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CAPACIOUS

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2024

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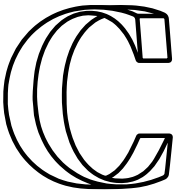

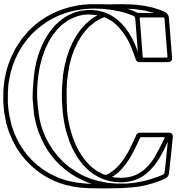

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Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry is an open access, peer-reviewed, international journal that is, first and foremost, dedicated to the publication of writings and similar creative works on affect by degree-seeking students (Masters, PhD, brilliant undergraduates) across any and all academic disciplines. Secondarily, the journal also welcomes contributions from early-career researchers, recent post-graduates, those approaching their study of affect independent of academia (by choice or not), and, on occasion, an established scholar with an 'emerging' idea that opens up new avenues for affect inquiry. The principal aim of *Capacious* is to 'make room' for a wide diversity of approaches and emerging voices to engage with ongoing conversations in and around affect studies.

This journal will champion work that resists:

- the critical ossification of affect inquiry into rigid theoretical postures
- the same dreary citational genealogies
- any too assured reiteration of disciplinary orthodoxies

The journal will always encourage the energies and enthusiasms, the fresh perspectives and provocations that younger scholars so often bring to bear on affect within and across unique and sometimes divergent fields of intellectual endeavor. *Capacious* seeks to avoid issuing formal 'calls for papers' and 'special theme issues.' Submissions to this journal are accepted at anytime and are welcome to pursue any and all topic areas or approaches relating to affect.

Our not-so-secret wish is that essays and issues will forever remain capacious and rangy: emerging from various disciplines and conceptual [t]angles. Indeed, our aim for every journal issue would be that its collected essays not really coalesce all that much, but rather rub up against one another unexpectedly or shoot past each other without ever touching on quite the same disciplinary procedures, theoretical presuppositions or subject matter.

Capacious shall always endeavor to promote diverse bloom-spaces for affect's study over the dulling hum of any specific orthodoxy. From our own editorial practices down through the interstices of this journal's contents, the *Capacious* ethos is most thoroughly engaged by those critical-affective undertakings that find ways of 'making room.'

ca·pa·cious
kəˈpāSHəs/

adjective
having a lot of space inside; roomy.

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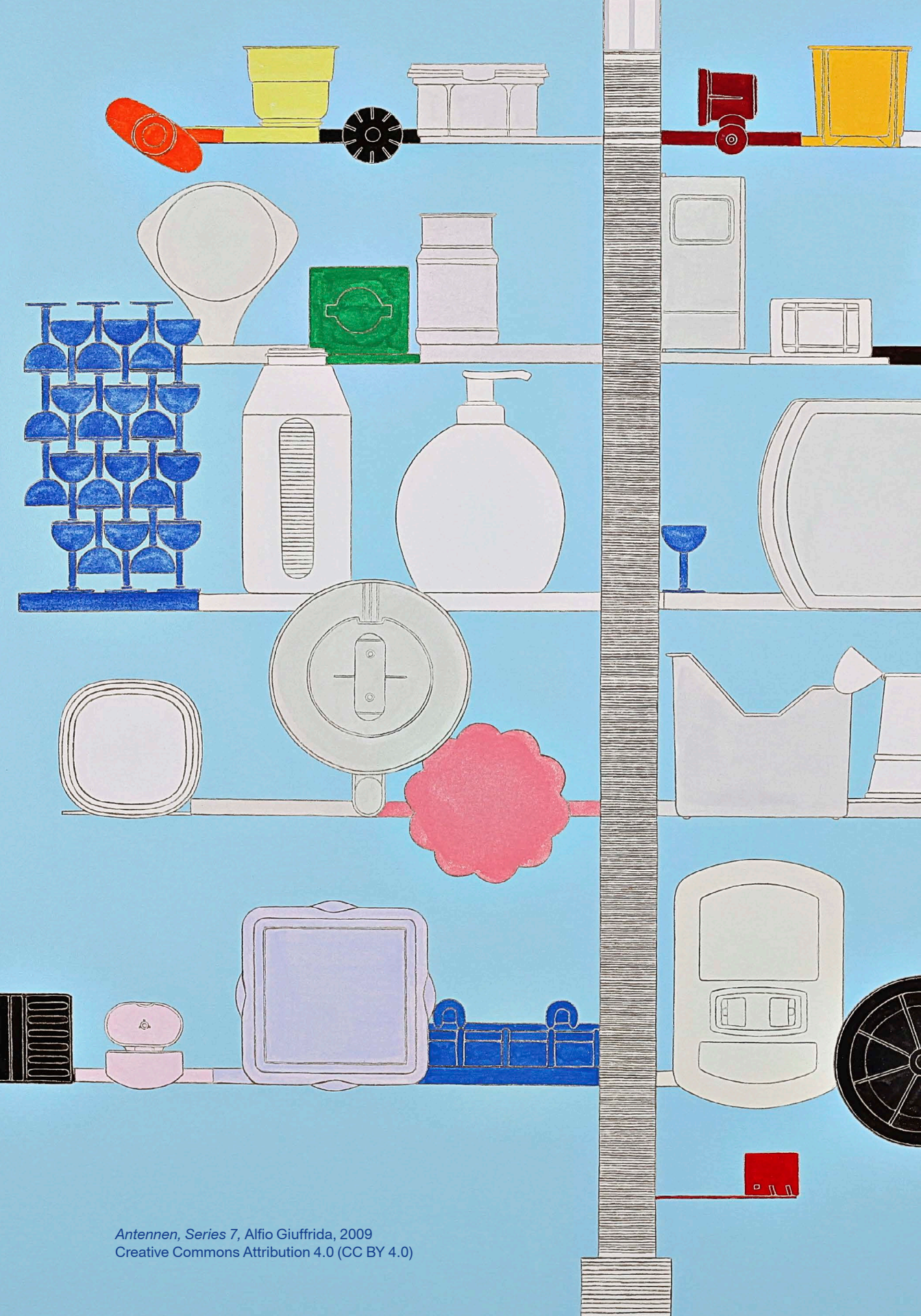

Antennen, Series 7, Alfio Giuffrida, 2009

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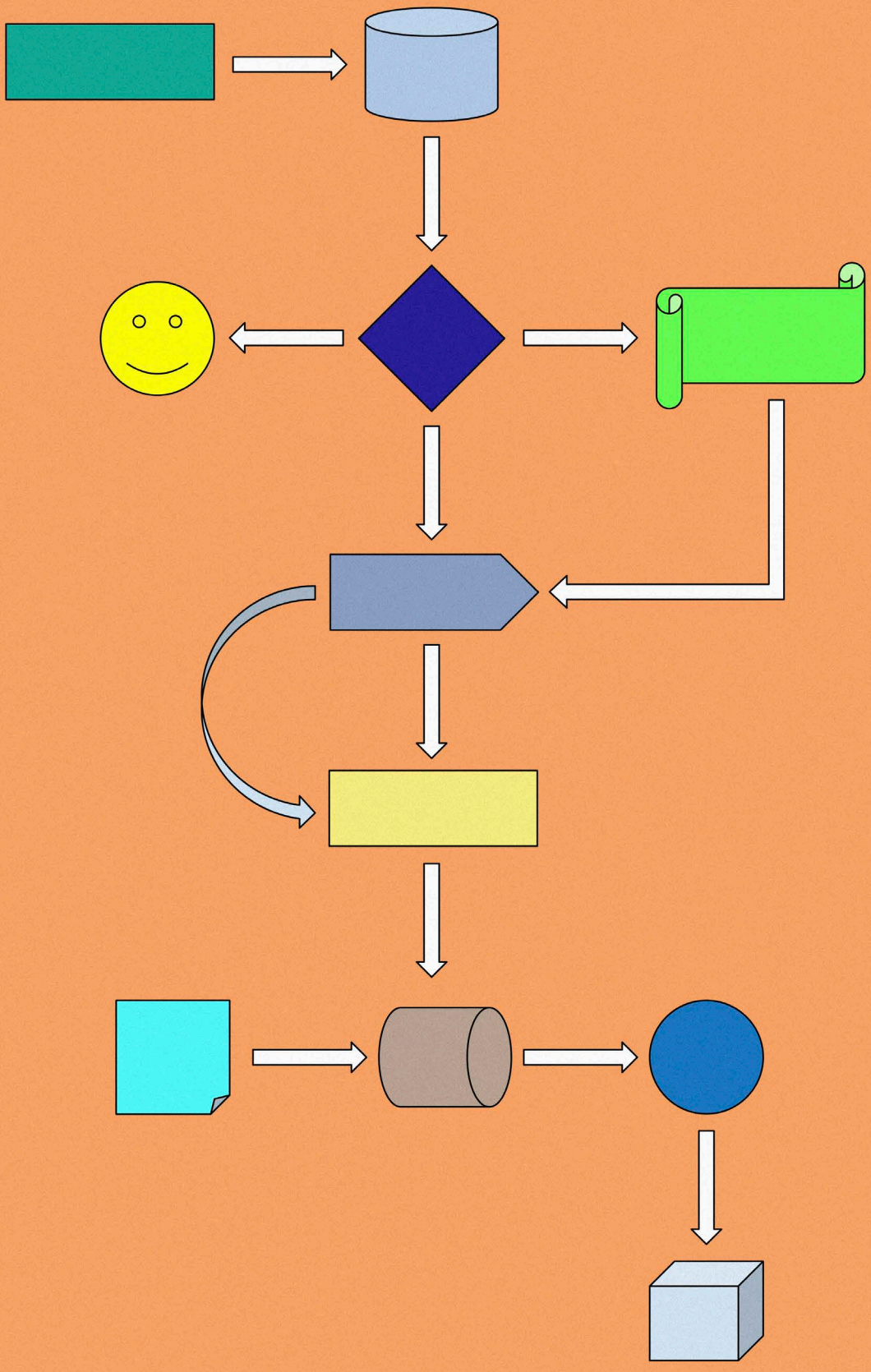

Introduction

WHAT DOES LAUREN BERLANT TEACH US ABOUT NETWORKED AFFECT?

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Lauren Berlant's profound legacy[1] for affect theory, cultural studies, queer theory and adjacent fields centers on her/their socio-sensory attunement to the role of media, popular culture, and the aesthetic in shaping everyday experience within late capitalist America and far beyond. And yet, within the pervasively digitalized media cultures of the twenty first century, it is curious, perhaps, that Berlant rarely engaged directly with digital culture, nor has their work (with notable pockets of exception) been drawn on widely in accounts of networked media within media theory, digital humanities, or critical data studies (Pedwell 2023b; see also Azhar and Boler 2023). The central claim orienting this introductory essay, however, is that the uncommon instances in which Berlant *does* address digital technologies explicitly are instructive and, moreover, that there is much to be gained from mining Berlant's rich oeuvre for what it teaches us about the changing relations among affect, subjectivity, digital culture, and 'the political' amid the intersecting crises of the present. The most significant lessons Berlant's work imparts in this vein, we will argue, concern the affective workings and implications of mediation, genre, and infrastructure in our digital age—lessons which prompt us to confront the ineradicable persistence of uncertainty, ambivalence, and vulnerability within human-technology relations, alongside the vital role of transitional infrastructures in the emergent ethico-politics of networked affect.

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Grasping Berlant's distinctive take on genre—and the possibilities it holds for grappling with contemporary networked affects and ecologies—requires that we first consider the role of *mediation* in their scholarship. If, within the backstory of media and cultural studies, mediation was defined traditionally as operating in between two entities posed as separate and distinct (i.e. 'a media representation' and 'an audience' or 'a digital platform' and 'a body'), Berlant, like other contemporary critical scholars, refuses such conceptual and temporal distinctions. Rather, in resonance with the Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams, Berlant understands mediation as "the continua of transformation in forms, shapes, patternings, assemblings (all matter of relations among form) across our uneven and inequitably lived existences" (Seigworth and Coleman 2023, 180). Mediation is thus, as Berlant (2022) puts it in their final book, *The Inconvenience of Other People*, "not a stable thing but a way of seeing unstable relations among dynamically related things" (22). At stake across Berlant's writings are the mundane processes that affectively entangle the individual and the social, personal and political, intimate and public amid the crumbling "social democratic promise of the post-Second World War period in the US and Europe" (Berlant 2011, 3) and the racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized "ordinary of biopower" (Berlant 2022, 7). Mediation, in such conditions, concerns how everyday objects of attention are imbued with sensorial force, and is linked to "the affective sense of the familiar friction of being in relation" (Berlant 2022, 2)—dynamics in which digital media and culture now play a central role.

When it comes to understanding how, exactly, media technologies, interfaces, and narratives connect with felt subjectivity, genre is, for Berlant, vital. If genre is frequently understood in terms of "textual types linked to cultural economies of artistic movements" (Cefai 2023, 272), Berlant approaches genre more broadly, seeing it as intimately connected to how aesthetic forms elicit, channel, shape and/or otherwise invest affect with meaning and possibility. From *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997) onwards, Berlant describes genre as offering a patterned set of emotionally invested expectations for how a given situation can (and should) take shape—often in ways that model "how affect becomes 'conventional'" (Azhar and Boler, 2023, 357). As such, analysis of the workings of genre and aesthetic form can, as Berlant (2008) suggests in *The Female Complaint*, begin to tease out "the mechanisms that enable the reproduction of normativity, not as a political programme, but as a structure of feeling, as an affect" (266 cited in Seigworth and Coleman 2023). Grappling with the implications of what

Jacques Ranciere called "the distribution of the sensible," or with Marxist cultural theory's account of the gradual "training of the sensorium" is thus, for Berlant, not only about how cultural-historical conditions and social relations of power immanently shape (without determining) sensorial receptivity and "visceral response" (Berlant 2011; see discussion in Seigworth and Coleman 2023; Pedwell 2023a); it also concerns how aesthetic genres—which must now surely include those linked to algorithmic architectures—mediate affective experience in the present, organizing available modes of anticipation, adjustment, and 'living on' through the everyday shocks of capitalist disorganization.

In Berlant's recent work, 'mediation' and 'genre' are increasingly tethered to a third orienting term: 'infrastructure'. While media theory's infrastructural turn has often prioritized the substance of "stuff you can kick" (Parks 2015 cited in Ingraham 2023, 157), Berlant's "infrastructuralism" centers, unsurprisingly, on the unfolding dynamics of material-ideational-affective entanglements. "[I]n the best ethnographic work on infrastructure," Berlant (2022) argues, "buildings, roads, institutions, systems of norms and laws" are connected to ideas, concepts and affects "that bind worlds together along with ideas of what this world might be" (21; see also Berlant 2016). From this perspective, infrastructure "is another way of talking about mediation," but with close attention to how we become affectively bound or attached to "material technology, aesthetic genre, form or norm" (Berlant 2022, 22). Infrastructure, as such, sutures mediation and genre to affective lifeworlds, to "the lively patterning or connective tissue of social forms" (Gunaratnam 2023, 318; see also Coleman 2017). Although Berlant rarely addresses digital infrastructures explicitly (at times it feels like they work quite hard to *avoid* invoking networked media), their writing can be employed to conceptualize infrastructure as both "vital attachments to people (individuals, groups and other constellations) and dependencies on the operability of devices, platforms and information networks" (Paasonen et al 2023, 287). If Berlant mobilizes infrastructure most provocatively to address both what it means to live with ambivalence and how personal and socio-political transformation might materialize, we are interested in the dititalized implications of such dynamics—and the role of networked affect in transitional infrastructures that can "loosen the object's world-self relation while holding onto living" (Berlant 2022, 23).

Drawing on our respective research on intuition and histories of human-machine relations (Pedwell) and the digital mediation of queer mobility in urban space (Stowe), this essay focuses on what Berlant teaches us about the algorithmically orchestrated dynamics of openness, vulnerability, and receptivity. Animating links among ritual, genre, and algorithmic affect in Berlant's (2023) short poem

"Ritual Aversions," the first section of the essay considers what genres of affective expectation contemporary digital media landscapes may be consolidating, attending to Berlant's invocation to approach everyday (mediated) life through 'the episode'. The second section connects the episode to Berlant's (2022) account of "living in the ellipsis," exploring the affective impact of digital (bio)production processes of endless modulation. Through the algorithmic organization of pre-emptive affects and actions characterized by the condition of the perpetual update, our shifting modes of anticipation are, we will argue, such that vulnerability is (differentially) folded into sensorial receptivity, shaping the genre of the 'elliptical present'—the ways in which we (are able to) approach 'openness' in fear and/or desire. Asking how we might stop ourselves becoming worn out in a world that is consistently training us for feelings we don't yet have, the third section confronts the ambivalence of networked affect amid algorithmic personalization, the both/and dynamics of curated (queer) online worlds. We conclude with Berlant's (2022) argument that the contemporary "critical obligation of any analyst, writer, or artist" is to offer "transitional infrastructures for the extended meanwhile" (19), considering its implications at the intersection of affect theory and digital media praxis.

Ritual, Genre, and Algorithmic Affect

> When I say that I've never loved a ritual, it makes me wonder what "love" means.
>
> Sometimes I fear being body-sucked into a tradition. Or being opened up in public far from where I live. Sometimes a ritual's too okay with mechanical sincerity. Then there's the demand that slaves and workers clap for their oppressors. Now a bot will remind you that it's time to perform fidelity to a time. Neither voluntaire nor involuntaire, bot memory expands your subjective dark. Because the algorithm told it to, it asks you to interrupt your inattention. You are not obliged to have true or any feelings, but you're forced to decide whether you care for the event of the date. Whenever time demands loyalty, we dissociate. Do you remember the start of this poem?
>
> —Lauren Berlant, *Poisonality*, 2023

The excerpt above features the opening lines of Berlant's poem "Ritual Aversions" from their collection *Poisonality*, published posthumously in *The Affect Theory Reader 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures* (Seigworth and Pedwell eds., 2023). Extending the evocative style honed with long-time collaborator Kathleen Stewart in *The Hundreds* (2019), the 12 poems in *Poisonality* each take the form of hundred-word units or units of hundred multiples. All were composed during the jarring conjunction of the COVID-19 pandemic and Berlant's diagnosis and treatment for cancer—an intensive stretch of time animated by deep collective uncertainty and, presumably, considerable changes in Berlant's own relationships with ritual, temporality, technology, and the future. This historical moment is one constituted, in turn, by the promises and perils of pervasive algorithmic architectures, as domestic and wearable AI technologies become further embedded within and productive of less-than-conscious affects, habits, rituals, and responsivities—or what Berlant (2023) calls our "subjective dark" (452). Entangled with such enveloping digitalization is also, of course, the long tail of Trumpism and the racialized tentacles of authoritarian populism in the US and transnationally, as, during the poem's very composition, "the Capitol is being stormed by whites on a mission to plant their fantasy flag next to another fantasy flag" (2023, 453). Within these intense and disorienting conditions, *Poisonality*'s measured free-writing style offers a means of feeling out the affective contours of the present – of inhabiting the fraught and shifting relations among atmosphere, genre, infrastructure, computation, and felt subjectivity – that "beckons us into the creative possibilities of quantification" (Gunaratnam 2023, 316).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ritual as 1) "a religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of actions performed according to a set order", and 2) "a series of actions always followed by someone without variation." In Berlant's earlier writing, most notably in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), the notion of 'ritual' (alongside related terms such as 'routine', 'habit', 'intuition' etc.) informs the distinctive vocabulary they mobilize to describe how we navigate the late capitalist 'impasse' of socio-political volatility, precarity, and stalled opportunity. If the aesthetic genres of the intimate public sphere offer a set of orienting expectations concerning how to feel, interpret, and act within the 'crisis ordinariness' of the post-war Euro-North American everyday (Berlant, 1997, 2008, 2011), Berlant's oeuvre also tracks what happens when genres fail and flail. Genre flailing, for Berlant (2018), is "a mode of crisis management that arises after an object, or object world, becomes disturbed in a way that intrudes on one's confidence about how to move in it" (157). When "the contours, framings, conventions, of [a familiar] situation are distributed," such as in the case of a global pandemic or debilitating

illness, rituals frequently constitute the handrails we cling onto in our attempts to manage sustained uncertainty (Turner and Coleman 2023, 331). Amid the swirling tumult of unwanted change, ritual's methodical repetition promises a certain comfort—the reassurance that, with all else in flux, a familiar architecture of action remains available and seemingly amenable to cognitive-sensory control.

