

Zoë Haggard

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*Critique of We Hold No Absolute Place in the Universe*

In her zine *We Hold No Absolute Place in the Universe*, Zoë Haggard explores the relation between astrophysics and queer identity. Through detailed drawings and galactic imagery – with wisps flowing across from one page to the next – Zoë attempts to merge both a personal narrative about her queerness with an astrophysical perspective through near-poetry and story. The work begins with an introduction, laying out the importance of perspective and reference frame, hinting at the concept of Special Relativity, though never explicitly mentioning it. The beginning's aim seems to be to get the reader to understand that multiple realities – narratives – can coexist within the same space and time. The work then shifts to the author's own narrative about understanding and coming to terms with her own queerness. Zoë, at the end of the zine, reflects back to the beginning and claims her own (queer) reality and spacetime.

At first read, the connection between the introduction and queer narrative, however, seems to be a little hasty. If anything, they seem to be almost two different zines: one about astrophysics and another about queer identity. This is especially noticeable at the transition point. The author could have done with more pages and exploration, or with a blank page in between to give the reader some time to process. There is also a drastic shift in style as the zine transfers from the poetry-esque writing of the introduction to the more casual writing of the story section. Especially at the switchover, the change is a bit jarring to the reader, changing

from an omnipotent third-person viewpoint to a very personal, first-person narrative.

Nevertheless, although the writing transitions were slightly lacking, the connection in the art is strong between the two sections. Zoë continues the same complex art style across all the pages, making the overall look consistent and polished. She also brings back similar imagery such as the pattern of eyes, orbital lines, stars, and gridded textures throughout the zine. For this reason, the work seems to be more held together more by its art than by its narration.

Nevertheless, while the work is slightly disconnected between the introduction and the story sections, the author does manage to weave the two together in the end both in the visuals and in the narrative. The visual tieback is most notable at the end of the piece, when the author brings the reader back to the introduction with imagery mirroring the first page – a character sitting on a planet, looking through a telescope. The narrative tieback, however, is slightly abrupt but begins by near-quoting a line from the introduction: “People go through their lives assigning judgements to realities they do not live.” From here, the transition falls into the language of the beginning (space, time, universe of infinities) to bring the reader back to the idea of a multitude of realities and the lack of an absolute truth. In this way, Zoë is able to tie together her story both with the visuals and with the writing, although the transitions are a bit fast.

As for the meat of the narrative, the story and coming to terms with her queerness, on one hand, is very personal. The author describes her own confusion with her identity and also outsider’s reactions to her queerness. In the end, the author seems to reject the outsider voices and claim her queerness for herself, as her own “truth.” While it is a story about claiming one’s identity and claiming one’s gayness, it could be taken as an oversimplification at worst. For one,

there is little discussion about *how* she overcame the hurtful and derogatory comments of others. But, on the other hand, the author clearly states that this is just “one such microcosm in a universe of infinites.” So, she does not claim to write about *the* queer experience just *her* queer experience.

In the end, *We Hold No Absolute Place in the Universe* with its distinctive art, poetry and prose weaves together a semi-scientific narrative with the author’s own queer experience. While there are certain aspects such as the transitions between sections that could be taken as confusing or odd to the reader, overall, Zoë succeeds in both telling her story and teaching the reader a little bit about physics.