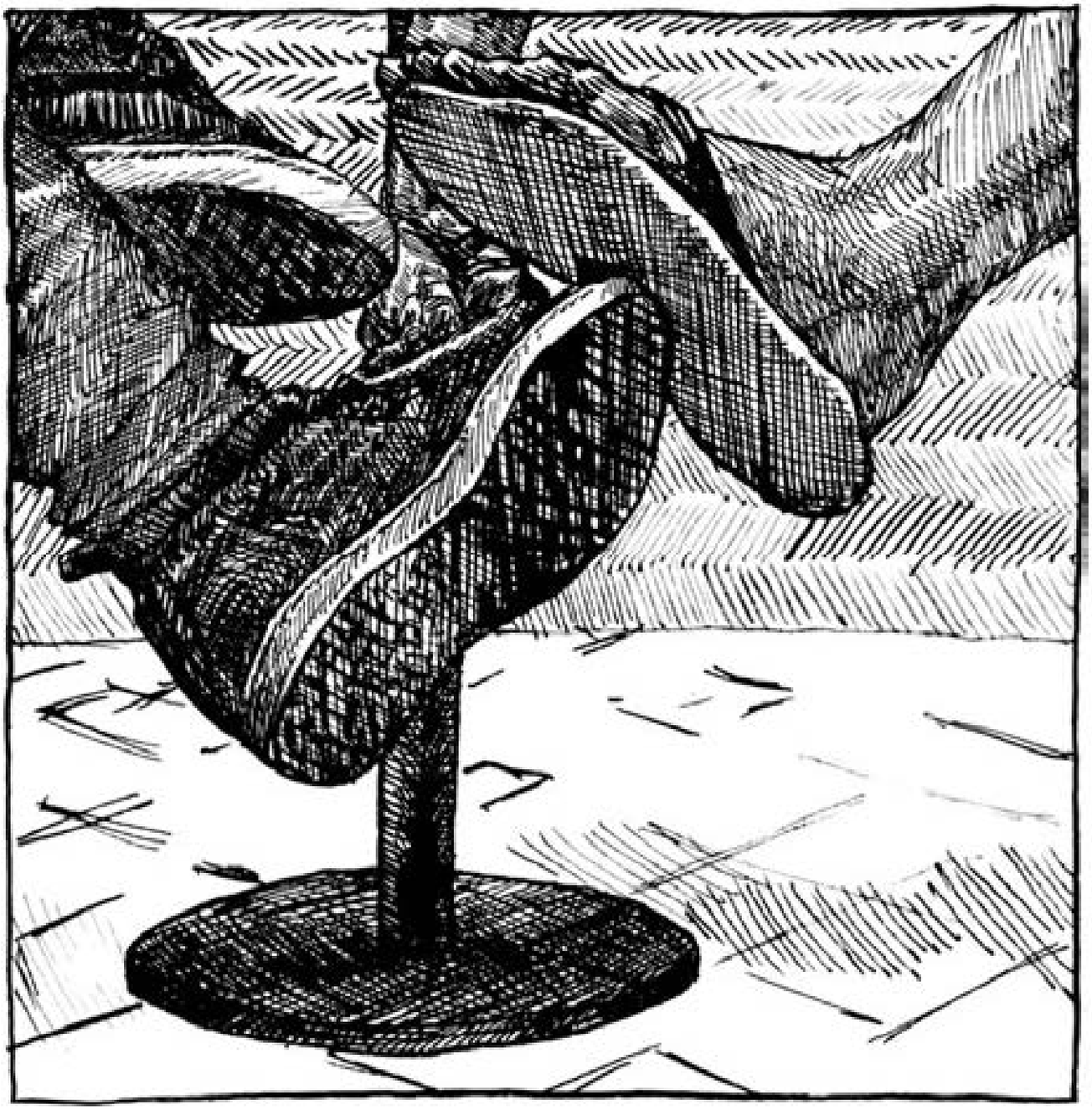
I think if I was not afraid of repercussions from my church community and my Armenian community, then I would come out. But those are two things that are really important to me. And I don't really have to come out because bi people have the privilege of being in a straight-passing relationship, which I'm in right now.

And so I can just pretend, you know. And that's how it is.









When did you start using dating apps?

In high school, and I want to say sophomore year of high school. At that point it was on Tinder. And it was both men and women.

How did you want other people on these apps to perceive you?

I don't know, I would say I have always wanted to just seem cool, like I'm always a bit of a try-hard, you know, I'm really focused on how I look, in terms of, if I look like I'm not trying hard. I try really hard to look like I'm not trying hard.

I would say I try not to look 'basic' because I feel like I'm teetering on the edge of someone that could really look like a straight woman who is just, like, experimenting. And being annoying about it or whatever. And I think that is something that — I want to look like I have an edge to me so people will take me seriously as a queer woman. That's a big thing, like, I do go with the pictures in which I look a little artsy, a little edgy, a little bit like I'm not a girly girl.

I dress really girly sometimes and there's times where I dress a little more, like, I'll have a flannel on or be, like, a little cooler. You know what I mean.

And it's a little too stereotypical but, like, I do go with all the pictures in which I look a little artsy, a little edgy, a little bit like I'm not a girly girl. Because it often feels like when I'm on dating apps, if I see someone who looks too girly, 'put-together' — 'basic' is the word that keeps coming to mind but I don't like that word — then I'm like, 'oh, they're not really queer, they're just, you know, on this for kicks, or they're bi, but only would ever go out with a guy.'

And so I noticed myself judging people like that, so I just try not to. So then I preemptively try to make people not judge me the same way by presenting in the edgy way.

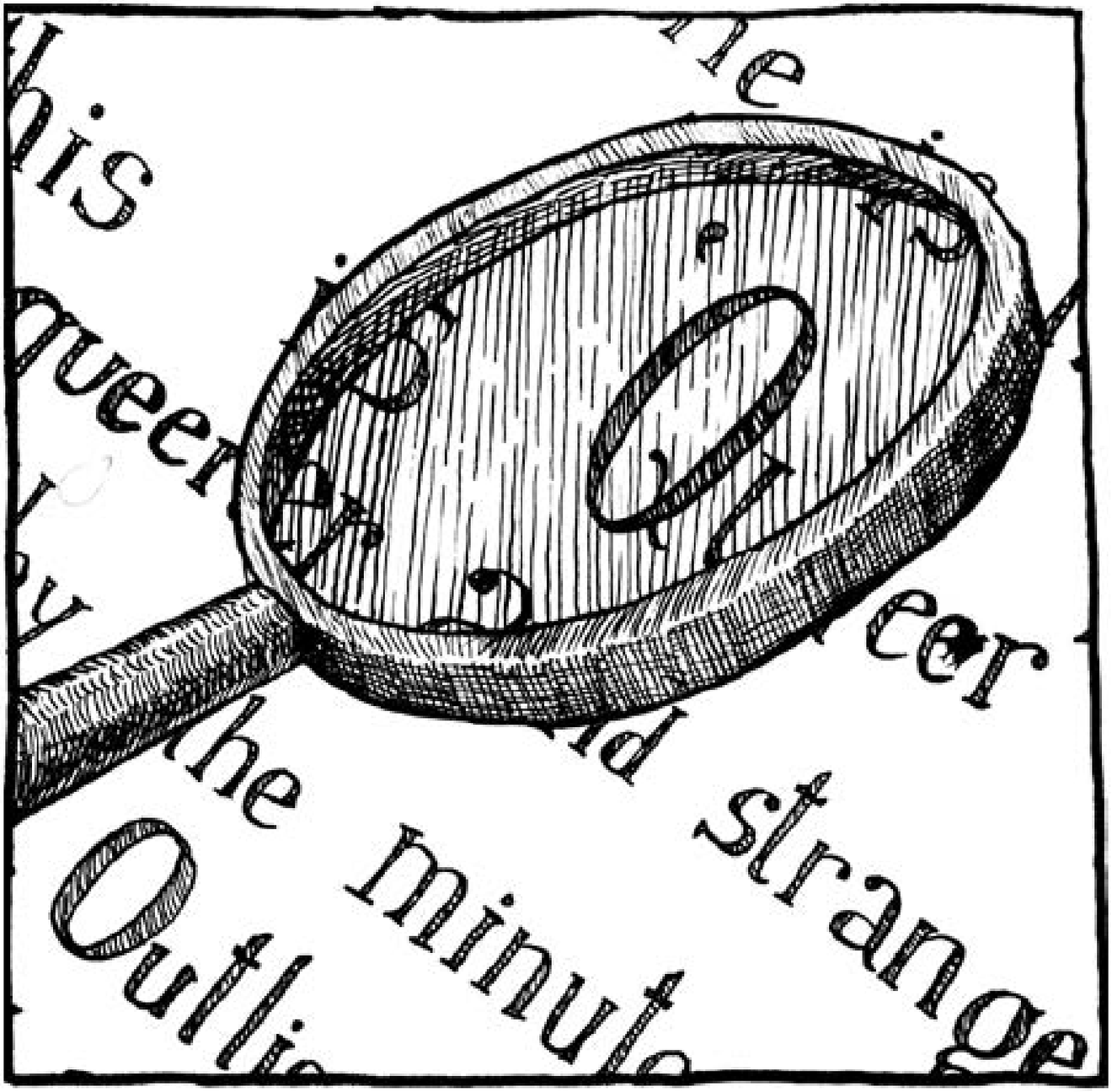
Do you think a lot of people on these apps judge you in this way?

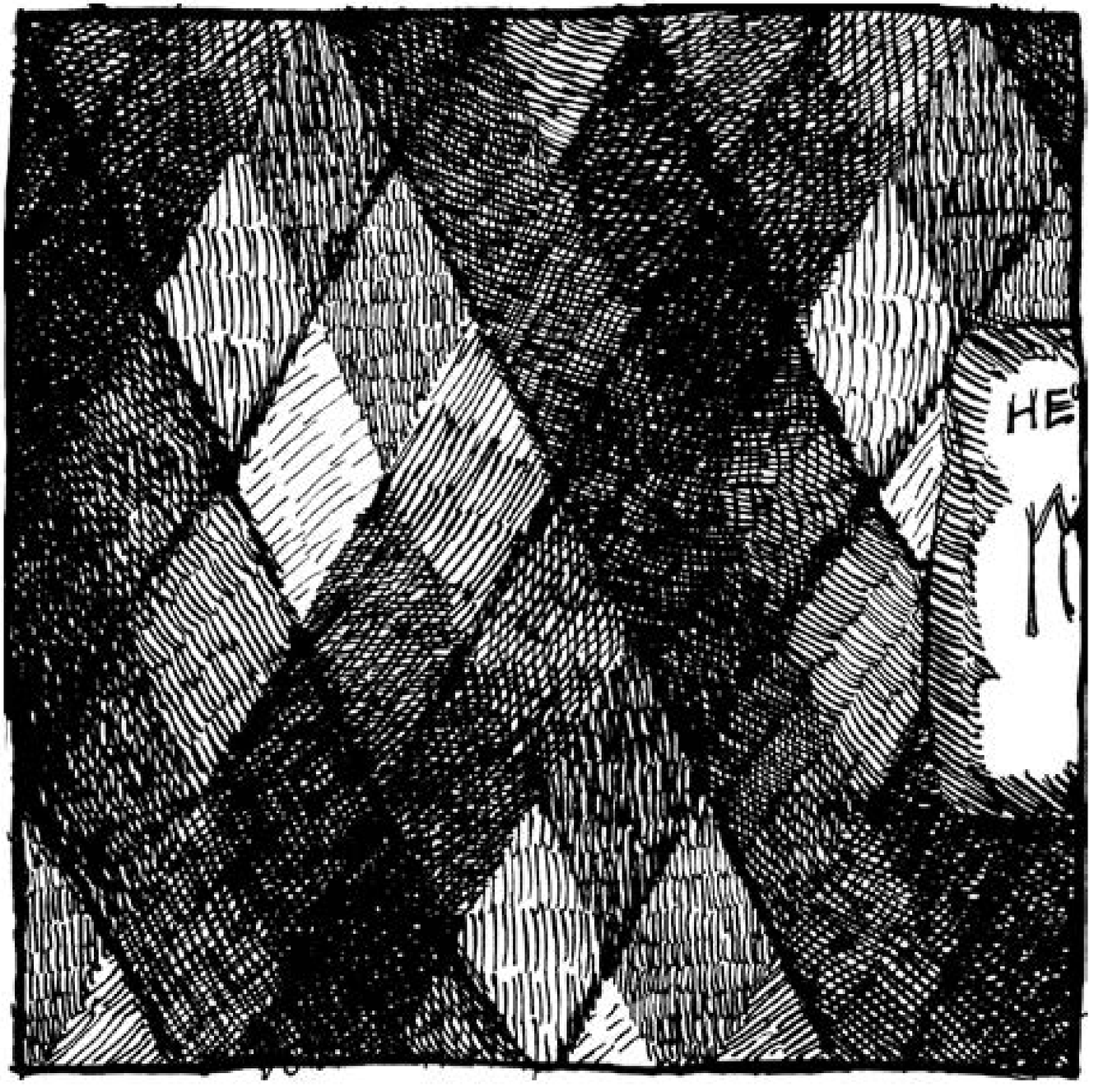
I have absolutely no idea. I don't know if that's all in my own head. But if people think like me, then yes — and I'm sure there are people who think like me.

I've been with women, obviously, but then every time I like a guy I'm like, 'oh my god, am I actually — do I like women?' And then I feel that judgment from other people that they'll forget that that's a possibility, that I would date a girl. And I always bring up guys, and I feel like that's partly because I hang out with really straight people. And so sometimes I feel a need to, like, overprotect that on dating apps.

It's something I'm conscious of, and it's something that freaks me out sometimes.

I feel, like, people forget about that part of me. And then I feel, like, weird about it.

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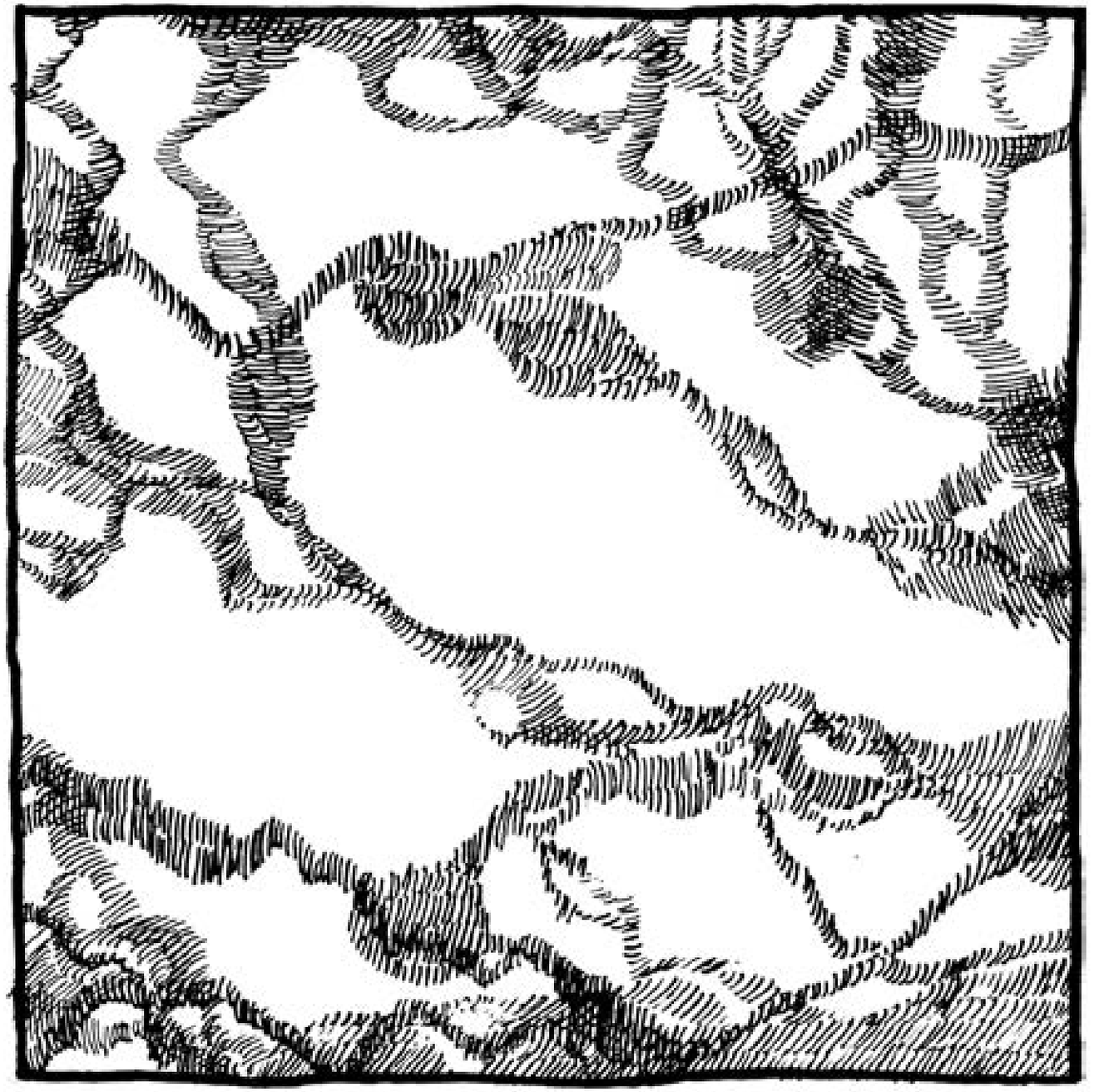


I did Jewish youth group for my first couple years of high school, and I was in one of those Facebook groups of just, like, the whole class. Probably a couple of people in that group were out at the time. I was not — I wasn't even aware, so it wasn't like a thing I connected with anybody over.

And then after that, I was on Tumblr a little bit, on fanfiction websites a little bit.

It was mostly like, I'd be reading a Ghostbusters story, and I'd say, 'this is really good and really sweet' and they'd say 'thank you.' I guess it wasn't really like we were bonding over anything except, I guess, it was a pairing of two women, so I guess that's why we were bonding. If I care enough about something, like something moves me enough that I want to say 'this was really nice, it meant a lot to me,' then I probably want them to know, like, 'I'm a young queer person, and your work is helping me.'

It's not that I go online looking for queer people. I go online and, like, if I go on Tumblr, I'm probably looking for fandoms. And then my perception is colored by whoever is in that fandom.

Generally, it's people with a lot of strong opinions. And I think also, a lot of the queer experience online, especially on Tumblr, is probably pretty intersectional.

So, for example, there's a lot different going on in just the yuri fandom. If you're in autistic yuri fan you have very different thoughts from a non-autistic yuri fan, or if you're a queer fan of color, you have very different thoughts from a white yuri fan.

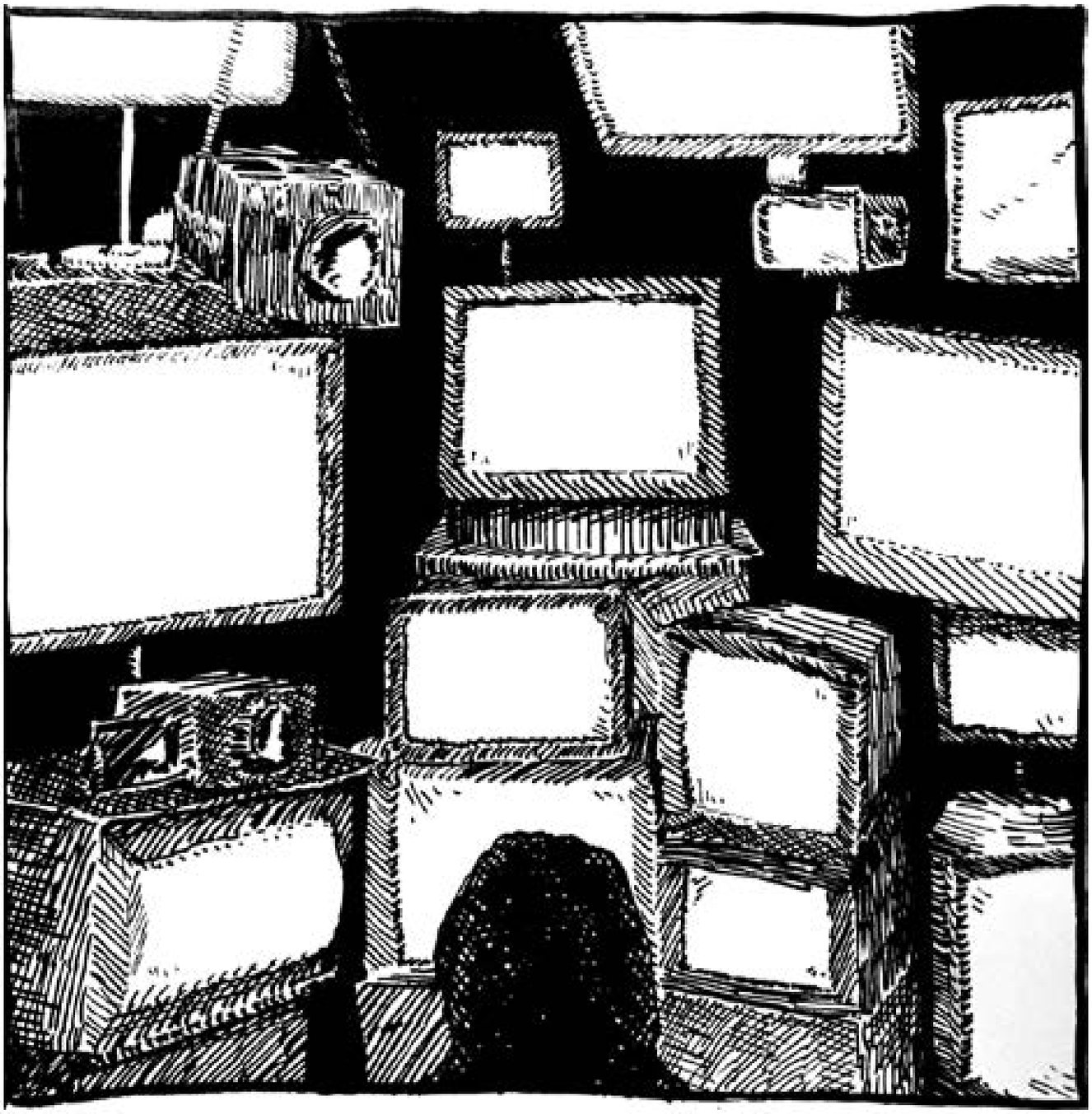
So I think a lot of opinion like that definitely colors the discourse a lot. In addition to just the fact that people are attracted to something, at least in part, because we want to see female ships, I think that's why we're all there in the first place.

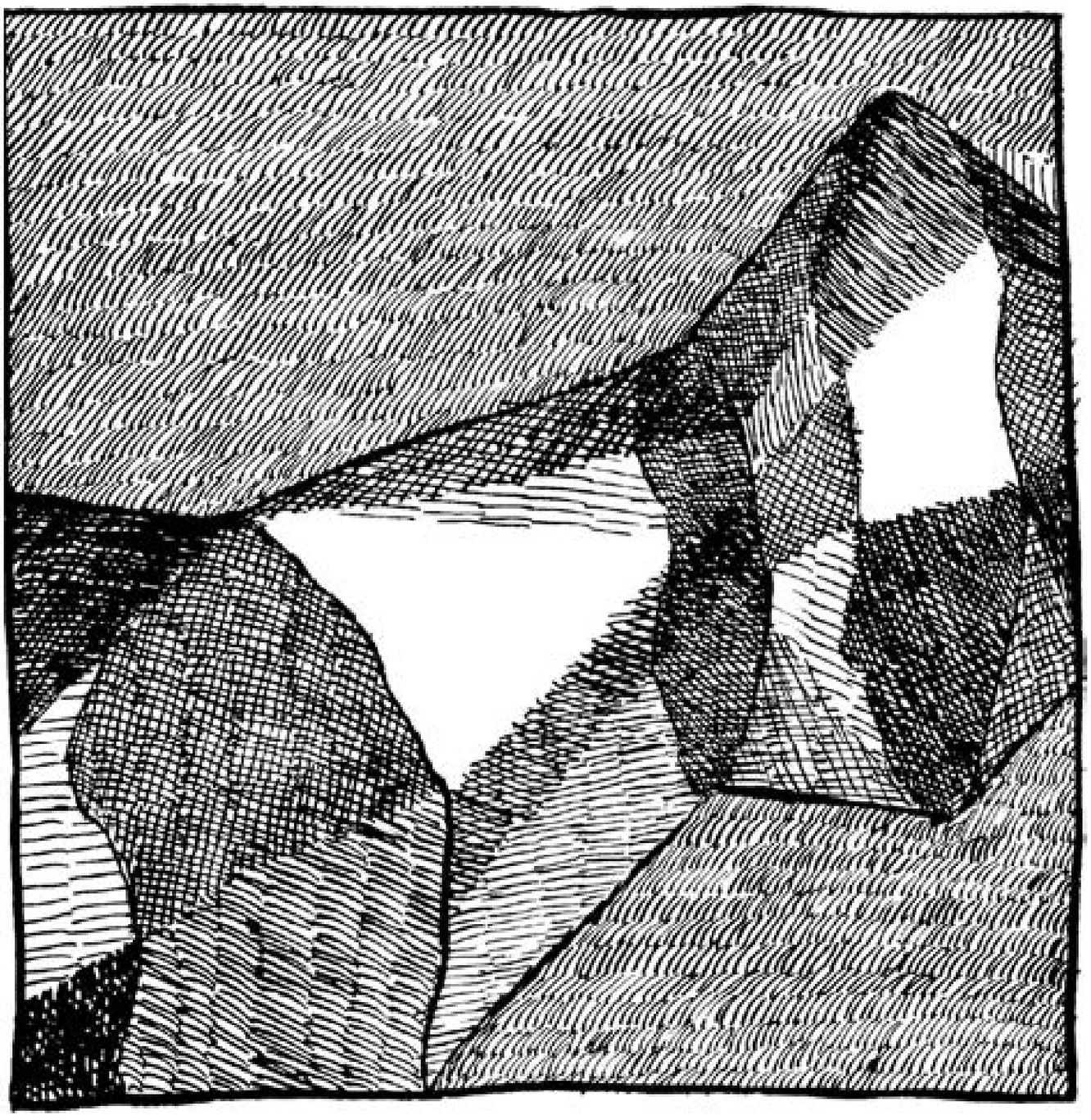
And also, because I read a lot of fanfiction, there's like two people — there's the ones who know a ton about sex and the ones who don't. So that's two different groups entirely: It's the ones who know everything, and the ones who are like, 'I'm going to be single for the rest of my life, help me.'

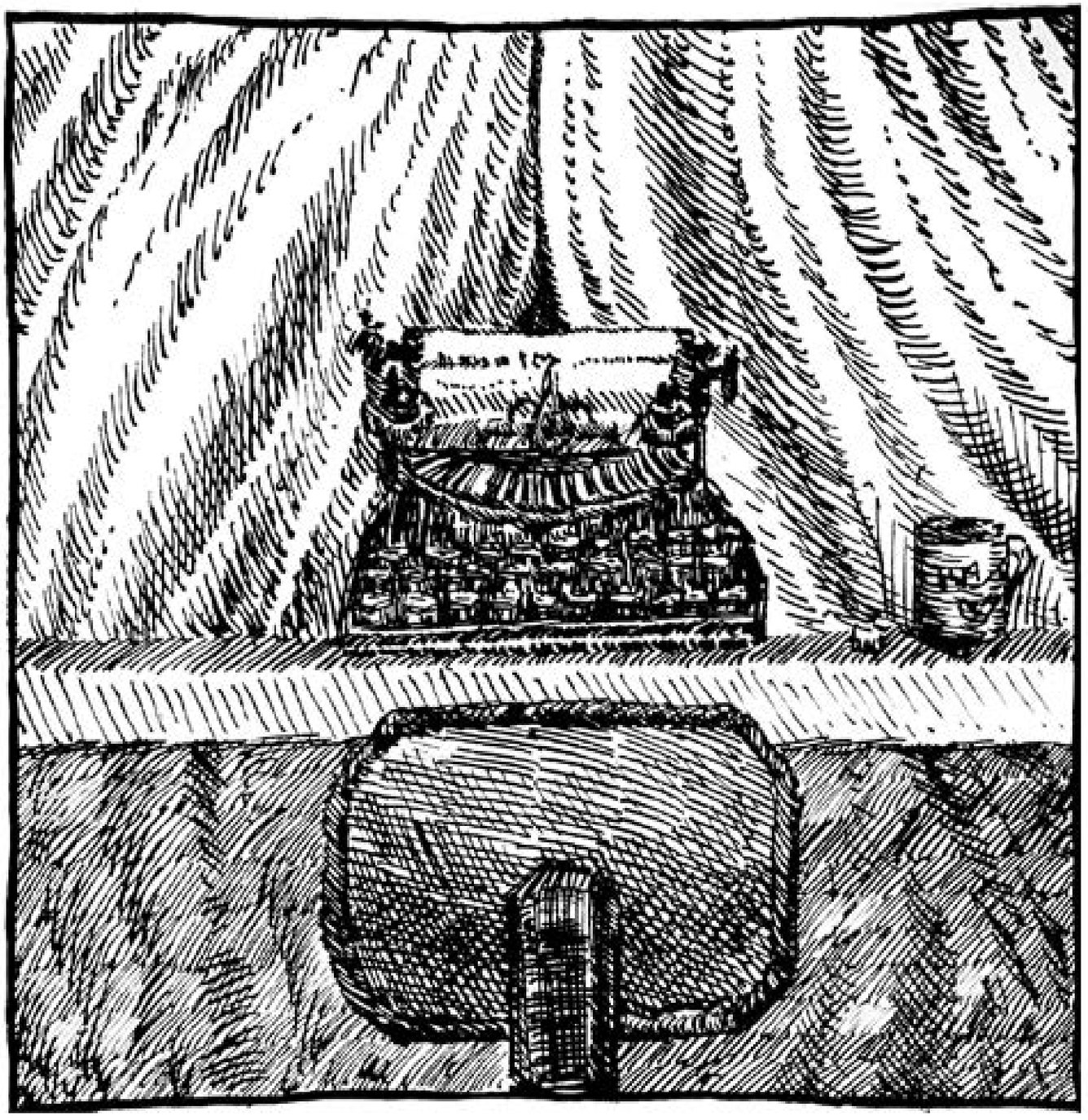
And if you're in fandom, you probably have some very strong opinions on it. You have a lot of opinions on whether or not it's good representation. On, like, Tumblr, or wherever it's not like you can find much about their real identity, I think people are a lot more willing to share their thoughts and their feelings about anything LGBT-related.