In "Ritual Aversions," however, the poem's speaker, who both *is* and *is*n't Berlant (the poem operates to invoke dissociation), confronts their antipathy to ritual amid efforts to withstand and adjust to the twin poisons of COVID and chemotherapy: "Ribs are breaking everywhere from cancer. Skeleton's clack like a marionette's dancing sticks but with nerve endings popping sharply. There is no perfect posture to relieve all that. Shifting around just redistributes discomfort" (2023, 453). In the face of terminal cancer's debilitating pain and discomfort, the speaker fears the "alien" quality of ceremonial rituals, of "being body-sucked into a tradition." They shudder viscerally at (known or imagined) surgical interventions to come, of "being opened up far from where I live" (452). It is tempting, and indeed affectively compelling, to read *Poisonality* as straightforwardly autobiographical. Yet, as Lisa Blackman (2023) suggests, Berlant's distinctive approach to cultural storytelling is informed less by "the personal" than it is by "the non-personal." Moving beyond confessional modalities, the non-personal may work as a "cover story" enabling Berlant to "move between different registers without exposure" (Blackman 2023, 260). In the interwoven registers of experience that animate *Poisonality*, then, we sense affective fragments of Berlant's own story alongside imprints of others' lifeworlds—an orientation that offers "a *transmutual* gesturing to how worlds are composed and put together, and how the I, the sovereign I, is not the focus and can, perhaps, should or always has the potential to be undone" (Blackman 2023, 248). In the context of "Ritual Aversions," this approach, we want to suggest, highlights the collective and distributed nature of ritual; gesturing to how rituals, routines, and habits are shifting more-than-human assemblages that straddle the Proustian 'voluntaire' and 'involuntaire' (Berlant 2023, 252), and are, therefore, never quite amenable to human mastery in the ways we might fantasize (Pedwell 2021a, b). As such, Berlant signals the 'cruel optimism' of ritual's promise of control or repair in the face of terminal illness – without negating the provisional infrastructures of endurance and survival that such affectively imbued modes of repetition may offer.

As government mandated pandemic lockdowns effect abrupt changes to everyday affects, socialities, and temporalities, amplifying the reach of, and shared reliance on, digital communications technologies (particularly for those compelled to shield themselves due to underlying medical conditions), "Ritual Aversions" also queries what is at stake in our collective acquiescence to the "mechanical sincerity" of algorithmically-adjudicated rituals (Berlant, 2023: 452). In this context, Berlant's non-personal approach has wider evocative resonances—invoking, perhaps, the impersonality of what Gilles Deleuze (1995) called 'the dividual.' Within the recursive relays of machine learning architectures, there are no *individuals* with visceral habits or sacred rituals but rather only *dividuals*: "the perpetually sliced-and-diced aggregation of identities-masses-markets-banks, intimate and impersonal at once" (Seigworth, in press; see also Amoore 2013, 2020; Parisi 2013; Clough et al 2015). As we increasingly delegate management of our daily lives to surveillant bots that "remind [us] that it's time to perform fidelity to a time" (Berlant 2023, 452), what, Berlant wonders, becomes of our intuition? When automated assistants like Alexa make demands on our (in)attention "because the algorithm told it to" (452-3), what happens to our historically-informed attunement to change as it unfolds? If intuition is, as Berlant suggests in *Cruel Optimism*, a "trained thing" (2011, 52), the poem prompts us to consider what kinds of gut feelings and sensorial modes of receptivity we are training (and being trained for) via our increasing enmeshment with the "data for life" (Dow Schüll 2016) of Big Tech's profit-oriented algorithmic architectures.

For Berlant, these questions are, in part, ones of genre. If the genres of the intimate public sphere have traditionally aided sense making, "providing framings, forms and conventions through which subjects can articulate experience and tether themselves to the world and others" (Turner and Coleman 2023, 336), the becoming 'environmental' of machine learning (Durham Peters 2015) could be interpreted as one massive genre flail. Through these recursive machine learning systems, we are, it has been argued, perpetually oriented and disoriented, trained and re-trained, disassembled and reassembled as part of a giant corporate psychological experiment which generates endlessly harvestable data (Andrejevic 2013; Stark 2018). 'Experiment' here operates as an immanent virtual laboratory for capital, in which emotional investments and sedimented habits matter less than the value generated from randomness and post-probabilistic uncertainties (Parisi 2013; Clough et al 2015; Pedwell 2021b). What genres of affective expectation can and do contemporary digital media ecologies provide then? In reconstituting the very nature of 'the intelligible' and 'the sensible' in line with state, corporate, and other powerful interests (Bucher 2018; Pedwell 2022, 2023a), the global consolidation of algorithmic architectures raises pressing questions about the nature

of genre and affective infrastructure in the twenty-first century—and what this means for the ideological mediation of collective subjective life. "Ritual Aversions" could be read, in this vein, as a quite succinct and pointed critique of the lived biopolitics of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) and its "demand that slaves and workers clap for their oppressors"—a lament for how, in rendering immanent socio-sensorial relations computational, digital infrastructures routinely flatten "true or any feelings" (Berlant 2023, 452-3).

Yet such 'major key' critical manoeuvres (Manning 2016) have never been Berlant's style. Rather, as Gregory Seigworth and Rebecca Coleman (2023) put it, Berlant characteristically operates "in the midst of the processual, the episodic, the lower case, often uncaptioned events of living" (182)—and it is here, we want to suggest, that their most vital insights for contemporary studies of digital media emerge. Although headline narratives of algorithmic surveillance, exploitation, and control sign-post the contours of the mediated present with haunting acuity, they can nonetheless miss what is percolating *affectively* beneath the surface. In other words, as Susanna Paasonen and colleagues argue, and Berlant's writing consistently illuminates, when it comes to affect, networked or otherwise, a "macro / structural / ideological / political economy level of critique does not suffice alone." Indeed, "the connections we make, the attachments we foster, the doubts we harbour, the things that we refuse, opt in, cherish, as well as the worlds that we strive for in datafied settings hold equal gravity" (Paasonen et al 2023, 304). Within our networked socio-political 'impasse' in which "almost nothing has to do with events" and "ordinary life is more like cleaning up after a party," what is required, Berlant (2023) suggests, is that we learn to inhabit 'the episode' (453). Through attuning to unfolding episodes, encounters, and (lower) cases, "many at a time leaning on each other without masquerading as repair or build" (453), we might establish a richer connection with what contemporary digital mediation *actually feels like*—and, perhaps, with that which affectively attaches us (differentially and ambivalently) to popular media and AI technologies and infrastructures.

At stake here is not passive reception, *Ritual Aversions* emphasises, but instead the more demanding effort of sitting "within the resonance of an impact while feeling it out" (Berlant 2023, 453)— affective labour that may become increasingly difficult the more 'crisis ordinariness' registers as an understatement, and as computational media reach further into the collective 'subjective dark' to prime, nudge, and elicit cognitive-sensory experience.

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Living On(line) in 'Elliptical Aperture'

In their *Inconvenience* book, Berlant (2022) describes "living in ellipsis" as a mode of inhabiting the episode, "an offering of how to construct and occupy the historical present" (125-26). Engaging with Berlant's (2022) ellipsis in relation to digital culture is not only a conceptual move, we suggest, but also a way to inhabit life, *hopefully,* in its inevitable algorithmic mediation. Living in ellipses involves an orientation towards the present as a time/space of openings, closings, and continuously transforming relations, "a falling apart of meaning or connection" that can leave us with a sense of "pervasive lostness" (125). The uncertainty and precarity that comes with feeling lost, or falling apart, is likely to evoke fear and anxiety (or indeed hopelessness) as we are faced with an expanse of possibility; yet, Berlant (2022) reminds us that falling apart also holds the potential for transformative growth and becoming. If the environment is "good enough" the ellipsis "releases affective potentiality," alerting us to the possibility that we *can* "connect the dots differently" or "devote them to play," an experiment in new forms of relationality (125; see also Aitken in Anderson et al. 2023). Across their writings, then, Berlant (2022) invites readers to inhabit the ellipsis, to resist being "made up" too quickly, to hold "out for multiple moods and rhythms" (147), to tune into the affective glimmers of alter-worlds which might offer hope for an *otherwise.*

The ellipsis, for Berlant (2022), is closely aligned with infrastructure: both are "transitional forms that slow and extend ways to live inconveniently with each other" and, in doing so, both tell us something about how to render objects which are at once fraught and enabling "available to transition" (xi, 9). Importantly, what Berlant (2022) figures as 'objects' are not only "material things" but also "forms of life, wrought out of affectively and politically jagged relationships, "clusters of promise, projection and speculation that hold up a world that we need to sustain'" (27 cited in Gunaratnam 2023, 313). Making everyday objects available to transition, shaking up the ways in which we are ambivalently bound to the affective amalgam of suffering and sustenance they may reproduce, requires the cultivation of transitional infrastructures that aim at "the extension of life *from within lifeworlds*"—improvising heterotopias within "the unevenness, violence and ordinary contingency of contemporary existence" (italics ours, Berlant 2022, 20, 25). This is never, of course, easy or straightforward, whether affectively, psycho-socially, or practically.

As Berlant (2022) writes, "[t]o achieve a transformational infrastructure is to loosen up in the moment when everything in me would prefer not to, would prefer for there to be a moving walkway between where I am and another place I can already see: a sidewalk embedded with concrete footprints that seem to have a destination in mind" (150). The idea of "loosen[ing] up" is pervasive in their work, and fundamental to queer theory more broadly. A queer orientation involves deviating from the predefined path, a disrupting and reordering of normative social relations driven by desire for an otherwise (Ahmed 2006, 2014). A queer path might need space and time to develop, perhaps with no final destination in mind; meanwhile, to reconstitute the normative is to move between predefined locations (Ingold 2007), following the "sidewalk embedded with concrete footsteps" (Berlant 2022: 150). And yet, as Berlant reminds us, loosening up and deviating from those footsteps can be an onerous (or indeed unimaginable) task, especially when the environment doesn't feel 'good' or supportive enough to engender a letting go of our attachments to the normative infrastructures and objects which promise to help us cope with the fearsome vastness and uncertainty of life.

Crucially, for our purposes, life, the elliptical present, now takes place in and through a digital media landscape whereby the (bio)production process is one of endless modulation, perpetual slicing-and-dicing; becoming *dividual.* As algorithmically constituted subjects, we are perpetually dissected and segmented, parsed into multiple strands that move at various scales and speeds through datafied terrains (Clough et al. 2015) in ways that mediate who has access to certain possibilities, and who doesn't, based on value-laden ideas of 'relevance' (Cluley & Brown 2014). Our digital falling apart (dividualisation) and reassembly is shaping the very parameters of the ellipsis, as the openings and closings of the contemporary moment are actualized by the performative algorithms organising 'the social.' The content and connections—the modes of relational sociality—available to social media subjects are increasingly shaped by the computational dynamics of these platforms.

The censoring and 'shadowbanning' of queer, trans, and disabled creators alongside the circulation and amplification of homophobic and transphobic imagery and hate speech is just one set of ways in which the possibility of "connect[ing] the dots differently," deviating from the "concrete footsteps" is constrained by current digital ecologies and entanglements: "TikTok uses its AutoR algorithm to imagine a social networking platform where trans, queer, disabled, fat, and people of colour

do not exist" (Rauchberg in Pain ed. 2022, 197), such that the convivialities and solidarities that can be virtually realized, and the extent to which we can imagine, or hope for, an *otherwise* is limited. The algorithmic streamlining of potentiality, then, shapes the materialization of the elliptical present, as one in which safe and 'liveable' belonging for marginalized communities, or even queer existence, is rendered more or less (im)possible.

Louise Amoore (2020) describes machine learning algorithms as an 'aperture'—an opening that is simultaneously a closing, or a shutting down of potential pathways. In bringing the affective dynamics of digital mediation to bear on Berlant's ellipsis, we propose the phrase 'elliptical aperture' to recognize the centrality of algorithmic technologies in rendering the forms of relationality that can be realized in the ellipsis. The elliptical aperture is a time/space of algorithmically orchestrated openings, closings and continuously transforming relations; it is a way to both conceptualize and experimentally inhabit the present digitally mediated moment. Given that machine learning algorithms are far from neutral, and are imbued with binary capitalist logic (Eubanks 2017; Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019; Chun 2021), are digital technologies priming us for socially normative ways of being as they manipulate available openings and closings? Or does our falling apart in digital entanglement nonetheless enable hope for an otherwise? Questions articulated via 'either/or' framings, like this, are rarely of great interest to Berlant, who advocates for staying with ambivalence and ambiguity, the both/and of ordinary affects—the ways, that is, in which holding on to hope for an *otherwise* might also, inevitably, involve holding on to the digital devices and infrastructures that keep us entangled in and subject to corporate and state-oriented algorithmic governance.

This is why, we want to emphasize, Berlant (2022) focuses on "loosening" (rather than abandoning, relinquishing, or destroying) our everyday objects (digital or otherwise): "you can't simply lose your object if it's providing a foundational world infrastructure for you" (28). What we can (try to) do, however, is use "the contradictions of the object to reconfigure it," exploiting "the incoherence of the forces that overdetermine it" (ibid). When objects are reoriented in this way, or when "an ordinary form of life is radically disturbed such that a subject's or people's sense of continuity is broken" (the disorienting impact of COVID and terminal illness reverberate here), what can result, Berlant (2022) claims, is "the release of affective enmeshment from its normative attachment habits" (123). Although this "freed energy and attention can be inconvenient, even frightening", it is nonetheless "available for recomposing the world, causality, and possibilities" (124)—yet only if, that is, we are *receptive* to such possibilities.

Receptivity to affective releases within the ellipsis, however, is now shaped by the algorithmically adjudicated categories of hierarchical difference that mediate the genre through which we approach 'openness' *in anticipation.* Worms, traversing through the earth, must *move* in order to make the openings in the soil that enable their *movement*, they "may be moving simultaneously within and outside of the normative world" (Berlant 2022, 21)—akin to world-making, we suggest, from within elliptical aperture. Moving within normative infrastructure in ways that push objects and boundaries towards transformation involves being *receptive* to openness: we need, Berlant (2023) notes in their poem "Port" in *Poisonality*, "to unclench enough to keep the shop open for the thrill of another encounter." We need, that is, to "take in new things that might kill or cure us" in order to "let things become other things" (461).

A body's openness to being affected, we want to suggest, depends upon the affective *genre* through which openness is understood—fear, for instance, reads openness as the possibility of danger or pain, whilst hope reads openness as the possibility of desire or joy (Ahmed 2000; 2014; see also Cefai 2023). Berlant (2022), of course, remains deeply attentive to the "material effects of inequality's persistent force" (4); hope is an ambivalent affect with unequal access, and those with access might be bound "to preserve normative habits of social reproduction" (Berlant, 2011, 21; see also Ahmed 2014) in proximity to those objects of desire or joy that are brought closer with hopefulness. Moreover, the reality of social subordination and algorithmic violence primes some bodies to (not unrealistically) anticipate threat or injury in the openings of the elliptical aperture.

Algorithms are, as we know, powerful gatekeepers, not only shaping the possibility of digital community networks and exposure to "people like us" on social media, but also limiting freedom of movement and access to life-sustaining resources (Aizeki, Mahmoudi & Shupfer eds. 2024; see also Eubanks 2018), as well as (re) enacting the differentially racialized surveillance and policing of certain bodies (Keyes 2018; Benjamin 2019; Amnesty International 2023). Living at the intersections of marginalization thus mediates the affective potentiality that is released in the ellipsis; openness may be obscured, the door only ajar, the path flooded with a sense of fear that circulates and consolidates in gendered, racialized, sexualized, and classed relays and blockages within digital ecologies.

If vulnerability involves openness being read as a site of potential danger, demanding evasive action as the body prepares for flight in anticipation of pain or injury

(Ahmed 2014), is the vulnerable body able "to unclench enough to keep the shop open for the thrill of another encounter … to let things become other things; to continue to throw [themself] against what unwelcomes life" (Berlant 2023, 461)? The computational technologies that train our receptivity to openness are clearly not objective decision-makers, such that vulnerability is algorithmically (re)constituted in socially-differentiated and divisive ways. Since "threat has long been shaped by desire arising from the entanglement of capitalism and colonialism" (Abbas 2019 cited in Dixon Roman 2023, 394), the omnipresence of looming hazard or peril that has differentially bled into ordinary life might be turning us away from fearful 'openings', nudging us towards objects of love/desire that maintain attachment to normative, exclusionary, and/or extractive ideas of 'the good life.' Our entanglement with digital technologies might therefore encourage a certain "hardening" towards one another as we anticipate pain or injury in potential encounters, binding us to what we already know and accelerating "the speed at which we point fingers at each other and say, 'I know exactly what sort of person you are'" (Drage in Drage & McInerney eds. 2024, 12).

The 'sort of person' someone is, in a computational media landscape, however, is always shifting and unknowable as techno-capitalist database marketing relies on the continuous modulation of difference (Zwick & Knott 2009; Darmody & Zwick 2020; Chun 2021). Amidst the ideological and discriminatory operation of algorithms, and the online filter bubbles and echo chambers so central to digital culture, then, there remains a pervasive sense of opposition between 'us' and 'them' that, while, never static nor definitive, is persistent in shaping our receptivity to the present moment as elliptical aperture as we are trained to pre-emptively feel, respond, and act on the basis of an 'unknown unknown'.

