Do you, ever, reflect on kissing? Maybe mid-kiss, wonder who you are, who you're kissing, where it's leading? Perhaps you don't make out—now, or ever. Still, what is kissing? Why do we kiss? It can feel luscious, libidinal, friendly. It can just be friendly. But are we trying to make out something via kissing? Is it a yearning, interpretive action? (I wonder if you think so. This book's for you.)

I am hot for kissing.

Tonight, I'm determined she will melt from kisses, delivered in a pattern (clever, irresistible) I am going to improvise. (Don't ask me how.) She doesn't know I'm kissing her with insects on my mind. Something is making our lips astir. Something somewhere flutters, making me wish I could trap a few of these kisses under glass.

Consider kissing's strangeness. You know you want to (I taunt myself while kissing). Make it out, slowly.

_All the political forces of our world_ are at our lips.
Fragments of the world embedded in a kiss. Kissing takes me deeply into politics and thought, race and economics, sexual childhood. I ask myself, How does something sensual swell so dramatically into these dimensions? Also, the status of the face feels involved. The way we grasp faces—just that world-defining endeavor—hangs around kissing.¹

Kissing swells with thinking, making kissing hotter.

Stoked, unquiet, I want company in thinking hotter thoughts. Maybe, like me, you have felt that kissing allows for feeling to overcome thinking, giving us space to escape our minds. Kissing halts thinking? It's not true. Not entirely true. The phrase “making out” can mean “to discern,” as well as “to kiss.” “To manage with some difficulty to see or hear something.” “To understand the character or motivation of someone.” It’s about interpreting; it’s about the wily searchings of desire.

Kissing becomes our coolest quest.

Kissing can be cloudy, but it’s also grand. We make each other out, discern the fog surrounding us, the haze that we are, when we’re kissing. Here’s the adventure—making out—I invite. How do I tell it?

Don’t get thinking this book’s about identity. (I say this to myself as much as to anyone.) I am tender toward identities but suspicious of them. I don’t
“identify with” many words attached to me, to put it mildly. But while I don’t identify with certain forceful signs—signs assigned to me—I believe their force.\textsuperscript{2} \textit{I believe in words}. We wear words—on skin, on cloth, on face, on muscle, willingly or not, clearly or not. (Some signs change, some are hard to read.) These quite often deeply, thoroughly, maddeningly, importantly wind around our kissing; drive our kissing; impede our kissing; shape our kissing. Therefore, kissing involves us in words.

Who am I who tells of words? What’s my kissing body? Piece me together—I am words for you—and you will assign me aspects of sight, hearing, cognition, dexterity, color, and shifting dress. These affect my kissing and your reading of my kissing.

\textit{Making Out}, no surprise, is about some kisses. They might prompt you to kiss, question, think, debate. And, of course, I’d prompt all the stories you have about your own kissing. Unless you’d rather lose them, which I’d understand. Kissing, clearly, can hold such pain.

The bigger surprise may involve \textit{reading}. This book on kissing asks about reading. Reading, you will watch me claim, is kissing and sex with ideas. Relax; I’ll explain. For the moment, ask yourself two simple questions. Why do we love the feel of certain words, seeking to roll them around in our mouths, eyes, and minds? (If we can.) How do words get into us, in
order to be words to us? The feel of words, the entry of words in bodyminds: what specific words would you use if you answered these two questions?

Mine involve kissing and sex with ideas. You’ll see why. The stranger you find this, all the better.

Kissing itself is just plain strange. Kissing is neither hetero nor homo; trans nor cis. Children do it, too—even with adults. Asexuals and celibates may partake. But is kissing sex? Odder still, is reading? For adults and kids?

Kissing, in this book, is

strange,

fertile,

inefficient,

treasured,

tonally various,

related to reading,

beautifully

unknowable.
There’s a story here about my kissing and my reading: how I’ve read kissing, made myself out in the kisses I’ve encountered. I am revealed in kisses I bend to.

Take back “revealed”: strewn is more like it; I, whoever I may be, am strewn, splayed across my memories. Memories I love as I distrust them. Thus, in all that follows, I recall kisses from across my life: the “Hollywood kiss” I request when I’m six, raising thorny issues of gender identity; Devin trying to kiss me as Fred bullies me; the chairlift kiss, with God in tow; “interracial kisses” (bullshit term); the accidental kiss we mean and desire during a haircut that will out me—the kiss and haircut blowing my cover; The Kiss, which can never be repeated or rendered; my kissing “marriage” (as a queer concept) while I’m against it; the don’t-share-your-day kiss changing my love.

The trail of varied kisses described in what’s to come makes for a layer cake of words through which I made myself out: “girl” turning “gay” feeling “trans” under “white” facing “God” soaked in “shame,” having a “blast.” An arc of heated memory curves across this book.

But this book isn’t just composed of kisses. It also asks what can count as a kiss: it includes a set of zones: memoir; conceptions; brief reflections on movies and books.
Making Out grows across five numbered sections: a splash of central claims (helping to lay out kissing, reading, and sex with ideas); a group of enterings, outings, and remains (asking how kisses sometimes stick with us; how do words decay in us?); various scenes of communal making out (what is group kissing?); the awesome force of “no” (not what you think—and fertile, besides); and the place of face (central to kissing, puzzling to read, something to hold).

In case you’re wondering, I survived. Often, I flourished—positively greened. Pleasure and joy weave around my pain, as does desire. (Always, there’s desire—even in childhood.) But my pain’s alerting. The climax of this book is tender, but unflinching. In fact, it explores “pain not mine”: how to think it, how to hold it, how kissing and reading may disclose it, how to have sex with this idea.

Lastly, something vital permeates this book, undoing “memoir” in its simple sense:

This could sound odd, though I think you’ll understand as you read Making Out: I do not believe in “the child” as we generally, typically, speak of it. (I wrote a book about this.) Indeed, I believe the “child” is the act of “adults” looking back. Neither exists, I still claim, and this division wildly plagues us. As I speak of “children,” and myself as “child,” take me as
looking fantastically back, suspended in the liquid now as not-adult. But since I had no choice but to “be” a child, I’ll use this sign. It may look like there’s “a child” before you; a later me; a kisser; a rational reader. Yet for you, I’m words.

My stories involve my desire for a word. What I wished to kiss: one blunt word. You’ll meet it soon enough. I think you’ll grasp what I mean when I say that I—with others—am a prequel to “trans” and gendered “nonbinary” life today. And perhaps a word-starved, word-aspiring child, such as I was, was bound to find in reading, often with others, a bounty almost not to be believed.

The book is a place for communal making out.