

## Vulnerability *as* Strength

The cat on the cover of this journal is quite content. Curiously, she has her belly exposed. As cat enthusiasts know, cats rarely expose their bellies. If they do, it is a testament to trust in their surroundings. Therefore, this image is very telling. Not only is this cat making herself vulnerable, but she is content in doing so. She is exposing herself to contact with the reader of this journal, even though this reader is not yet known to her. But perhaps this exposure signals more – a willingness to engage, to collaborate, and to respond. In this case, this cat’s vulnerability truly is her strength.

However, everyday usage of the word ‘vulnerable’ rarely connotes strength. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘vulnerable’ as to be “exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.” In other words, to be vulnerable is to risk exposure to harm. It is something we are taught to avoid, and it is something we are taught is a weakness. This is likely why we avoid appearing vulnerable at all costs: we are often ashamed to cry in public; we do not often communicate our experiences with mental illness; and, we rarely communicate our innermost desires. Yet one thing is certain: we all have the urge to cry, we all have experiences, either directly or indirectly, with mental illness, and we all have desires, in one form or another. What if, rather than limiting these vulnerabilities to our private homes and private minds, we brought them into the public to draw collectively upon them? What is the potential for vulnerability when reframed as a strength?

In response to this question, Judith Butler dares to reimagine “the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss” (2004, 20<sup>\*</sup>). Butler does so by reimagining vulnerability as corporeal vulnerability, or the way in which we are all “constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed” (2004, 20). For Butler, the disposition caused by our relations with one another collapses the distinction between ourselves and that other (2004, 25). In other words, it is the social that makes us vulnerable, but socially there is potential to do something with that collective vulnerability.

This edition asks us and you to reimagine vulnerability as a collective strength – one which we all experience (albeit in many and different ways), one which we may share in common, and one which we can rely upon as communities to affect positive social change. What would such a project look like? The articles contained within this edition, while different in so many ways, answer this question when taken as a whole. Specifically, by presenting the reader with these pieces and thereby exposing the bellies of our undergraduate work, we are vulnerable. However, by sharing our ideas we are also sparking and contributing to important discussions, and engaging the reader to do so as well. This is a collective project, engaged in by both the contributors and the reader. To this end, our vulnerability certainly is a strength.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Normandeau

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\* Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York and London: Verso, 2004. Print.