"I'm training for a feeling that I don't have yet"

> 'Can you feel your receptivity? ... I'm training for a feeling that I don't have yet'
>
> —Lauren Berlant, *Poisonality* 2023

In *Ritual Aversions*, Berlant gestures to how the recursive dynamics of algorithmic pre-emption and prehension are keeping us in a near-constant state of anticipation, training for feelings that we don't yet have, but always *could have* as we inhabit the elliptical present. If openness is read as potential danger, the speed

at which difference is reconstituted via computational technologies keeps open the structural possibility that an object of fear might pass us by at any moment. Thus, our expectations and anticipation towards the elliptical present are being continuously (re)trained through each updated version of the object of fear (Bucher 2018). In this way, our *intuition*—our sensory-socio receptivity towards the elliptical present—is shaped by digital technologies that recursively "incite us to pre-emptively act on an 'unknown unknown'" (Dixon-Roman 2023, 386); to live life (computationally) primed for unending uncertainty. As the poem's speaker proclaims, "it's easier for me to love exposed nerves without a purpose since I love being alive" (Berlant 2023, 453). We are interested then, in what version of 'being alive' we are algorithmically trained to desire, and how our attachment to this life is keeping us tied to the digital technologies that expose our nerves to constant anticipation.

One way in which our anticipatory receptivity to the openings and closings of elliptical life might be illustrated is through the unequal access to "the right to the city" (Lefebvre 1968), or the right to mobility, notably for queer and trans subjects who often modify how they behave and present in public, avoiding certain locations altogether amid an increase in public violence and hate crime towards LGBTQ+ people (Stonewall 2017; Azzouz & Catterall 2021). Gendered, racialized, sexualized and classed bodies are continually becoming a/under threat, a/at risk in public spaces. Anticipation of danger comes, in part, as we have discussed, from algorithmically amplified media discourse; the prevalence of online hate speech, misogyny, sexism, and politically motivated homophobia, and transphobia shapes how non-normatively gendered and sexualized people affectively experience, or anticipate, encounters with/in public spaces. This anticipation, and thus the possibility of (hope for) a *queer* right to the city, is mediated by the algorithmic dis/ordering of the world that makes the elliptical present appear in certain ways. Whilst Big Tech algorithms defended in the language of responsible 'content moderation' create a world in which non-normative bodies are erased, and social media/online news reporting alert us to constantly refreshing transphobic and homophobic political rhetoric and incidents of violence against queer communities, the 'openness' of public space is approached *intuitively* with the expectation of a threat that is an ongoing process of algorithmic becoming. Our anticipation of fear is sustained, or perhaps our *receptivity* is *re-trained*, through our attachments to digital media which bring closer the promise of the (always changing and unknowable) object of fear.

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Computational technologies, in these ways, shape future becoming-events and objects based on a past, imbued with values, beliefs, and ideologies, such that specific pasts remain ever-present in the imagined future, generating anticipatory affects and actions—we are training for something that might never materialize. Whether the threat, or the good life, comes to be isn't necessarily of concern, given that their status as what *could have been* shapes how we approach the elliptical present *in anticipation*. Since "pre-emption is an operative logic that can never be false," when we act, or feel, pre-emptively based on an 'unknown unknown' we are creating and maintaining a version of the truth based on what could have happened (Dixon-Roman 2023, 387; see also Massumi 2010, 2015). The elliptical aperture, then, is an ever-changing present futurity that we are algorithmically training (and being trained) for—such that uncertainty becomes a primary affective orientation, the body is always prepared/preparing for something unknown to happen (Puar 2023), and our receptivity to this contingency and indeterminacy is shaped by socially differentiated modes of vulnerability.

Meanwhile, digital technologies are also presenting us with a 'solution' to this fear, uncertainty, and vulnerability, the promise of a means to induce transformation that might feel possible from within the throes of the custom-built, hyper-relevant bubbles which invite us to anticipate a highly personalized world: the good life. These online spheres might register as a safer place to be, an affective escape from an unwelcoming world. Entangled within such computationally-rendered socialities, we might feel able to cultivate the alt-world imaginary *from within*, as we are brought closer to worlds that feel like they have been specifically crafted by, or at least *for*, us. Of course there is much contradiction and ambivalence in these relations, since such hyper-personalization wouldn't be possible without intensive techno-capitalist surveillance—an immanent tether to normativity (Zwick & Knott 2009; Darmody & Zwick 2020). Nonetheless, we remain bound to the digital in our more-than-humanness, whilst we (genre) flail about trying to find ways to "keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 2011, 24).

Attending to the ambivalent both/and of algorithmic affect in this way could, we suggest, cultivate more empathic (or perhaps more realistic) understandings of why we stay attached to digital devices, platforms, and infrastructures—encouraging a move beyond the shaming of networked affective attachments (Anderson 2022, 2023), towards an exploration of how social media and AI technologies might be both making the ordinary (into a) crisis, and making it more bearable. As Berlant (2022) so compellingly illustrates, the "inconvenience" of being an imperfect subject

surrounded by imperfect objects forces us to generate alternative forms of getting through existence, creating pervasive cuts and "heterotopian builds" in our digital entanglement, and often in ways that enable continued attachments to life (even and especially a cruelly optimistic one). Digital media clearly manage our (in)attention, modes of anticipation, and understandings of 'the good life' via techno-capitalist profit motives aligned with social normativity; yet, reading with Berlant we are inclined to question how our "being wooed by a line of code" (Winterson 2024) is not an entirely passive or involuntary relation. Voluntary and involuntary affects and actions are increasingly entangled as we are cultivating receptivity styles (and/or modes), in and through our algorithmic mediation, which enable us to attend to the unequal price of vulnerability—finding glimpses of utopia from within the folds of the normative worlds, in the promise of happiness in (online) spacing out.

In such conditions, digitally-enabled *dissociation* might be a praxis of survival. Rather than pathologizing digital 'addiction' or 'distraction' (see, for example, discussion in Paasonen 2021), Berlant instead teaches us to attend to how human-machine relations can shape the management of self-disintegrating intensities, offering relief from a compromised world as we affectively generate (virtual) spaces, habits, and rituals of alternative life alongside the threat, breakdown, and crises of the present. In a world characterized by algorithmically amplified uncertainty where we are always anticipating something unknown, dissociation could be interpreted, Berlant ventures, as a transitional tactic of affective citizenship: an (in)volitional way to avoid being overwhelmed or worn out by the 'affective surround' of threat and distress, to keep on living on through shifting our attention to the co-presence of an otherwise.

Amid the interconnected socio-political, economic, technological, and environmental crises of the present, the ethical obligation of the cultural critic is not only, Berlant (2022) argues, to offer "judgement about positions or practices of the world" or "prefigurations of a better good life"; it is also to cultivate transitional terms and genres that "that help alter the hard and soft infrastructures of sociality itself" (25-6). From this perspective, the challenge facing current critical scholars, practitioners, and subjects of digital media is not only (how) to trace the continually changing logics and practices of 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019), 'discriminating data' (Chun 2021), or 'ontopolitical control' (Massumi 2015), but also (how) to participate in re-making the (im)personal "patterns, habits, norms, and scenes of assemblages and use" that constitute everyday infrastructures (Berlant 2022, 95).

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This does not, we want to emphasize, entail taking the identification of affective ambivalence in algorithmic sociality, or the inevitability of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and contingency in human–machine relations, as analytical endpoints. Rather, using, if we can, the reconfigured energies that come from flailing, from falling apart, from dissociating, Berlant (2022) invites us to inhabit the elliptical aperture so as to "figure out how to move better with [our] objects" (171) in ways that might incrementally (re)train our receptivity. With the necessary acknowledgement that "everything proceeds under conditions of probability, friction, accident, and uneven transformation," our collective task is, they suggest, to pursue how, in "transforming the temporary into the contemporary," infrastructure can "remediate the world" (22). Remediating our (digital) worlds is, in this view, not such an audacious aim; rather, it is already afoot, percolating in the emergent affective relations, rituals, and receptivities of the present.

Endnotes

1. At the time of her/their death in 2021, Lauren Berlant was the George M. Pullman Distinguish Service Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago.

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HETEROPESSIMISM AND THE PLEASURE OF SAYING "NO."

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ABSTRACT

Using Lauren Berlant's keynote at the 2019 Duke Feminist Theory Workshop as a starting point, this article offers a comparative reading of feminism's "heteropessimistic turn" and the involuntarily celibate (i.e., incel) movement. In doing so, I demonstrate that both groups are saying "no" to certain elements of what Berlant refers to as "the pleasure regimes of sexual normativity." I focus on the affective function of heteropessimism—what Asa Seresin identifies as its "anesthetic feeling"—arguing that it affectively soothes but politically stultifies the feminist movement. Framing the incel movement in a heteropessimistic light, I dispute the common perception of incels as 'merely' misogynistic and argue that their totalizing sexual nihilism indicates a broader hatred of, and disidentification with, the politics of heterosexual desire. Introducing the example of "Black Pill Feminists," I take the heteropessimistic connections between feminism and incel to their logical conclusion, showing that feminist heteropessimism's inherent essentialism affectively cements the incongruous ideological positions of feminism to incel's sexual nihilism. I conclude with an argument for the naturalization of negativity as part of a broader move toward accepting the ambiguities of heterosexual desire and the antagonism(s) that drive it.

KEYWORDS

affect, Lauren Berlant, feminism, heteropessimism, heterosexuality, incel

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What do incels and sex-negative feminists have in common?

This question sounds like the opening line of a misogynistic joke (the punchline being "no one wants to have sex with either of them"), but it is a question I have been asking myself for some time. In researching and writing on misogynistic, masculinist online subcultures, as I have done since 2014, I would occasionally get a fleeting sense of an uncanny resemblance between these two seemingly disparate ideological (and exceptionally affective) social movements. However, this impression on my part lacked form until I attended the 2019 Duke Feminist Theory Workshop, where the late, queer, feminist scholar Lauren Berlant explicitly identified a string of shared sentiments between sex-negative feminists and incels during her/their keynote, "Sex in the Event of Happiness," (2019) saying[1]:

> When privilege unravels, it goes out kicking and screaming and people lose confidence in how to be together, uncertain about how to read each other, incompetent even to their own desire, wanting everything to be "post" already, with few skills for bearing this transition—as the incels [...] and many new sex negative feminists exemplify.

I felt the room tense at the mention of incels and sex-negative feminists in the same sentence. During the Q & A, I asked Berlant to expand on the connection she/they made between these two groups. She/they responded, "There is a lot of pleasure in saying no to the pleasure regimes of sexual normativity. And that's what links the incels […] to #MeToo: they're all saying 'no.'" A skeptical audience member interjected, "But they're not saying 'no' to the same thing!" Berlant (2019) responded: "They're not saying 'no' to the same thing, but they are saying no to the pleasure economy that is not interpreting [them] in the way that [they] want. [They're] saying no to that. And they both produce a politics. They both produce a public sphere."

As I thought about this exchange in the pandemic-distorted years since, I began to ruminate on the content and significance of that "no." Feminism and incels' shared "no" indicate that they are both engaged in a politics of refusal. Incels are saying "no" to the normative pleasure regimes of heterosexuality because heterosexuality has, for them, failed to deliver on its heteropatriarchal promise of categorical male domination and unqualified female submission. The feminists

whom Berlant identifies as "sex-negative" are saying "no" to the normative pleasure regimes of heterosexuality because *feminism* has failed in its aim to reform not just heterosexuality, but heterorelationality as such—to make it less oppressive, less dangerous, more egalitarian, and more pleasurable.

Six months after Berlant's talk, *The New Inquiry* published an essay by Asa Seresin (2019) titled "On Heteropessimism." In it, Seresin (2019) describes a phenomenon wherein straight women habitually bemoan their heterosexuality, often to their queer friends or to the broader public via the internet. Seresin calls this phenomenon "heteropessimism," defining it as "performative disaffiliations with heterosexuality" that are often expressed by straight women "in the form of regret, embarrassment, or hopelessness about the straight experience" (n.p.). [2] Seresin (2019) writes that heteropessimistic expressions are "rarely accompanied by the actual abandonment of heterosexuality" (2019). In fact, "most [people] stick with heterosexuality even as they judge it to be irredeemable. Even incels, overflowing with heteropessimism, stress the involuntary nature of their condition" (Seresin 2019, n.p.). However, Seresin (2019)writes, "men's heteropessimist claims tend to be neither ethically nor logically equivalent to those made by women. Instead, they are a kind of funhouse distortion of feminist complaint" (n.p.).

Updated interpretations of heteropessimism have focused less on heteropessimism's "performative" element and more on the inherent affectivity of the term. Jennifer Hamilton (2022), literary scholar and co-founder of the collaborative media project, *The Heteropessimists*, defines heteropessimism as "a pervasive disappointment, ambivalence, if not doubt, about the quality of the lived heterosexual experience" (Allen, et al. 2022). In her book *Rethinking Sex*, Christine Embe (2022) writes that heteropessimism is "meant to help distance its mostly female adherents from really feeling a sense of sorrow for their lack of control and repeated disappointments, or from fully acknowledging the pervasive awfulness of a culture that's not suited to their happiness" (24–25). While each of these descriptions stress the affectivity of heteropessimism, Seresin (2019) argues that these affects come together to produce an "anesthetic feeling": "a feeling that aims to protect against overintensity of feeling and an attachment that can survive detachment" (Berlant & Edelman 2014, 17). Heteropessimism's "structure is anticipatory, designed to preemptively anesthetize the heart against the pervasive awfulness of heterosexual culture as well as the sharp plunge of quotidian romantic pain" (Seresin 2019, n.p.). What is crucial is that the anesthetizing function of heteropessimism puts it in tension with feminism's political ends, producing an affective quagmire within which there is no meaningful movement.

While much of the feminist literature on incels focuses on articulations of misogyny and anti-feminist viewpoints within the incel community, I want to do something a bit different in this essay. I offer a comparative reading of feminism's "heteropessimistic turn" and a particular ideology within incel called "The Black Pill" to demonstrate that the affective content of their shared "no" is heteropessimistic in nature. Using the example of "Black Pill Feminists," I argue that the heteropessimistic overlaps between feminism and incel reveal reactionary inclinations within feminism that problematically reinscribe uncritical beliefs about the rigidity of gender and (hetero)sex. I also argue that heteropessimism's "anesthetic feeling" not only stultifies feminist praxis, as Seresin suggests, but risks casting feminism back into the confusion of postfeminist identity.

This essay proceeds from the observation that heteropessimism is comprised of social affects that both reflect and shape these ideological movements. To do this, I read for highly emotive language within what Raymond Williams (1961) termed "structures of feeling": the unarticulated material that fills the gaps between official discourse, popular discourse, and cultural texts (Buchanan 2010). For feminists, this means looking at all forms of feminist discourse—the field of cultural, political, and social commentary that is generated in the gap between feeling and organizing—from essays produced by the feminist commentariat to academic texts to empirical work, for incels, it means reading for affect in their purportedly 'rational' ideology. As a theoretical structure, I am drawn to the capaciousness of affect theory, particularly how it attends to the ways in which affect stimulates, strengthens, and maintains relations through discursive practices, and how these discursive practices themselves are wielded to affect politics and culture; as Ben Anderson (2010) writes, "[A]ffects are an inescapable element within an expanded definition of the political" (164). I am also drawn to affect theory because it offers new modes of conceptualizing normative regimes that diverge from queer theory's anti-normative doctrine (Wiegman & Wilson 2015). Thus, affect theory allows theorists (and especially feminist theorists) to probe our attachments to heterosexuality that seem to—but do not actually—exceed the political (Ahmed 2017). Reading for shared affect(s) among disparate groups, as this paper does, has the potential to provide new insights with regard to how the affects that drive feminist praxis and feminist discourse are operating simultaneously, albeit toward very different ends, within anti-feminist groups.

CAPACIOUS

I begin by situating heteropessimism within the broader theoretical tradition of queer theory, demonstrating that heteropessimism is itself comprised of a double movement: toward queerness as an aspirational fantasy and back towards heterosexuality as a disappointing/embarrassing reality. I contextualize the emergence of heteropessimism within feminist discourse by offering an overview of feminism's reinventions over the last thirty years and where we find ourselves today. Building on the work of Seresin (2019) and Andrea Long Chu (2019), I argue that heteropessimism's "anesthetic feeling" allows feminists to displace some of the disappointment they feel toward feminism onto normative heterosexuality. I then move into a discussion of incel. After offering a condensed explainer of incel's origins and beliefs, I demonstrate that an ideology within incel called "The Black Pill" represents a broadened escalation of a heteropessimistic position. I then discuss "Black Pill Feminism," an emerging ideology that combines a degraded form of feminism with the nihilistic, biological determinism of The Black Pill. I conclude with a discussion of how we can move beyond the quagmire produced in the tension between heterosexuality, heteropessimism, and feminism's political motivations.

Feminism's Heteropessimistic Turn

Since the "Sex Wars" of the 1980s, the most impactful critiques of heterosexuality have largely emerged from queer theory. Unlike feminist theory's structuralist critiques of the patriarchy, which focus on issues such as systemic inequality, exploitation, and violence *within* heterosexuality, queer theory's post-structuralist, anti-normative sensibilities trouble the foundations of heterosexuality itself, revealing that heterosexuality is not a natural state but rather a complex normative framework (Weigman and Wilson 2015; Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990). For example, in their widely influential 1998 essay "Sex in Public," Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that heterosexuality is best understood as a set of inchoate and aspirational fantasies that are stimulated and codified by regulatory institutions; moreover, the coherence of heterosexuality is a façade managed by heteronormativity, as is the privilege it confers (548–552). Heterosexual privilege can take several different forms: "unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment" (Berlant & Warner 1998, 548). Logically, these privileges are inherently contradictory—how, for example, can something be construed as moral

accomplishment if it is a supposedly 'natural state?'— but in practice, the idealistic, moral coherence of heterosexuality becomes even murkier. Berlant and Warner (1998) use the following example to demonstrate this:

> The proliferation of evidence for heterosexuality failings has produced a backlash against talk-show therapy. It has even brought [conservative politician and media personality] William Bennett to the podium; […] we find him calling for boycotts and for the suppression of heterosexual therapy culture all together. Recognition of heterosexuality's daily failures agitates him as much as queerness. "*We've forgotten that civilization depends on keeping some of this stuff under wraps*," he said. […] Every day, even the talk-show hosts are newly astonished to find that people who are committed to hetero intimacy are unhappy. After all is said and done, the prospects and promises of heterosexual culture still represent the optimism for optimism, a hope to which people apparently have already pledged their consent—at least in public (emphasis mine, 556).