Pretty much everything I learned about the LGBT community — especially in high school, beginning of college — I learned almost entirely online. So it was just a whole lot of scrolling through social media and scrolling through news sites... a lot of Buzzfeed. So lately I've been wondering if I've been getting any of the right information.

But yeah, I think it's mostly just good that we have the Internet now, because it's a good resource if you want to learn stuff, even if I'm not sure if it's an accurate resource.







Around age 15 and 16... I was very, very much in the closet, like, rooting around with my winter clothes. So, you know, very deeply closeted.

When I got into what you would call the online poetry community in high school and college, there were a lot more people who were talking about it and discussing it.

It's complicated, because some of my original stuff that was published that dealt with LGBT themes, was published under a pseudonym. But some of it was related to my own name, so I think there was very much this idea that I wanted to be seen within this community space.

I sort of started to grow and connect because I formed my own literary magazine. And so that sort of put me into a position where I was having to reach out so I can make connections with strangers.

I ended up using 'queer' a lot because that just seems to encompass everything and because I like reclaiming it as a word. I know that it's a contentious word and so I try to use it from my own experiences and I don't use it for other people.

You hear a lot about, like, 'queer spaces,' or like, 'oh this queer poet,' or you'll hear

some discourse about using the word queer in like, whatever form. And I'm not sure if I agree with it completely but I think it just — it tends to come up a lot.

I think on the one hand, language is incredibly important and labels are important, but on the other hand, there are other things you can be arguing about. It gets tiring and I think at some point I feel so jaded of seeing it online, whereas someone who's like 15 and first encountering this — that could be a completely different experience.

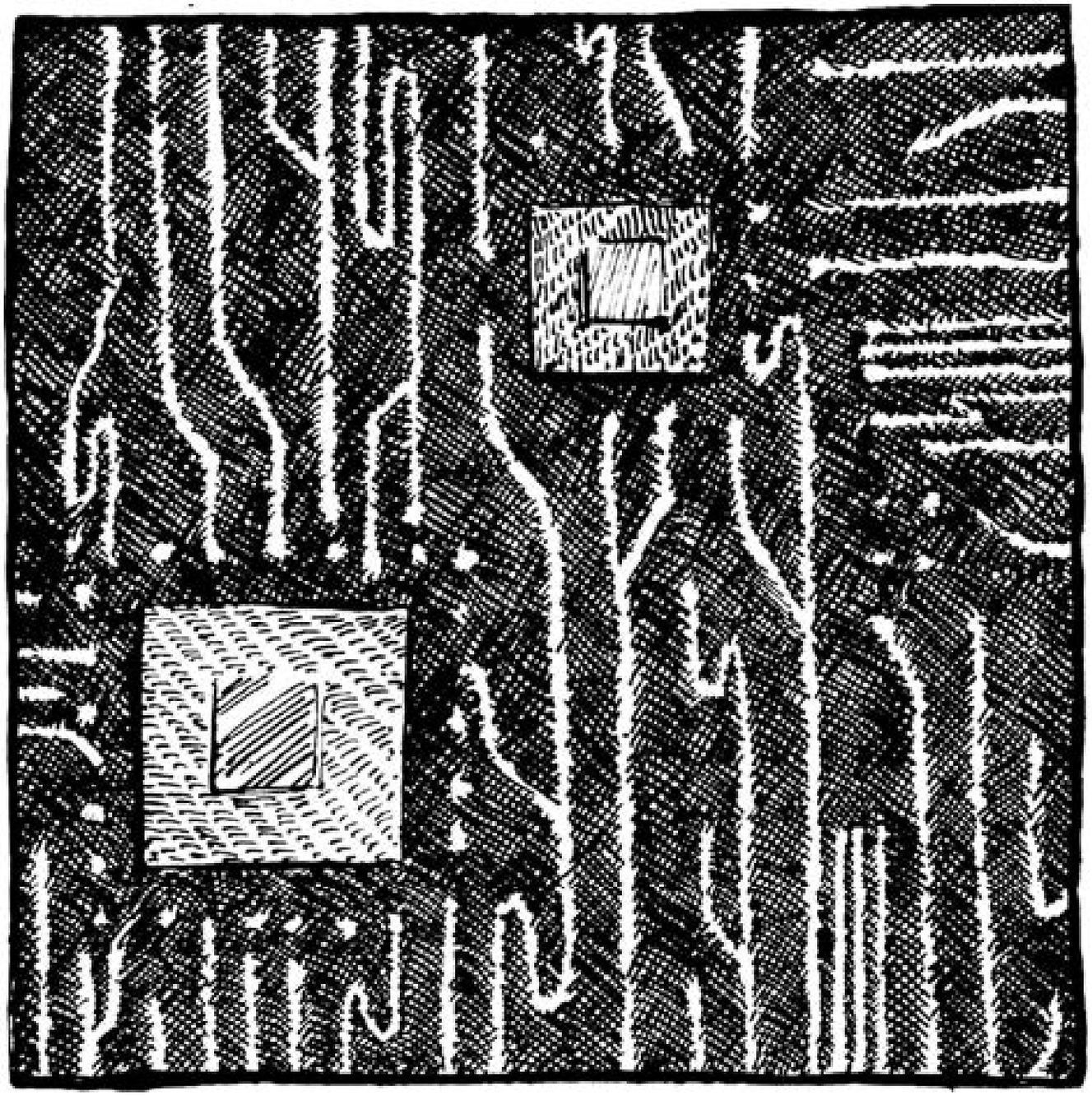
So at this point in my life, I'm just kind of like, 'can we move on already?'

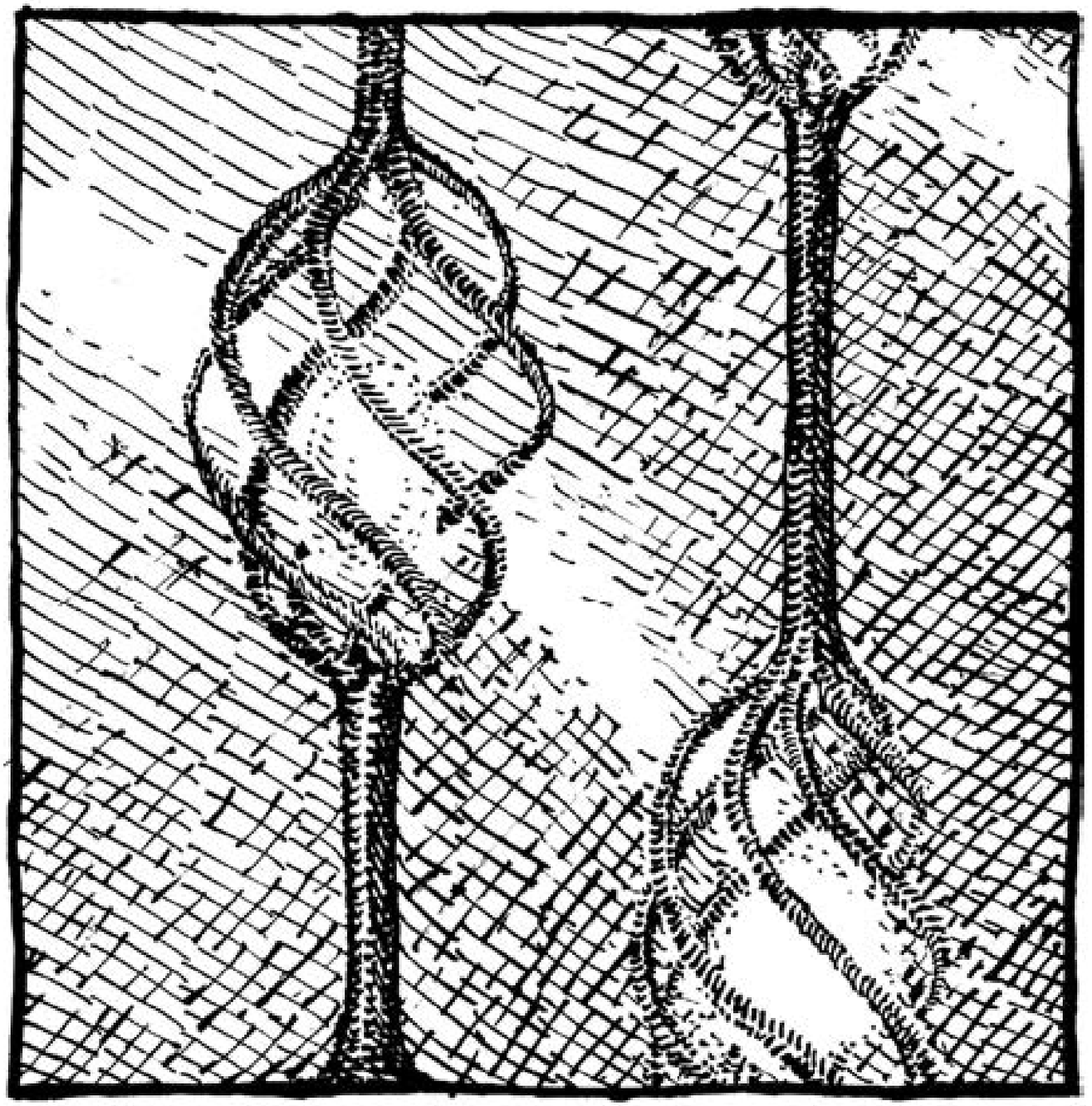
I tend to lurk a lot, and don't really get involved in that much. For the most part, things have tended to be positive, but I've also seen a lot of stuff that I'd rather not have.

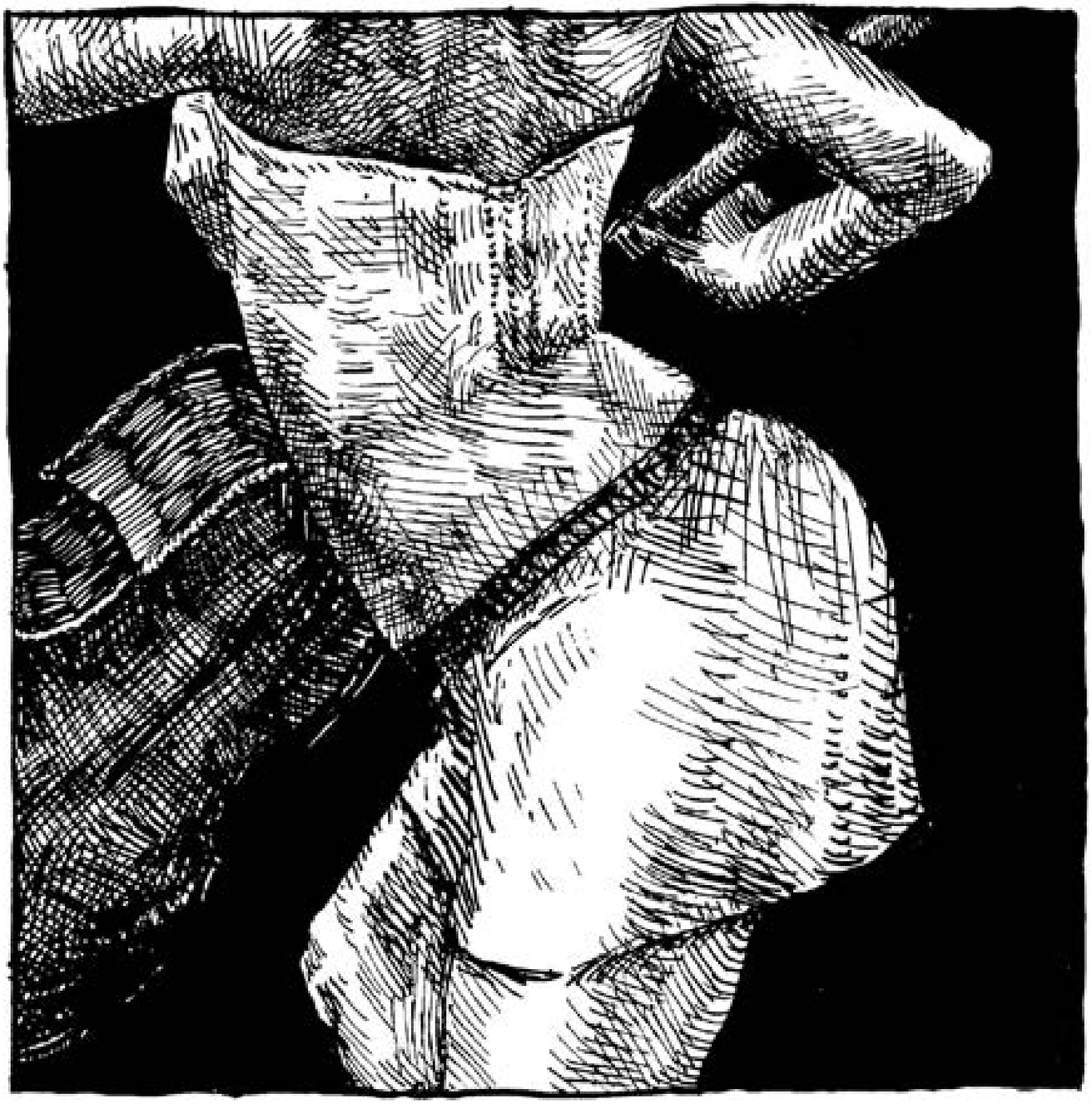
I don't trust as many people online as I think I did when I first started and was trying to get my footing, so to speak.

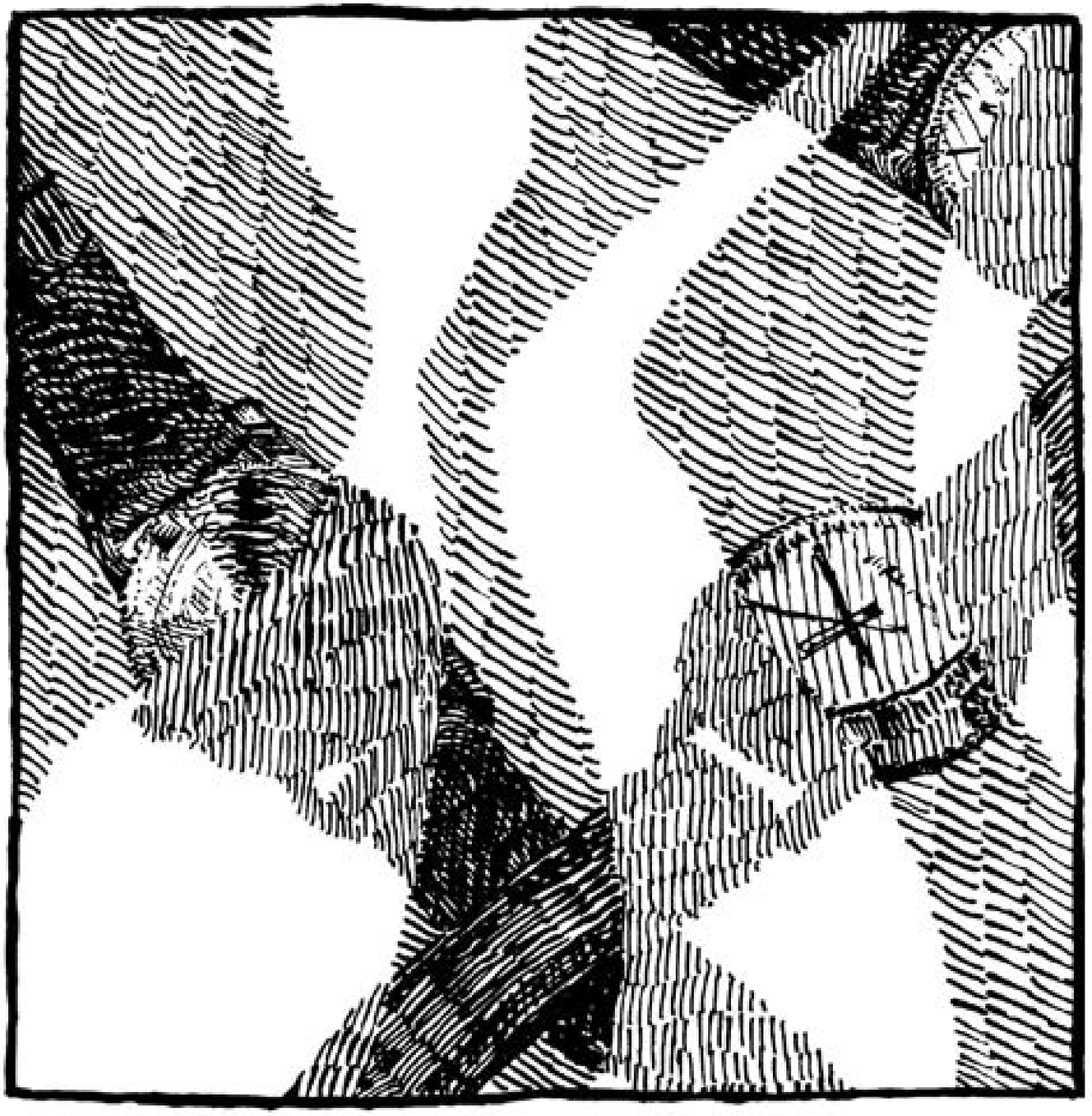
There's this pull toward being performative online and, like, creating some sort of identity for yourself that you have to sort of live up to. But in reality, I feel like I've never been able to talk authentically online, so I prefer reality more.

I think that a lot of people do. I've never quite felt comfortable in these spaces.









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What is the first social media platform you remember using?

Myspace! I was in middle school and I hid it from my mom because she didn't want me to use it.

I was 12-13, very awkward, and not comfortable with my body. I felt weird and kind of like an outsider — I had felt an attraction to both boys and girls a few years later and was unconsciously suppressing any queerness. And because I was loud and weird and energetic, I didn't get much notice from the boys I had crushes on so that wasn't super fun! I was still relatively happy and outgoing though.

Have you ever followed or interacted with any LGBTQ+ internet personalities online?

Yes, and for the most part, I really appreciate seeing out people be so visible and famous. I don't have a close queer group in real life so it's nice to find these queer spaces and people to connect with or follow.

Would you consider yourself to be "out" in any online spaces?

Yup, out on all of them. I haven't always been but now I consider being out as a core part of me and post a lot on Twitter about gay stuff.

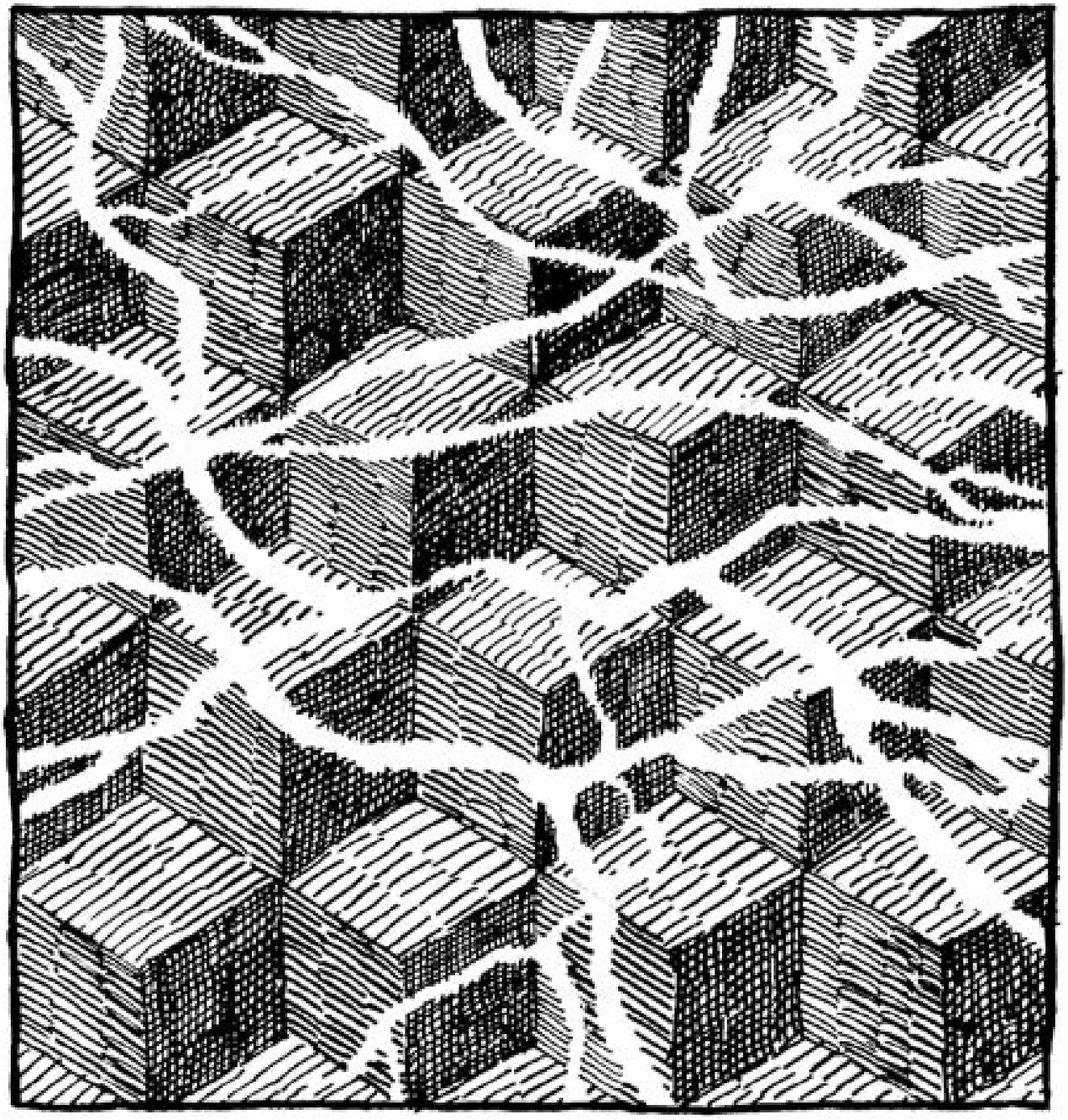
Gay Twitter is a hot mess. I appreciate the funny and informative tweets/convos, but there's also a lot of biphobia, mean white cis gay men, and anti-trans non-sense.

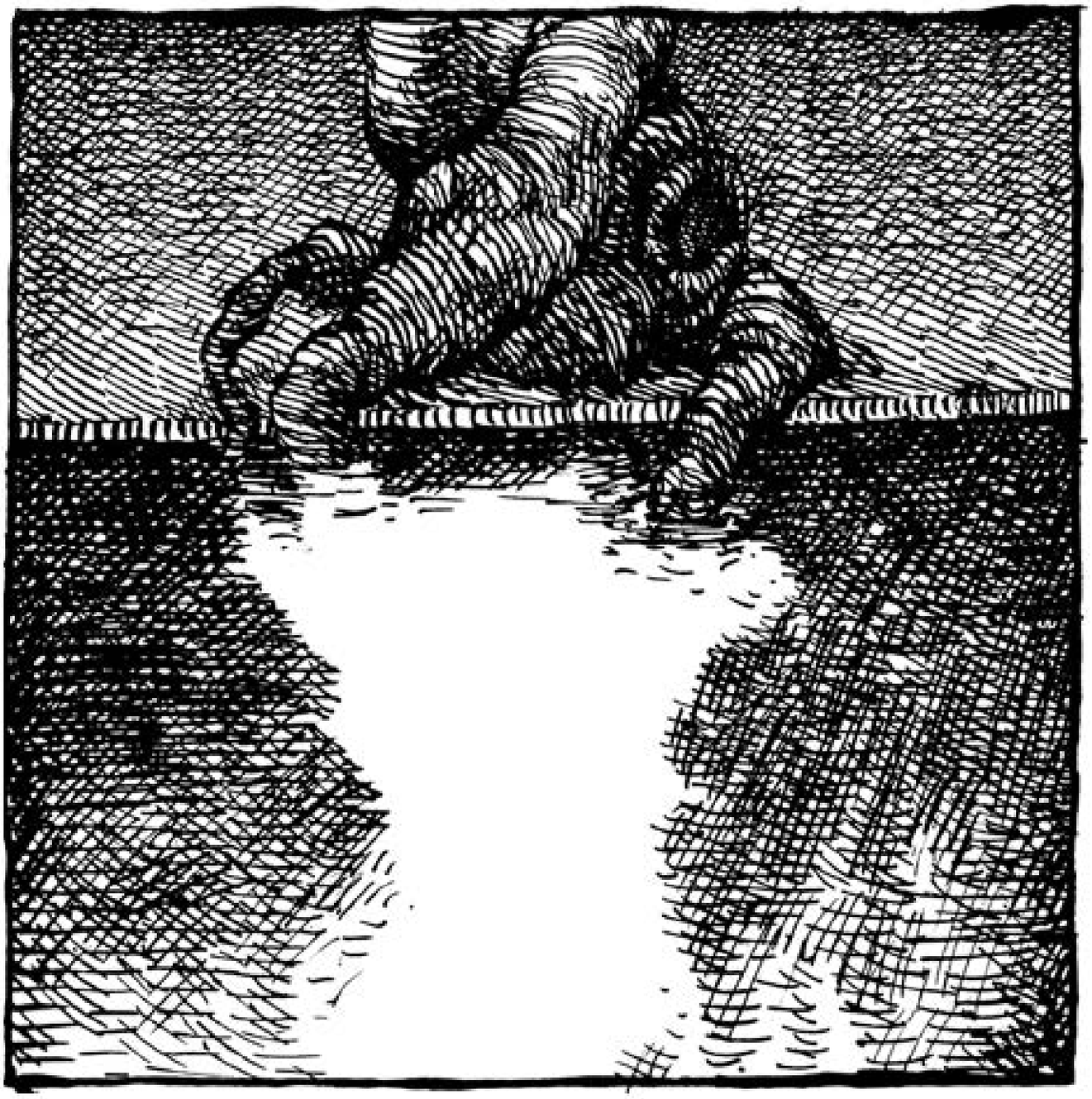
Have you ever interacted with or observed particular LGBTQ+ community spaces online? Do you currently?

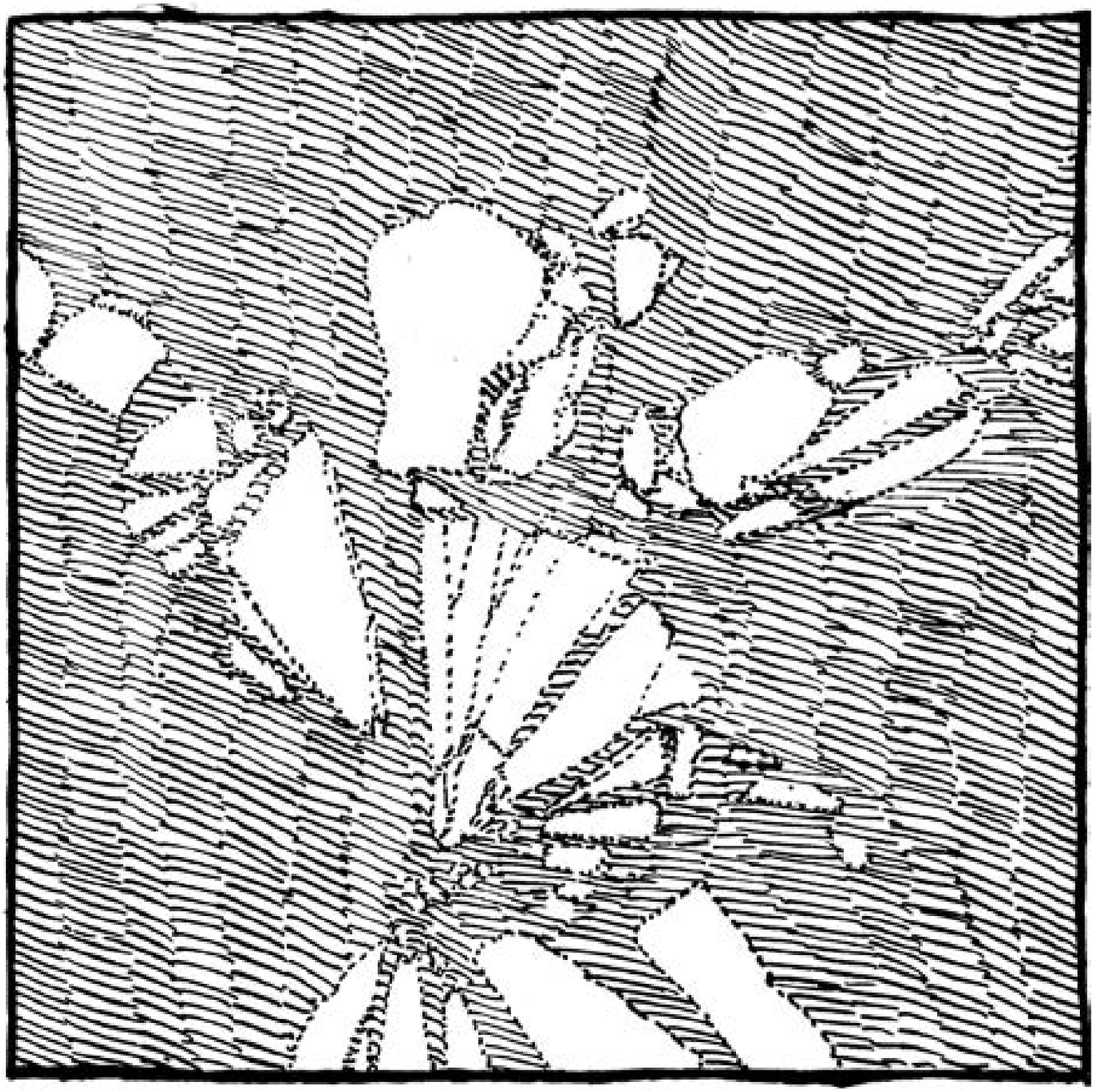
Lex! I really like Lex, it feels actually inclusive and queer and designed as a safe space.

