

Inheriting Pleasure

An Essay By Thea Mony  

My first conscious act of pleasure was the day I told my ex-husband I wanted a divorce. It was painful, frightening, and riddled with uncertainty. It was also my naked truth. It was a moment of unapologetic surrender to a deep yearning for freedom to be more than I'd become, and the first sign of my willingness to fight for a life that prioritized my desires.

I was 30 years old at the time.

Prior to that day I have no recollection of intentional or conscious pleasure. I'm not saying I didn't have happy moments or enjoy activities with family and friends. I have many beautiful memories.

I'm saying I had **no understanding of what pleasure was.**

No example or conversation to guide me towards a pleasure-centered life.

I recall messaging that encouraged me to be *less* spontaneous,
to be more tame,
to act in accordance with a prescribed definition of acceptable,
to attract *less* attention.

These messages were societal,

cultural,

and in the absence of a familial conversation around pleasure, these external definitions curbed my craving for pleasure.

It is only now, ten years after my decision to divorce, I can recognize and label my decision a pleasurable act because I've defined pleasure for myself.

***I imagine a world of decolonized bodies able to reclaim their sacred
sensuality,
to reattach to the bodies colonization claimed,
and experience all of the bliss the erotic has to offer,
the bliss I had no idea I was entitled to for over half of my life.***

Fear of pleasure is sewn into the fabric of our collective Western consciousness, overtly and subliminally. I see it surface when I ask clients to identify joy and pleasure in their lives and tears form, as though I pricked them. Their eyes accuse me:

How did you know I have these urges?

How did you know I have these needs?

Our early conditioning falsely equates safety with fear, but the erotic doesn't desire our fear:

She demands our **reverence** in exchange for the spontaneity, passion, creativity, and unbridled energy She offers.

She expects her altar to be adorned with flowers, honey, copper, laughter, poetry, and any other natural by-product of our union with Her.

She is the opposite of fear.

For those of us who were colonized, She is a *familiar* spirit, one we used to welcome into our lives, homes, and bodies before we were taught to fear Her.

When I think about the landscape of social justice, the fight for equality and the struggle to create a society that is truly free, ***I know our liberation is inextricably tied to our ability to embrace the erotic***, to access **PLEASURE**, and to reclaim **JOY** as a birthright.

Pleasure, joy, and the erotic pour from the same place,

along with grief, pain, and sorrow.

We've been taught to limit our access to the latter three.

Stories of survival, blind patience, and turning cheeks have conditioned the Black experience to be defined by trauma,

but pain isn't our sole inheritance.

Our story isn't defined by our survival, it's ***PRESERVED*** by it.

The core of our story is that in the midst of it all ***we claimed our bodies with pleasure.***

We moved them in secret,

in the sunlight,

against each other,

and on our own.

We moved our bodies until we created jazz,

rhythm and blues,

and hip hop.

We moved our bodies until we created economies,
 traffic lights,
 open heart surgeries,
 hair care empires,
 and social networks.

We moved our bodies and created generations,
 legacies,
 and unparallelled social movements.

We moved our bodies and preserved our ability to feel and connect
in the midst of systemic and strategic disconnection.

What a gift!

What an *inheritance* our ancestors have given us!

All that's left to do now is to **claim it.**

It will be scary and uncertain.

It will feel foreign at first and we will question if we are doing the right thing.

Our ancestors will remind us to bathe nude in the moonlight, to adorn our waists with beads,
and to encourage our parents and children to do the same.

We will bring the flowers and honey, unsure if She will remember us,
 but I promise, She will.

She remembered me.

She caught the truth as it slipped from my mouth and I knew I could never lie to myself again.

She offered me honey to soothe the bite marks on my tongue, and I no longer self-silence.

She placed Her hand between my legs and taught me to enjoy the smell of my own flower.

Not only did She remember me,

I remembered me.

Now I work for Her, pushing Black bodies to reclaim what is rightfully ours.

I can't say whether or not this racist, heteronormative, patriarchal system will come crashing down during my lifetime. I can say my ancestors didn't pleasure me into existence so I could live a tame, joyless life.

I'm gonna use every drop of my inheritance while this body exists to experience all the pleasure I am owed.

I will bring honey and flowers to as many altars as I can until we all remember.

It's possible the greatest inheritance of all is the mystery of our survival, a secret white supremacy is salivating to discover.

How are they still here? How are they still loving, forgiving, and creating?

The answer thrives in the core of our being, sealed in Black skin they can never own.

It has been preserved for a time such as this.

It is quietly and powerfully ushering in the era of #blackgirlmagic, and has no equal.

The secret is out.

The only permission we need to access transformational pleasure and joy ***is our own***.

Liberation is here.

Smell your flower, and *enjoy!*