Twenty-five years later, it is safe to say that the failures of heterosexuality are no longer "under wraps." As it turns out, heterosexual culture's "optimism for optimism" has proven to be rather ineffective in maintaining the central myth on which heterosexuality and heteronormativity rely: heterosexuality is not only normal but *good*, in that it serves as a path to "the good life" and that it can and will make one "happy" (Berlant 2011; Ahmed 2010). But what happens when heterosexuality fails, again and again, often in very public ways, to reflect and manifest its supposed "goodness" in the lives of its adherents?

In a podcast interview for *The Heteropessimists*, Hamilton asks Seresin, "Why heteropessimism? Why now?" Seresin replies, "Heteropessimism has always existed. It may in some ways have been even more intense at times in the past. But it's also very 'of the moment.' […] We're living in a moment where our culture is influenced by both feminism and its failures" (Allen, et al. 2022). Seresin is right: straight women are struggling to manage the tension between pervasive heteronormative (and mainstream feminist) messaging that tells them that heterosexual desire is natural and good against relentless reminders about the inescapabilty of sexual violence and romantic incompatibility (Ruti 2018; Ward 2020; Embe 2022; Allen, et al. 2022; Giovannitti 2020; Lewis 2020). Heteropessimism describes the forced resignedness of this position, conceptualizing heterosexuality as a "prison within which [women] are confined against their will" (2019). This

analogy is already common within reparatively-minded queer discourse, wherein queerness is presented as the liberatory escape hatch within the joyless prison of heterosexuality (Sedgwick 2002). Examples of queer heteropessimism on social media are easy to find: Twitter user Tyler Wood (2017) writes, "Yes, I'm bisexual: I'm attracted to women because women are incredible and I'm attracted to men because I love making bad choices." A more recent example is a 2022 TikTok by queer comedian Sam Sferrazza applies the oft-shared career advice, "if you can do anything else, do it," to straight cis-women: "If you can be anything else but straight, do it—because it's too hard for you. […] Straight women are going through life on hard mode" (2022). Seresin (2019), Jane Ward (2020) and Shannon Keating (2019) have all described encountering heteropessimism in the form of straight women stating their lives would be "so much easier" if they were gay. Such scenes reveal the contradictory kernel at the center of heteropessimism. Heteropessimistic proclamations from straight people are a move toward queerness (or, less frequently, celibacy) as a fantasy of liberation but also *back toward heterosexuality* as an aspirational fantasy undone by a disappointing reality.

Beyond this central contradiction, another issue with heteropessimism is that it is predicated on essentialist views of sex and gender (Yang 2020). Sophia Giovannitti (2020) critiques this aspect of heteropessimism by linking it to club promotions that ban cis-men from entering, writing:

> Our popular discourse around men—the final gendered category we allow ourselves to treat as both *fixed* and *bad*, marked as a collective scapegoat for all things narcissistic, obtuse, and disappointing—is an expression of maintaining our fidelity to the world of distinction, or refusing to break with the conditions of the struggle we observe. In this way, we are simply repeating the belief that a binary gender *can be a stable category„even* as we simultaneously fight against the conditions of the gender binary foisting stable and unwanted categories upon us. We cannot champion a non-biologically essentialist, trans-inclusive feminism *and* champion No Cis Men; we cannot have it both ways (2020).

In addition to reifying these problematic categories, heteropessimism has the consequence of reinscribing heteronormative notions of 'the good life' by presenting heterosexuality as something one strives for despite its many obstacles (Holzberg & Lehtonen 2021). Heterosexuality thus becomes the site of a conspicuous kind of cruel optimism: a relation produced when an object one desires also poses an obstacle to one's flourishing (Berlant 2011). Blythe Roberson's cheekily titled, post-#MeToo dating-strategy book, *How to Date Men When You Hate Men* (2019), exemplifies this phenomenon: for women to pursue heterosexual relationships de-

spite largely finding the objects necessary to complete that relationship (i.e., men) intolerable certainly implies a problematic attachment. Given the contradictory double movement that characterizes heteropessimism, one might argue that it is not heterosexuality itself that is a "prison," but rather one's optimistic attachment toward *the promise of heterosexuality* (e.g., romance, happiness, reproduction, contentment, etc.) that causes suffering. Heteropessimism could be thought of as *a negative affective orientation toward* and *disaffiliation with* one's own attachment to heterosexuality, informed by the view that heterosexuality is, at the very least, incommensurable with feminist sexual politics or, in a wider sense, irreparably broken. Of course, feminists have long felt and expressed ambivalence about their personal attachments to heterosexuality (Firestone 1970; Rich 1980). Feminist psychologists Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkson (1993) manage to capture some surprisingly straight-forward examples of early 1990s heteropessimism in the introduction to their edited volume, *Heterosexuality: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (1993). The authors outline their opening observations very plainly: "it seems that on the rare occasions when heterosexual feminists are challenged about their heterosexuality, they tend to describe how miserable they are, compared with the (presumed) happiness of lesbians" (Kitzinger & Wilkson1993, 12-13).

Prompted by #MeToo, feminism became deeply involved in an interrogation of what Moira Donegan (2019) would eventually call "strident and incurious" sex-positivity, which unsurprisingly reinvigorated interest in sex-negativity (Berlant 2019; Lewis 2020; Srinivasan 2021b). At DFTW 2019, Berlant said:

> Feminism, historically viewed, has involved more than the documentation of harms and the ordinariness of brokenness, not just adding resilience to post-traumatic recovery, not just being utopian, but getting into the weeds of what to do with the creative energies that become released from a life that had been bound up in surviving supremacy.

Berlant's nostalgic view of feminism's reparative ideals indirectly reveals the recursive properties of feminist discourse. Within this particular return we have, on the one hand, what Berlant (2019) refers to later in their talk as "the embrace of erotophobia," signified by the revitalized interest in sex-negativity and heteropessimism (n.p.); on the other, we have the vestiges of what one might call post-postfeminism—capitalistic, neoliberal, mainstream, and sex-positive—with which many feminists are disenchanted (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009). Neither of

these discursive trends are particularly generative (Gonzalez 2022; Hood 2022). The problem, as I see it, is that there remains very little of what Berlant (2019) refers to as "creative energy" within feminism's political and affective reserves. This shortage can be partially attributed to the pandemic, the affective fatigue brought about by #MeToo and other monumental feminist losses, such as the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision. But on a more general level, I suspect that today's feminists are not necessarily experiencing their creative energies as "released" from "a life that had been bound up in surviving [white male capitalist] supremacy" (Berlant 2019). This feeling of being trapped has produced an affective tenor within feminist and queer thought that contributes to what Berlant (2019) calls the valorization "of erotophobia as the ground zero of realism about sex and power."

The heteropessimistic turn in feminist discourse reveals that feminism is in the process of being rearticulated through an ambivalently-coded, negative lens, resulting in an increased awareness that feminism *cannot* just be about 'feel good' confidence and empowerment because feminism demands a negative affective apprehension of one's own situation or, at the very least, empathy for the struggles of others (Ahmed 2004, 2016). In my view, this turn is good: political organizing of all kinds necessitates an antagonistic relation to structures of oppression and the agents of those structures (Ngai 2005; Ahmed 2016). The tractability of heteropessimism as an idea demonstrates its indispensability as a concept for understanding the unique ways these negative sentiments are expressed in today's political and discursive context. Though it does not produce action itself, heteropessimism has the potential to connect feminist sexual politics to a sphere of collective affectivity from which political momentum can be generated.

The problem is that, at this particular moment, there's plenty of fuel, but no fire. Worse of all: the matches are wet. While negativity *can* provide the necessary foundation for meaningful organizing (see, for example, the consciousness raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s) it also has the potential to contribute to a dissociative/nihilistic mire which stymies political movement. Today, one sees very little direct action and an excess of what Elisa Gonzalez (2022) diagnoses as "discourse feminism": a version of feminism that is currently fashioned, maintained, and policed by feminist critics on sites such as *The Baffler* and *The Cut*. For some time, discourse feminism has, according to Jess Bergman (2022), been "trapped in a loop of disavowal," with much of feminist criticism focused on "patrolling the movement's border for interlopers" and defining twenty-first century feminism by what it *isn't*, rather than what it is (n.p.). "While feminist dissensus is as old as feminism itself," Bergman (2022) writes, "it can feel like we're living

through a particularly degraded form of this disagreement" (n.p.). It is from within this negatively charged discursive crucible that new feminist identifications are emerging: the resurrected postfeminist "anti-woke cool girl" (Hood 2022), the Fleabag-inspired "dissociative feminist" (Clein 2019; Peyer 2022), and, finally, the anesthetized, heteropessimistic feminist (Seresin 2019).

In her 2019 article, "The Impossibility of Feminism," Andrea Long Chu taps into this developing feeling, arguing that the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s "accidentally proved feminism impossible" by failing to "deliver on its promise to radically restructure not just material institutions but relationality as such" (63). Our implicit recognition of feminism's failures has produced pervasive feminist disappointment. "In fact," Chu (2019) writes, "disappointment is the governing affect of feminism as a political imaginary. […] most feminists are mostly disappointed in feminism most of the time" (63). Chu connects this disappointment to heterosexuality through the example of the notorious *Babe.net* story published at the height of #MeToo. The piece recounts the story of a woman named "Grace" and her discomfiting date with comedian and outspoken male-feminist Aziz Ansari. Grace came to view her encounter with Ansari, in which he rode roughshod over her attempts to place boundaries, as sexual assault. While it is clear that Ansari was inconsiderate, selfish, and perhaps even coercive, Chu (2019) writes that Grace had chosen, over and over, to stay for a simple reason: "she wanted to" (76): "The surprising durability of [Grace's] optimism" manifested as an unspoken plea: "Let me believe that heterosexuality isn't a lost cause. Let me believe that feminism is possible" (Chu 2019, 78).

For Chu, the promise of feminism is that it will change the nature of heterorelationality for the better; but #MeToo and the repeal of Roe v. Wade have demonstrated over and over that the field of heterosexual politics is defined by interminable strife and that even our chosen intimate relations are fraught by their very nature. Is it any wonder that the inability to escape this reality produces heteropessimism? When heteropessimism collides with feminist disappointment, its anesthetizing effect intensifies. It doesn't just numb the pain; it incapacitates as well, hindering feminism from moving toward a radically inclusive sexual politics that productively blends feminism's inherent negativity with its positive direction. If we attempt to refashion heteropessimism into a kind of feminist politics, we risk regressing back into the discursive loop and taking a quasi-feminist/qua-

si-anti-feminist position that fails to integrate the hard-learned lessons of the Sex Wars and therefore comes to resemble a tattered version of 1990s postfeminism. In fact, this regression is already happening, as the emergence of the "anti-woke cool girl" (Hood 2022) and the pseudo-ironic "tradwife" (Cooksey 2021) demonstrate.

Yet feminism does not reject heteropessimism because, in the same way that it functions as a queer-identificatory/hetero-aspirational double movement for the individual expressing it, it serves a very particular and crucial function for feminism as an ideological apparatus. It displaces the disappointment one feels about feminism's failure to affect material change in heterorelationality onto heterosexuality itself, thereby naturalizing heteronormative inequality and protecting feminism from critiques of its impossibility (Chu 2019). This trade off comes at a steep cost: in aestheticizing ourselves against the awfulness of heterosexual culture, we have tacitly accepted its awfulness. We have traded pain—which builds resilience, solidarity, and passion for change—for numbness and, in extreme cases, nihilism.

The Black Pill

> Erotophobia is not just the fear and hatred of sex, after all. It is projected onto anybody said to bear a kind of body deemed at once incompetent to life and too powerful in its appetites to control (Berlant 2019).

The sexual politics that defined 1990s-2000s postfeminism paralleled the emergence of a related cultural phenomenon that was gradually integrated into U.S. mainstream culture: Pick Up Artists (PUA). Popularized by journalist Neill Strauss in his best-selling 2005 book, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pick Up Artists*, PUA is an ideology based on cherry-picked and misconstrued evolutionary psychology that essentializes gender differences in order to "gamify" sex. Jacob Johanssen (2022) writes that PUA "sells some straight men the illusion that they can 'crack' any woman," by presenting women as "machines" for whom "all it takes is the right male 'algorithm' to get access to them" (11-12). The gamification of sex and the objectification of women is consistent with the fact that PUA's ideology is dependent on uninterrogated principles of capitalistic consumerism and neoliberal ideas of self-determination. By the late 2000s, PUAs views on sex and gender began to modulate in ways that track with global shifts "within the wider arc of [...] neoliberal practice" (Bratich & Banet-Wiser 2019, 5005). As neoliberalism became even more precarious during the 2008 global recession, so was PUA, opening up rifts that allowed other masculinist sexual frameworks to

emerge. Jack Bratich and Sarah Banet-Wiser (2019) write, "In the years between 2007 and 2014, the PUA community […] increasingly shared cultural space with a different online community, that of 'incels,' who create homosocial bonds over the *inability* to become a PUA" (5004). Mirroring the attitude that many held toward neoliberal economics post-2008, incels began to (hetero)pessimistically declare that "the game [i.e., the politics of heterosexual desire] was rigged from the start" (Beau 2018, n.p.).[3]

While incels are often presented by the media one-dimensionally as hateful misogynists, eternal virgins, and hopeless losers, incels have co-constructed a complicated, totalizing ideology online that, in many ways, is feminism's antithesis.[4] If feminists understand the world to be shaped by male domination, incels view the world as shaped by biologically innate sex hierarchies which are skewed to benefit women and attractive men. Incels generally feel that politics of heterosexual desire, i.e., what traits are both desirable and attractive to others within a particular heteronormative schema, are unfair and exclusionary (Srinivasan 2021a). When examined, however, exclusion is often produced by incels' own rigid views on and entitlement toward unfettered sexual gratification, love, and affection from attractive, "unspoiled" women or "Stacys" (i.e., "model-tier" women), who allegedly only want "Chads" (i.e., ideal males). On the subreddit r/trufemcels, a support group for *women* who want long-term relationships but find themselves chronically single, a frequent topic of conversation is the hypocrisy of incel men, who have constructed an entire subculture around being too ugly or too socially awkward to find love or sex but are simultaneously "explicitly uninterested in conventionally unattractive or socially awkward women" (Srinivasan 2021a, 115-116).The politics of heterosexual desire are incompatible with incel's entitlement and expectations; in short, if she's not a "Stacy," she's worthless. Amia Srinivasan (2021a) recounts that "on one incel forum, as members address the question of why incels aren't interested in non-high-status women, someone posts: 'You're upset because people don't want to fuck actual filth?'" (116).[5]

While incels' entitlement is certainly consequential, most analyses or discussions of incel ideology bottom out at this issue and therefore fail to consider the ways in which incels' entitlement (and the reportedly involuntary nature of their celibacy) is complicated by a strong disgust response toward the female body, a deep suspicion of intimacy, and despondency regarding the biologically innate aspects of sexuality. For example (*figure 1*):

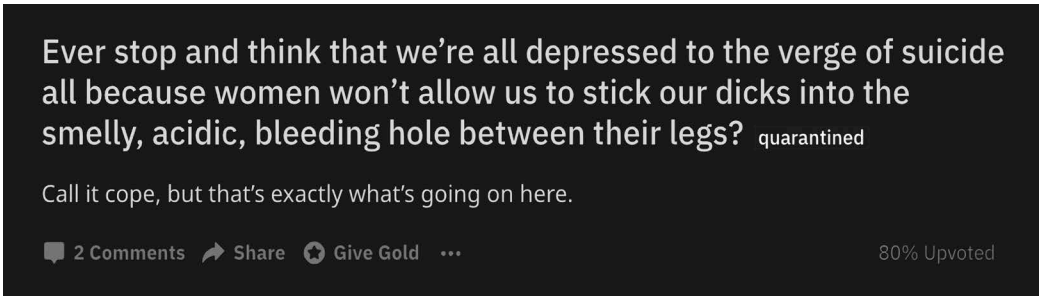

Figure 1

A central problematic for those who study both misogynist movements and misogyny more generally is the ambivalent nature of misogyny (Wrisley 2021). As the above example demonstrates, incels simultaneously occupy an affective space of desire and disgust, adoration and contempt. Johanssen (2002) writes that these contradictory thoughts go beyond misogyny and reveal that the men of the manosphere, including incels, are "structured by states of dis/inhibition: apathy and toxic symbolic power, contradictions of desire, affective forces and the push and pull of the unconscious. Their egos are fragile, and they feel threatened by women, female sexuality and the (alleged) power women hold today" (4). This contradictory state is especially present in communities that are focused on the inequity of the politics of sexual desire such as incel.

Misogynist statements like the one featured above are also emblematic of the post-ironic deployment of memes and offensive language that epitomize Right-wing internet spaces (Dafaure 2020). Post-irony simply describes a state in which sincerity and irony become muddled, making it a useful tool for those who want to say hateful things and avoid consequences. When self-identified incel Jack Peterson (2018) was thrust into the spotlight as the "semi-official spokesman" of the incel movement after the Toronto Van Killings in 2018, he attempted to frame incel's overt expressions of misogyny as "venting" and "darkly ironic" (Ling 2018). "The response I got [from fellow incels]" he says, was: "'You're misrepresenting us: we really do hate women. We're not joking'" (Ling 2018). "I always viewed it as very dark humor, and people being sarcastic," Peterson says, "Not as ironic as I imagined" (Ling 2018).

In light of this context, I tend to read incel texts like the one above from the perspective of a feminist close reader, recognizing the post-irony for what it is—a semi-real performance of shock speech. In my view, expressions that employ descriptive, visceral terminology go beyond what Donald Trump so famously

referred to as "locker-room talk" (Nelson 2017; Ward 2020): such statements are abject expressions meant to generate a kind of social power (Kay 2022). Maggie Hennefeld and Nicholas Sammond (2021) write that "appearing to be socially abject, although strongly undesirable in daily life, can generate widespread sympathy and even institutional redress […] Being abject (or performing self-abjection) often carries significant political capital" (4). Building on this observation, Jilly Boyce Kay (2021) adds that incels' performance of self-abjection positions "the figure of the incel […] in contemporary culture as an emblem of the injustices of the zeitgeist, about which *something must be done*" (29).

However, the impetus to "do" something about the abjection of the incels does not seem to extend to the incels themselves. While some incels openly ponder and seek feedback on the extent to which their sexual status can be improved by "lookmaxxing" or "gymceling" (incel terms for improving one's looks) (Hines 2019), many reject potential solutions to their loneliness and, instead, dump affective energy into fantasies about what the world would look like if the politics of heterosexual desire were "fair" (see *figure 2*).

While such fantasies are often held up by watch-dogs as paradigmatic of incels' politics, incels derisively label such fantasies as "cope" – a process by which one "rejects a harsh truth and adopts a less disturbing belief instead" (Incel Wiki: Cope 2021). Incels' rejection of "copes" is often communicated succinctly in a two-word phrase: "it's over." That is, there is no point in changing yourself or continuing to pursue dating; things are completely hopeless; your lot in life is to suffer; you should just LDAR (lay down and rot) (Johannsen 2022, xxiii).