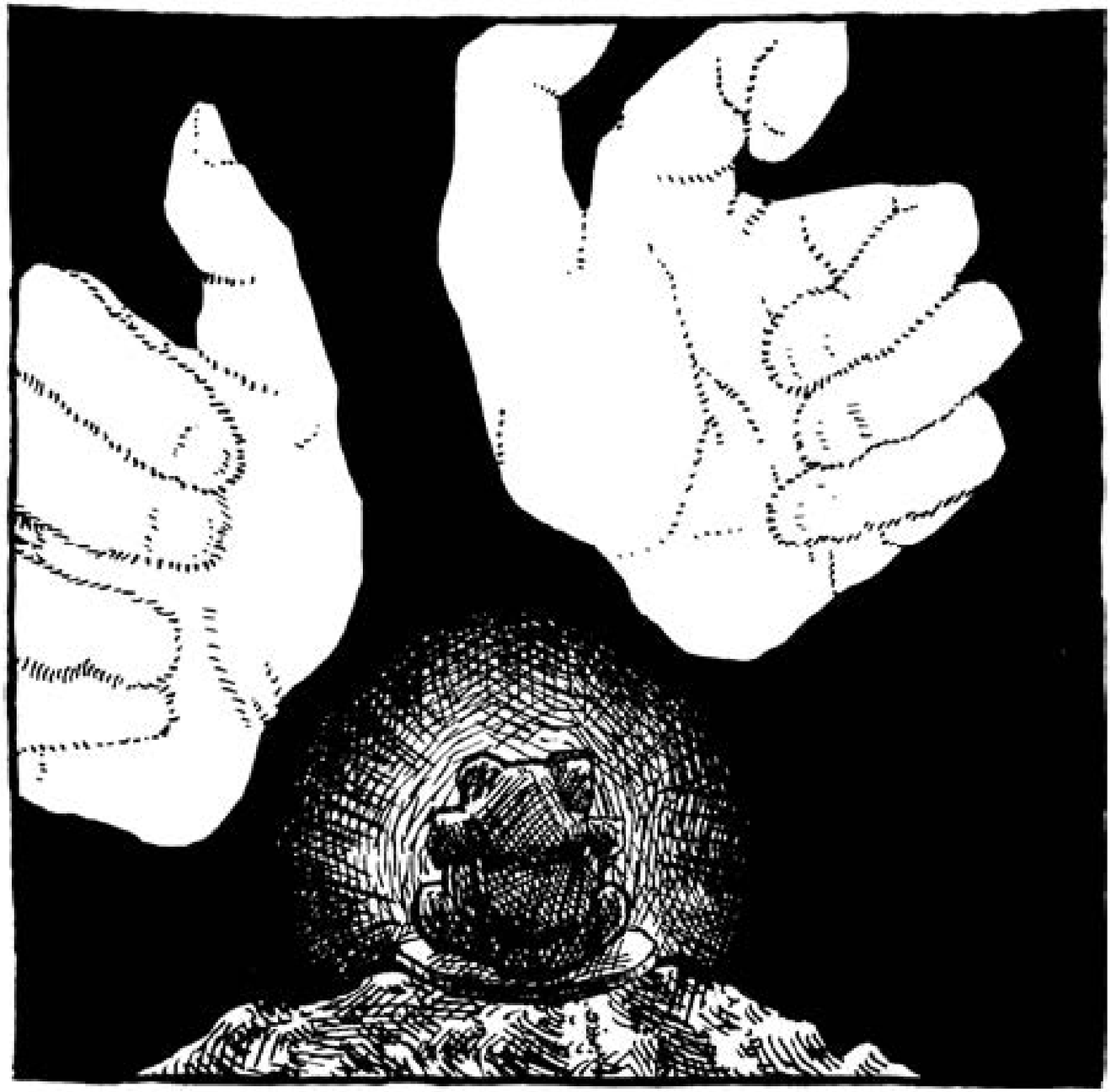
Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe as a result of an online experience?

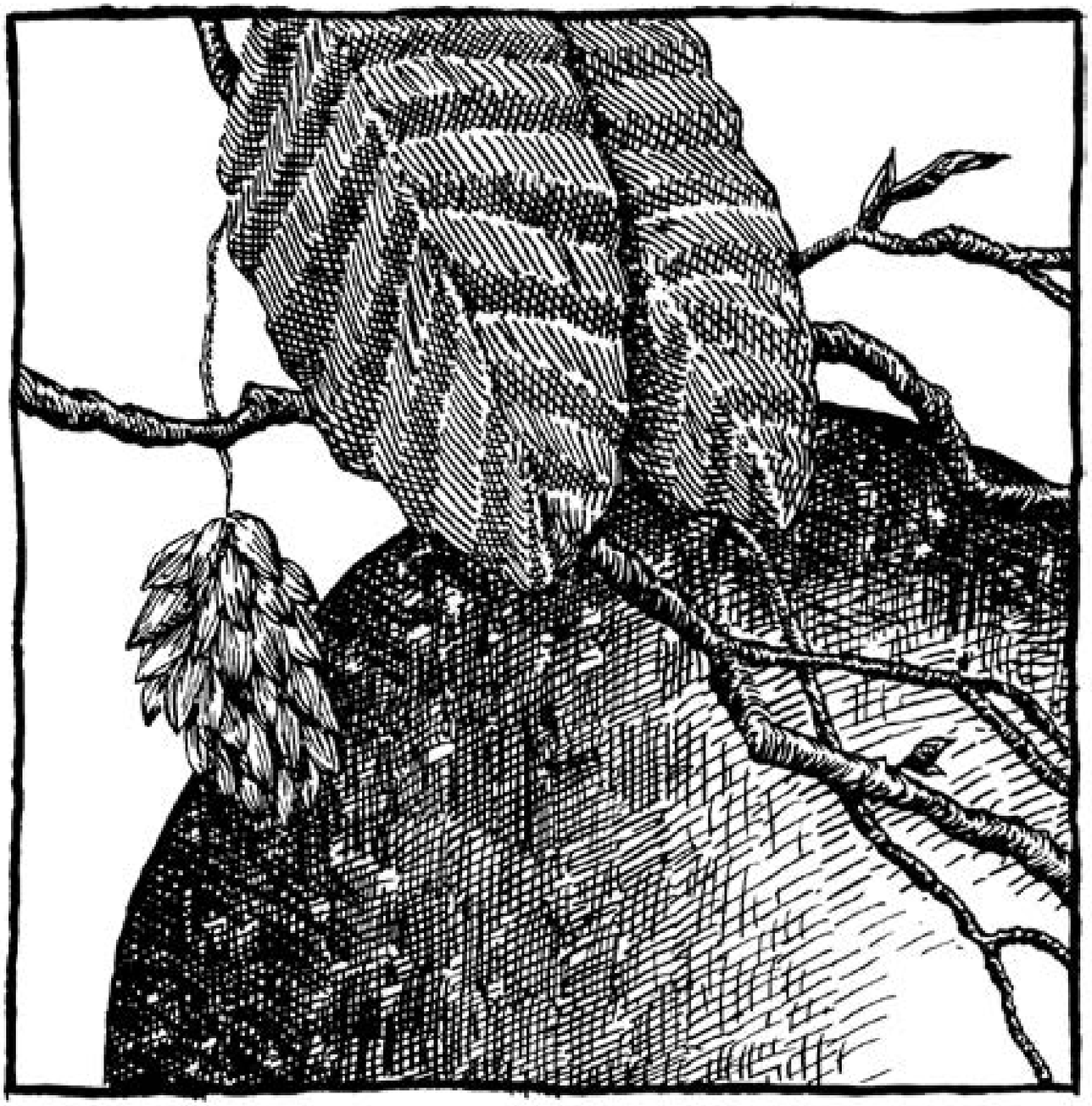
Sometimes I'll get creepy DMs or responses, I just ignore and block them.











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I don't really interact with people online. I feel like the political correctness culture, just that kind of vibe, I don't really know what to call it. The queer community is very vast and there's lots of different identities within it. There's not really a consensus that we can agree to sometimes. And I think, especially in the time that we are in, where we are trying to be more aware of correctness and respect, but at the same time there's a vibe where, like, anything that is said is like law, almost. Like someone could just say some shit and be like, 'yo, you're a bigot if you don't' or something like that and it's, like, wait a fucking minute. Like, hold up.

A weird thing that annoys the fuck out of me: The flags. It sounds so weird to say, but I just feel like, as a community, we're just – I feel like hyper-labelization is obnoxious as fuck and actually harmful. I understand why wanting to have an identity that's close to you is important, but it's almost in a way separating all of us, and it's just almost sometimes too hard to even manage. Like how can have straight people understand anything when I feel like, sometimes, do we understand everything going on? But the worst is when it's, like, angry, too. It's like, 'yo, if you don't know this and you're not seeing this then you're actually the worst.'

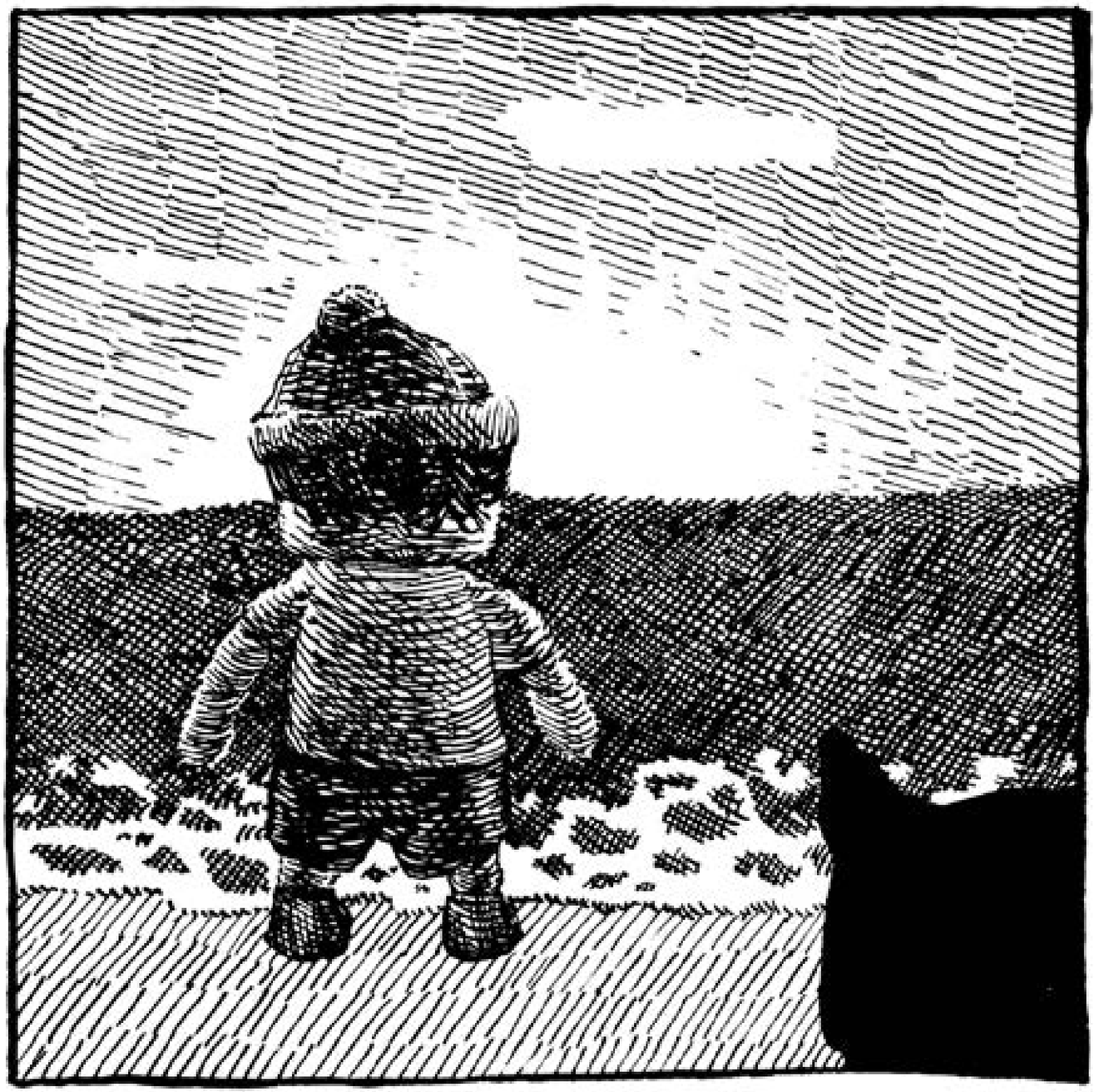
I feel like I zone out in a lot of queer circles. I have queer friends, but I'm not like in queer organizations and circles and I think I would find it so tiring and exhausting, to be honest. Like, damn, I'm gay, without a doubt. Love that for me. And I have tons of queer friends, but it's not like – our queerness is everything but it's not. And I sometimes feel like I can't — like in those kinds of spaces, I feel like it's suffocating, almost.

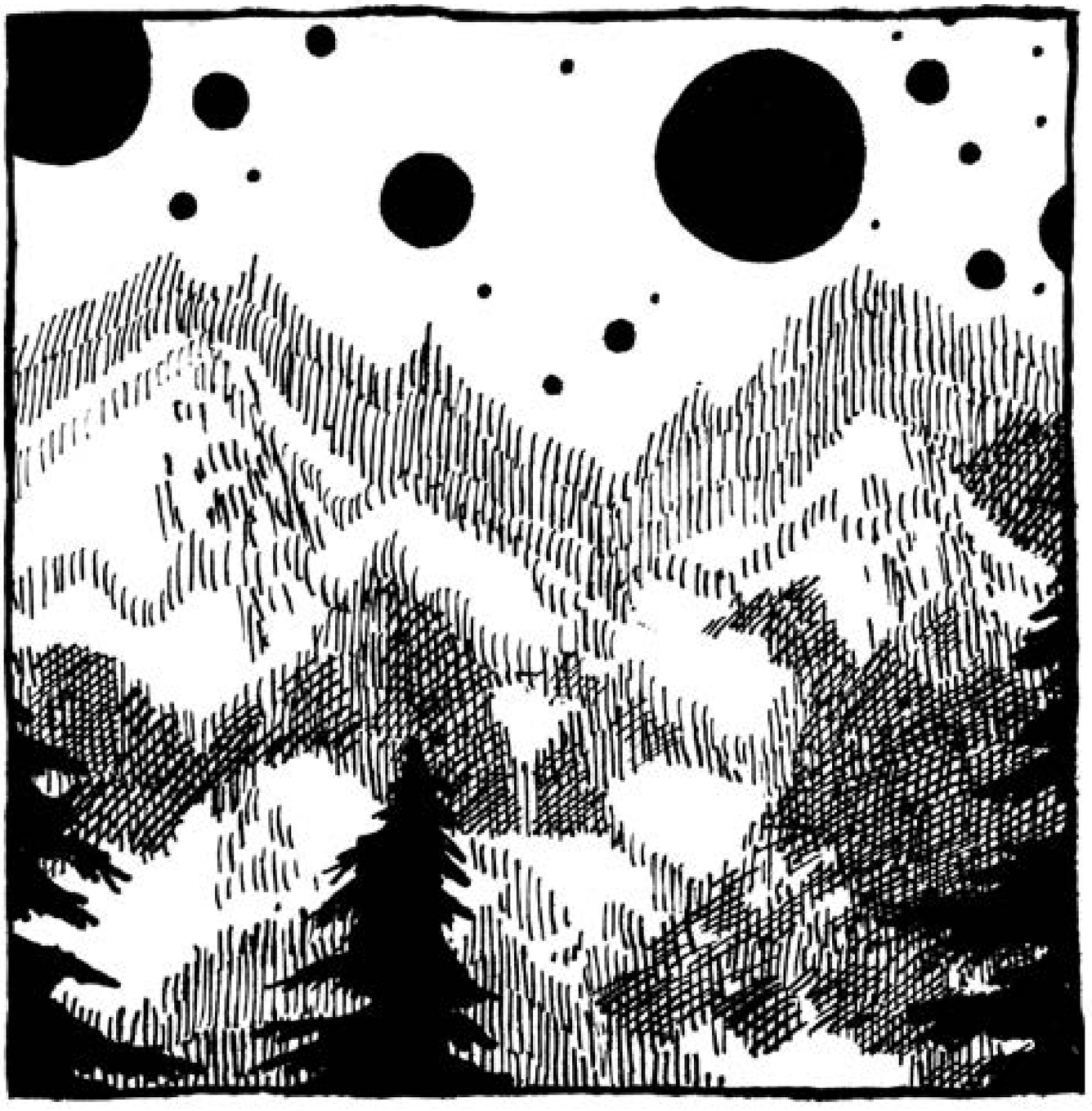
I was looking at a post about asexuality — other arguments aside there were some things where it was just talking about the different things. And this is one of those instances where I think it's harmful for young LGBT people, where it's like 'oh I thought this but maybe I'm that' but it doesn't matter. Labels are important but at the same time, like, explore and figure yourself out and that's okay and I think that's why I'm embracing the term queer a lot more because it's just like, trying to pigeonhole yourself in this box I think is actually hurting you and confusing you more than anything. There were some things in that post where I was like, 'I don't think that's an identity, and I low-key think you should go to therapy.' Like 'you like to consume sexual content, you'd jack off or something, but the idea of someone touching you feels disgusting.' Like, that might be okay, but also, like, wait. I'm a little worried.

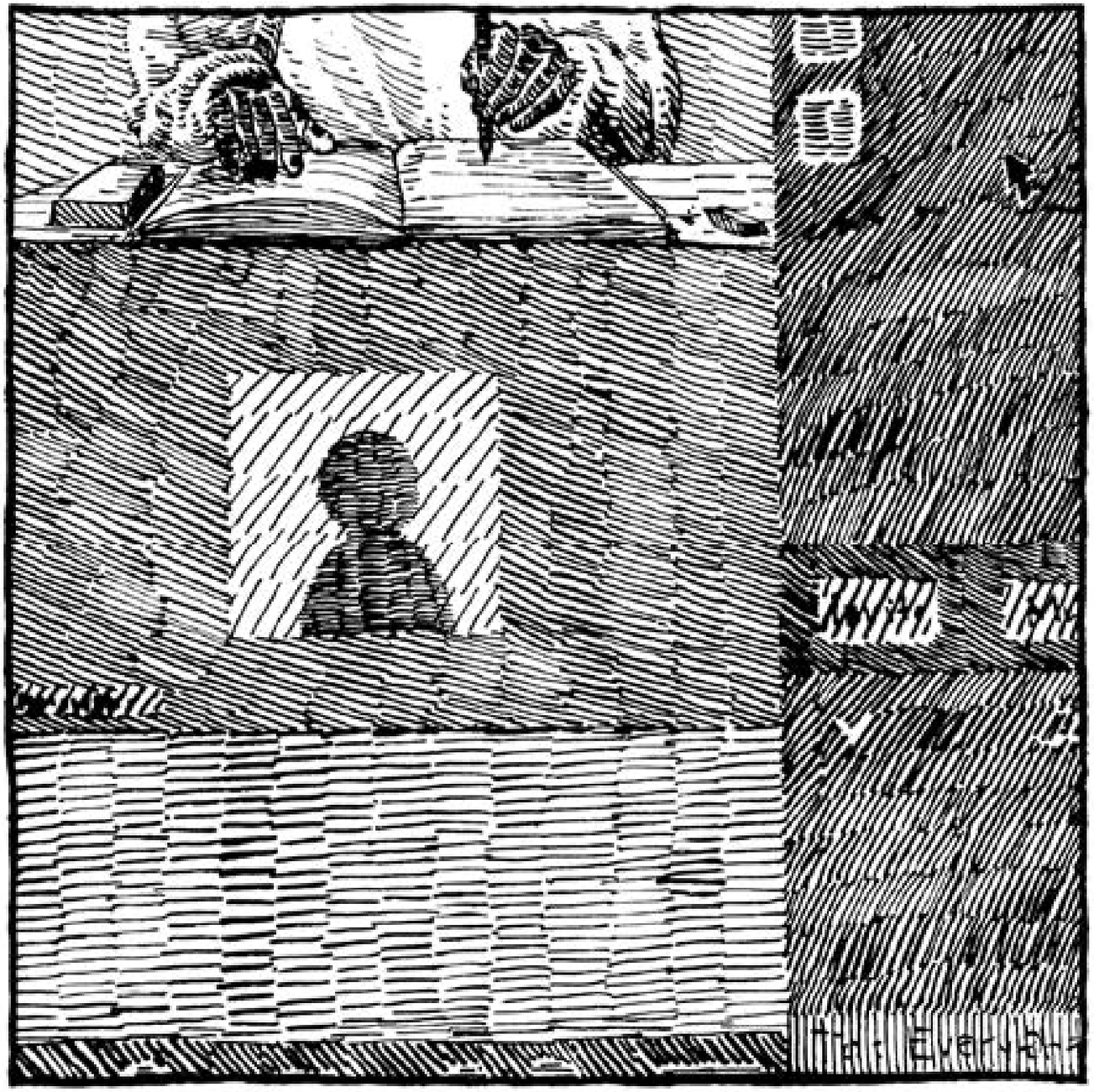
Like, someone just made this post and all of a sudden they can just have this in a form everywhere, like everything is just being sent out and so now it's like, okay, this is almost law.

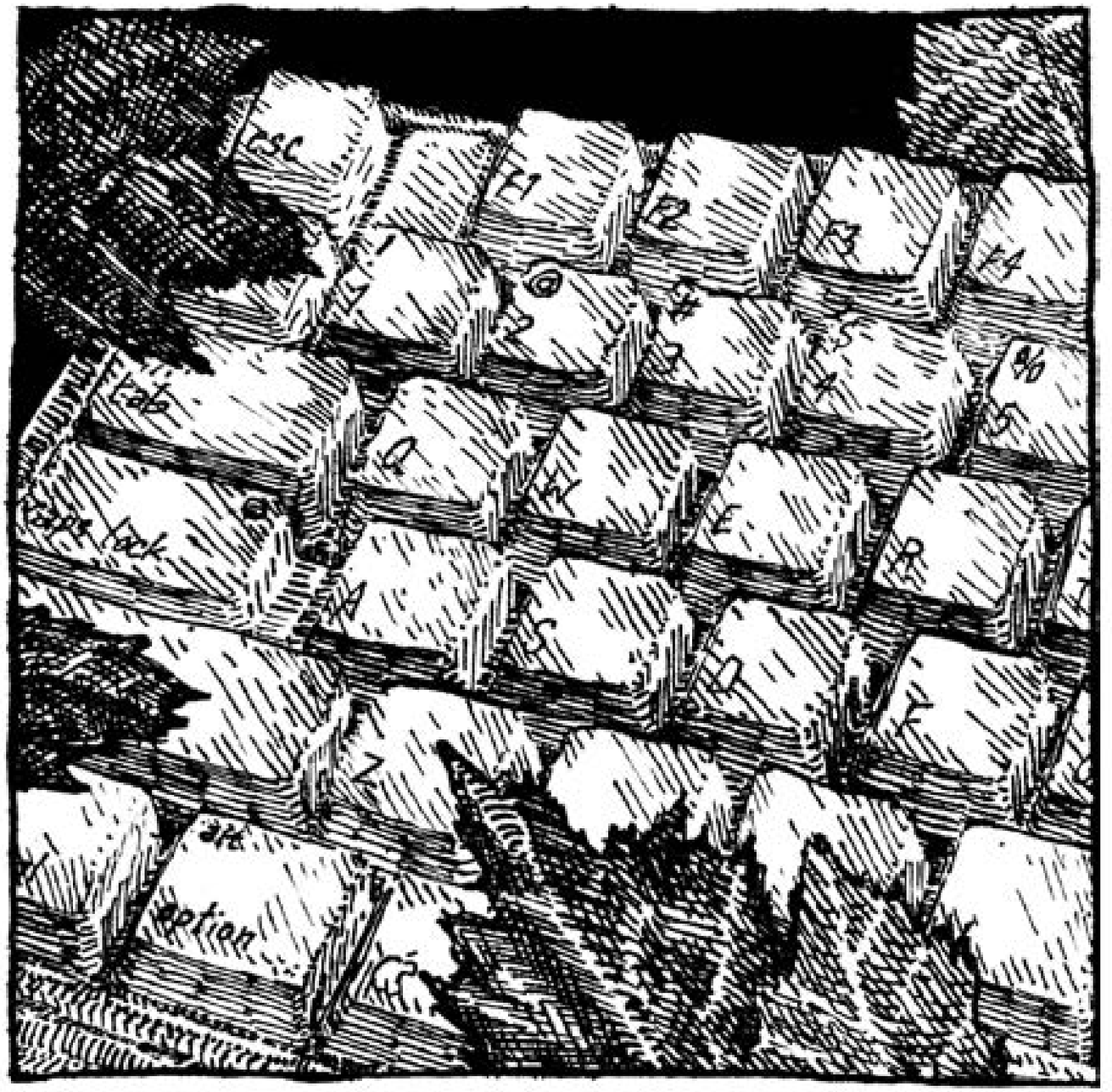
I just thought, like, some of this stuff is harmful. And not all gay people are mentally ill, but I think there's obviously a lot of us who have suffered from mental illness and different things and it's easy to be like 'this is my identity and I can actually just hide and have this and not have to deal with certain things' – it's, like, no. I don't think that's true. Like, I'm worried about you. I think I've seen a lot of that stuff.

I just think it'd be nice to have more of a discussion of things together, and I think it'd be more inclusive, too, because we're all just getting our information scattered across all these different peoples with all these different whatever. Just having more discussions and real discussions and real talking and education and, like, someone proposing an idea and someone not just hating on it or not someone just taking it for what it is. I think that'd be best. I don't think we host a lot of that. I don't think we have a lot of discussions.





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I have no idea about when I first heard the words gay or bisexual — or woman — but I think I started considering myself gender nonconforming when I heard one of my friends describe herself that way in college.

I usually describe myself as gay because I identify most strongly, sexuality and gender-wise, with being attracted to women, and I usually use it just to describe my attraction to women. However, I sometimes see discourse about whether or not gay is an umbrella term, or whether bisexual people can describe themselves as lesbian — which I don't think is exactly the same thing — which makes me worry about the way I use both gay and bisexual to describe myself.

Have you ever followed a stranger or 'internet personality' online?

Yes, I follow a lot of strangers on Instagram and Twitter.

Any who you believed to be LGBTQ+?

Yes, many of the strangers I follow are LGBTQ+ and post about it.

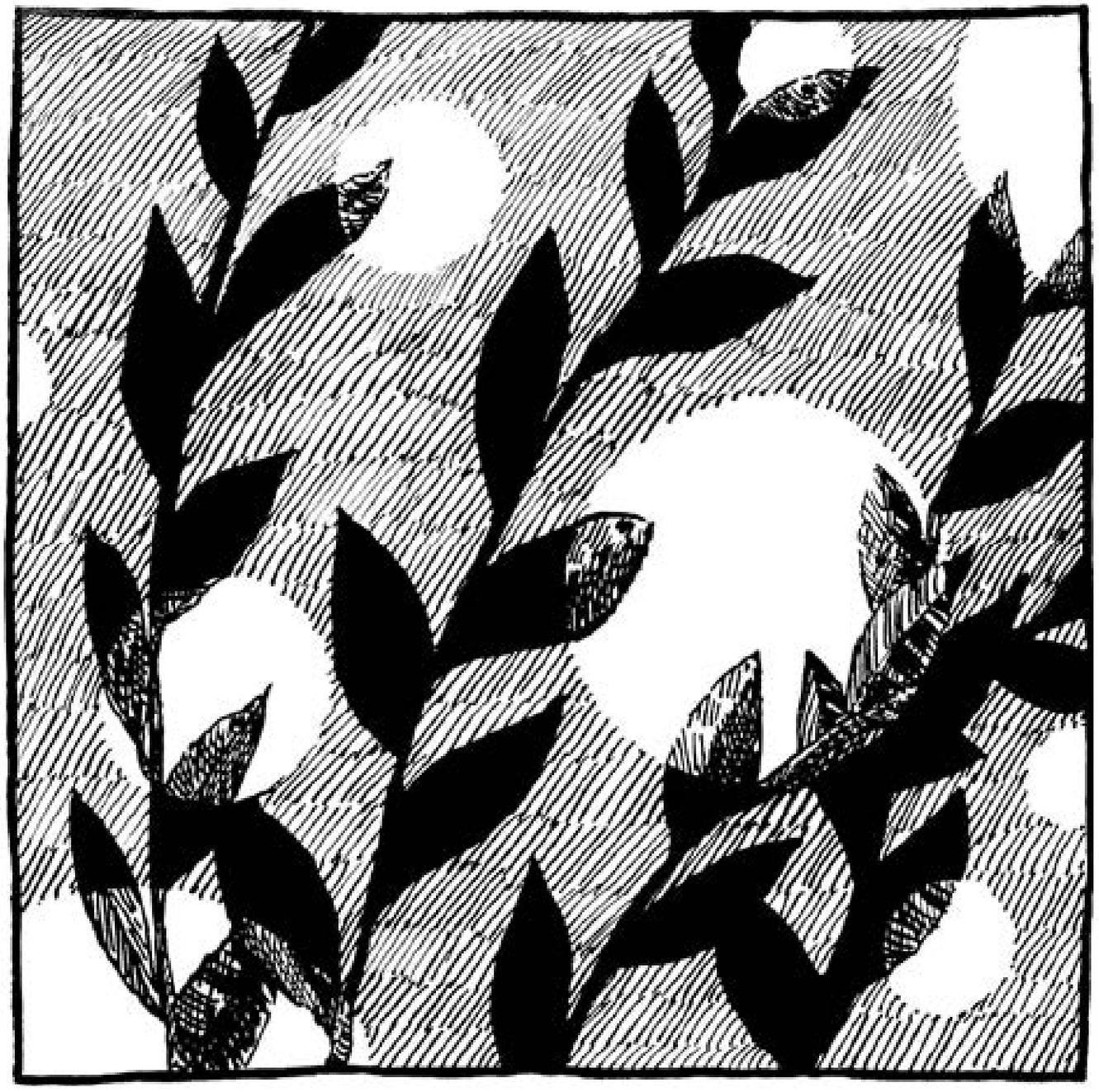
Have you ever interacted with a stranger online?