This heteropessimistic nihilism functions as the foundation of "The Black Pill," a designation meant to signal a shift from the "Red Pill" approach to inceldom put forth by PUA. While Red Pilled men attempt to change their sexual status through sexual strategy, working out, or achieving wealth, incels who have "swallowed the Black Pill" accept that heterosexuality is the domain of attractive, neurotypical individuals and that one's status within heterosexuality is genetically predetermined and therefore impossible to change. The Incel Wiki (a surprisingly useful source of ascertaining consensus as it is collectively authored) defines The Black Pill as follows: "[The Black Pill] is a pessimistic, nihilistic or defeatist version of the redpill [*sic*], where one accepts the fate nature has bestowed

people make is sound as if the "Incel Rebellion" is a laughing matter and that people don't understand problem.

The Incels are not the problem, but rather they are a symptom that something is very wrong in our society - and unless their legitimate grievances are addressed this could very soon spiral out of control just like what happened in Iraq, Libya and Syria when their respective governments refused to address and deal with the legitimate grievances a portion of their popolation had.

Calling the Incels a bunch of "virgins and frustrated losers with communication skills equal to that of an autistic potato" is oversimplifying the problem. Yes, they are all that. But why are they frustrated virgins?

The real issue is that with the advancement of makeup, healthy at any size bullshit, feminism and through social engineering a lot of women have become detached from reality. The reason these incels arn't getting laid is because women with a sexual market value equal to theirs use makeup to go from a 3/10 - 7/10 (false marketing, in my opinion, and should be a punishable offense) to fuck with men above their league.

So I propose that rather than making Incels look bad, we look at the reasons they've become this way and what steps we can take to deconflict and reverse things. Because let's be real, calling them names, labeling them a terrorist organization etc isn't going to make the problem go away.

There are several ways I propose we do this:

1) Women are no longer allowed to wear makeup, i.e falsely advertise "their" beauty and hence stop them from banging guys above their league.

2) Women are ONLY allowed to date men with equal sexual market value to them. State-mandated tests should be made and everyone get a sexual-market value card, ranging from 1/10 to 10/10, like an ID card.

3) Every time a woman sleeps with a new man she lose one (1) rank on her sexual-market value card, until she reach the lowest rank (1/10).

4) There's no way to rise through the ranks, other than through excercise.

5) Women with more than 9 sexual partners and single moms should be forced by the state to date and have sex with incels that can't get any women despite the above changes.

This would deal with the problem, not the symptom, and is the way we deal with everything from counter-piracy to counter-terrorism. The Incel threat is real and should be treated the same way.

Figure 2

upon them, and resigns themselves to the fact that the world is naturally unfair and will always remain so" (Incel Wiki: Blackpill 2021). As with other offensive internet subcultures, incels use post-irony and humor to "defensively shut down any possible form of change, transformation or agency—as well as debate" (Johanssen 2022, 103).

Incel heteropessimism goes deeper than accepting that the politics of heterosexual desire are irreparably broken and therefore unfair: incels believe that sex is the mechanism by which one accesses full-subject status, arguing that incels are "*de facto* not considered as humans by normies [i.e., non-incels]" and that "incels are denied the same human rights as others" (Incel Wiki: Subhuman 2021). In taking a heteropessimistic position, Black Pill incels conceptualize themselves as consciously rejecting this ontological paradigm, therefore rejecting the mode of achievement (i.e., normative heterosexuality), and accepting their status as non-subjects or, in their terms, "subhuman" (Incel Wiki: Subhuman 2021). The adoption of this radical position is, of course, where incels and feminist heteropessimists diverge significantly.

The Black Pill creates a philosophical dilemma for many incels: if "hope" (i.e., optimism about one's future in the schema of heterosexuality) is excluded as a possibility, then the only other options are "cope" (i.e., engage self-deluded mental gymnastics) or "rope." "Rope" is presented as the inevitable end point to one's inceldom, as suicide is viewed as the only means by which one can escape one's biologically predetermined incel status (Incel Wiki: Roping 2021). While hope, cope, and rope are presented as a neat, rhyming tri-set, there is a fourth option—one that is often enthusiastically encouraged within some incel communities: to take revenge; to kill.

As a queer/feminist theorist whose primary focuses are heterosexuality and misogyny, I have hesitated to write on incels for a long time, partially because incel's misogyny has always felt a bit overdetermined. I sensed that their hatred of women was almost beside the point. I see now that I felt this way because the object of incel hatred is not straightforwardly women. For incels, women merely serve (as they often do) as convenient receptacles for bad feelings, including hate, disgust, desire, and fear. This general sense on my part became even clearer as I considered the targets/objects of the typical incel mass shooter (because there are,

unfortunately, enough of them now to form a type). The targets of these attacks are rarely only women. Elliot Rodger, whom many identify as the ur-incel mass killer, killed more men than women during his spree on the campus of UC Santa Barbara, despite setting out to kill "every spoiled, stuck-up blonde slut" he saw (Garvey 2014). Inspired by Rodger, Alek Minassian drove a rented van down a busy sidewalk in Toronto, explicitly targeting both women *and* men. A few hours earlier, he wrote on Facebook, "The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger" (Kassam and Cecco 2018). Nikolas Cruz, who, in a YouTube comment, vowed that "Elliot Rodger will not be forgotten," targeted his classmates and teachers at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School on *Valentine's Day*.

What is more interesting to me is how The Black Pill seems to actually comfort incels. As with the feminist heteropessimists, the heteropessimistic nature of The Black Pill seems to function as an "anesthetic feeling," succinctly captured in the idea that "the game was rigged from the start." If one's sexuality and desirability is purely determined by genetics and biology, as The Black Pill says, then Black Pilled incels are shielded from the harsh reality that 1) their desires and reality are grossly mismatched and 2) one's success within the schema of heterosexuality (and life in general) at least partially hinges on one's ability to negotiate one's own desires within said schema. Acknowledging these realities would force Black Pilled incels to integrate their legitimate complaints about the politics of heterosexual desire (for example, how heterosexuality is shaped by lookism) with recognizable deficits in their personalities (Johanssen 2022, 104). The Black Pill is an anesthetizing tool of avoidance; it allows these incels to tuck their desire for love and sex away and maladaptively sublimate and rationalize those desires by adopting a heteropessimistic outlook that completely rejects the politics of heterosexual desire. Of course, this means that adoption of the Black Pill is, in essence, a cope of its own. As it turns out, there is no outside inceldom.

While The Black Pill has drawn some attention due to its connection with acts of mass violence, little has been said on the heteropessimistic nihilism inherent to this kind of inceldom beyond the fact that it portends further violence. Nothing has been said of the fact that The Black Pill's heteropessimistic nihilism has transformed and broadened incel identity, from an identity centered around one's (presumably temporary) sexlessness to an identity that also signifies a contempt for and disgust with the normative structure and pleasure regimes of heterosexuality. Black Pilled incels have moved beyond being concerned with the fact that women do not find them sexually appealing. If this was still their primary concern, incel ideology would be more about self-improvement and less about wallowing in

the implicit superiority that comes with being a sexual nihilist. Incels feel as if they are sexually (and therefore ontologically) below *but intellectually above* the "normies," who are apparently unaware of how they are being manipulated by the twisted and unfair politics of heterosexual desirability peddled by manipulative "foids."[6] They therefore adopt the heteropessimistic Black Pill position even if it means accepting that they will never be happy in a heteronormative society, even if this pessimistic nihilism is telling them they should just go ahead and kill themselves (and, while you're at it, take some Chads and Stacys with you). Those incels who are still trying to shoehorn themselves into the pleasure regimes of heterosexuality? That's just "cope."

At the heart of things, it is not women—who fail to fuck, validate, and love on command—but heterosexuality's politics of desirability that is the primary object of the Black Pilled incels' hatred. While they would love nothing more than to be brought into the fold as proper heterosexual subjects, they reject heterosexuality as it exists because they perceive it as fundamentally broken and unfair. This move preempts their inevitable failure to be integrated into the norm. The hatred they feel toward heterosexuality's politics of desirability is projected onto the Chads and Stacys of the world who, in incels' two-dimensional mythos, are successfully navigating what Berlant (2019) calls "the pleasure regimes of sexual normativity." Black Pilled incels embrace heteropessimism because heterosexuality has failed to deliver on what they interpret as its patriarchal promise: undeniable male domination and unqualified female submission. To minimize their own responsibility, they turn toward a view which states that nothing can change the politics of desire except for a radical, systemic upheaval and the elimination of female autonomy. In this sense, Black Pilled incels have taken on the mantel of perhaps the purest version of heteropessimism.

Black Pill Feminism

At this point, the overlaps between feminist heteropessimism and incel might seem largely incidental: both groups are ultimately struggling with the changing landscape of heterosexual politics. But what happens when elements of incels' deterministic gender ideology leak into the heteropessimistic feminist consciousness?

In April 2020, an anonymous Reddit user established the subreddit r/BlackPill-Feminism. The introduction reads as follows:

> FEMALE (XX) ONLY
>
> Misogyny, male violence and female pick-me behaviour are biology. Equality is a lie. Feminism is a scam and failed movement. We are heading towards a misogynist dystopia and there is nothing we can do about it. Take the Black Pill, sit back and enjoy the ride to hell (r/BlackPillFeminism, Reddit, 2020).

The subreddit was banned by Reddit administrators within two months, but in that short amount of time r/BlackPillFeminism had accumulated over 3100 subscribers.[7] In 2021, new Black Pill Femimism (BPF) forums began appearing elsewhere online on Reddit knock-off sites such as "Saidit." These sites are less censorious than Reddit and have therefore attracted many of Reddit's ousted communities.

Discussions on these BPF forums include misreadings of studies that suggest that up to "90%" of men are pedophiles (LaQueSabe 2021), polemics instructing true feminists to stop loving their fathers (Trueblackpillfeminism 2021), and the supposedly proto-Black Pill philosophy of Shulamith Firestone (Fuckitall 2021). BPFs express identification with other notable feminist works. User OasisReverie writes, "I would say that I agree with many of the points Valerie Solanas made in the SCUM Manifesto. I'm just that *out there* when it comes to my disdain for men" (2020). User green_olive responds, "Willingly dating an XWhy as a woman in 2020 has to be one of the dumbest decisions you can make. There's no faster way to bring danger, stress, and trouble in your life than allowing scrotes into it" (2020).

BPF represents a merging of an intensified feminist heteropessimism and incel's nihilistic and deterministic gender ideology. The mechanism of this merger is symbolic but meaningful. Despite their apolitical nihilism and up-front disavowal of feminism as a "failed movement," it seems that BPFs have chosen to preserve their "feminist" identification as a way of alluding to the group belief that women are inherently ethically and morally superior to men. By wielding determinism to explain gendered violence and inequality, by accepting that "women are fucked and things will keep getting worse and worse," BPFs turn their back on the possibilities of feminism and reserve their energy for incel-like tirades against the outsized yet amorphous idea of the all-powerful male.

Needless to say, the affinity that some so-called feminists share with a nihilistic ideology that thrives on the dehumanization of others along the lines of hardline biological essentialism/determinism is concerning. Viewed alongside other feminist essentialisms such as trans-exclusionary radical feminism, BPF's ideology suggests a strong reactionary reflex within feminism along the lines of heterosexual relationality. One can see watered-down versions of it in provocative but shallow essays like Pauline Harmange's *I Hate Men* (2020), which unconvincingly argues that hating men is a useful response to sexism because it fosters female (yes, *female*) solidarity. It is this reactionary reflex that can be traced back to the "valorization of erotophobia as the ground-zero of realism about sex and power" (Berlant 2019). While such reflexes are understandable—particularly when every day seems to reveal America's Next Top Sex Pest—but they must be interrogated when they arise.

Conclusion

The heteropessimistic turn in feminist discourse is a turn away from the unfulfilled promises by postfeminist sex-positivity and the empty representation and consumerism that defined mid-2010s mainstream feminism. What has yet to be defined, however, is what heteropessimism is turning toward. As the Black Pill Feminists demonstrate, there are serious costs to sliding into the misandrist essentialism that germinates in the shallow soil of mainstream, "empowerment" feminism. Entertaining and promulgating such essentialisms not only obscures the quiet optimism many professed heteropessimists still privately hold, but also the manifold, ambivalent realities of the heterosexual experience and the recognition that heterosexuality is often shaped by antagonism-driven desire, the pleasure to be found in oppositeness, and the playful manipulation of gendered power differentials (Allen, et al. 2022; Ward 2020; Wypijewski 2020).

The fact is that heterosexuality has a lot of problems, but it is not *the* problem. Rather than making heterosexuality the receptacle for all of our bad feelings about the state of sexual politics, which obviously exceed heterosex, feminism needs to acknowledge negative affects as part of the fabric of ambiguity that cloaks sexual politics. Leaning into feminist negativity and uncertainty is a tall order, for doing so means making peace with what Maggie Nelson (2021) summarizes as "the

fact that everything is *not* going to be OK, that no one or nothing is coming to save us, and that this is both searingly difficult and also fine" (126). But let's not mistake this position for a nihilism or a different form of pessimism; it is, instead, a capacious view of the intricacies of desire, the tensions that define it, and the conflicts that give it life. I will resist going so far as to call it an embracing of hetero-optimism, but it is a move in that direction. May we discover the requisite "skills for bearing this transition," as Lauren Berlant said in 2019, and rebuild our "confidence in how to be together."

Endnotes

1. Since her/their death, Lauren Berlant's estate has offered the following guidance regarding her/their pronouns: "Lauren's pronoun practice was mixed—knowingly, we trust. Faced with queries as to 'which' pronoun Lauren used and 'which' should now be used, the position of Lauren's estate (Ian Horswill, executor; Laurie Shannon, literary executor) is that Lauren's pronoun(s) can best be described as 'she/they.' 'She/they' captures the actual scope of Lauren's pronoun archive, and it honors Lauren's signature commitment to multivalence and complexity. It also leaves thinkers free to adopt either pronoun, or both of them, as seems most fitting in their own writing about *her/them*."

2. After his essay's publication, Seresin (2020) wrote in a blog post that he was stepping away from the term "heteropessimism" in favor of the terms "heterofatalism" or "heteronegativity" in order "to make totally clear that there is no parallel between heteropessimism and Afropessimism" ("Pretty Straight, Pretty Conventional"). I am holding onto the word "heteropessimism" as I believe it, unlike "heterofatalism" (which narrowly implies "accepting of one's fate") and "heteronegativity" (which is too affectively general), captures the affective complexities of the concept.

3. After the 2016 American Presidential election, the social media site Reddit faced increasing criticism for hosting groups that encouraged violence. Reddit administrators executed the first round of bans targeting misogynist hate groups on November 7, 2017, which eliminated the original r/incel subreddit. Incels responded by creating a new subreddit, called "r/braincels," which was subsequently banned in April 2018.

4. The selections I use to illustrate various aspects of incel were based on both their relevance to this article and their (admittedly subjective) representativeness of larger discursive trends within the group over the last five years. I was not aware of Black Pill Feminism until after the subreddit was banned by Reddit administrators. Thus, examples from BPF's subreddit are based on the random screengrabs collected by internet archiving tool "The Way Back Machine" before the subreddit's deletion. Examples from "Saidit" and "The Pink Pill" were selected based on both relevance and their prominence on the forum at the time of writing (see bibliography).

5. For more on "femcels," see Kay (2021) and Tiffany (2022).

6. "Foid" is an incel term for women that merges the words "female" and "humanoid."

7. While this number is significant, it is worth saying that, by the time Reddit banned r/incel and r/braincels, r/incel had over 40,000 subscribers and r/braincels—which was only 10 `

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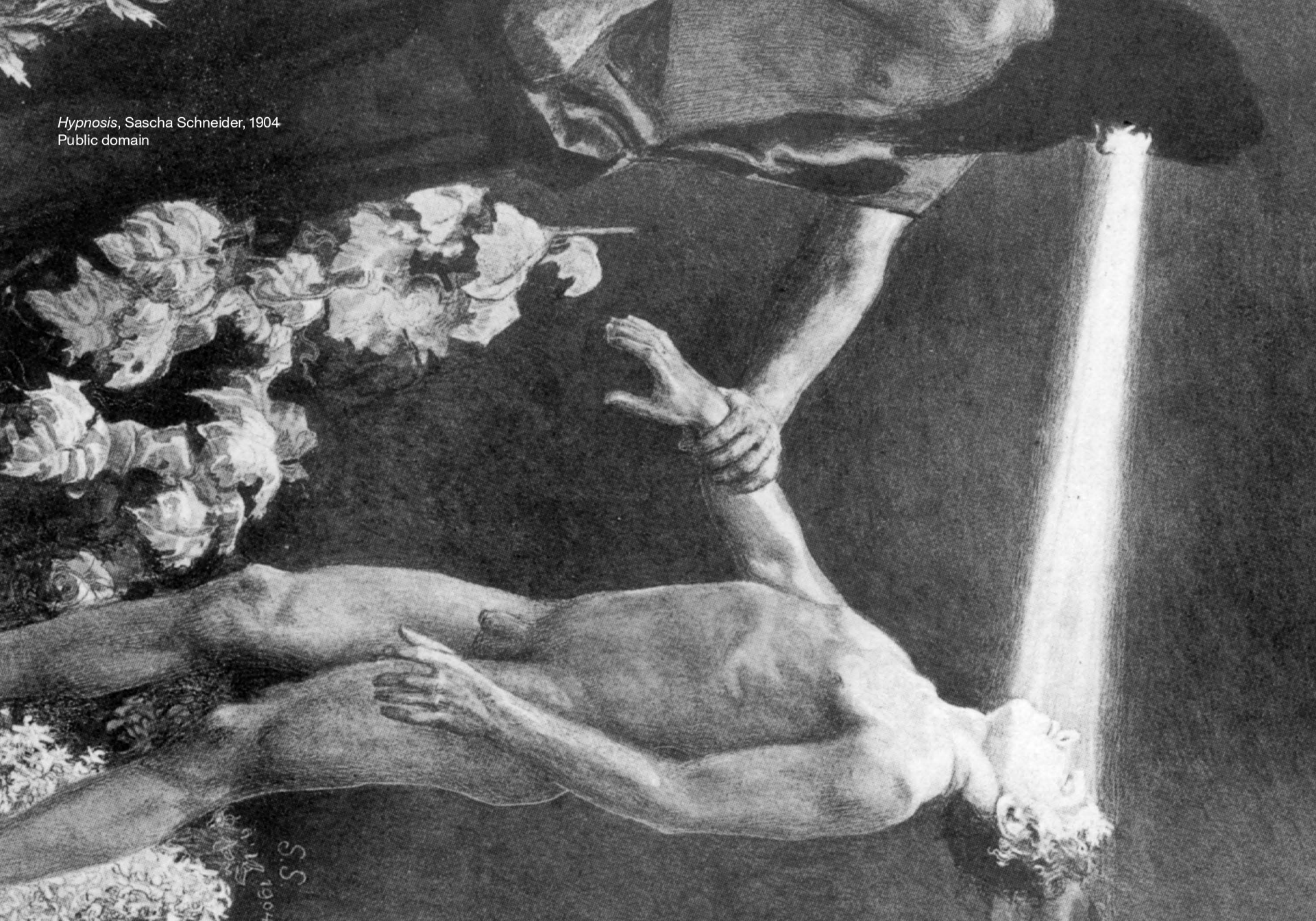

Hypnosis, Sascha Schneider, 1904
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SOUL SEARCHING: BETWEEN JUNG AND DELEUZE

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> The years, of which I have spoken to you, when I pursued the inner images, were the most important time of my life. Everything else is to be derived from this. It began at that time, and the later details hardly matter anymore. My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me. That was the stuff and material for more than only one life. Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then.
>
> —Carl Jung, the opening comment of *The Red Book* (2009)

Introduction

I have long held an interest in Jung's archetypes. For some time, I've felt there must be a relationship between them and Deleuze and Guattari's plane of immanence; in so far as Jung invariably describes archetypes as being experienced as felt affect. Jung (1973) states they are accessible to the human imagination mostly as dreams or visions, where they manifest as "archetypal-images" (20). At first, I didn't really pursue the relationship further, knowing that Jung is so readily disparaged by the academy. In my personal experience there is often an automatic dismissal of his work, often without much reasoning as to why, and without appreciation that an understanding of Jung's work requires experiential immersion

as much as it does theoretical interrogation. That is, Jung's ideas cannot be fully appreciated without undergoing the very analysis that his work promotes. Despite this, there are emerging pockets of scholarship that are taking an interest in his work, particularly in analyses of proposed connections between Jung's ideas and that of Deleuze's Spinoza (Kerslake 2007; Semetsky and Selpoech-Ramey 2012; McMillan 2018; Lacey 2022; Maxwell 2023).