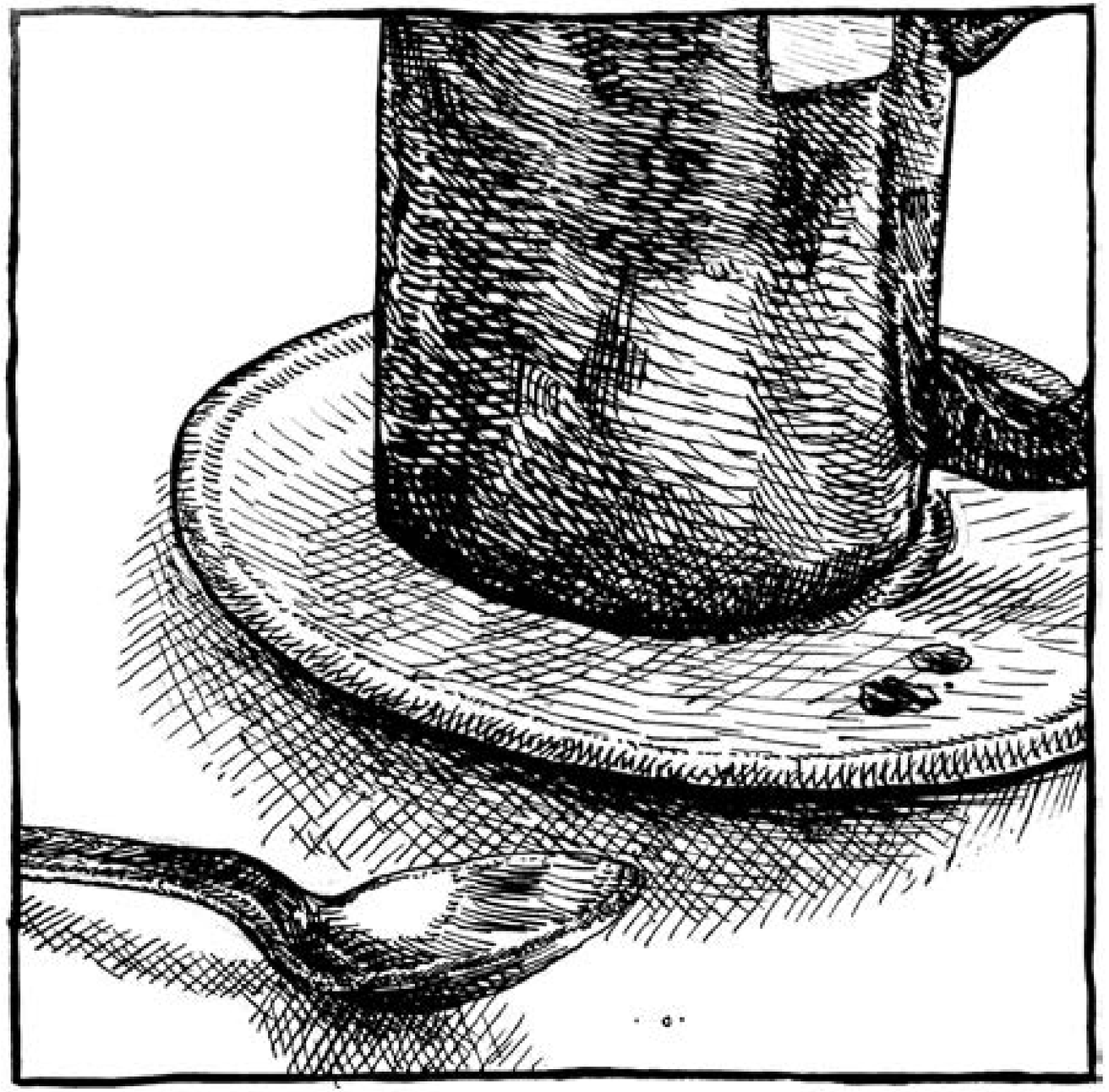
This week, I joined a zoom co-working session with a Tumblr user who I follow but don't know. I didn't really want to be perceived, I just wanted to see other people doing work so I would be motivated to do my own work. When I was in high school, I sometimes talked and played video games with friends – who we didn't know in person – of an in-person friend. I wanted to be perceived as fitting in with the group; I think we were all in high school.

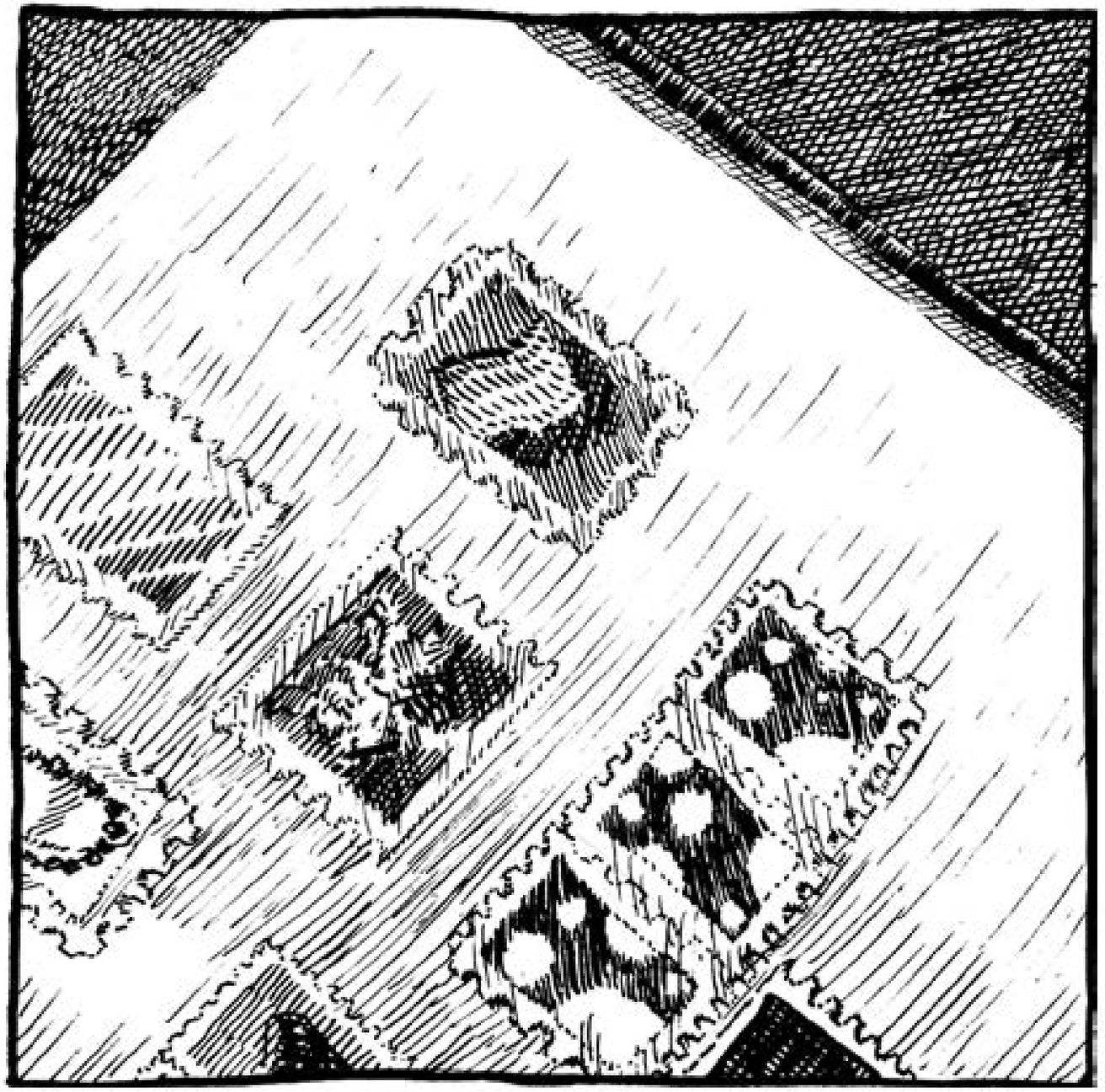
Have you ever had what you would consider to be 'internet friends'?

The friends of a friend who I played video games with in high school were internet friends. I also had internet friends on an Animal Crossing forum when I was in elementary/middle school.

My video game friends always felt kind of scary, because they were mostly guys and I didn't really know who they were or why they were friends with me or our mutual friend. I'm no longer in contact with any of these people.







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I love following queer people. It makes me really happy. But I think, like, back then, I was really naive. I remember when I realized that, like, gay people were real. And, like, that it was okay to be gay. Like, I just didn't even think that it could be possible.

I feel like the majority of the people that I was following who were LGBT online were probably people that I didn't know. I didn't have a lot of friends who were LGBT, at least when I was younger.

Have you ever followed or interacted with any queer celebrities or 'Internet personalities?'

As I grew older, yeah. I do remember watching Troye Sivan's coming-out video when it came out, I do remember that, but I don't remember what time in my life. I think that was later in my teenage life when I think I was already like, 'yeah I'm a, I'm a little bit gay.'

I feel like when I really started interacting with or, like, looking for more queer content was when I became, like, older. I'd say, like, after I had my first girlfriend. So like, after I was 15. Definitely, like, in TV shows, like really looking for those things.

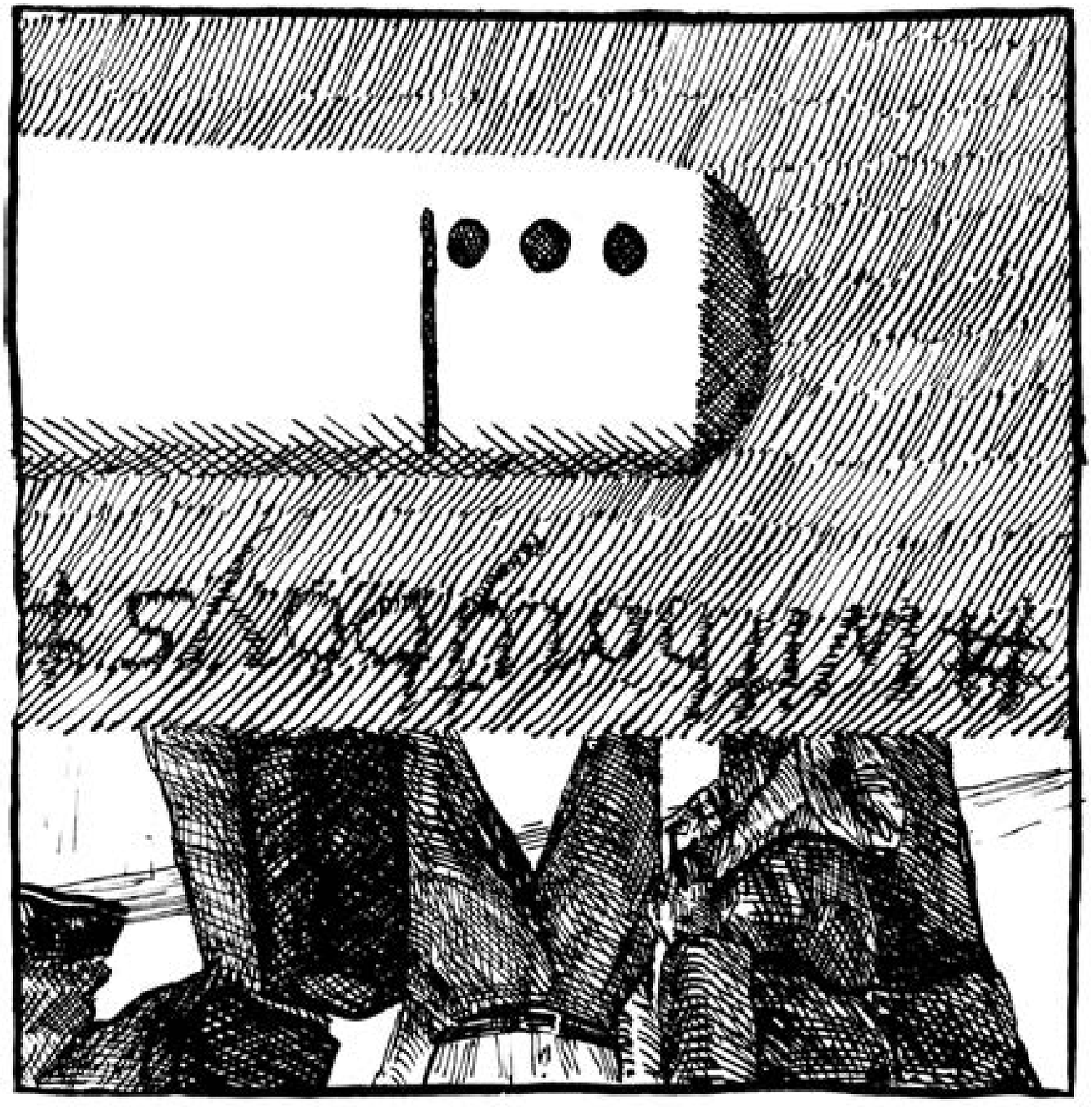
And I mean, like, there is no woman-on-woman representation in anything. Whenever I saw something I would get so excited so I remember Orange is the New Black, I didn't even watch that show but I was so excited that Ruby Rose was a thing.

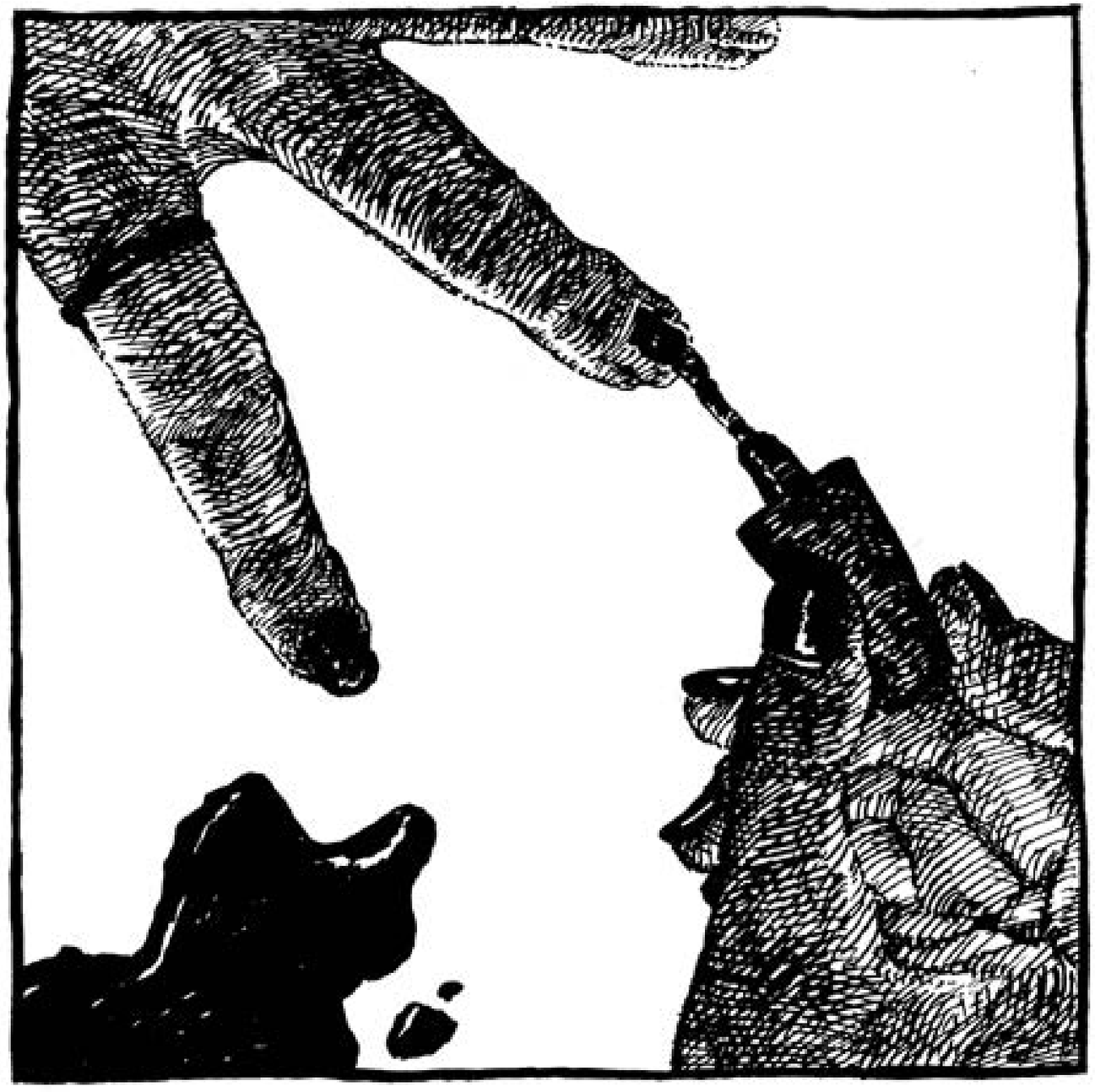
Have you ever had an interaction or experience while following anyone online that's bothered you or made you uncomfortable in any way?

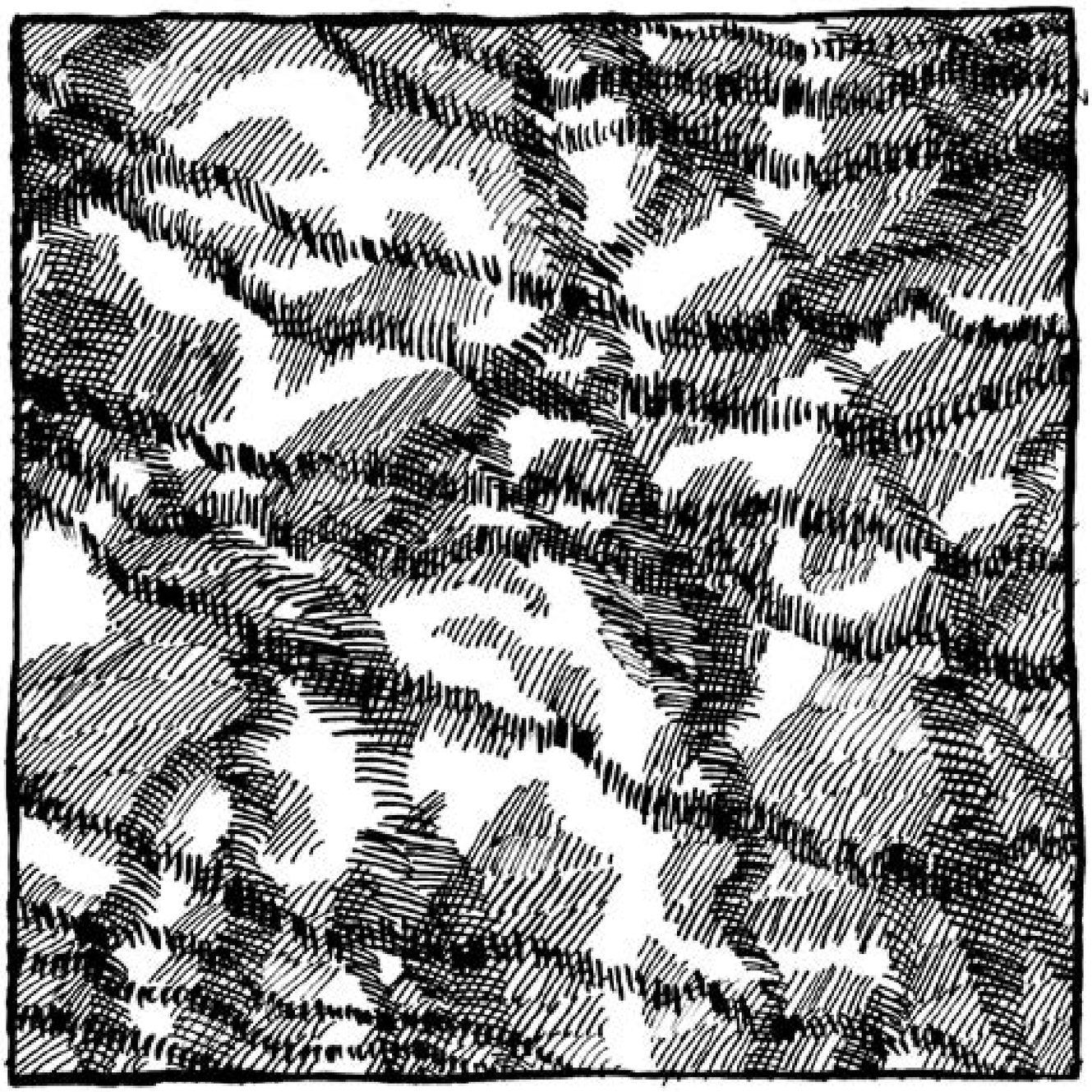
I guess I remember a lot of the backlash that Troye Sivan had when he came out. I remember that there was a lot of hate and a lot of, like, I guess this was kind of my first – how do I say this – I mean, when I came out, my family was, you know, from Ann Arbor, it's a fucking bubble, people are liberal as fuck here, you know. And my family is really accepting and, you know, it obviously was nerve-wracking when I came out but they were so supportive in every way, you know. And all of my friends were as well, and even at school... People didn't say things to my face, at least.

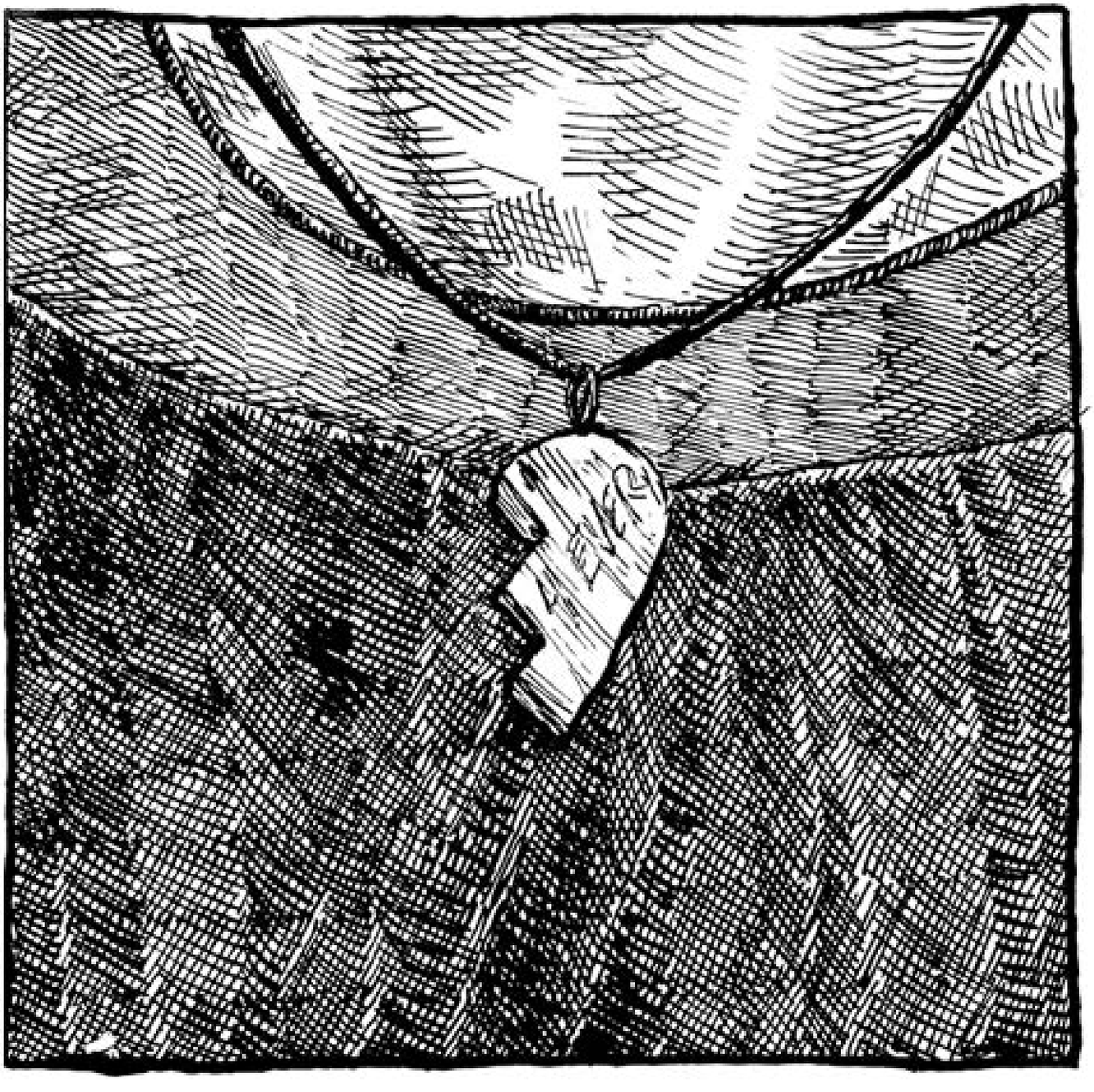
But seeing Troye Sivan come out and then seeing the, like, direct and really vicious hate that came towards him, like a lot of people threatening him and telling him that he should, you know, hurt himself and things like that, um, I think that was shocking to me, and upset me.

I had such a positive experience and I never really had, like personal interactions with people who had really negative experiences coming out that it was kind of shocking to see that. I mean, I understood that and I knew that, um, that happened, and that homophobia was real, but it was really different to kind of witness it in that way, you know. That was something I didn't understand. And I think also part of me was, like, 'I wish that he could have had the same experience that I had,' you know, at least when I was younger.









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Have you ever followed or observed a stranger or 'internet personality' online?

Yes, watching various YouTubers and following people via Tumblr and Twitter.

Any who you knew or believed to be LGBTQ+?

Yes. Queer YouTube channels such as Rose and Rosie, Ally Hills, and people who run LGBT Tumblr accounts.

I have used different labels for my sexuality in the past – pansexual, bisexual – but it never felt like it fit me, then I saw someone on YouTube who defined themselves as queer and said that it was an umbrella term and I liked it. I also was not aware of the term cisgendered until recently where I have started watching more transgendered YouTubers.

Have you ever interacted with a stranger online?

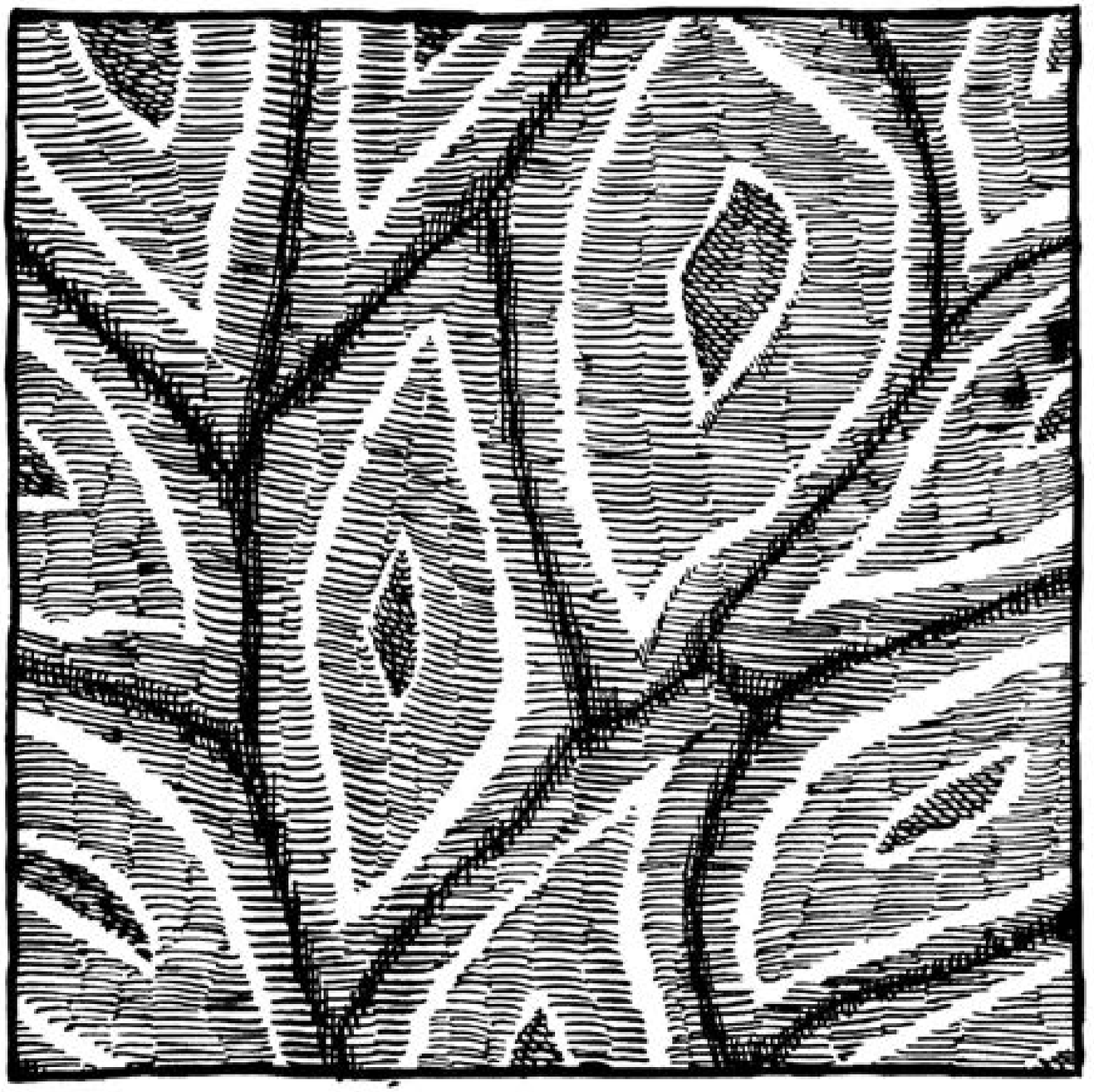
Yes, [we] met on a mobile quiz app. Added each other on Facebook and talked about our lives and where we lived. We were both around 15 years old. I wanted to fit in and seem cool and interesting.

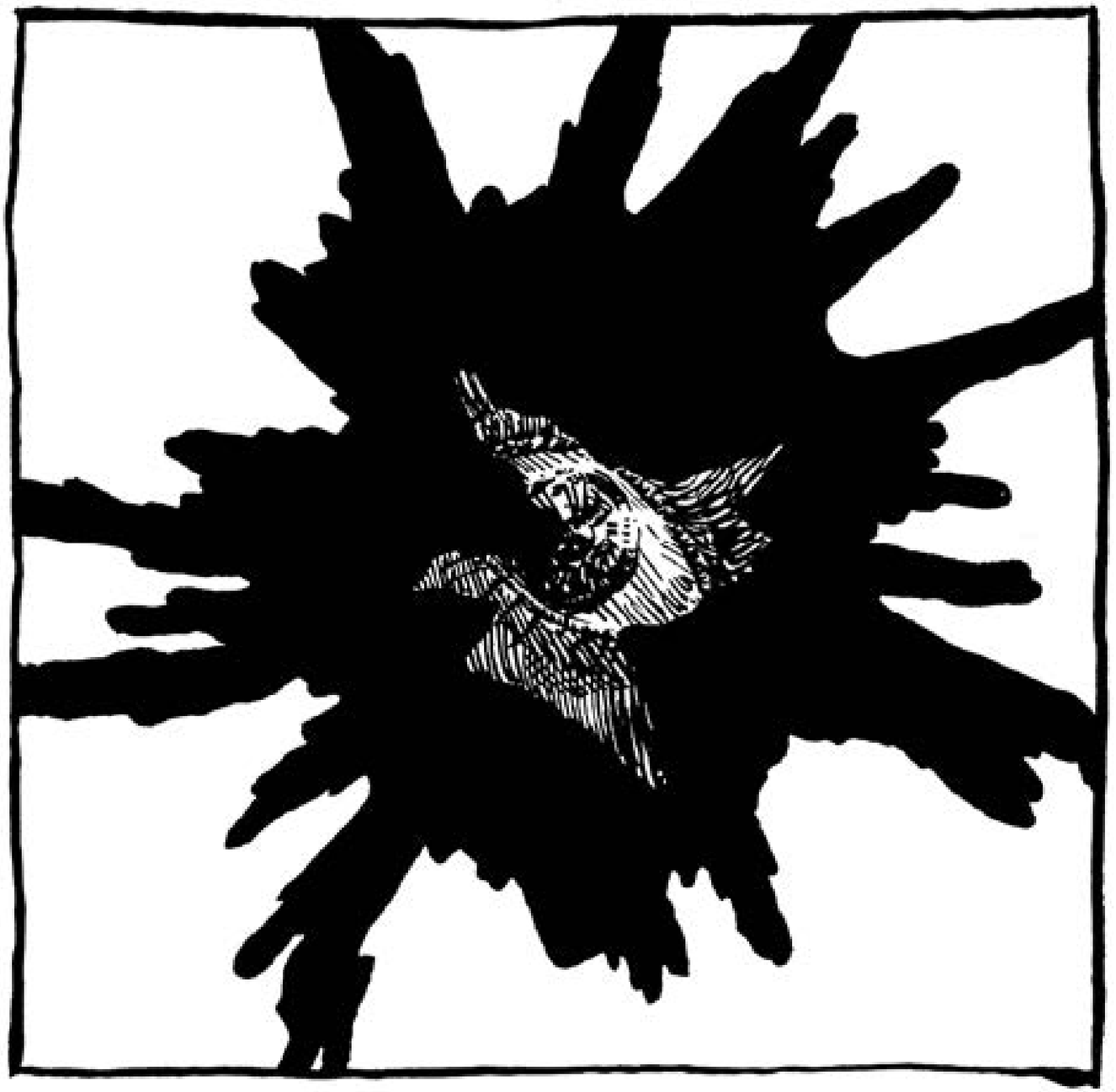
Have you ever interacted with a stranger online who you knew or believed to be LGBTQ+?

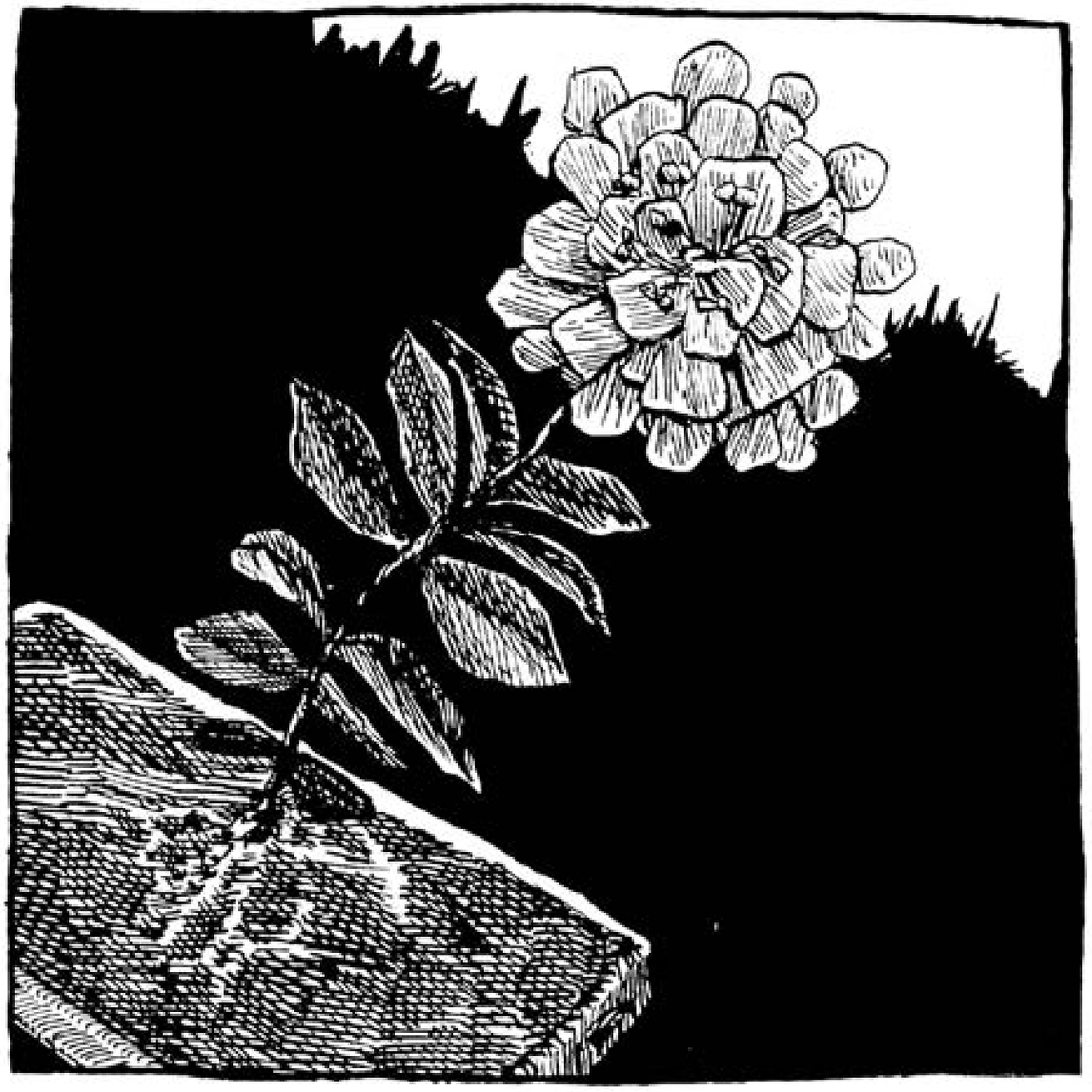
Yes. Met someone on Tumblr via private message. It started after I replied to to her ask that had been answered by Rose and Rosie, which was a quote from Orphan Black. I found her very interesting and learnt about her life and she helped me become more open and confident in myself and my sexuality.

Most significant interaction was after two years on messaging — her coming to visit me and stay at my home for two weeks. We were both 16, I wanted to be perceived as a friend, I wanted to be liked.

We are very similar people, have both gone out of our way to visit each other. We make sure to message and catch up with each other every couple of months.







Facebook, for me, or my feed or whatever, it's not overtly queer. I don't see a lot of, like, queer content unless it's around Pride and they're trying to, like, get our money or some shit like that. But for me, I would say the apps that are mostly queer, that are, like, centered for queer people are the ones where I feel like people are being more comfortable to be themselves.

Have you ever had an experience online with other LGBTQ+ people that made you feel uncomfortable?

Um, I would just say that a lot of queer spaces are just white, and so it's not always the most welcoming or most safe space for people of color. Just because it's tailored and super super white and people have their ideas of, like, what queer is and what queer isn't and it's such — it's so weird that even within, like, our community, a lot of people act within the binary or they make us try to, like, fit us in certain categories, which is very... it's beyond me. It's just, it makes little to no sense.

Even within the queer community I see, like, on social media and also in real life, that it's almost embodying some of the heteronormativity shit that we see within, like, straight people. And they just kinda, like, put that into the queer community. So if we're trying to break off of that, it's almost like a problem, you're almost kind of, like, ostracized or like 'you're not queer enough' and, like, I've witnessed that, not with me personally, but, like, different hateful

comments or whatever. Or if it's like 'stud for stud' or something like that, you know what I mean, or like a stud who's pregnant and they want it to be the femme that's pregnant, there's, like, even within queer people, saying, like, 'oh that's backward, that's not right.' And so that's been very troublesome and weird to me.

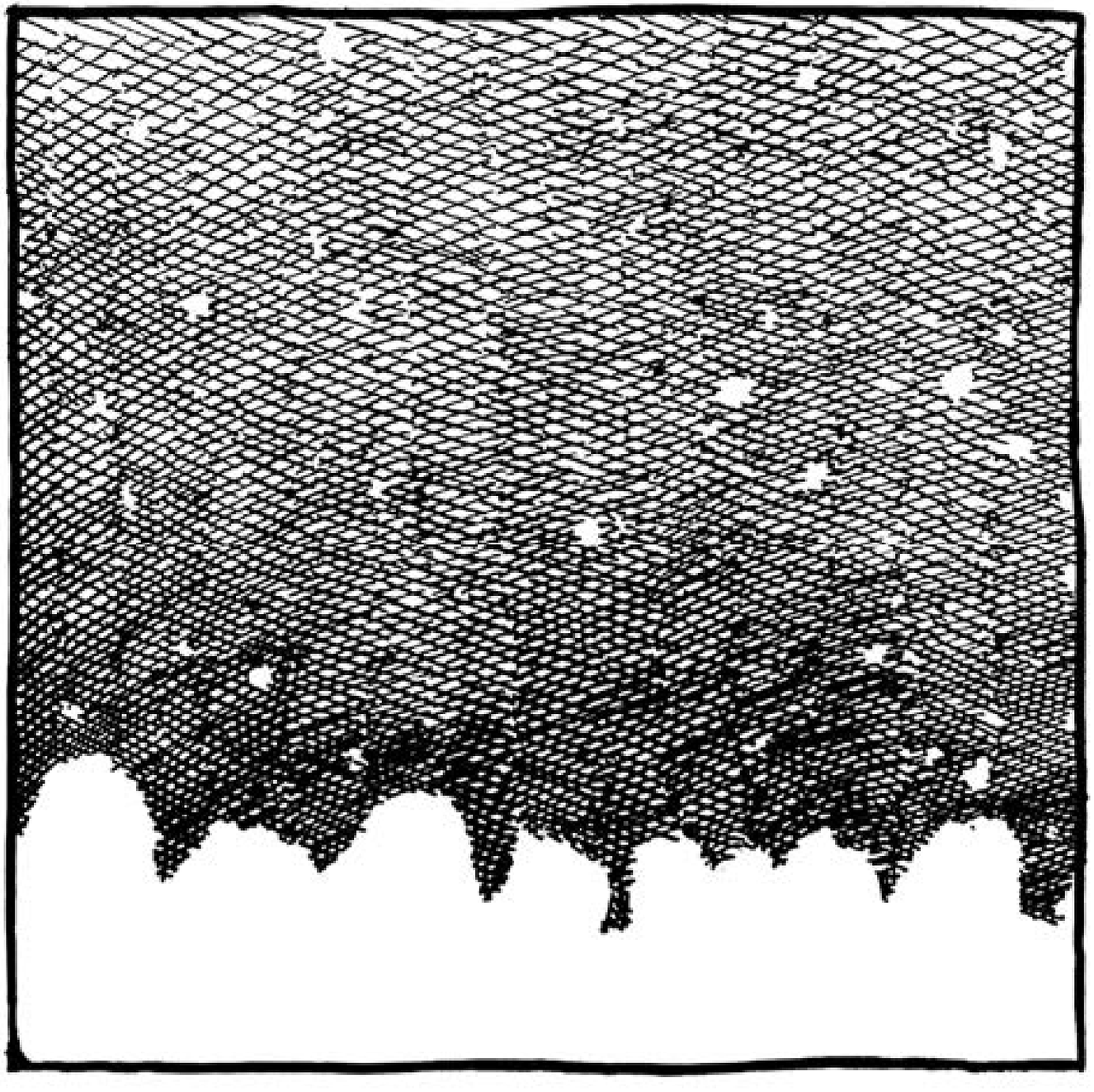
Have you ever followed or interacted with any LGBTQ+ famous people?

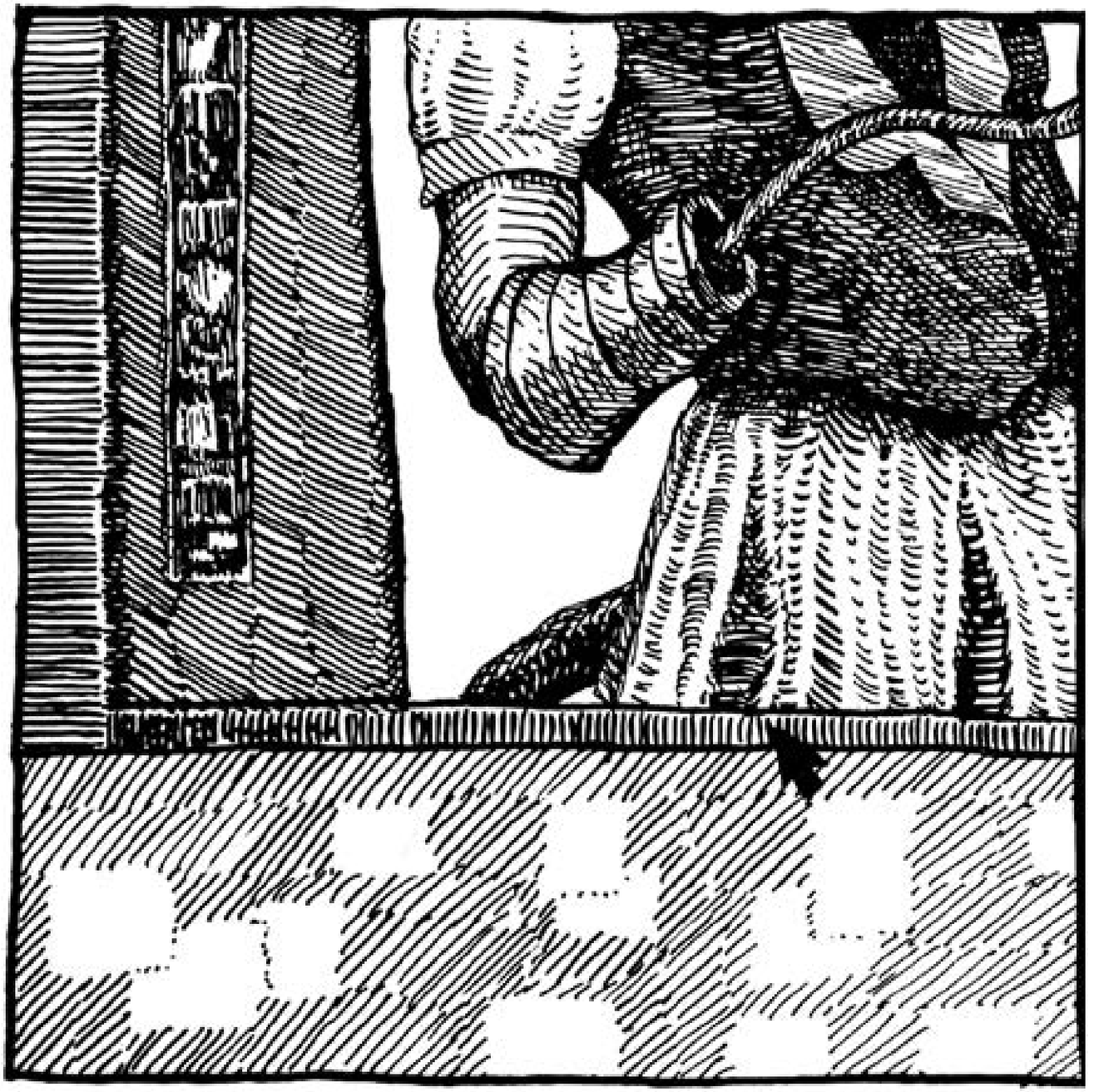
Personally for me, like, I don't follow celebrities on my Instagram. Our lives are so completely different and a lot of time, like, a lot of people only portray the best versions of themselves, you know what I mean?

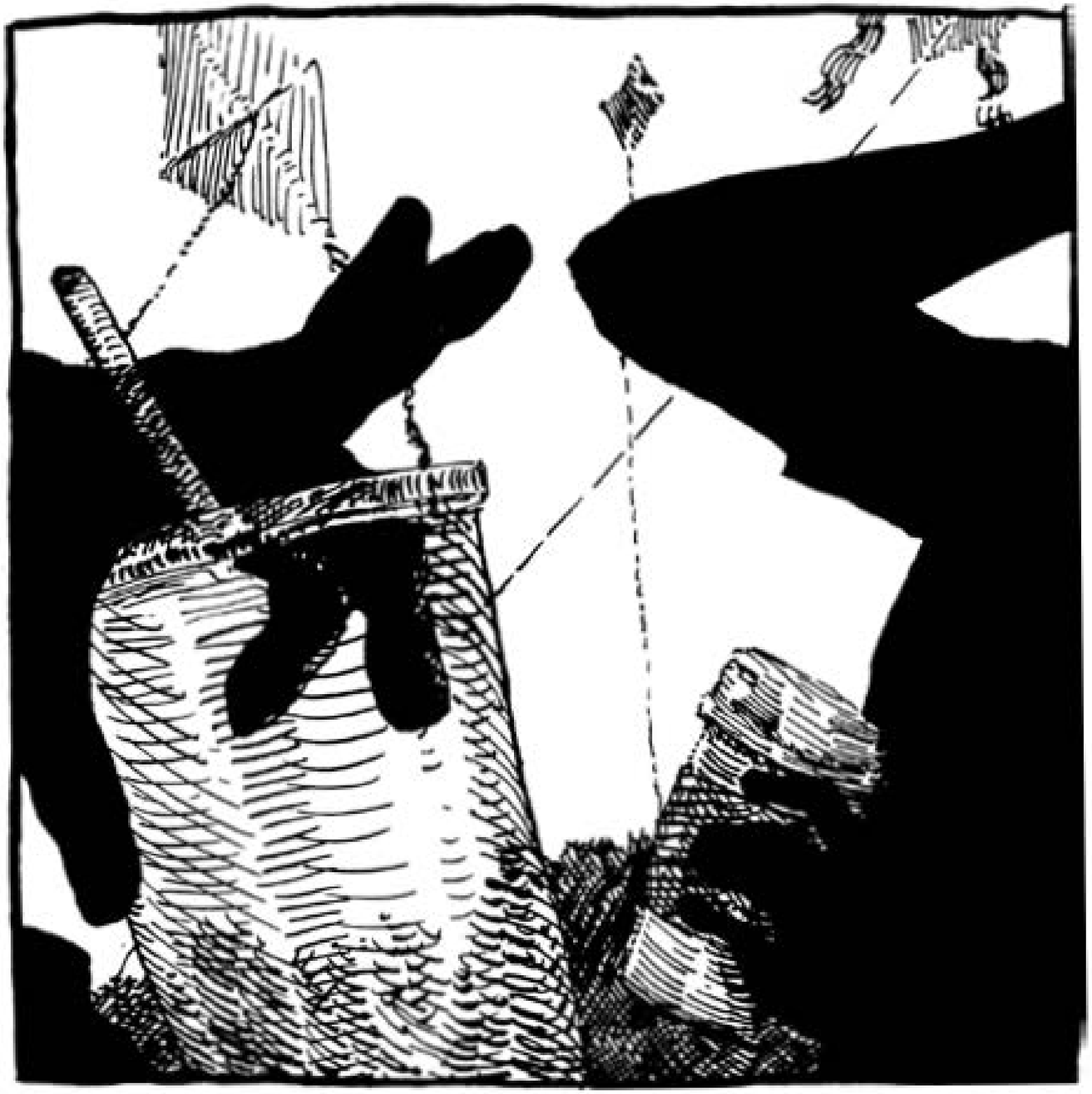
And a lot of times, like, if you're scrolling through social media and all you see is someone, I don't know, wearing, like, Chanel and all those name brands going, I don't know, to Paris or to Ghana or to the U.K. or – it just feels like it's so out of touch with the demographic of people I think they're trying to represent or, like, reach that I don't follow them.

So I more so follow people for their message. I'm really into yoga as of lately so this person who's, like, been doing hip flexor stretches and they post a lot about that and of course post, like, a lot of informational things, or I'm really into, like, crystals and so I more select pages that I feel like, if I see, add value to my life, or I can learn something from it.

A lot of the queer celebrities — it's just they're just so out of touch with their community. Like, they're queer, yes, and they kind of chose to take on a different persona once they reached a certain elevation, and they may use their queerness to kind of keep some, I guess to pull in some fans who are also queer who may also be looking up to them. I'm just not gonna follow you just because you're queer and you're a celebrity because it does nothing for me.







12

What is one of the first social media platforms you remember using?

DeviantArt. I think I was way too young to even be on the Internet, I think I was, like, 12 years old. I probably found out about it because of, like, fan art or something.

And what current social media platforms do you use now?

I use Instagram. I don't know if Snapchat counts. Of course, I'm on Lex. I used to have a Facebook but I don't use it anymore. When I use Snapchat I'm only talking to people who are my queer friends or my personal friends, but when I'm on a platform like Instagram or TikTok, I'm actually, you know, viewing content from creators and trying to interact with them. I don't interact that much, like I don't post my own queer content on those platforms, but I do try to interact with creators.

I just want to be up to date on their content. And I really like interacting with them because it just makes me feel more part of a community, I guess, especially recently with the pandemic. Like, following queer celebrities or content creators on the Internet has really helped me feel more connected to queer people, especially when I can't interact with the community.

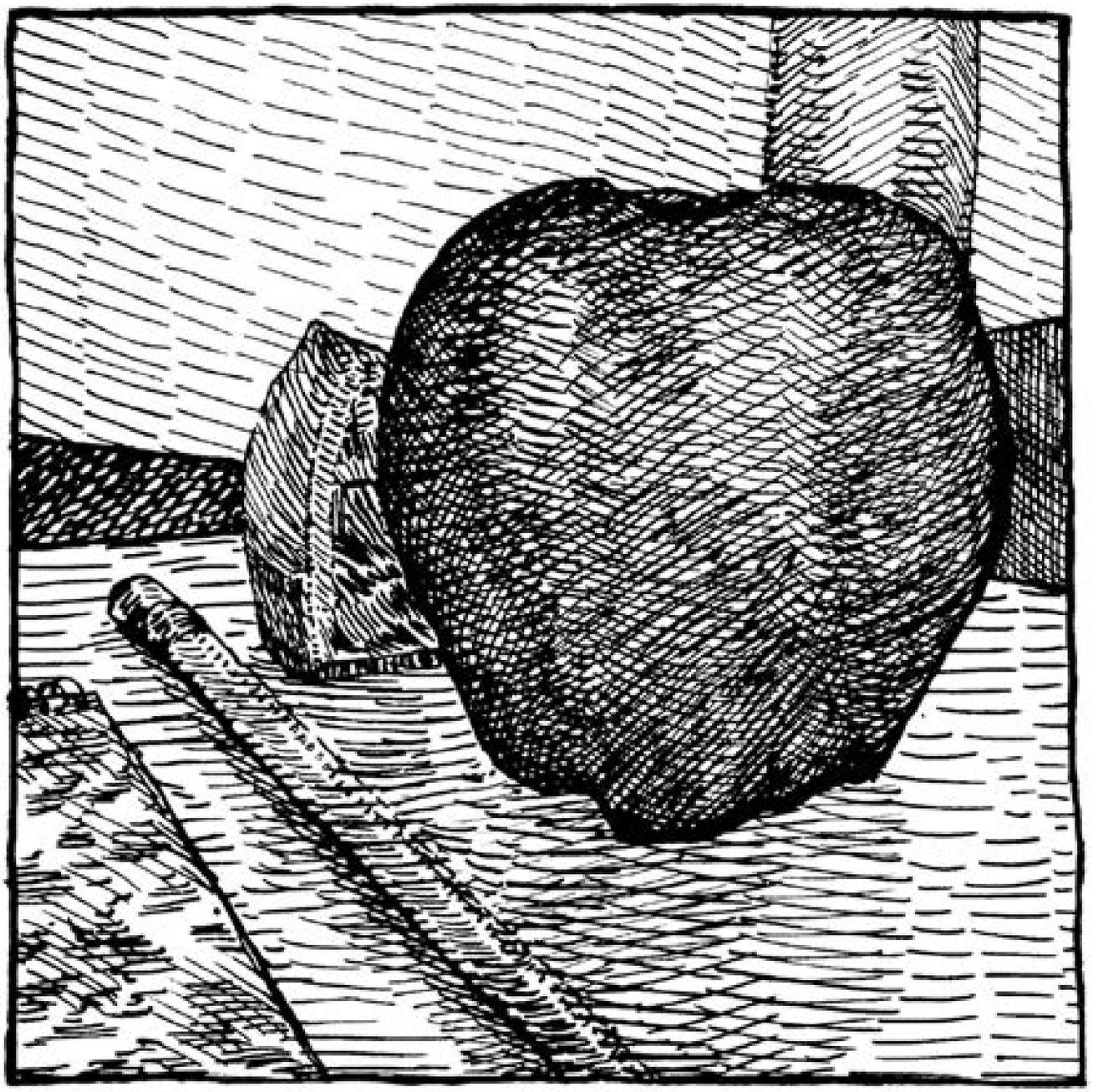
One specifically that I used to go to – I don't even remember what it's called. It was some sort of, like, queer dance night or something that was hosted at a brewery that's in Oakland. It was, like, an open night for queer people to show up and just have a dance party at this brewery and you could, like, drink alcohol and stuff. So I started going to that because it felt less scary than going to a club or a bar, and I really love dancing.