Much of Jung's vision is tied up with his early experiences while producing *The Red Book* (Jung 2009). Jung was guarded about the release of this work, only sharing it with close colleagues and confidantes during his life time. *The Red Book* recounts a series of mystical experiences, during a period of time when Jung encountered autonomous forces as expressed by the collective unconscious during trance-like episodes he termed "active imagination." He spent the rest of his professional life translating these experiences into academic and psychoanalytical explanations. However, beyond this, there are compelling connections between Jung's work and specific ideas of Deleuze, coming to the attention of contemporary scholarship, which could enhance our understanding of affect. The most interesting connection, for me, is the similarity of Jung's synchronicity to Deleuze's noncausal correspondence, both of which are posed as solutions to psychophysical parallelism, which I will argue below sheds light on both Deleuze's and Jung's use of the term "soul."

Synchronicity and Intuition

Synchronicity is defined as two seemingly unrelated events that feel meaningfully connected to the experiencing subject. The power (or feeling of meaningfulness) of such acausal experiences, Jung (1973) claimed, is because a synchronicity experience has a direct connection with the manifestation of an archetype (65). Synchronicity occurs without any obvious cause, and is thus considered to be an intuitive experience.[1] The archetypes, that accompany synchronicity experiences, can be thought of as pre-personal intensive forces, experienced by human subjects as felt affect. I spend considerable time in my book *Urban Roar* (2022), linking the experience of synchronicity to intuitive thought. Unlike rational knowledge which is constructed through conceptual scaffolding (for instance, as processes of induction/deduction) and verbal/written dialogue (the combat of interlocutors),

intuitive knowledge is a-rational (beyond or more-than rationality), and thus, deeply personal insofar as it is experienced as *felt knowledge*. Intuitive knowledge is accompanied by surges of affect that reveal new possible worlds able to burst through the typically limiting structures of our own human experiences. Intuitive knowledge accesses the voluminosity of nonbeing, existing as those virtualities in excess of the actual. Or put another way, intuition brings to awareness those potentialities inaccessible to rational investigation.

Indeed, if we allow academic knowledge these moments of dialogue (such that it is) with intuition, then we open knowledge-generation onto that uncomfortable (*qua* a-rational) terrain of the mythic. Myth is a misunderstood term, often placed in contradistinction to fact. *Myth vs fact*. This very statement betrays a prioritizing of the rational over the intuitive, presenting specific forms of knowledge (i.e. scientism) as fact-finding truths, rather than their actual status as methods for specific types of (rational) knowledge formation. Alternatively, Jung considered the mythic, or myth, not as something overcome by rationality through the studies of archaeologists and mythologists. Myth, he said, is alive. Through his own experiences in the creation of *The Red Book*, he saw as complementary, the mythic and the collective unconscious. Mythic experiences are encountered mainly in our dreams (but not only), presenting challenges requiring integration into consciousness. Indeed, this could well be a one-sentence summary of Jungian psychoanalysis.

From the theoretical standpoint, most of Jung's career was spent locating his intuitive experiences in the writing of *The Red Book*; indeed, he knew his experiences would be disparaged, so he set about formulating analytical psychology, which was driven (rather than justified) by his original mystical experiences. It is only now, with the posthumous release of *The Red Book*, that we can begin to study this connection. His approach to psychology supports a process of individuation by which an individual experiences and absorbs the problems of the unconscious to develop a unique and thereby healthy (*qua* peaceful/joyful) relationship with the Self (more on that later). We can understand his oeuvre as supporting other individuals to take a similar psychological journey as recounted in *The Red Book*. The process of individuation—the becoming of Self (and/with world)—was also of interest to Deleuze (Kerslake 2007, 81–6). For both, the process was connected with attempts to articulate the meaning of soul. Before we turn to this, I will briefly present and respond to four criticisms aimed at Jung through which I will introduce the concept of autonomous affectivities.

Approaching Jung, via Four Criticisms

1. RACISM

Farhad Dalal's 1988 essay, "Jung: A Racist" gives an unequivocal answer to the question, was Jung a racist: *yes*, says Dalal. Dalal's essay, for a Jungian enthusiast like myself, is a challenging read. He methodically works through Jung's material discovering multiple remarks that show racial bias towards those, most particularly, of African descent (including African-Americans) and also South Asian and Indigenous people. Dalal traces Jung's commentary (which at times is, without question, offensive) comparing the unconscious drives of Europeans with the contemporary 'primitive' consciousness of the aforementioned communities. The unavoidable inference is that Europeans are somehow more evolved, or advanced, in their individuation process. The essay was impactful enough to draw an apology from a group of Jungians (after some 30 years) acknowledging the comments had "caused considerable disquiet and often anger within the communities concerned" (Open Letter 2018, 673). It is the addressing of these concerns that has been a primary factor in the emergence of post-Jungian thought (to which, I would include my own contributions). That Jung travelled to Asia, Africa, and North America is suggestive of a respect for 'non-European' practices, at least insofar as these studies impacted his writings about the 'depths' of the collective unconscious. But perhaps the truth is he was casting a condescending anthropological eye observing what Europeans may have been like in their prior 'inferior' primitive state—this seems to be the claim made by Dalal. How forgiving should we be? Jung, I suspect, was so deeply affected by his own mystical experiences in the writing of *The Red Book* that he perhaps failed to recognize how his subsequent theories and practices might also be advantageous and useful to cultures, religions, and practices that diverged from his own. After all, the collective unconscious is not a political or denominational force that favors specific races or individuals; it is the relentless drive of pre-personal affect into human consciousness. A natural force common to *all* humans (and possibly non-humans beside). How we humans comprehend, manifest, and practice this becoming of affect is unique to our sociocultural contexts across all places and all times (an argument I unpack fully in my *Urban Roar*). An article by the African-American Jungian therapist Alan G. Vaughan (2019) somewhat supports this position. He appears to take a different tact to Dalal's unequivocal evisceration of Jung when writing about Jung's visit to America in the early 20th century.

Vaughan writes that Jung was so swept up by the racial politics of his time it caused him to ignore the intellectual ascendancy of the 'Harlem Renaissance,' which was then in full swing in North America. Vaughan (2019) shares at length the intellectual developments of the Harlem Renaissance and its relationship to archetypal thinking, including an explanation of "the Bantu principle of Ubuntu or 'humanity' [which] is identified as the relational ground in African cultures" (320). The point being that Vaughan acknowledges Jung's racial position, without losing sight of the possible applications of Jungian ideas. The real question at play here: is the collective unconscious and the archetypes a theoretical construct built on a racial politics, or, did Jung discover the collective unconscious and the archetypes, which he (unreflexively) entangled in the racial politics of his time? Of course, I choose the latter. This is a post-Jungian position, which is the most ethical course if we are to acknowledge the racial politics so deftly uncovered by Dalal. If we follow this line of thinking we needn't dismiss Jung's theories and practices, but instead disentangle them from their colonial roots so that they might be put to use by *anyone*.

2. UNCANNY

A possible root cause of the academic disparaging of Jung is an accusation from his colleague Sigmund Freud. Freud said Jung invested too much importance in the uncanny (Freud, and his followers, have no time or interest in a 'collective unconscious'). Freud was focused on gaining scientific legitimacy for his beliefs, which accounts for his distancing from Jung's experimentation with the mystical and the imaginative (uncanny experiences, as Freud would have called them). Given the prior discussion it is interesting to note that Freud claimed Jung's interests in the uncanny were akin to primitive beliefs (Kerslake 2007, 145), which should no longer be regarded as important by modern man. This of course is another example of racial politics at play. Might this partially account for Jung's own racial positioning? Was he seeking legitimacy by unreflexively embracing the colonial mindset of his peers (including Freud)? Or was early 20th century analytical psychology unable/unwilling to disentangle itself from colonialism, as it is now able to achieve in a postcolonial age? Of course, it is not possible for me to answer these questions in the context of this paper; I leave them here as speculations.

One of the more famous encounters between Jung and Freud was a moment of sonic synchronicity—the exploding bookcase in Freud's home—in which Jung demonstrated the power of intuition. A loud crack could be heard, at which point Jung (1989) predicted another would emerge, and much to Freud's shock, indeed, another cracking sound followed. Jung claimed the moment had such an impact on Freud that it caused Freud to become deeply wary of Jung and his ideas

(153–4). While Jung did not know what gave him the certainty that the second cracking sound event would occur, he informed Freud that it demonstrated an acausal link between internal sensation and exterior material event (he called it "catalytic exteriorization phenomenon" [ibid.]); and certainly, the fact that Jung correctly predicted the coming of the second crack is quite remarkable (even if the moment should be reduced to the natural creaking of a house, as Freud later claimed). Should such moments be dismissed as simply uncanny, with no further meaning ascribed to them? A world of systematic logic and retrospective rationalizations would demand so, and yet, the experience can't be denied. The question asked here is what role does intuition have in the generation and understanding of experience? Indeed, how is intuition—that a-rational dimension of experience—able to generate knowledge, seemingly spontaneously?

3. FORMALISM

In addition to his interest in the 'uncanny', another accusation aimed at Jung is that his readings of literature and art are a type of formalism, which scans and thereby reduces creative works to the service of archetypal thinking (Mambrol 2020). Mambrol (2020) writes, that "language was ignored or subject to gross generalization as Jung searched for universals in texts" (n.p.). It is true that a formalist approach to searching for archetypal-images risks reducing creativity to the service of Jung's ideas. But the idiosyncrasies of individual works or the singularity of an author's creation and/or a work's existence can be maintained in this scenario; it adds an extra dimension wherein the affective charge of the collective unconscious, as manifested thorough artistic works, is revealed. It is important to remember that Jung's original experiences recounted in *The Red Book* are built from a collection of archetypal images as he experienced them, not as he discovered them in source material: archetypes manifested within his consciousness in the only way they could (that is, in relationship to his specific sociocultural context). The work of defining and identifying these archetypical-images came later. There is a huge body of work, added to Jung's own, including via Marie von Franz, Joseph Campbell, and Thomas Singer amongst many others, discovering links in mythology, literature and fairy tales across cultures and time, that show a continuity of archetypal-image types that have manifested in the human psyche.[2] There can be no doubt that archetypal-images manifest in relationship to the sociocultural context. This is why it is important to maintain a distinction between archetypes and archetypal-images. The archetype is not a formal property, but rather a pure potential, without form. Archetypes as pure

potential manifest in the dreams and visions of the psyche, presenting in ways we are able to apprehend (dependent on our sociocultural contexts) often as image and/or sound.[3] As such, archetypes are formless, eternal, and pure potentials that only become tangible via their containment within our own experiential registers as archetypal-images. Their original intensity remains unknown beyond the affects they produce.

For instance, the mandala is an archetypal-image of the *individuated* after the integration into consciousness of what was previously unconscious;the becoming of Self. Jung used the mandala to represent four personality types—thinking, feeling, perceiving, sensing—that need to be fully integrated before the individuated self can emerge. The mandala appeared to Jung in the writing of *The Red Book*, before he was aware of their existence in Eastern mythologies. That the image should appear across cultures is remarkable. But the archetype itself (in contrast to the archetypal-image) needn't be considered a mandala, but rather, a *manifested feeling* of completeness or wholeness as represented through the image of a mandala. The archetypes themselves are formless, and thus, beyond representation. We might think of the archetypes as a malleable psychic architecture, an excess of affect, presenting idiosyncratically as archetypal-images to each being, as part of that being's own becoming. Despite their seeming difference, archetypes, like essences, are made of the same potential/affect. As I argue in *Urban Roar* (2022), that archetypes can be recognized as common archetypal-images across time, space, and sometimes cultures is not to reduce any one work to a common ideal, but to recognize the creative charge of what I am calling 'autonomous affectivities' in the becoming of creativity.

4. NEGLIGENCE OF THE BODY

The fourth criticism of Jung is that he is mostly interested in the psyche, giving very little attention to the body (Lacey 2022, 75). Jung largely ignored the body, and thus overlooked, or possibly misunderstood, a philosophical system that may have provided him with much needed support for his cosmology—namely, Spinozism. As argued by Kerslake (2007, 143) and Langan (2019, 112), Jung may well have misjudged Spinoza as being overly concerned with logic and rationality, which was anathema to a man invested in the mystical experiences of the unconscious. Instead, Jung used Platonic Ideas and Kantian *a priori* knowledge (Jung 1968, 75-7) for his philosophical grounding of the archetypes: comparing them to Plato's Ideas as pure or perfect forms, and Kant's *a priori* as inborn pre-empirical archetypal knowledge. Jung chose these philosophical schema as they support his bias towards the psyche. And yet as Jung himself states, the body can be just as

important as the mind during synchronistic experiences. Indeed, Spinoza has a wonderful acausal mystery at the heart of the *Ethics*, unseen by Jung, but uncovered by Deleuze, that supports Jung's cosmology—psychophysical parallelism. It asks, what is the link between body and mind, those two attributes of a singular substance leading to the formation of the human mode? As discussed above, Deleuze (1992) calls it noncausal correspondence. Jung (1973) calls it synchronicity. And it is Christian Kerslake (2007) who makes this important connection between Deleuze and Jung: "in our pursuit of reference to make sense of Deleuze's claim that there is a differential unconscious in the work of Jung, all the evidence is pointing us to the phenomena that Jung classed under the term 'synchronicity'" (141). The noncausal correspondences of the plane of immanence and the acausal synchronicities of the collective unconscious are transversal; both are always and everywhere immanent to human experience. The plane of immanence is more expansive than the collective unconscious in so far as it also accounts for flows of materiality—organic and non-organic matter—and thus, it could be seen to encompass the collective unconscious (and its archetypes) and much more besides.

So, What is an Autonomous Affectivity?

My proposition is that the plane of immanence is constituted by an ongoing composition of autonomous affectivities—archetypes for Jung and essences for Deleuze's Spinoza—that are responsible for creative human becomings. During synchronicity experiences, autonomous affectivities are expressed simultaneously through both the body and mind attributes, which is consistent with Spinoza's cosmology of a single substance expressing its essence (soul) through each mode (see my *Urban Roar*, 62-83).

An autonomous affectivity does the work of reaching out to all cultures and places from its timeless space in which potentialities can emerge to affect human imagination in the form of deities, gods, stories, fairytales, patterns etc. The autonomous affectivity refers to those pre-personal, more-than-human forces that surge beneath consciousness coming to life through the collective unconscious, and into human consciousness. They are pure power, and have as much concern for our well-being as does a hurricane (which is none). In an everyday sense, we are able to contain them with our structured existences and rational overlays, but

they always push into awareness. We can control them in our dreaming life no more than we can control the weather in our waking life; both are forces in excess of human capability (though lucid dreaming problematizes this statement).

Jung's ideas and processes are misunderstood when connected to New Age hopes of 'feeling good' or being guided by a 'greater being.' This was not Jung's intention. For him, archetypes seem to be a natural phenomenon with which we must contend as part of our own life development. Confronting the unconscious, for Jung, can be a painful and harrowing experience, as much as it can be elevating and inspiring (more or less like everyday life). Autonomous affectivities are autonomous exactly because they are autonomous from human life; they can only be understood by us in their momentary manifestation/formation as archetypal-images. They are more-than-human, in so far as the human is not required for their existence. They can even be imagined to emerge within other conscious life forms (non-human; alien) perhaps even through non-living matter in ways that cannot be perceived by humans. But for us humans (assuming it is only humans reading this paper), an awareness of autonomous affectivities is synonymous with synchronicity experiences; eternal expressions accessible to the human mode via a surge of affect through body and mind. They are the very forcefulness that is the becoming of the soul, to which this paper now turns.

Body-mind Parallelism, and the Soul

So, then, how should we understand the meaning of soul? What is it, and what is its purpose? Obviously I am hardly in a position to definitively answer such an unanswerable question; nevertheless, a study of both Jung and Deleuze leads to an interesting way to approach the problem. I have been perplexed as to why both Jung and Deleuze at times mention body-soul parallelism rather than body-mind parallelism. It is the latter that was discovered by Deleuze's Spinoza when he reduced Descartes' two substances (mind and body) into a singular univocal substance. Given the etymological roots of substance as being a singular ground of being upon which we stand, that is, the essence of things, Descartes' proposition seems strange. How could there be two substances, that is, two grounds that subtend everything? Spinoza's response was elegant: he proposes a singular substance through which everything is expressed. Thought/idea and body/extension are two attributes of this substance, expressing the very essence of Nature (God/Substance). So where does the soul fit into this description? Why do both Jung and Deleuze, at times,

eschew mind in favor of soul in their description of parallelism? For instance in *Expressionism and Spinoza* (1992), Deleuze seems to skip from a discussion of mind to a discussion of soul as if they were interchangeable:

> If parallelism is a novel doctrine, this is not because it denies a real action of soul on body. It is because it overturns the moral principle by which the actions of one are the passions of the other. "The order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind." What is a passion in the mind is also a passion in the body, what is an action in the mind is also an action in the body. Parallelism thus excludes any eminence of the soul (256) [Internal quote is from Ethics III.2s].