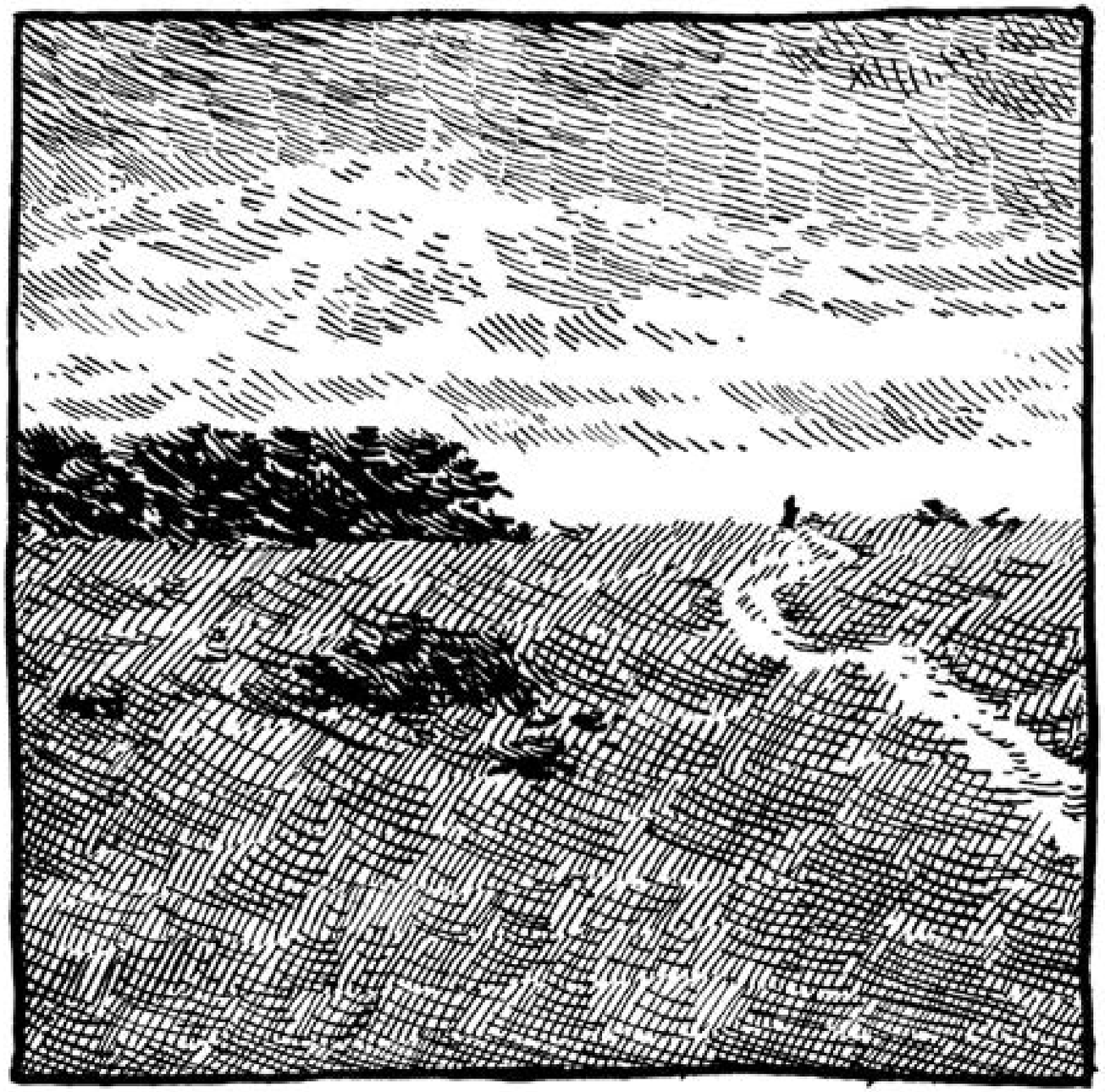
Is there anything that this interview has brought up or reminded you of that you wanted to discuss?

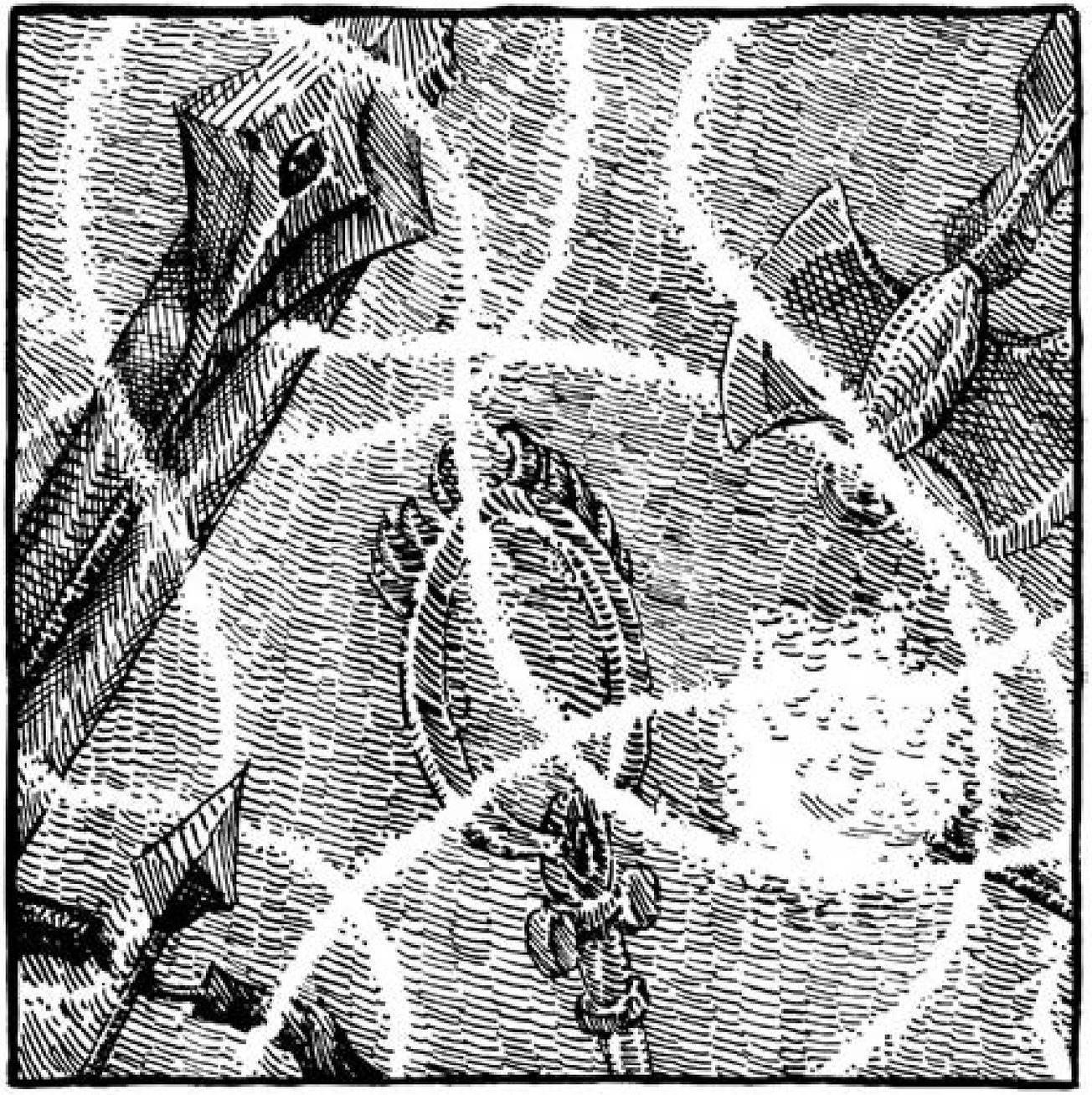
It makes me realize that maybe there's a distinction sometimes, I realized, with, like, younger queer people and myself — I'm not that old, I'm only 25 — but sometimes when I see queer people on, like, social media platforms who are younger than I am, I feel like there's a sort of a difference in the language that they use. A lot of younger people will describe themselves as nonbinary. That term didn't enter my vocabulary until very recently, so it's really interesting for me to learn what that means and how people define that word for themselves.

I didn't even know anyone who described themselves as genderqueer, it kind of just wasn't a term when I was growing up. People were just not gender-conforming, and they didn't have words to describe themselves.

Actually, I guess I should say this — I actually find, especially when I started interacting more with queer people on the Internet, that I felt more drawn to trans and nonbinary spaces than before the pandemic.







I play games that have built-in communities there. I also, like, I don't know if this counts as social media but I do it too much — a lot. So, like, I stream on Twitch, and I talk with people in there.

So on Twitch, or in gaming communities that are built-in, do you find yourself interacting particularly with other LGBT+ people?

Yeah, in those cases, like if I have an option on multiple streams to watch, I will go to the queer one. Definitely.

How would you describe the communities in those spaces, broadly speaking?

Um, pretty inclusive. A lot of people are trying to help others by streaming or help themselves. So it's, like, a very... I find it to be pretty supportive.

I tend to stream games like League and Puzzle Pirates. It's kind of, like, a more chill game. And then I watch other people do, like, sometimes there's mental health awareness streams. But, like, I generally watch games.

Have you ever had any interaction or witnessed any interaction on social media between LGBT+ people that made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in any way?

Um, I think I tend to curate my feed pretty well. So, not really, no.

I ask my friends what they're following. Like, I never really choose random things unless I knew about it somewhat previously. I unfollow things pretty quickly. I

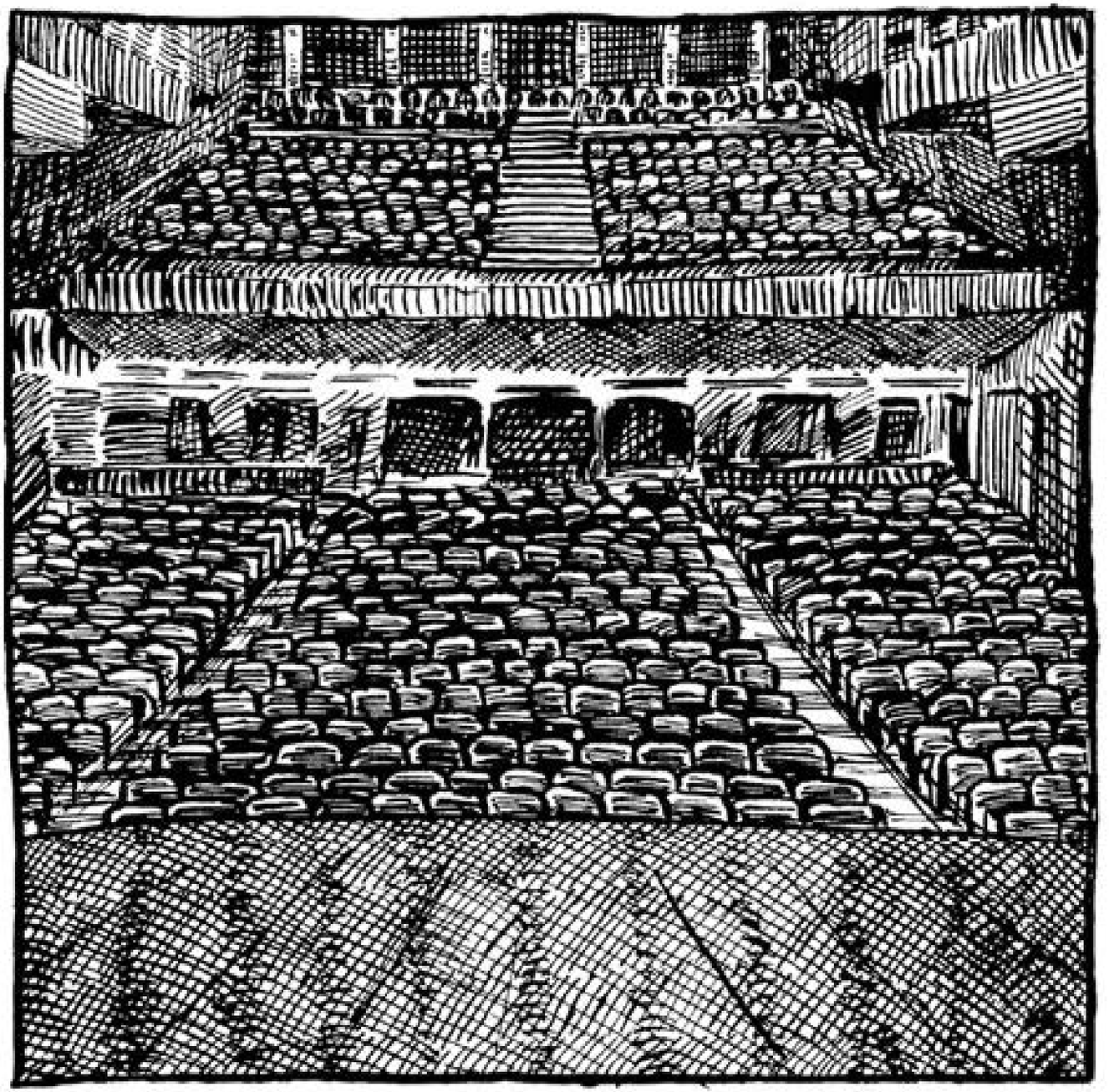
f they, like, tried to be biased against a certain group of people, like if they try to generalize things in a negative way. Wouldn't want that. Or, like, fat-shaming, or... I think those are the top two. Yeah.

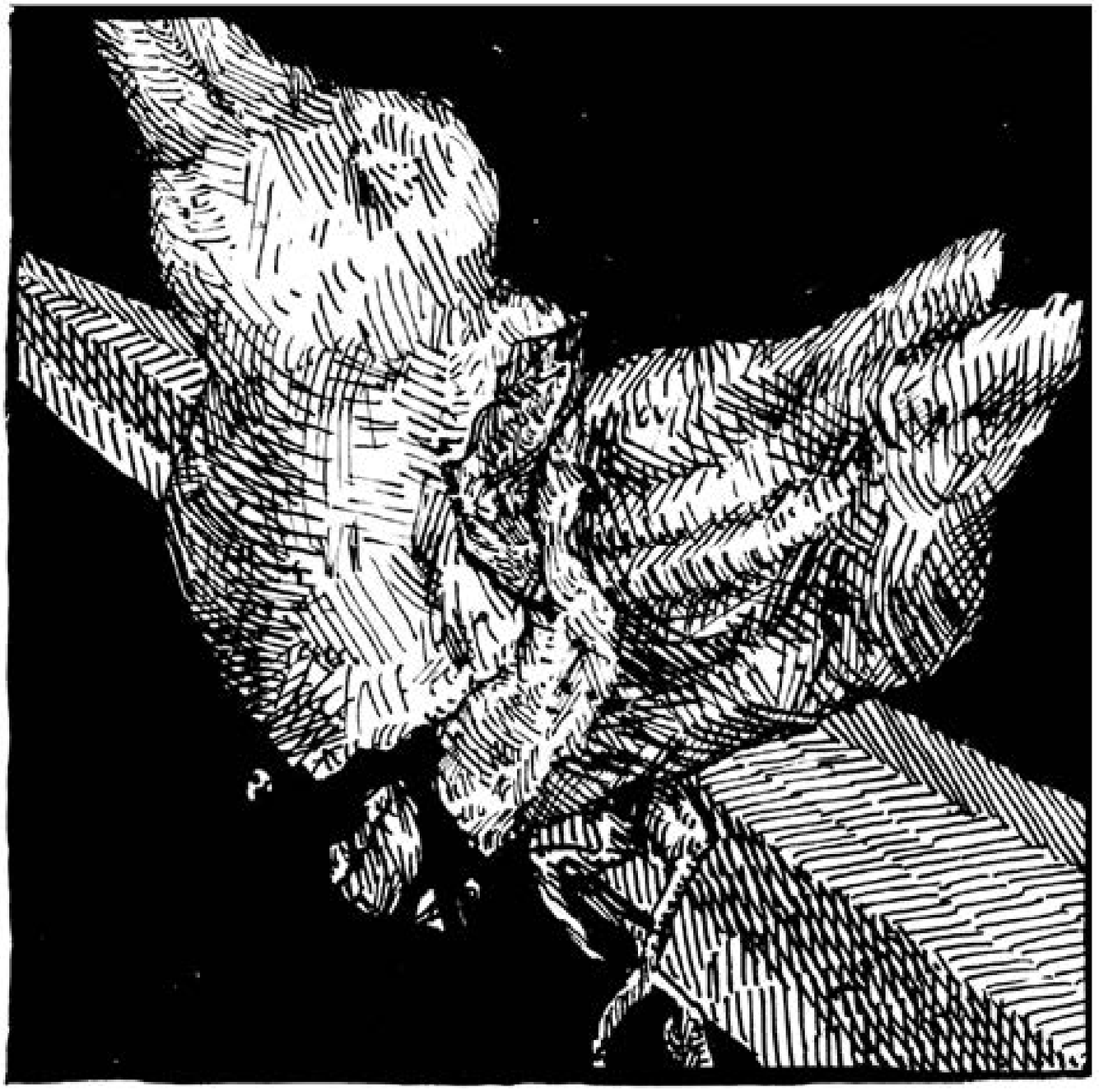
Have you ever met someone who was at one point an 'Internet friend'?

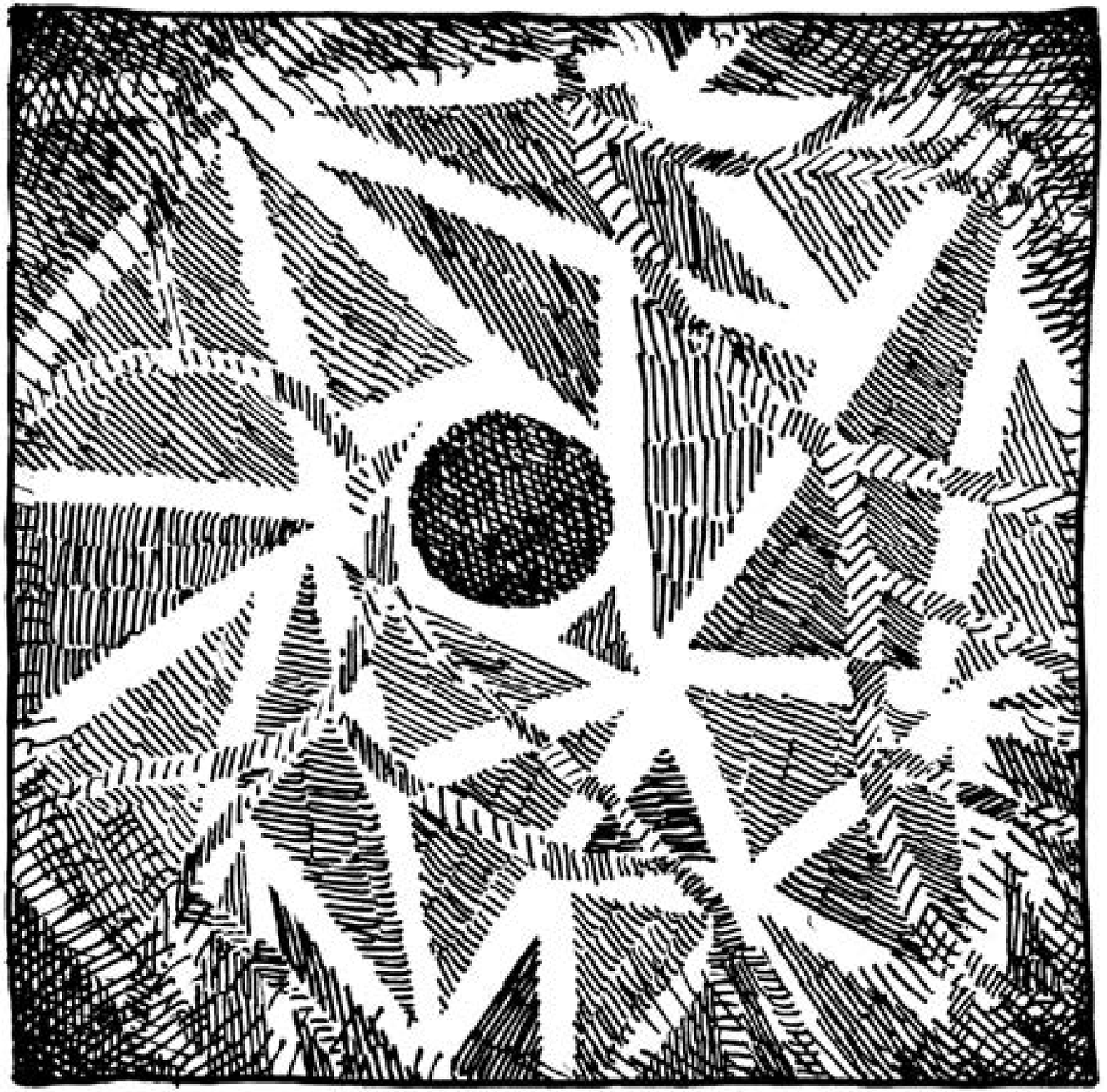
Um, one on purpose. I felt pretty safe because I had played with this person for, like, over eight years at that point, and we started when we were young, and they just lived in the area.

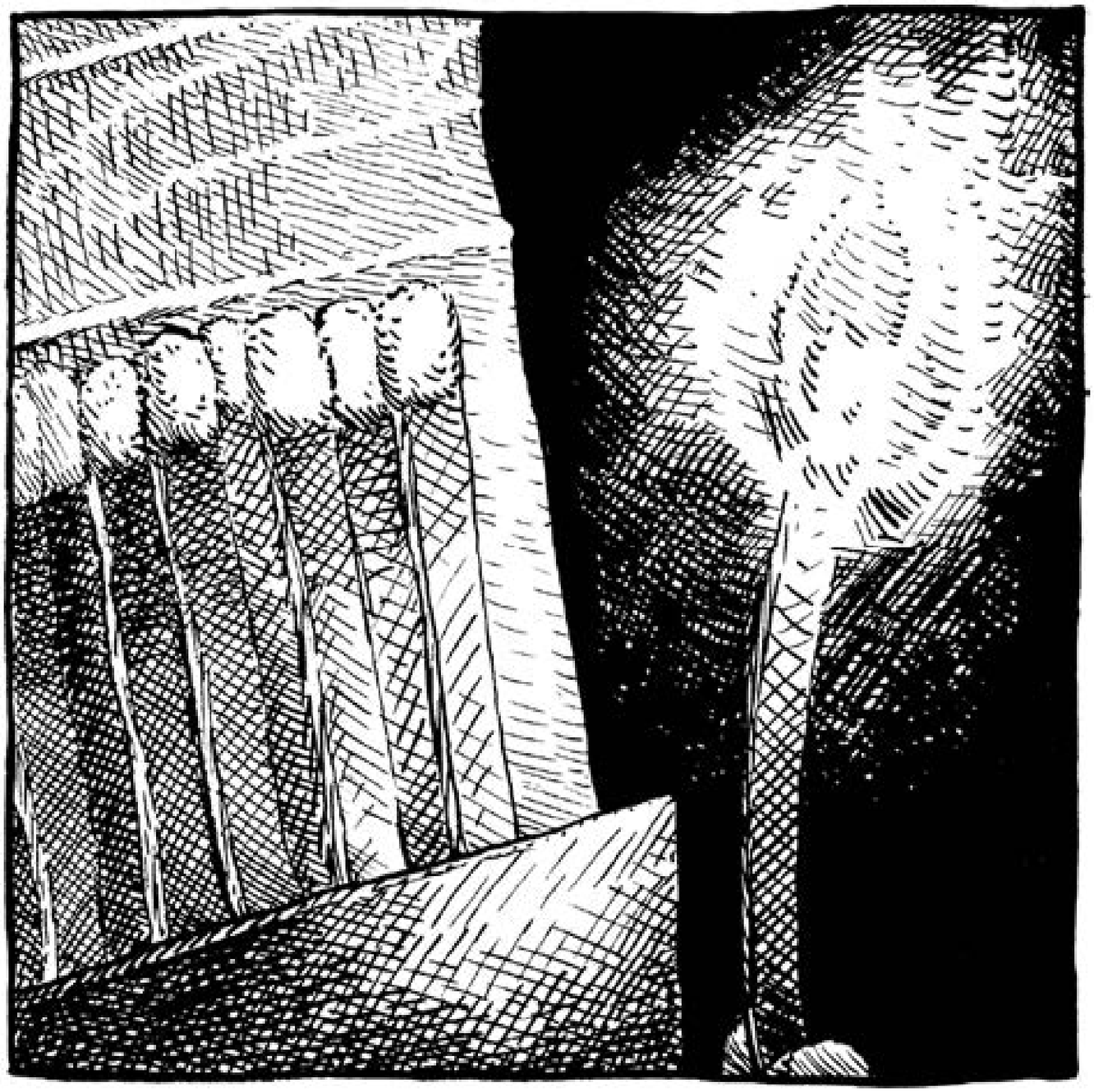
Are there any particular platforms or experiences online that you would describe for yourself as formative, or that have changed a lot about how you think of yourself, identity-wise?

Hm. Well, I guess I do that through my games, kind of. Like I started streaming, because I played games, and I connected with a lot of people once I started streaming. And I'd say that's helped me improve my social skills and also learn how to be, like, more comfortable talking to random people.









14

What kind of content mainly would you say you're interacting with or observing?

Um, definitely a lot of fashion, a lot of theater. And when I say theater, I really mean performing arts, 'cause it's drag, it's plays, it's music, um, like social justice creators, people who are speaking about current events and also political and social movements. And also visual artists, like, makers, craftsmen, you know.

Do you think you put out a lot of your own content?

Not as much as I would like to, you know. Like, in my ideal world, I would just constantly be posting more.

Why would that be in your ideal world?

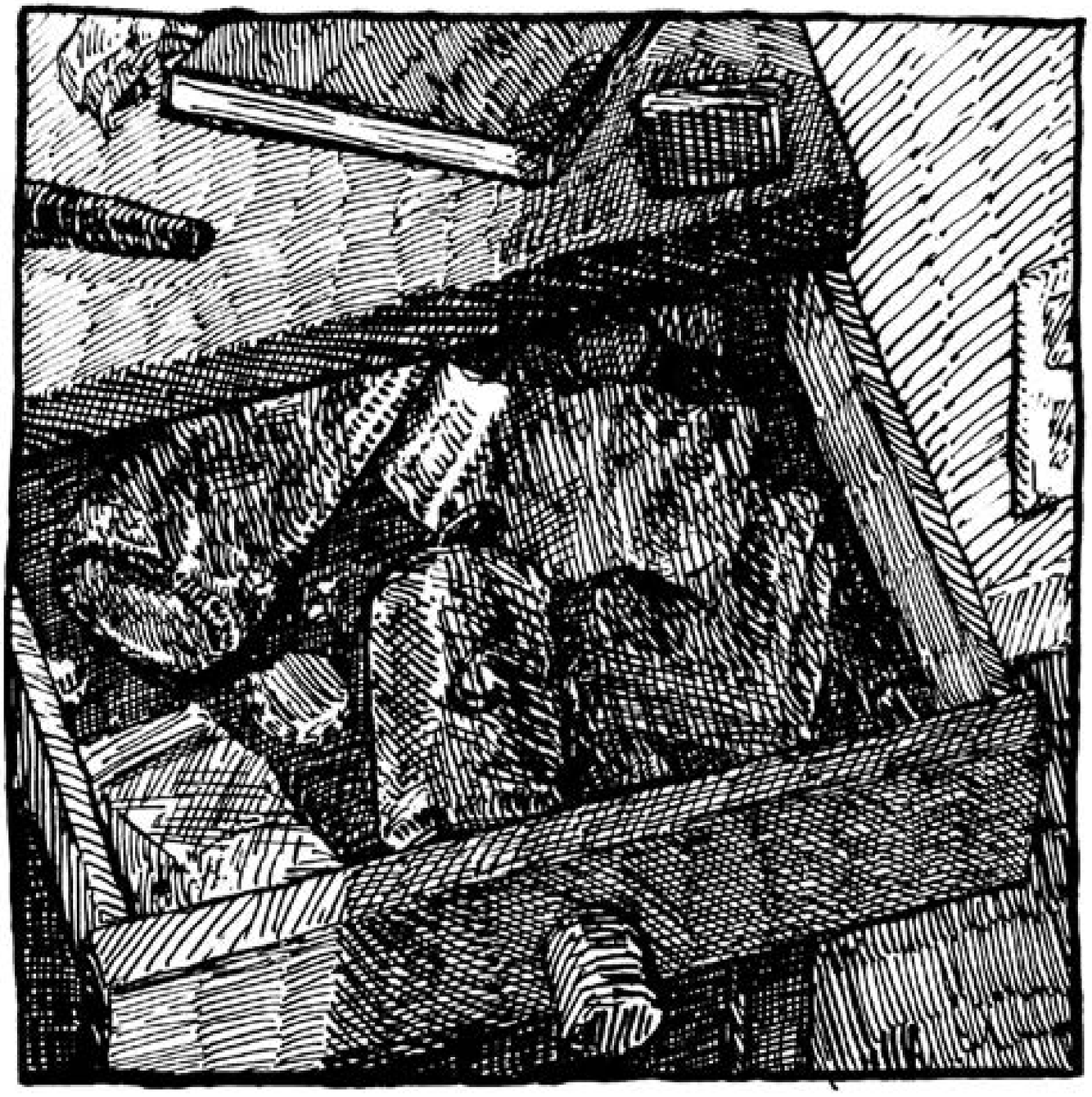
Um, it makes me feel good when I share, you know, whether it's like a decoration in my house or an outfit I put together or a poem I wrote. It's like, I'm looking like, what — what's the word when you want people to accept you or, like, affirm you like that.