What Deleuze seems to be getting at here, as I read it, is that the soul does not favor the mind over the body (*qua* it is not eminent or transcendental); it is expressed equally through the body and the mind. Thus, it is not so much the parallelism of body and soul that is at issue, but rather the *relationship* of the body to the soul. Deleuze continues:

> Thereby, and thereby only, can we know of what a soul is in itself capable, what is its power. Thereby we find a means of "comparing" the power of the soul with that of the body, and so find a means of assessing the power of the soul considered in itself. (ibid).

As I understand it, for Deleuze's Spinoza, the soul considered in itself is a force or intensity that makes up the whole of the plane of immanence, and expresses itself equally through both the mind and body attributes.

Jung, on the other hand, maintains the idea of the soul as having a more exclusive relationship with the psyche. He does go as far as to say that bodily or objective experience (as he calls it) is essential for a synchronistic encounter; however, the actual work of the soul is done by the psyche. Thus his exchanging of body-soul parallelism and body-mind parallelism makes more sense, in so far as the soul presents itself to the psyche (and not the body). As mentioned, Jung's disinterest in Spinoza means he missed an opportunity to connect his ideas with the cosmology of Spinoza. Spinoza's monist nature/substance can be considered to encompass a transversal collective unconscious. Thought of in this way, it is helpful to connect Jung's collective unconscious with Spinoza's mind attribute. The mind attribute

could be attributed to our personal unconscious, that receives archetypal dream-images from the transversal collective unconscious. Jung's theory is enriched here with the conceptual use of autonomous affectivity, as it makes the surge of affect relevant to both the mind and body (and not just the psyche, as favored by Jung). If autonomous affectivities inhabit the ground of being in Spinoza's substance, as I am claiming, then their simultaneous emergence in body and mind should be understood as the *equal* upsurge of affect across both attributes—the 'cause' of synchronicity experiences.

So, returning for a moment to Deleuze's discussion of soul (a life), Soul (as plane of immanence) subtends both attributes of body and mind; in fact, soul is the very expressive essence of this substance. That is, the soul is the whole of the plane of immanence, as simultaneously expressed through mind and body. Thus, *the soul is not parallel to the body, but is simultaneously expressed through both body and mind*. Let's continue with this axiomatic position: the soul is common to both attributes due to the very essence of substance, *qua* plane of immanence, as Soul. The soul of self comes to awareness during synchronicity experiences (Jung) and noncausal correspondences (Deleuze).

"From Affection to Soul"

It is this relationship of Soul with the plane of immanence that Seigworth (2011) elaborates in his chapter, "From Affection to Soul." Seigworth (2011) points out that there are three versions of affect, which Deleuze develops through Spinoza's writings. To paraphrase, they are *affection*, which is the affection of a body when in contact with another body; *affectus,* as a line of continuous variation (relevant to both attributes); and *pre-personal*, affect as pure immanence outside any distinction of interiority or exteriority, which Seigworth (2011) writes "is affect as virtuality, soul or a life." He ends the paper with the following:

> Trace out the story of affect and its encounters, and you will arrive at this plane of immanence: always there, always to be made, never still. It is affectionately yours, and, through it, the *whole* of the universe (168-9).

As I understand this, the plane of immanence is Soul, and the soul is the whole of the Universe as expressed through (and lived by) each of us, uniquely. Distinction emerges here between Soul and soul, much like Life and life, or Self and self. The capitalization refers to any momentary immanence of the whole of the universe—

going beyond the experience of the lived—and the lower case as the unique expression of that whole universe as expressed through a worldly object/being. Thus, my own soul, your own soul, any soul, is the whole of the plane of immanence as it comes to express itself through a life. This speculation is described to great effect in Deleuze's (2001) paper, "Immanence: A Life." In it, Deleuze (2001) references a Charles Dickens' novel to describe a character who is quite reprehensible and thoroughly disliked; that is, until he is dying. As his life ends, Life takes its place. At the moment of death "something soft and sweet penetrates him" (28). A crowd becomes strangely attracted to this man, as he expresses something more expansive than that expressed throughout his life. A Life is the whole of immanence shining through this man, as his own life fades away. But as he comes back to life, Life subsides, and the crowds are once again repelled by the old man's coldness and cruelty. Just after this passage, Deleuze (2001) also writes about newborn babies, and the manner in which Life shines through them: "Small children, through all their sufferings and weaknesses, are infused with an immanent life that is pure power and even bliss" (30). It is after birth and before death (a truncated life), on either side are to be found two moments in which the plane of immanence shines through, momentarily exposing the pure bliss of Soul. The goal of individuation—in which the self (ego) comes into proper relationship with the Soul as it is expressed through our life—is to experience these moments of beatitude as often as possible (the third type of knowledge as Deleuze's Spinoza calls it; an intuitive knowledge).

Personalizing the Soul

If we take the position that the Soul is pre-personal (or impersonal since it precedes and persists/insists/subsists with the arrival of one's personhood), we can consider it to be a neutral force. It is neither good nor evil. It simply expresses its own virtual nature through the things of the world; in the case of the human mode, this neutrality is expressed through the two parallel attributes of body and mind. As mentioned, there is conjecture that psychophysical parallelism—what Deleuze calls noncausal correspondence and Jung calls acausal synchronicity—was developed by Deleuze in relationship to Jung's own position (Kerslake 2007; Maxwell 2023). At the very least, Jung had already provided his particular answer before Deleuze developed his own. The chief and significant difference that I can detect is that synchronicity is the *personalization* of acausal correspondence—it is a specifically

human experience, whereas Deleuze's term presents a broader, more philosophical solution. But synchronicity is something personal—a.k.a. subjective—for Jung. For him, synchronicity is a moment of powerful intuitive meaning, a bodily encounter in the world acausally linked to a thought, vision or dream, charged with personal meaning. This charge, he claimed, is the intensive force of an archetype coming to consciousness. Note here: an archetype should not be understood as an image, but as a charge of affect associated with non-rational meaning making. It is precisely here that the two thinkers part ways: Deleuze, the philosopher, applies 'noncausal correspondence' to resolve a philosophical conundrum; Jung, the psychoanalyst, applies synchronicity to locate the experience of the individual soul, which for him, traces a meaningful path in accordance with the structures of the unconscious. While both maintain a course towards individuation—the coming to consciousness of joyful experience (the nature of the plane of immanence)—it is Jung who follows a more personalized course.

Evolving Archetypes

From here, we can revisit Jung's analytical psychology, but now revisioned through Spinoza's substance. The soul for Jung, was something very much alive. Something to be *encountered* in dreams, mainly. Most famously (or infamously) he uses the opposites in his description of the evolving soul; for instance claiming that we would meet our gendered opposite (*anima/animus*), or shadow forms cast by the light of our own consciousness. These opposites are not binary, but co-constitutive and intermeshed. For Jung, a full apprehension of the opposites (thereby revealing their wholeness) is critical for the movement towards individuation. These would appear in our dreams and visions, most often presenting in mythic form. These encounters with the unconscious present as problems to be solved and then integrated into consciousness.

The *anima/animus* is a problematic theory in our age of non-binary ethics and queer politics. Jung's experiences were no doubt shaped by the gender (as much as the racial) biases of his day. However, archetypes, if understood as the pure potential of autonomous affectivities (and not as set forms), can manifest in infinite ways. Indeed, we might say that *archetypes have always been queer*; after all they can manifest in any form—woman, man, hermaphrodite (*qua* intersex), living conglomerates, and anything in-between, not to forget their non-human (animal) and other fantastical manifestations. Jung may have created binary oppositions for the sake

of his therapeutic work, but prior to their manifestation they are without identity; and as such, thinking of an archetype as an autonomous affectivity may help us overcome notions of fixed archetypes (*vis-à-vis*, the archetypal image). Besides, as I have already alluded, it is likely that archetypal-images evolve in relationship to social and cultural dynamics. The archetype (or as I'm calling it, autonomous affectivities) is a remarkable concept for that reason. Archetypes provide a malleable psychic architecture applicable to all belief systems at all times, the images of which are specifically relevant to the cultures and persons within which they manifest (for further discussion see Lacey 2022, 57-62). For instance, as queerness and androgyny become new social norms, archetypal-image changes are observable, as expressed, for example, through the artful life of David Bowie, whose interest in Jung has been attributed to his personal exploration of archetypes.[4] Bowie realizes this potential across multiple queer archetypal images, including the androgynous, bisexual rockstar Ziggy Stardust, and as a canine-human hybrid on the cover of the album, *Diamond Dogs*.

Indeed, any attempt to present archetypes as absolutes should be resisted, instead their malleability should be foregrounded. Nadi Fadina (2015), who explores the *anima/animus* archetypes and their limitation in a feminist context, writes in relation to archetypes, "Attributing universal meaning to certain images and experiences dismisses the constantly moving psycho-social dynamics of human existence which are integrated into ideological matrices of dominant systems of particular societies in particular historical periods" (65). I agree, and I would add that the archetypes are best understood as pre-personal pure potentials, the images of which can transmute into infinite forms. Jung generated his own psychoanalytical transformation into a therapeutic process to assist others; however, there could be so many more pathways (such as Bowie's), and so many more images yet to be encountered. No one person, or study, could ever contain the infinity of possible manifestations imbued in an archetype's potential.

Soul as Evolving Self

When understood as pure potentials, archetypes can be considered as intensive forces intersecting with human modes within the plane of immanence. They present themselves to the personal unconscious as problems to be integrated into

consciousness. This is the process of individuation of which both Deleuze and Jung speak. For Deleuze's Spinoza, this means experiencing as much as possible the third type of knowledge (intuitive knowledge) in which the plane of immanence is fully experienced as feelings of bliss, beatitude, and joy (Lacey 2022,76).[5] Although Jung had the same life goal in mind, for him the individuation process (becoming joyful) is a painful and difficult life course more akin to a Buddhist or Christian ethic of suffering. For Jung there is no way to avoid life's traumas, which must be encountered before the joyful essense of the soul can be fully appreciated. A tsunami wipes out a city. A lover breaks your heart. A child dies. Cancer appears. All of these moments, beyond our control, can appear in an instant. These moments can break us, leaving us listless and devastated. For Jung, these breaking moments are necessary, and a natural evolution of the soul as the self comes into a healthier relationship with the Self. This contrasts Jung's soul from Deleuze's Spinozian soul. Whereas the presence of trauma and suffering is inevitable for Jung, Deleuze's Spinoza offers the possiblity of a different experience wherein intutive knolwedge (experienced as the "intellectual love of God")[6] potentiates joyfulness; presumably, this enables the self to acccess joyfulness without the necessary precursor of suffering. This is not to suggest Deleuze's studies do not acknowledge life's sufferings (or Spinzoa as discussed in footnote 5, above).[7] For instance, his study of Nietzsche's eternal return, in which every moment repeats infinitely, creates an ethic by which each of us is compelled to overcome the difficulties and traumas of life. Nietzsche's underlying principle is randomness—every possibility that could exist will exist due to the finiteness of matter unfolding within the infinity of time. There is no journey of individuation here, but rather the superman who must try and exceed the limitation set by his own fate. The compulsion to feel as much Joy as possible makes sense in the face of such a nightmarish scenario.

I do appreciate Deleuze's Nietzsche—providing a particular impetus to live a joyful life. But it seems to me that this account of suffering is too limited—Nietzsche's fate-driven eternal return presents no meaningful structure subtending the real; only that all choices should be made with the awareness that every lived moment is fated to endless repetition. I tend towards Jung's vision here. That while the goal is bliss, the story of life is anything but bliss. Trauma is unavoidable; it cannot be escaped, but must be worked through to reap the rewards. Thus, for Jung, the soul's drive is a natural cause of suffering. So how do we reconcile this divergence between the two thinkers?

Two Soul Aspects: The Demanding Infant and The Sage

To personalize the soul is to risk anthropomorphising the ineffable. Something Deleuze's Spinoza avoids with the plane of immanence. For Deleuze, the Soul is neutral, both as an eternal virtual state and as manifested in the life of a person. For Jung though, this neutrality, when expressed via the human experience, becomes personal, insofar as it becomes a theme of struggle and transformation.

I'm going to interpret Jung's relationship to the soul using a very Jungian approach—by imagining it as a mutable dual image. Firstly as a demanding infant, and secondly as the awareness of an old sage (yes, sort of what Deleuze does in his "Immanence, a Life" essay). In reality, the dual image manifests as a singular event—a human life. As demanding infant, the soul holds no regard for the being through which it is expressed; and as sage, the soul is able to reveal to us the Soul (the whole of the plane of immanence) and its more-than-human beatitudes. This encounter with soul as demanding infant occurs only in relationship to our ego. The ego—so important to all psychoanalytical schemas—for the purposes of this paper is best understood in relationship to Deleuze's earlier description of Dickens' dying rogue. As the rogue dies, the plane of immanence (Soul) expresses its essence (the neutrality of 'a life,' any-life-whatever), drawing in a crowd. But when it recedes, as the old man's ego reasserts itself (this life, this-ness of the actual), the crowd disperses again. The ego can be considered the identity of the self. The truth we tell ourselves, and the world, about our nature. The ego is a life, constructed, learnt, a masquerade of permanency in the form of a personality. But in relation to the soul, and its constant yearning—its endless movement and becoming—the ego is helpless. At the moment of death the old man's ego subsides, as Soul shines through. The ego will always disappear, even if only at the time of death. As experience, this breaking of the ego can be shattering. It is this experience that Jung equates with suffering. The soul easily subsumes the ego, as the impression of self dissolves and is replaced by the expansiveness of the plane of immanence (like the caving in of the walls of a house one has never left, only to be confronted by the extreme expanses of a horizon). The concerns of the soul exceed the personal; pushing onwards in the unfolding of its own nature—the becoming of its potential as uniquely expressed through each being—it is unaware of the damage done to ego-identity. The ego defines us until the very moment the soul wipes it away. The belief of self is shown

to be an illusion, embedded in a broad plane of possibilities. According to Jung, everybody will have this experience at some point, even if it is only at the moment of death. As our self-image dissolves, Life is revealed as the source of a life.

In keeping with the soul's neutrality, it has no desire to hurt or maim that through which it is expressed. It is simply the soul expressing its own nature. The soul is not for or against the ego. It simply doesn't recognize it, and is always pressing, surging. An irrepressible push that is the becoming of each self into a new relationship with the Self. This is soul as demanding infant. As any parent knows, an infant can be a most demanding being as it pushes towards its own realization (the development of its ego-identity). The soul, in relation to a strong ego-identity, is exactly that: a demanding presence that pushes on, regardless. An ethics of Joy remains reconcilable to this perspective of the soul, because it is only in the breaking of the ego that the blissful nature of the plane of immanence can be fully felt. But it doesn't come easily. The experience of being shattered as the self loses its identity, can be torturous. It might be met with suicide, drug addiction, all sorts of destructive behaviours, that cope with the experience of pain.[8]

Pain cannot be avoided in a Jungian universe; it has to be felt, and this is the course that Jung sets for his analysands. Jung's promise is that by engaging with his course of action that the soul can eventually be met as the old sage (the properly individuated self). In this case the soul no longer torments, but instead puts the self, or a life, in relationship with the Self, or a Life. The soul as sage opens awareness to the blissful nature of the whole of the plane of immanence, which is ever active and expressive through all things. A life lived as intuition—gentle guidance and gently guiding in a symbiotic relationship with world, in which acts as simple as breath are enough to inundate the self with Joy.

That Jung was brave enough to develop and systematize his own mystical confrontation with the collective unconscious, means that a path is open to those who might want to take his pantheon of archetypal-images seriously. However, from a philosophical perspective, some of Jung's ideas (synchronicity and body-mind parallelism, in particular) are consistent with that of Deleuze's Spinoza, even if it took other scholars to make this connection (much as Deleuze revealed Spinoza's insights to a future world). What is clear, is that for all of these thinkers—Spinoza, Deleuze, and Jung—there is a consistent agenda: to propose a way of being in the world that leads to full exposure to the joyful—and *painful*—waves of the plane of immanence (Soul), which moves through, in and across all materialities and all virtualities, including our own very being.

Endnotes

1. Before proceeding, it is worth considering the differences between acausal experiences (used by Jung) and noncausal experiences (used by Deleuze). The prefix *a-* refers to 'without' or 'in the absence of'. And so, we can say that acausality is concerned with phenomena that are not governed by the laws of cause and effect as we know them. The prefix *non-* refers to 'not' or, 'turning proceeding words into a negative statement'. And so, we can say that noncausality refers to cases where cause and effect are not immediately or directly connected. The differences are minor; a- appears to suggest that there might be an order in existence that precedes cause and effect, whereas non- suggests there is no identifiable relation between cause and effect. In relationship to this paper, I take the terms to be synonymous, insofar as no obvious cause and effect is discernible.

2. At the time of writing Thomas Singer was the president of *The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism*, which "archive(s) mythological, ritualistic, and symbolic images from all over the world." See: www.aras.org (accessed: 22 August, 2023).

3. The term 'image' as used here is not meant to be representational. Rather, the image refers to the flowing visual and auditory perceptions of dreams and/or visions. These images are not fixed forms, rather they are archetypal flows manifesting as images.

4. See for example, the following article discussing David Bowie's use of the archetypes (https://jungpage.org/blog/loving-the-alien-on-david-bowie), especially the androgyny of "Ziggy Stardust". See also my own description of their possible resonance with first nation cosmologies (*Urban Roar* 2022, 54-62).

5. This is not to discount the place of suffering in Spinoza'a philosophy. For instance he writes in Part IV Propostion 15 of the Ethics: "A Desire which arises from a true knolwedge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other Desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented".

6. See Part V Proposition 32/33 of the Ethics.

7. This paper draws mainly on Deleuze's discussion of Soul from two texts, "Expression in Philosophy: Spinoza" and "Immanence, A Life." However, different conclusions on Deleuze's thoughts on suffering may be drawn from alternative texts. For instance, in "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs*"* from the book *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari (2004) write a "(BwO) can be terrifying, and lead you to your death. It is nondesire as well as desire. (…) (Y)ou're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveller and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our

place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated: on it we love" (166). And so, in collaboration with Guatarri, we see Deleuze explore pain more so than he does in his own solo encounters with Spinoza.

8. See footnote 7 for commentary on Deleuze's discussion of pain as expressed outside of the two main texts explored in this paper.