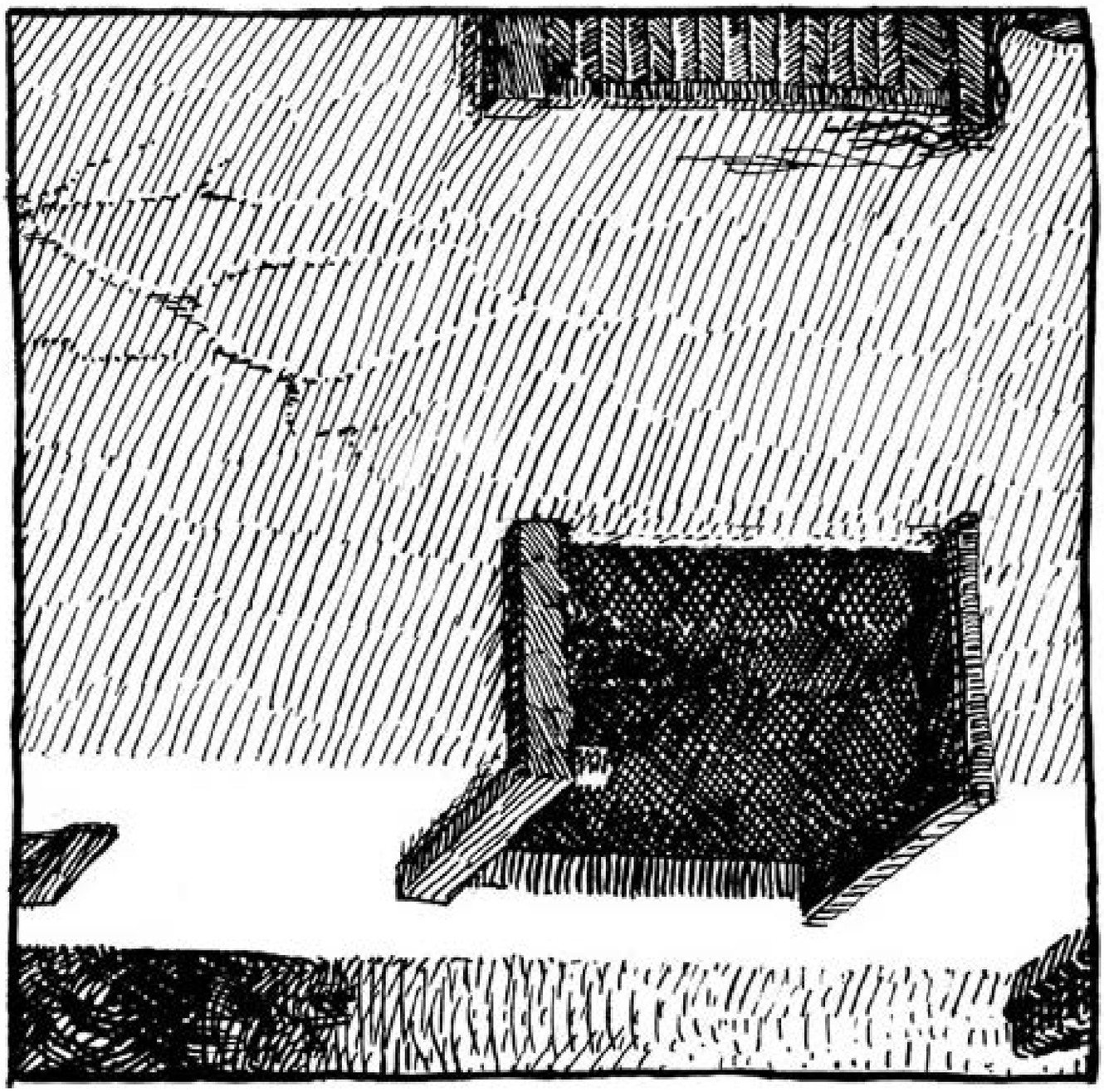
I've sort of this past year started following Jeremy O. Harris, who is a, um, playwright. I guess ;ike Miley and Gaga are, like, really famous ones. You know, I can't think of their names, but they run a sticker company and it's two women who are married and they're partners and they make stickers. Um, I can't think of their names right now, but they're awesome.

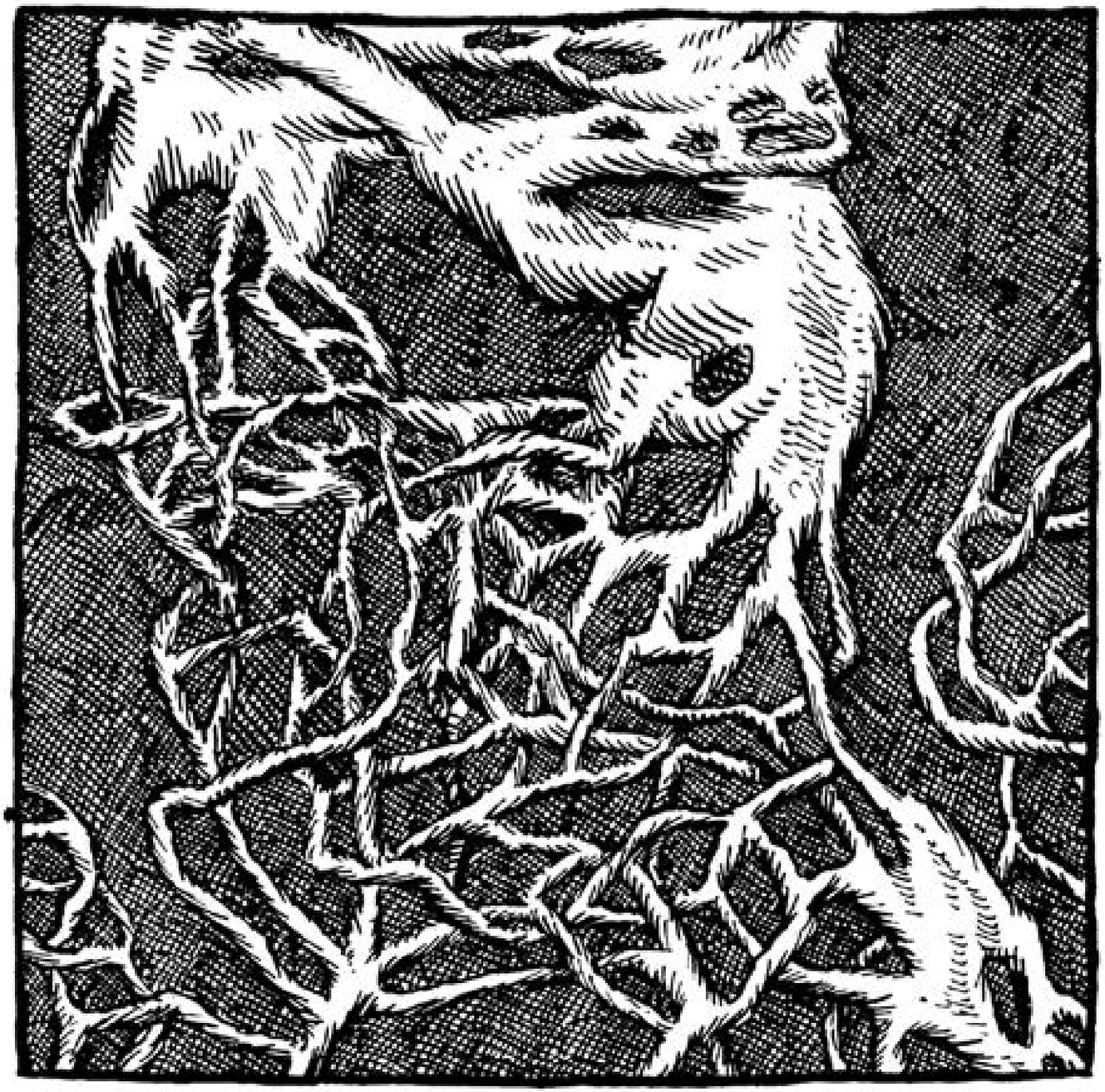
They're all artists or creators in some way, and yes, they are selling things and, like, on there to promote their artistry. But I feel like by existing in the public eye, it's also representation, you know, it's positive affirmation that people exist and, you know, they're artists and they're rich and things like that. So I think it's positive.

I think it's a little harder to relate. It's easier to sort of idolize them and want to be more like them, but I'm certain that we relate. Like I just heard Gaga talking in an interview about her mental illness and feeling suicidal and that struck me. I was like, 'whoa,' I didn't even — I didn't know. You know, and everyone, well, not everyone, but a lot of people feel that way sometimes. And so when this huge, perfect, rich, successful person also feels that way, it's easy to relate to them. I've talked about how the experience seeing LGBTQ+ people online has been a good experience.

I want to say, like, it's also really inspiring and like, you know, growing up, I still don't know who I am, but as I'm forming myself over and over again, it's like I'm pulling from people in the community. Like whether it's something that they wear or an idea or something I learned, it's just very inspiring to see others online. Like, especially now, cause I'm not going out, I'm not going to bars and seeing people and, you know, embracing the culture in that way.







15

It's weird to think about, because I don't think I used to think of myself as someone who, you know, used a lot of social media or was really online all that much. But then I, like, go back and think about it and it's — I guess it was a really formative part of my life. Especially, like, my early teenage years.

I was on a bunch of those, like, chat apps. Like 'LGBT Chat' or whatever they were called. They had a lot of similar names and, um, I was from a fairly small, kind of, rural-ish area. Not a lot of out gay people my age, you know? And not that I thought my hometown was, like, bigoted, or anything, just that it wasn't the kind of place where that kind of thing was just visible. So I didn't really know anybody, and I thought going to an online space would be, like, nice to talk to people without the risk of outing myself or something like that.

I spent a lot of time on stuff like that. I would talk to a lot of other, like, gay kids. Like, early teens. Low commitment, pretty anonymous. It would be stuff like 'how did you know you were, you know, a lesbian' or whatever. I wasn't, like, looking for a girlfriend or anything, just trying to, I don't know, figure things out. Like know that I wasn't misinterpreting things or feel sure that I was actually, you know, pretty gay before saying anything to anyone in-person.

When I got older, like 16, 17, I started using stuff like Tinder and Her and all of those things. I didn't think about too much, like, in the way of me being a minor or anything. But I was, I guess. And I think that was just what people were doing. Like there weren't that many people in, like, the area anyways, so it was just me and there were other teens I saw, definitely, who would list themselves as, you know, '18 years old' but their bio would say like 'just so you know I'm actually 16' or whatever.

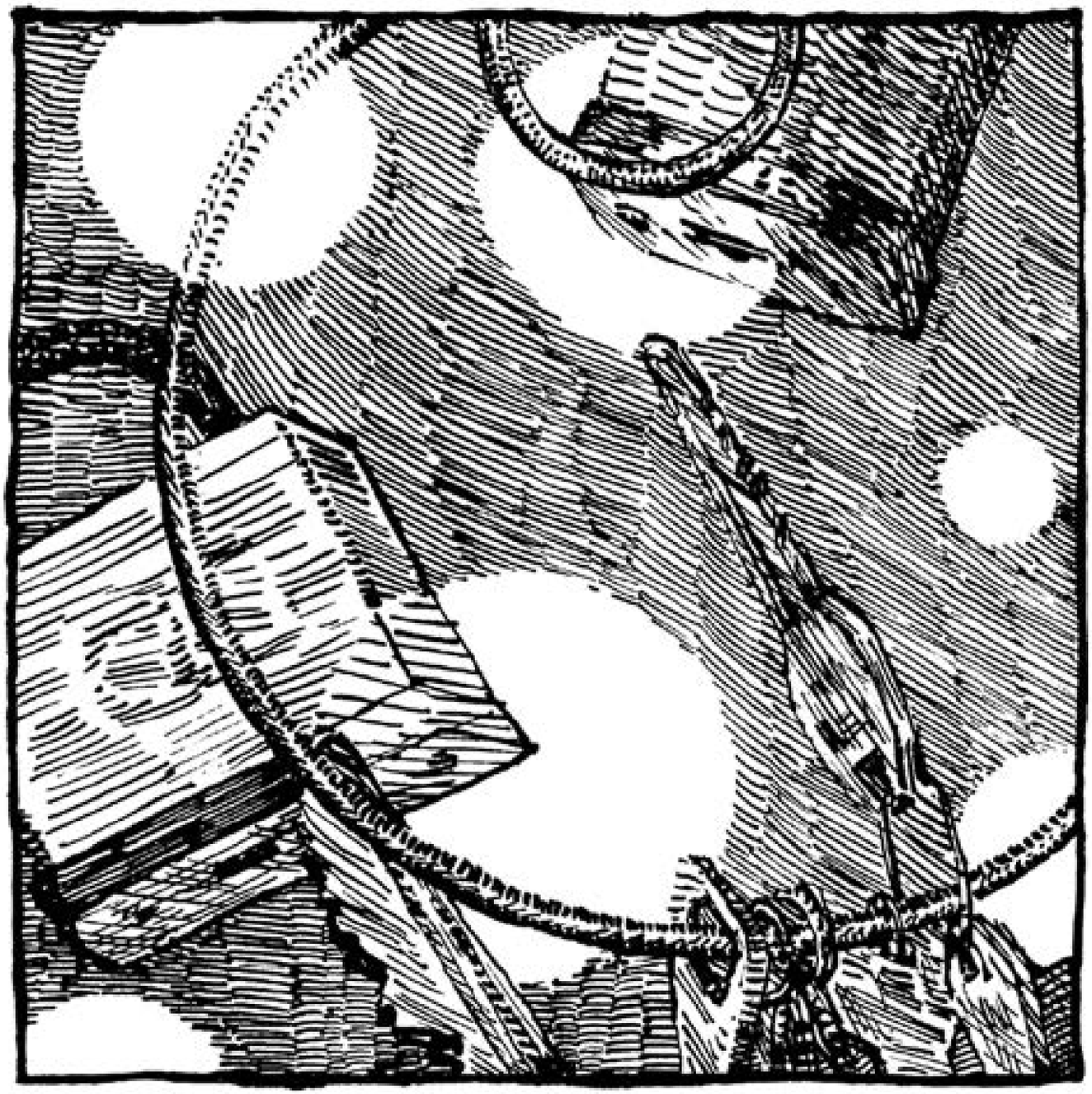
You couldn't really have – this sounds mean to say, I'm not trying to be, like, ageist – but, like, you couldn't get too specific with, like, ages. I remember this one woman I was talking to was, like, 37. And it seems kinda creepy, I guess, in retrospect. Because she, you know, knew I was underage. And she still talked to me and even, like, invited me over.

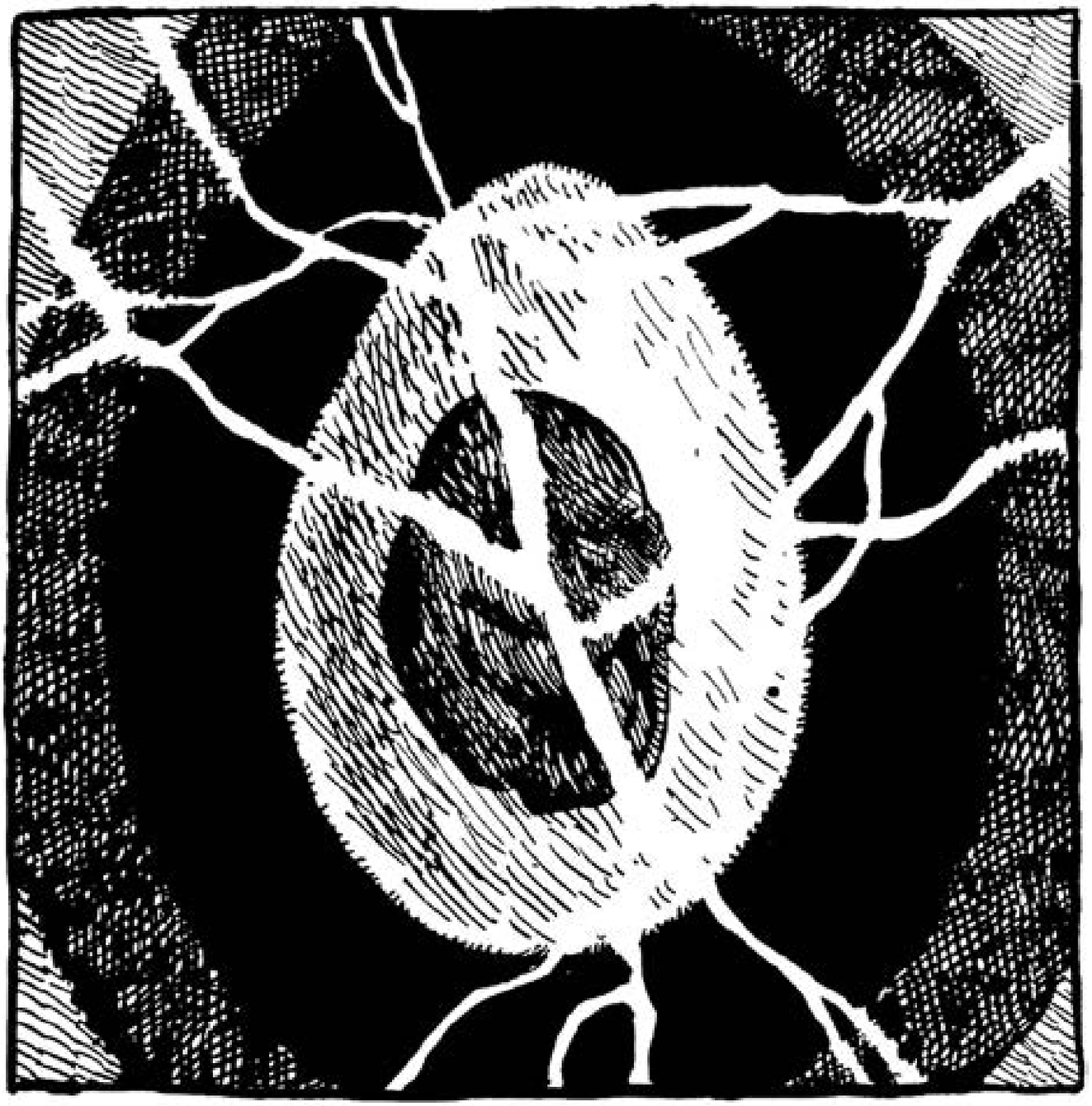
I did almost go there, yeah. I really considered it. I had her, uh, you know – like I got in the car and just decided not to. She had a kid, like a daughter. And I think that was the deciding thing. Because her daughter, like, she showed me pictures, and she wasn't – like she wasn't that much younger than me. And that's when I started to get, like, that's when I got kind of weirded out. But I don't know. I felt bad about it, too. Like, I was lying or leading her on or you know.

I'm sorry, that's, like, so weird to say to someone. That probably was not at all what you were looking for.

Yeah, um, I feel weird about it, I guess, but it's also not, like, that bad. Like I got myself into it, you know. And nothing happened.

I don't use those anymore. I think, like, I think some people probably get a lot from dating apps and stuff, but it's just not really for me.





16

I feel like Twitter exposes — like almost wants other people to find out things about you. I don't know how to phrase that, but the fact that people can see your likes, fact that it'll recommend you what your friends have liked, your followers, what people you are following have liked, like, on your feed unless you specifically turn that off.

Just the default seems to be, like, share, share, share. And that's not something that — again, I'm a very private person.

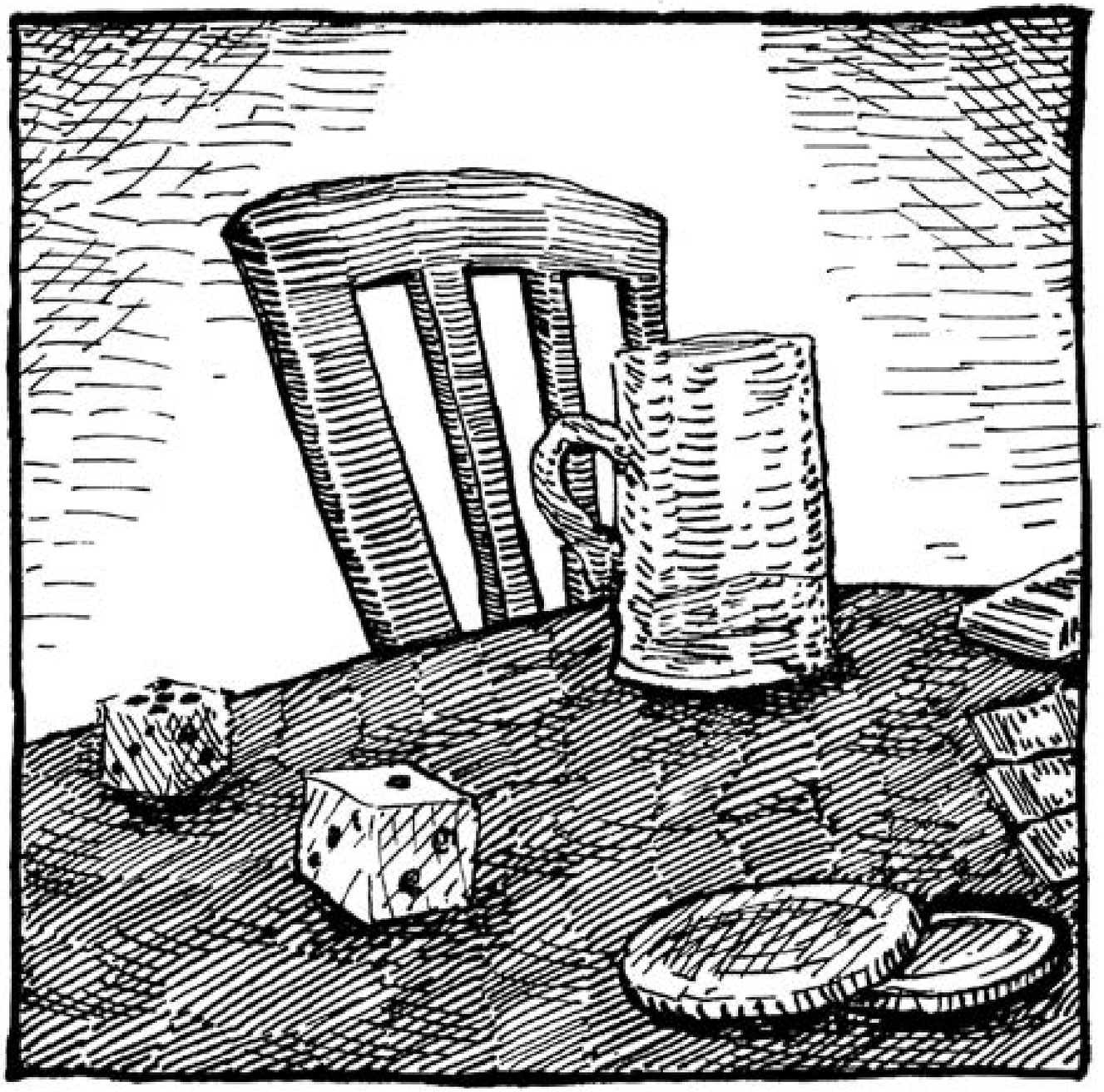
Especially in, like, this quarantine year with a specific increase of public awareness of a lot of, like, politics and stuff, I've been trying not to go on all the time and check it all the time. I think it's definitely a very easy platform to spiral down.

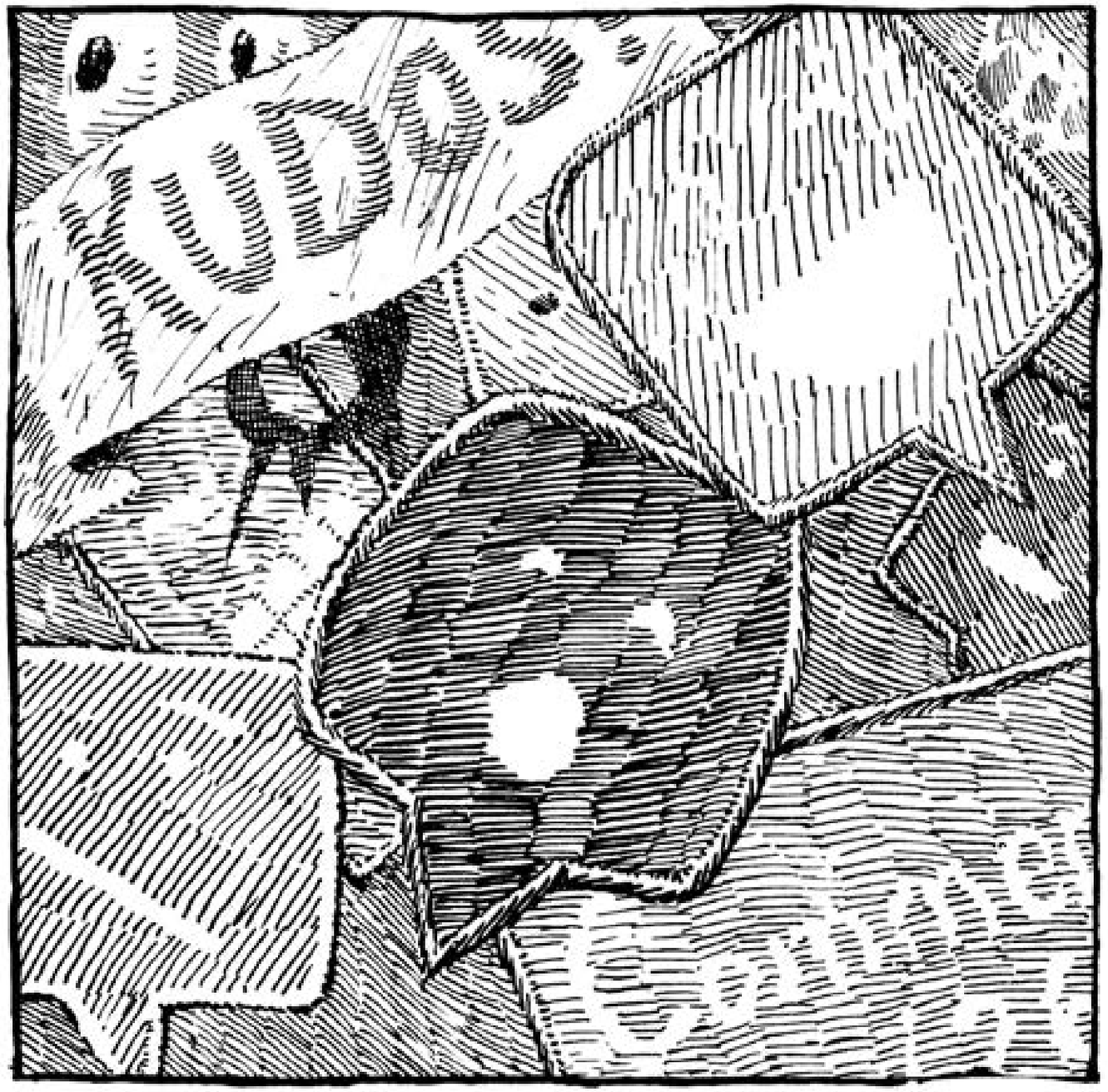
Discord pisses me off because you can't — there's no way to delete, or mass delete, things that you've said. I don't like the idea of, in a public place, once my account is deleted, all my messages would stay. I don't like the idea — and this is because I have a very particular sense of paranoia — but I don't like the idea of someone being able to know what I said. And then for me to have no way to check what that was. And not that, like, I think I've said any bad things or anything. It's just the idea that someone else has access to information about me that I myself don't even have, because I would have deleted my account, that rubs me the wrong way.

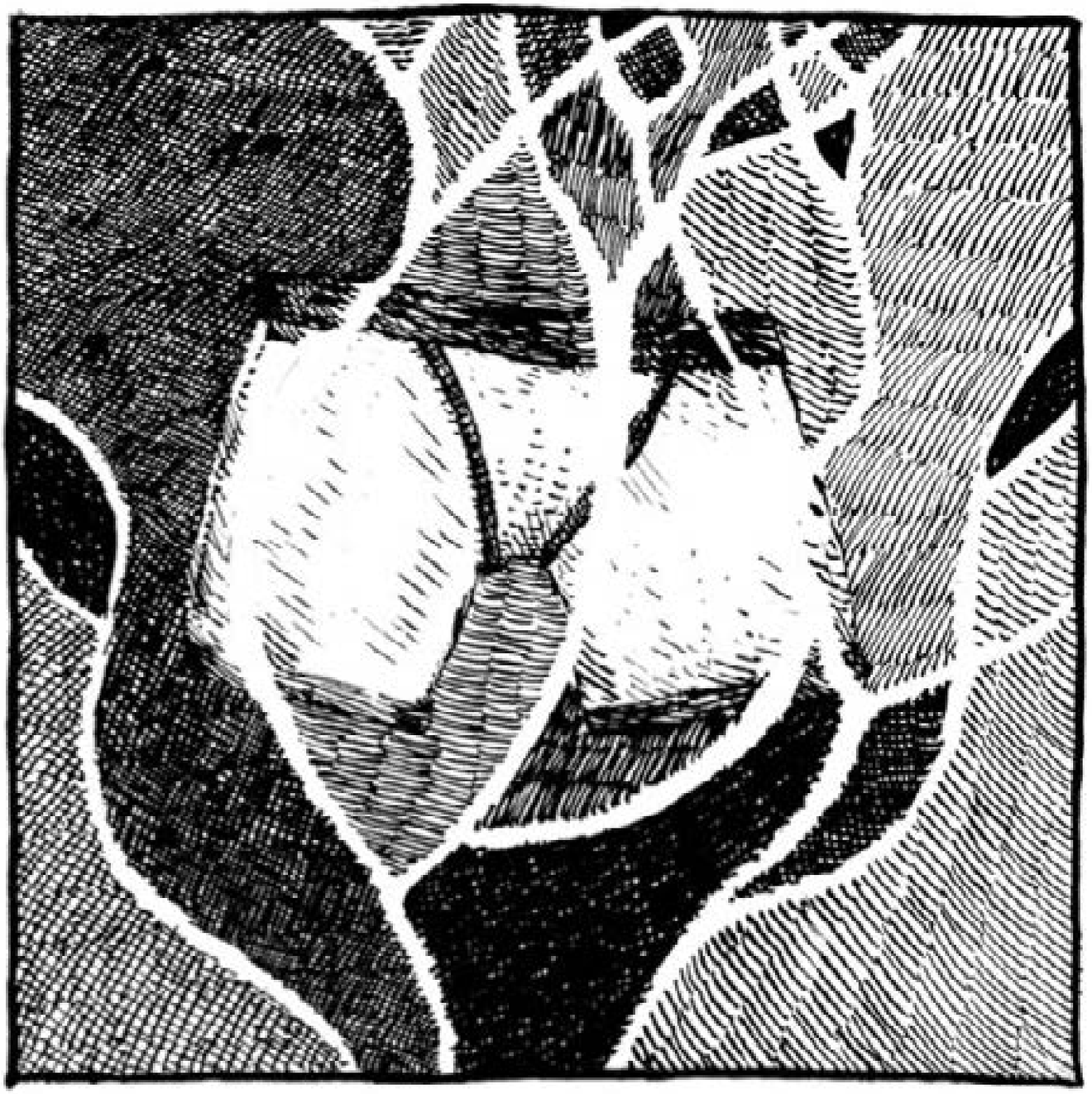
I just want to add something — just because I remembered. The part where you talked about social media and, like, seeing things that you don't want to see randomly, that one thing I have been thinking about a lot is how, because ... my parents are immigrants, I'm brown, and, like, that cultural identity has affected me a lot but also a lot of online sources can be very white. And I feel like that's impacted the way that I sort of interact with my queerness, especially at first, when I was younger.

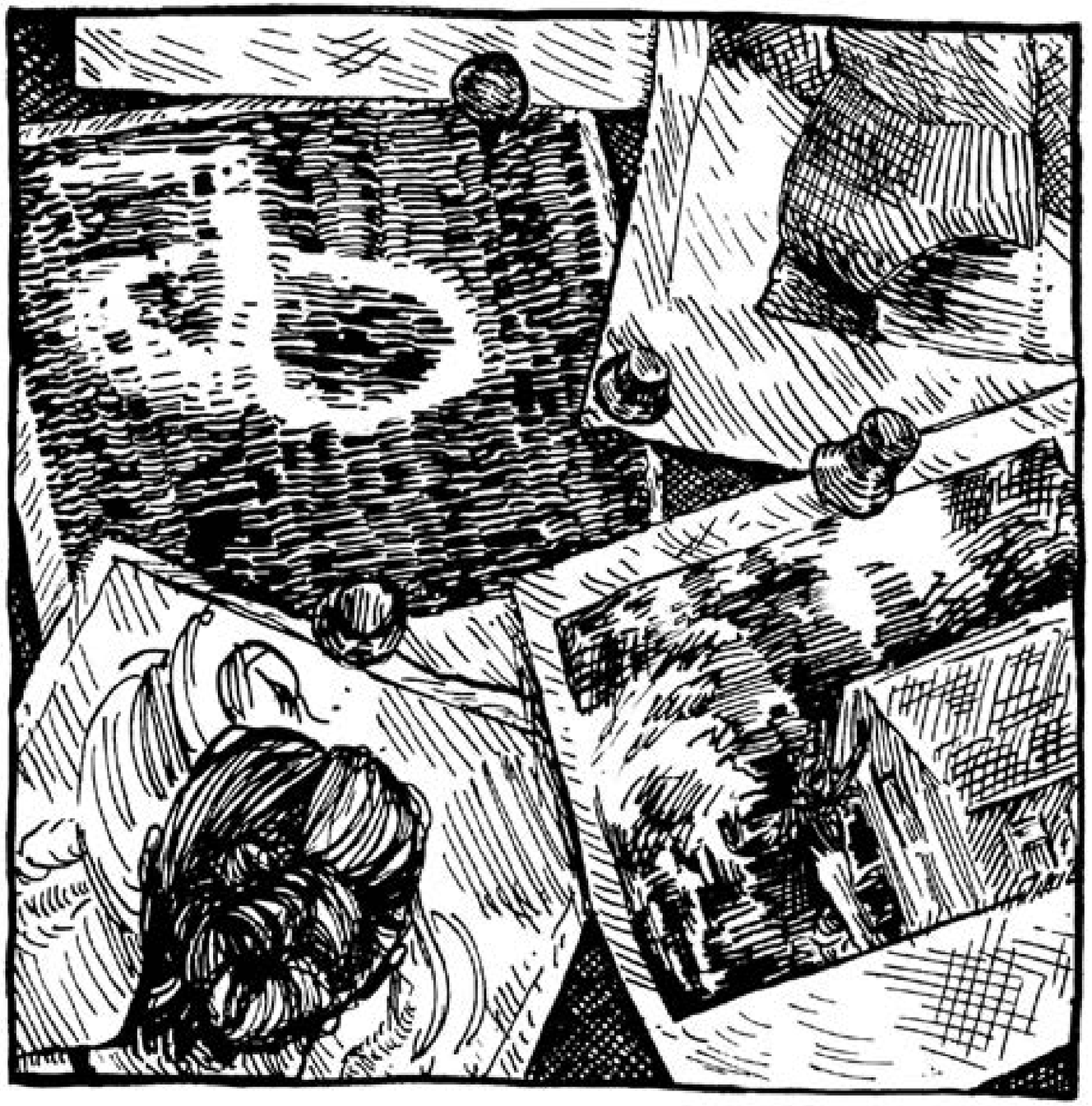
Like, I don't really have a sense of queer history beyond what I've learned online. I don't have, like, older queer people in my life, for the most part, that I can interact with. And part of me kind of wants that. And so, and the reason I bring that up is because I feel like there's a lot of discourses, I guess, online, about being queer and queer identities and what have you, there's so many, I literally could not name them all. And I feel like a big contribution to that is that a lot of things that seem unresolved are questions that have already been answered, but, like, in history by other queer people. I feel like a lot of younger LGBTQ people — especially ones who were able to come into their identity on the Internet, and find a space there to be in their identity, I mean in a way they can't be be in real life — I feel like there's a lot of history that we are all missing.

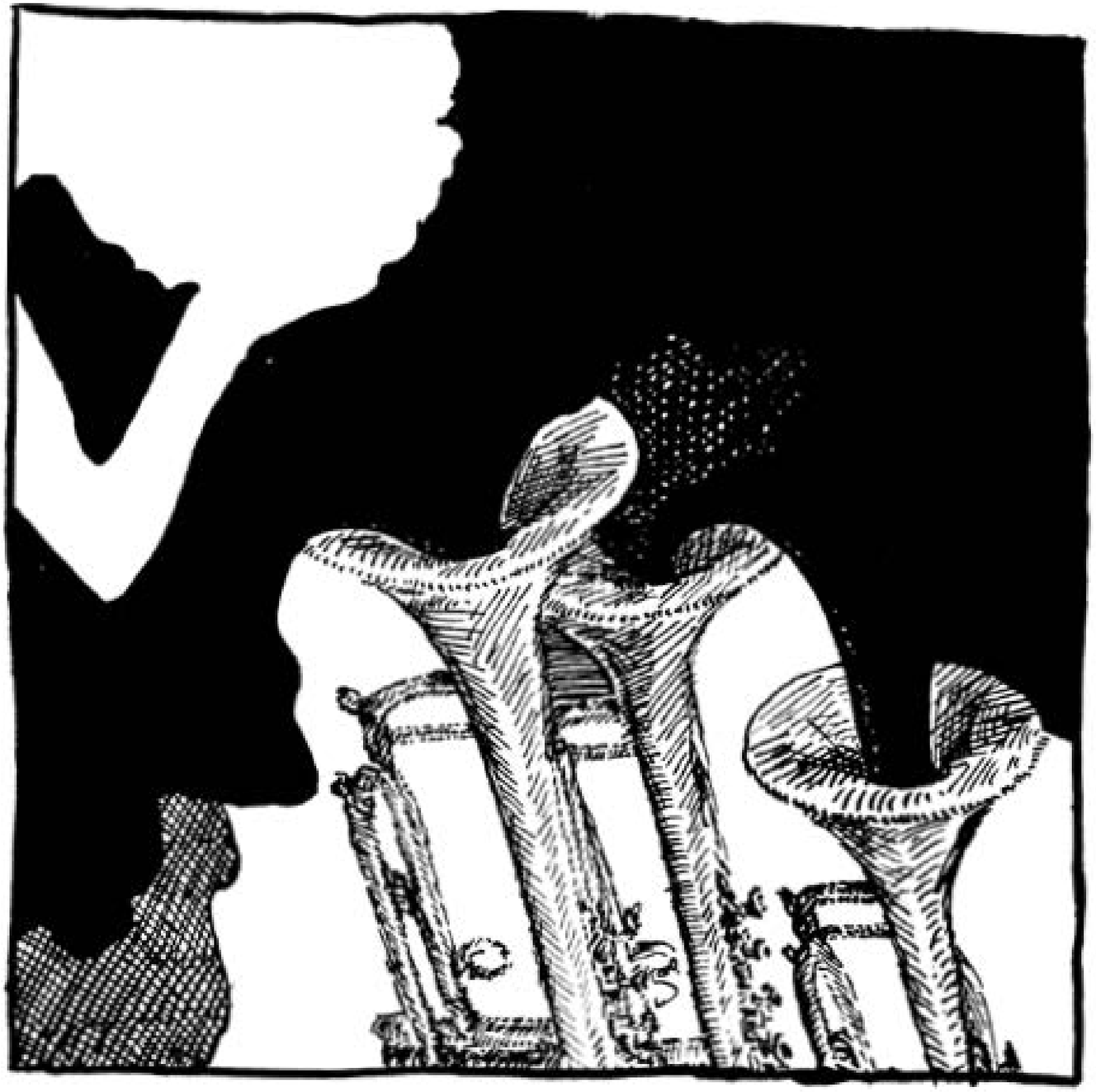
I don't want to be like, 'it's hard to find' — sure, if you, like, Google stuff, there is definitely some stuff that exists, but I feel like some things need to be experienced or, like, read in proper books, as well as — like, I don't want to prioritize one over the other. I just feel like there's a lot of history that, because it's not stuff you would learn in school, it's more of a 'you get it if you seek it out.' And even then, like, what you get is variable depending on what's been lost, and what has been digitized. And I feel like there's a definite loss that I can feel especially with respect to not having a history of, like, queer brown people, specifically in the U.S.

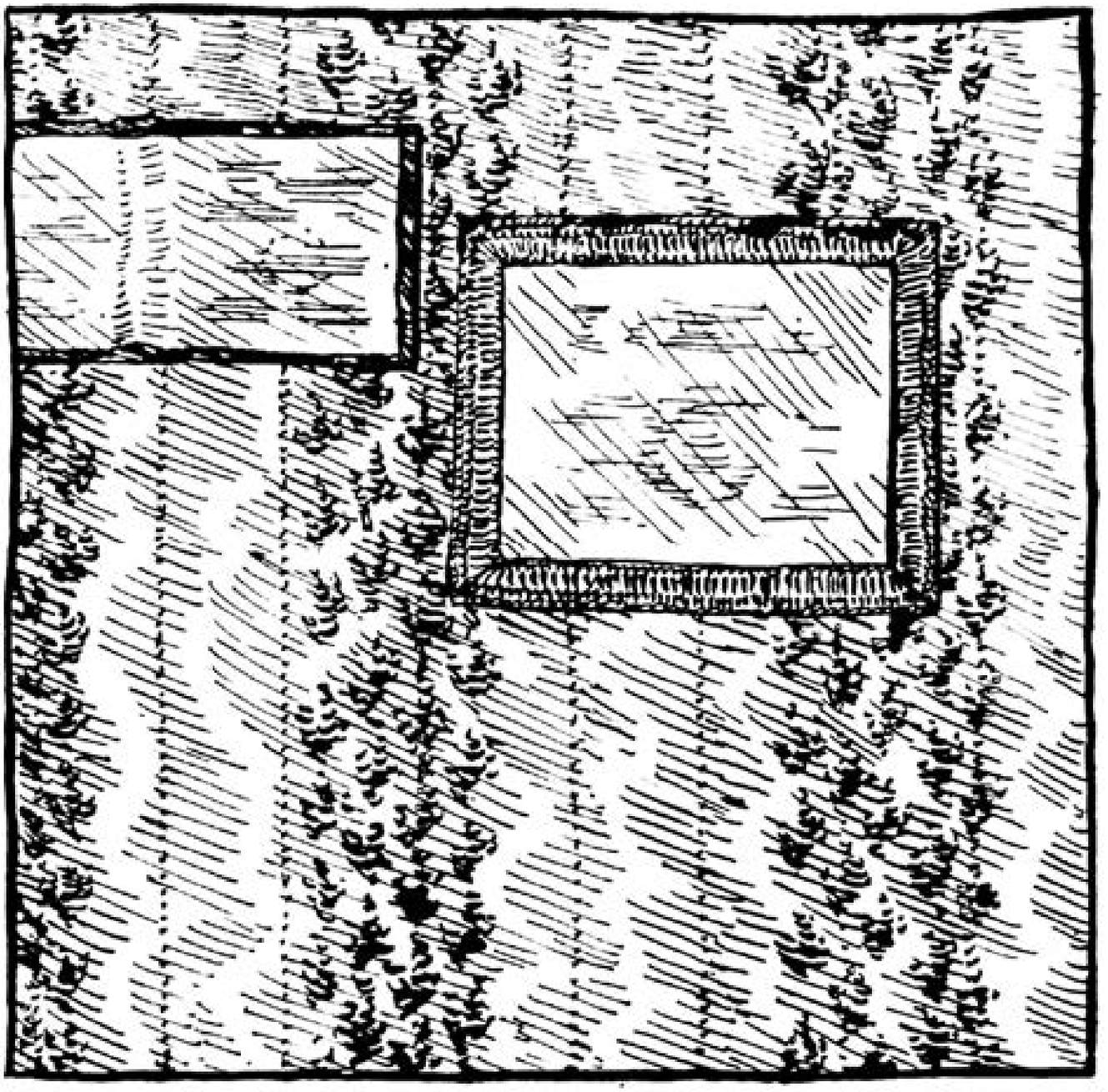












17

I'm pretty obviously a homosexual person on all social media. I present as a cis male in public, and on social media and et cetera. So it's not necessarily a secret, but it's not something that's, like advertised, either. On social media that is private, or is a service where you have to, like, add someone specifically... I interact with LGBTQ people more often. So, like, I don't think I follow any straight people on Twitter and I don't think any straight people follow me. Uh, no, lots of straight people follow me, I'm sure.

Do you think your experience on social media has changed at all since you were 12?

On the one hand, there's, you know, nine years later, being able to better discern media. I think a lot of times when you're 12, like, you just see what you see and you don't really know how to interpret it. Now I'm, like, 20, almost 21, it's okay, I know what kind of media I like to interact with and see and I know, like, how to make sure I see what I want to, do you know what I'm saying? Like you figure out how to cultivate your own experience, I guess. And when you're 12, you don't really know how to do that. And also just being an adult and having, like, a more defined sense of self, I guess, makes that easier.

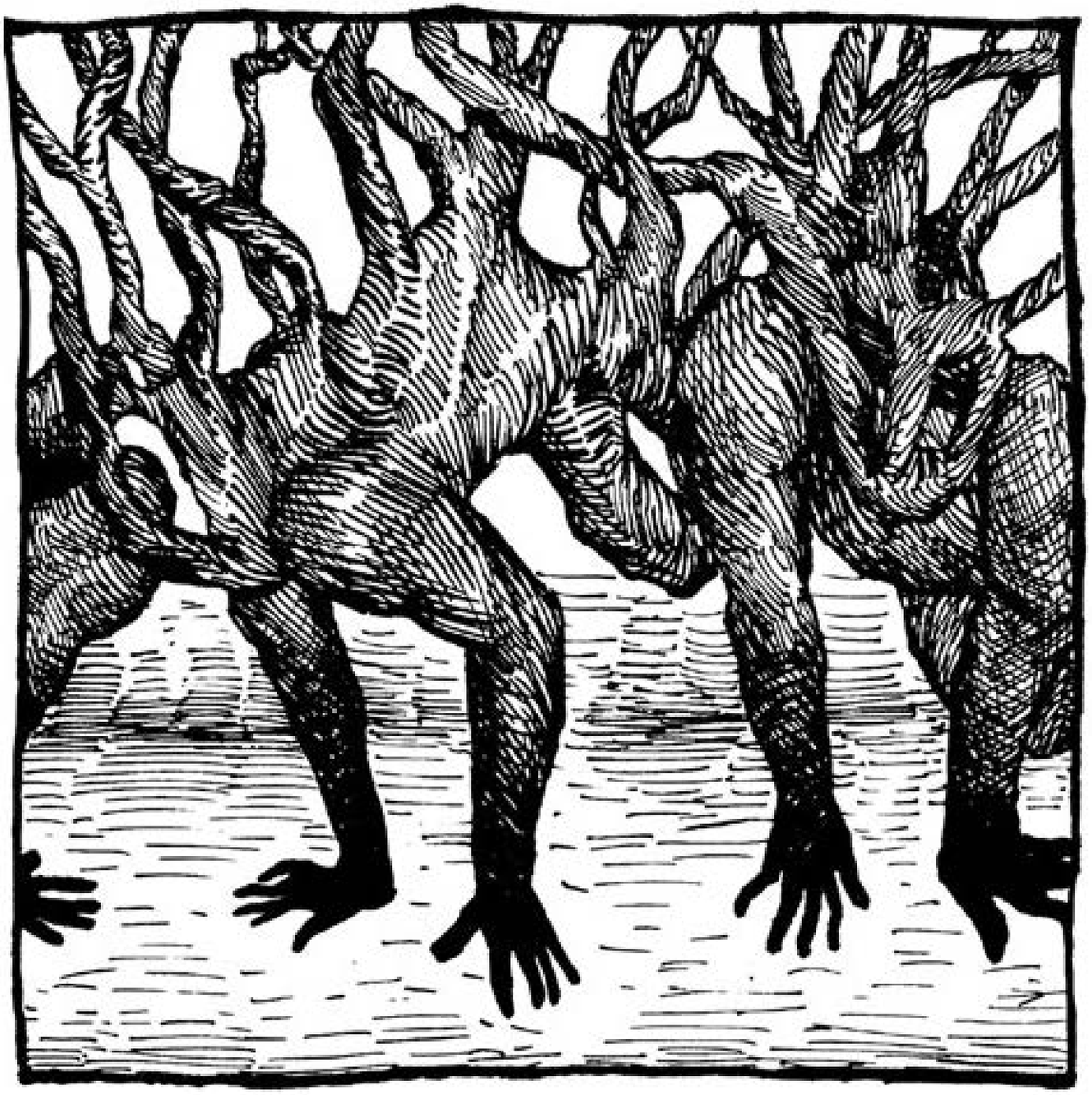
If you could change anything about how the people you interact with typically use social media, would you change anything?

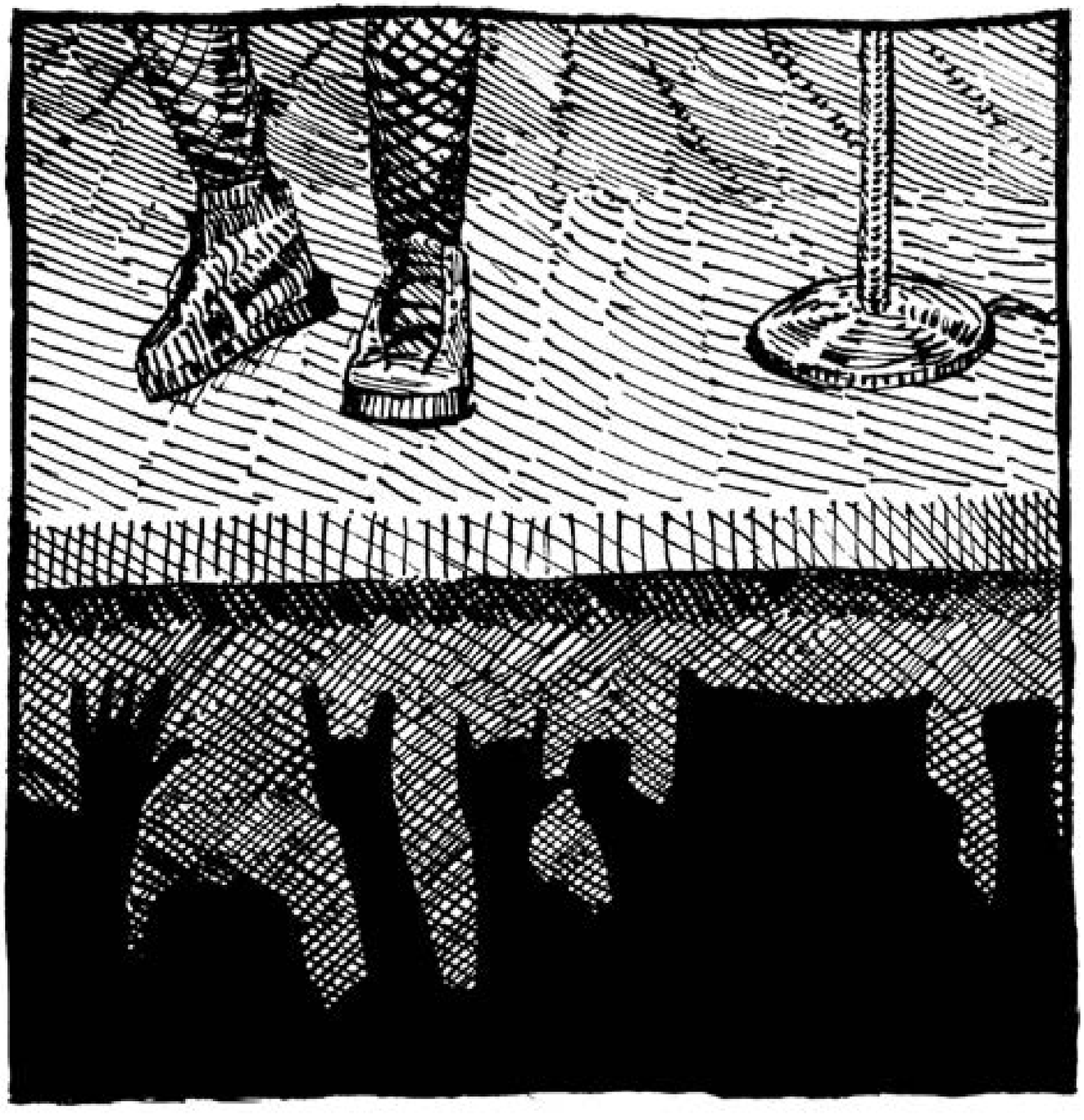
Like, don't debate the existence of people's livelihoods on, like, positivity posts. I don't even, like, follow that many trans Instagrammers but, oh my god, sometimes the comments on those. I don't know if this is really within the scope of your project, but, um, I guess just personally as somebody who has been living at home for the past year, and hasn't really beenable to interact with people outside my household given COVID, I wish people would stop posting so many pictures with other people.

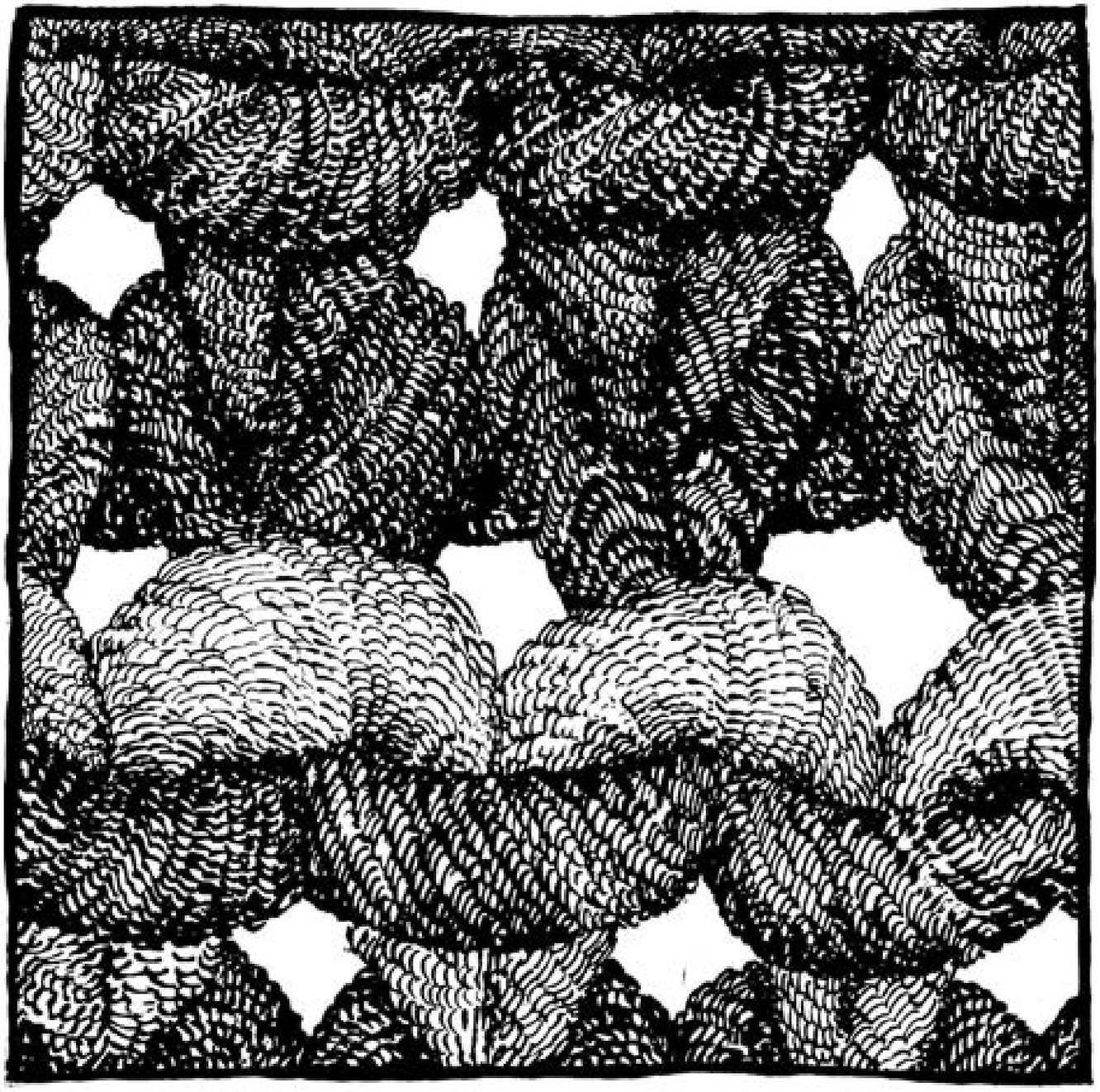
Because, you know, people aren't going to know the story and I don't want to make people feel bad or isolated for, like, not seeing people during COVID. And so, um, yeah. I guess I wish people would maybe stop pretending like life is normal or, like, if they're going to do things with other people, maybe don't rub it in so much, I guess. Like, there's a bragging element that I don't care for.

Do you ever see things that you would consider to be on those lines — like, having a bragging element — but aren't necessarily COVID-related?

I mean, it's a thin line. I can't really say. You know, I think, on the one hand I understand why people post life updates, like, 'oh I got a new job,' or like, 'oh I'm moving to a new state' or something, and I don't have a problem with that so long as people aren't being, like, 'oh, haha, I'm,' you know — it's one thing to share something good that happened to you versus, like, make other people feel bad because something good happened to you.







18

The first social media platform I was allowed on was Instagram in 2015. I was 13 years old and I was very unsure of myself. I was deeply insecure and still trying to find my place in this world. I tried desperately to be like the 'popular' girls on Instagram. Everything need to fit my 'theme' and be aesthetically pleasing. I was trying to fit some mold that didn't even exist.

Currently, I am still questioning a lot. Bisexual would be the best label to describe me, but I'm still unsure in my attraction to men. I do know that I am attracted to women and nonbinary people. I identify as female, though I don't really believe in the gender binary. I am just most comfortable using she/her pronouns and being perceived as a woman.

I first learned about bisexuality in middle school, probably in eighth grade. I think this was around the time Shane Dawson game out as bisexual. My friends were obsessed with Shane — for some reason — and they were talking about it. I read more about it in online spaces. At the time, I didn't really understand myself and didn't know what sexual attraction was like for me, so I didn't think much of it. Every time I had feelings for someone who wasn't a man, I brushed it off as platonic or 'everyone experiences this.' It wasn't until I left home and found spaces where I could really be myself, whatever that meant, that I was able to find how much that label really described me.

Hearing other women's experiences in discovering their sexuality also helped me to discover this. I have always felt female and been told I was a girl. I have never had any experiences where I felt like these words didn't describe me, but I wonderwhat it would have been like for me if these words were not forced on me as a kid.

I follow many LGBTQ+ creators and they are all amazing people. I feel really heard when people with thousands or millions of followers are addressing things that I dealwith. I would describe the experience as educational, as many of them also talk about things I do not deal with in my life. That way I can be a better ally to other people in the LGBTQ+ community.

I am lucky and have never felt uncomfortable or unsafe in any online space. I don't engage in arguments or places where I think people will react negatively. I am not out in most online spaces, especially in spaces where there are people I know from my hometown. I am out in other spaces that are anonymous or very LGBTQ friendly, but these spaces do not include people I know from back home.

Social media has been an amazing tool for me to get out of the mindset of my parents and my small town and open myself up to new ideas and experiences. I have learned so much about myself and about what is happening in the world because of social media. I don't think I would have discovered my sexuality if it weren't for social media and my exposure to things I wouldn't have seen otherwise. People talk all the time about the harm of social media, but for some people, social media and online spaces are the only places they can be themselves. I have felt this a lot recently as I grapple with my identity and how other people feel about it. I hope one day I can be out to the world and everyone will be okay with it. For now, I have my TikToks and my online messaging and the people I've met on my college campus.

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