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Caduta Pericolosa Exp4, Alfio Giuffrida, 2020

Night Drive, Unknown, 2020
Public domain

A DRIVING FORCE: RELATIONAL BODIES IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PERIPHERY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the act of driving a car shapes identity through relational moments of contact. So often in our social interactions individuals are recognized through the roles they inhabit or actions they repeatedly undertake, whether that be teacher, father, gardener, etc. These roles are not solidified identities, but are rather momentary performances that an individual must temporarily embody in accordance with the circumstances they find themselves in. For many people, driving is a mundane practice that enables 'more important' activities in their daily lives, and yet for the time that a person operates a motor vehicle they must make their embodiment of that role a top priority. Using auto-ethnography, I will be looking at how a person 'becomes' a driver when they are driving by locating themselves in relation with their surroundings and how those interactions may shape identity for the duration of time that a person is driving. I will be considering how the individual is an intermediary point of contact in a web of relations and how responses to those interactions can shape how that person shows up in the world by considering how a person recognizes and accommodates for their relations with the objects, environments, and people they come into contact with while operating a motor vehicle.

KEYWORDS

driving, attention, embodiment, relationality, affect, human/non-human relations

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I glance quickly at the clock on my phone; "45 minutes until class starts." I absent-mindedly jam the phone into my coat pocket and lean down to pick up my backpack, swinging one strap over my shoulder; "I have to hurry or I'm going to be late." The strap digs into my shoulder and the weight of it makes me sway slightly as I adjust my balance; "This thing is so heavy, I'm going to have back problems." While feeling for my keys in my other pocket, I hurriedly start wriggling my feet into my shoes; "Every morning. Will I forever be known as the 'late person'?" I shuffle across the doormat to make my shoes fit more comfortably as I unlock and open the front door. I yell a quick "I'm going!" to no one visible and manage an odd run/walk to the car as I shut the door behind me; "The neighbor's car is in the driveway, what does she do for a living? Her husband is a lawyer, she was a painter, right?" I open the car door and see acorn shells littering the hood and windshield; "I really need to make time to clean, why is self-care so stressful?" I jam my keys into the ignition to start the car and begin rolling back out of the driveway. I feel fondness bubbling inside me as I look at the oak tree I was parked under, remembering how I climbed it in my youth. I shift into first gear and accelerate down the street.

In this essay, I will be exploring felt bodily tensions in moments that are peripheral to ethnographic fieldwork. I am exploring these moments to interrogate how a researcher comes to imagine both themselves within the field and the scope of their ethnographic focus. This is an interrogation into what ethnography is and when it is, or 'should be', taking place. My intention for this work is not directly related to a larger project but is, rather, an ethnography of 'non-ethnographic', 'pre-ethnographic', or 'inter-ethnographic' space, that is, space which is not conceptualized as being ideologically or materially central to a research objective. Rather, the objective of this exercise is to explore how research *comes* to matter, how subject matter may be identified, and how a researcher's daily engagements may impact the research process. It interrogates the perceived banality of the everyday by applying an ethnographic focus to tensions resulting from the actions that my body is constantly engaged in, at times when I would not normally be paying close attention. I am positioning this questioning of the ethnographic periphery as an exercise in affective praxis.

Chris Ingraham (2023) points to the difficulties in studying the pre-conscious, extra-lingual intra-actions that produce what we call affect, therefore in this essay I am attempting to *do* affect theory in hopes of "affecting theory." To do

this, I will first outline theoretical frameworks that I am drawing from, and will then provide a literal demonstration of the relationality I perform when driving a car. I am attending to driving because of the central, yet peripheral, role it plays in my everyday life. It serves as a "non-place" (Augé 1995), a transitory place with predetermined rules and modes of interaction. I do not live in an area with accessible public transit and my ability to physically go to work or to meet with people necessitates a car, yet rarely do I consider driving to be an activity that is 'worth' close examination. The event examined at the end of this piece is not of particular importance, but rather serves as a snapshot of a daily activity that enables my larger objectives without receiving commensurate recognition.

A Question of Methods

As a methodology, ethnography entails giving a certain level and quality of awareness to a situation in order to extract meaning that aligns with prior research questions. It is not defined by a strict adherence to the use of a limited set of methods but can instead be considered as a sensibility or sets of ideas or intentions that are applied to research engagements. As a doctoral candidate currently preparing for my dissertation fieldwork, the primary motivation for this examination is inspired by my own questioning of the efficacy of ethnography as a methodology. While ethnography has been taken up by many fields outside of its anthropological roots, it has also been the recipient of serious criticisms, two of which I will discuss here. The first is that ethnography is a more improvisational scientific process that can be left to interpretation and because of that has been criticized for its subjective parameters and lack of reliable reproducibility (LeCompte & Goetz 1982; Hammersley 2006). The second questions the motivations behind ethnographic work, which is tied to its sordid past linked to imperial projects of violence and domination and, thus, how it has been criticized for objectifying non-Western peoples as being 'primitive' or 'Other' (Fabian 2002; Trouillot 2003). I see these criticisms, first and foremost, as valid and necessary to be addressed by every potential ethnographer before entering the field.

In discussing ethnography's concern with reproducibility, it is important to recognize that scientific methods are generally concerned with extracting replicable results to gain an understanding of our lived experiences and our larger world. Replication is significant because it indicates an existing reality that is shared by multiple sources rather than existing in the mind of the researcher alone, thereby allowing research to better contribute to improving our shared realities. However, the understanding of replication in social science research should not be under-

stood on the level of a one-to-one comparison. To be able to arrive at precisely the same result multiple times requires that neither the 'objects' of study, nor their environments, introduce complicating factors by changing over time. Expecting multiple studies in the social sciences to produce the exact same result, rather than a symbolic, theoretical, or social similarity or alterity is also expecting that the subjects of study will exist and be in relation in the exact same way over time. To take my morning departure as an example, expecting exact reproducibility would expect that every day without fail I will sleep in, will be going to the same location, will have a functioning vehicle, etc. This is not a realistic expectation given the fluidity and malleability of lived experience and intentionally seeking some degree of exact reproducibility risks a researcher imposing their desires or preconceieved notions upon their interlocutors in ways that do not reflect the transformative nature of the conditions being studied. This desire informs a related concern of a historically motivated propensity to locate and construct Others through ethnographic research, by desiring static understandings of complex situations and individuals (Asad 1973; Smith 2012).

The reflexive turn in anthropology attempted to address some of these concerns by recognizing those biases that may influence a researcher's perspective and, thus, the potential power and privilege an ethnographer has in comparison with their interlocutors (Clifford & Marcus 1986). But even reflexivity has been criticized for not fully addressing these issues because recognizing one's position within a structure is not the same thing as altering that structure (Salzman 2002; Abu-Lughod 2008). While the problems of relation and representation are in many ways linked to ethnography's inception as a tool within the colonial arsenal, this does not necessarily mean that ethnography itself is a problem. Methodologies are tools that serve to assist the objectives of the users wielding them and it is therefore critical to understand how research objectives come to matter in the present as well as the histories they are situated within. Though ethnography has been historically undertaken in harmful ways, it is still an important tool for interrogating the systemic structures that influence and govern collective lived experience (Fassin 2013; Simmons & Smith 2019; Boylorn 2011).

This paper's focus on non-ethnographic space is an exploration of how fieldwork can be generatively disrupted in ways that provide an opportunity to question research motivations and interactions. By examining moments that are peripheral to fieldwork I seek a better understanding of what it means to be *in* the field, what

kinds of topics are worthy of study, and how I can imagine research that does not position relational contact as a process of constructing an Other. To do this, I intend to critically engage with how the moments leading up to applications of research methods are contextualized within already existing models of knowledge production by focusing on affect theory and relational embodiment. I am calling for a stronger recognition of the ways in which attuning to the relationality of sensory engagement on a bodily level may impact, locate, or disrupt a researcher's points of entry into a field.

To some extent, this methodological exploration brings notice to the ways in which the body and mind are not immediately unified in experience, and how the body produces felt tensions in response to its surroundings, and how the mind improvisationally adjusts to these responses. This is not a return to a sort of Cartesian dualism; it is not my intention to suggest that the body and mind are isolated as separately existing entities. Rather, I am considering the body as an intermediary point of contact, as a heuristic tool that recognizes its surroundings in a particular way (Bernstein 2009; Sofer 2012). In his contribution to an anthropology of sound, Stephan Helmreich (2007) uses the analogy of a submarine to discuss the methodological difference between immersion and transduction in ethnography: immersion being considered as the anthropological tradition of placing oneself 'in the field' and conducting participant observation, and transduction as attempting to detect what immersion may leave out by questioning the dichotomous positioning of inside/outside, sensor/sensee, etc. "Transductive ethnography would be a mode of attention that asks how definitions of subjects, objects, and field emerge in material relations that cannot be modeled in advance" (632).

Transductive ethnography provides a challenge to the process of preparing for fieldwork because it necessitates not knowing what will be found in the field but is nevertheless important in unsettling preconceived notions of what being in the field will entail. But how does one parse out what those preconceived notions are if they are produced from the banality of everyday life? I want to consider how this mode of transduction occurs through everyday practice in my own body and how the labor of detection that my body undertakes in realizing its surroundings exposes my relations to the environments I move through. This recognition can provide an opportunity to identify and trace tensions within those relations. To engage with these instances of transductive awareness, I am drawing from iterations of affect theory associated with Spinoza and Deleuze that consider how relationality between two, or more, entities transform experience through infinitesimally brief moments of time (Thrift 2004, 70). I am considering the actions of my body in this way to more deeply question how my attention

is directed and how the field emerges as a result. This contributes to discussions of subject formation, materiality, mobility, and relationality by calling attention to how moments of contact can direct attention both in and outside of the field. By placing focus on the labor that the body does, I hope to highlight these moments of contact as not being isolated products of the mind or body alone, but as a constantly shifting conversation our beings have with the environments they move through.

Selves Through Contact

Before examining the labor of my body, I must first consider the body I am examining. What is 'my body'? Or more specifically, what aspects of my body am I aware of when conducting research? How do certain needs, like hunger, sleep, or mental health, impact how I consider my body in relation to fieldwork? I begin this inquiry by understanding my own body as a familiar stranger through noticing the dissonances I experience between my actions and intentions. Though I consider my body to be my own, there are times when I feel my body to be more than 'just me' through the actions I undertake in response to how I feel about myself or my surroundings. In her examination of how disease is conceived of and discussed in medical settings, Annemarie Mol (2002) puts forward the idea that no body or object is singular, and that attending to the reality of multiplicity and relationality is an action that intervenes in how objects and bodies are constructed. She argues that to limit a disease to existing as a singular event in a single body or to rely on medical knowledge alone misses a broader experience of the social, material, and biological networks that construct what it means to be a medical patient.

While this paper is not necessarily discussing a medical body, the idea that my physical body cannot be neatly categorized as a singularity of organic matter is pertinent to this discussion. Moreover, it inspires questions about the ways that I associate parts of my body as being fundamental to my identity. My body becomes me when I associate the organs, bones, etc. with some aspect of my 'self', and I make that association through action, through movement. In her discussion of biomedical tourism, Emily McDonald (2011) frames agency in subject formation through the idea of momentum, which suggests that "rather than enacting

motion, [I am] also caught up and enacted *by* motion" (484). This idea of momentum considers how moving across spaces acts to shape the subject within larger socio-political frameworks. I am transposing this idea to consider the movement that happens within the bio-scape of my own body in ways that ideologically shape or give voice to parts of my body that I may not otherwise consider.

At the moment I am writing this, I feel a slowly building pressure in my lower abdomen; I will have to go to the bathroom soon. In ways that are reminiscent of Andy Clark's "I am John's Brain" (1995), a short literary piece wherein the character of John's brain makes the case for the labor done that is hidden from John's consciousness, my own bladder is also moving and laboring in ways that are unbeknownst to me. It has an existence that is distinct from 'my' ideas, hopes, and desires, and there is no reasoning with it despite my best efforts. In spite of my intention to continue writing and despite the fact that I do not particularly want to go to the bathroom right now, I recognize this quickly filling bladder as being 'mine' and know that it is a consequence of the thirst I felt approximately an hour ago. I do not control these sensations of thirst or urinary relief, but nevertheless must place myself within these points of contact and must improvisationally respond and adjust to these movements and tensions produced seemingly adjacent to my own cognitive will. A bladder detached from a human body may be understood as being nonhuman in and of itself, but it becomes ideologically human when I recognize it as a factor that contributes to human life. Paying attention to the needs of the body and my relationship to it can not only disrupt my current action but can inspire a questioning of the conditions peripheral to my outlined field site that led to this 'disruption'. What were the circumstances I faced an hour ago that compelled me to drink so much? Why am I working against, or even upset by, the needs of my body?

To extend this further, this act of self-creation through contact does not occur solely within the confines of one's body but rather in interaction or communication with an externality that gives a body its bearings, providing a sense of orientation. In her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) more deeply asks what it means to have an orientation, or to understand where we are in relation to the things around us (15). This line of questioning helps us to immediately consider the idea of a self as a co-created concept, one that requires something or someone to be in relation to. It can also be one way to ask where the lines of a person can be drawn. I don't mean this in some kind of hypothetical or fantastical sense, inasmuch as the idea of a self is not already an imagining of one's relationship to the world.

I am not suggesting that I am anyone or anything other than what I truly consider to be my own self and vice versa; however, there are many factors that deeply shape and impact myself that do not exist or originate within my physical body. For example, the death of my cousin deeply impacted me, and I felt as though I had lost a part of my 'self' when he passed, though my visible physical being remained untouched. My ties with family or friends, my access to mobility, my ties to conceptions of race, gender, sex, class, or my interactions with works of art are just some examples of externalities that I consider to be central to 'who I am'. While these things are not necessarily physical parts of my body, I take steps to embody them in order to perform their ties to my identity; whether that be through my patterns of speech, through articles of clothing or jewelry I wear, or in how I moderate and regulate my actions or beliefs.

Understanding selves 'in relation to' challenges the idea of an individual as being an autonomous and wholistic entity echoes Marilyn Strathern's (1988) discussion of the "dividual" in her comparison of Melanesian and Western ideas of personhood. The notion of "dividual", or distributed individual, contends that a person is comprised of multiple separate factors and is therefore also able to be divisible. The clear self/other distinction being made here, and in other conversations of the plurality of personhood, has been criticized as being a dichotomous understanding of identity. In elucidation of this critique, Karl Smith (2012) asks for the consideration of selves as "porous subjects" that neither discount personal autonomy nor the external influences that shape personhood, suggesting that this "porosity" is fundamental to the constitution of the self.

Putting the idea of plural, fractal, or permeable selves in conversation with the previously addressed concept of McDonald's (2011) momentum suggests a more intimate relationship between 'subject' and 'surrounding' that physically and socially implicates subjects in their movements through or interactions with environments. Studies of mobility, which can be defined as "a complex assemblage of movement, social imaginaries and experience" (Salazar 2017, 6), consider the constantly variable nature of how a subject is constructed in relation to their surroundings and experiences, and vice versa. It is not just other people or ideas that help to shape a human experience, but the spaces that people are moving through and the objects they move with as well. For example, when I am driving to work (expanded upon below) I am putting myself directly in relation to the functionality of my car, to the road and weather conditions, and to other motorists

that will influence the ease of my journey. If I wake up to a particularly frigid morning and my car will not start, or if I run over a pothole and get a flat tire, my journey will be delayed or altered completely. While these relations are not central to what I will do at my intended destination, leaving space for these relations to matter allows for a more complex picture of what 'work' is and how it shapes me.

The study of spaces through the frame of mobility leans into previous rejections of the nature/culture binarism, wherein 'nature' is an inert entity to be manipulated and consumed and 'culture' signifies lively forms of human intervention (Castree 2001; Bennett 2010; Latour 2005). Just as I am able to enact motion upon my surroundings, they are also able react to me. Attuning to the ways in which environments and subjects impact each other is especially important for ethnography, as research takes place in a field site. In her book *Spatializing Culture*, Setha Low (2016) elucidates the unique contributions ethnography can make in conceptualizing and theorizing the constantly changing shapes of bodies in motion in relation to their surroundings. Significant for this essay, she positions explorations of emotional, affective, and embodied spaces as being essential to the experiencing and interpreting of spaces in ways that provoke new social and political possibilities and imaginings of space and place (146). The training that allows ethnographers to connect lived experiences, like the anxiety of being late for work, with larger theoretical frameworks, like the lack of care given to the self in neoliberal systems of production, makes room for reimaginings of what movement means for the human experience and how experiences of these interactions shape my perceptions and actions.

The ways that moving through a space is felt and embodied impacts how that space is conceived and how attuning to those experiences influences conceptions of the self in relation. In this way, one could argue that a 'self' is a constantly shifting entity that slightly changes with every new moment of contact. In the case of this essay for example, I feel that the ideas I am thinking about are very much a product of myself. I have had these thoughts and I have written them down. However, I have had these thoughts or have modified these thoughts after reading the thoughts that other people have written, or after talking to my colleagues and friends, or after having been cut off by another car while driving. I can also recognize that my current momentary identity extends beyond the confines of my relationship with this text (which has now become external to my own body). Are these thoughts me? Are these still me once they have left my body to statically exist on a page? Does their stasis represent a death? Does a 'self' have to be alive? I can feel myself reordering and reimagining these flickerings of thought and experience in a way that makes sense to me. I do not exist in a vacuum, but I do exist. My existence is touched by the world, and I also reach

out to touch back. By following the tensions that are corporeally presented to me, the buzz of caffeine I feel or the slight cramp in my foot from the position I am sitting in, I can question how this moment is existing around me and how I am moving in and with this space. Paying attention to the labors of the body in relation to the environments I move through provides me with a framework to isolate moments where I am able to understand how I am finding and responding to my own humanity in the environments I find myself in and how this directs and attunes my focus in particular ways.

This level and quality of attention is a monumental task, maybe an impossible one. After all, ethnographers are also human and there is only so much that a person can be aware of in every moment of every day. Rather than demand a kind of omnipresent hyper-attention, this paper asks only that a genuine striving for this level of attention be applied in considering the potentially overlooked marks of everyday experience left upon our bodies and in our research foci. It asks for a deeper consideration of how those points of contact may be shaping conceptions of value in research, and thereby shaping research itself. And it asks for an acceptance of the possibility of failure that will require a shift in research scope or approach. Along with the recognition of our co-constructed beings must also come the recognition that we too have an active role in the constructions of others, especially in fieldwork; and because of this, we have a responsibility to attend to how we come to value the importance of research questions and objectives.

We have a responsibility for how we are shaping ourselves and 'others' through our work. This "response-ability", as described by Karen Barad (2012) in their discussion of touching as understood through quantum field theory, questions what exactly constitutes the other and what constitutes the self on the level of particle matter. They position touching as an infinite alterity wherein touching the Other is touching all Others, including the 'self', and touching the 'self' entails touching the strangers within. … Touching is a matter of response. Each of 'us' is constituted in response-ability. Each of 'us' is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other (214–215).

By paying attention to moments of contact, I extend the associations that make my body-parts human to the surrounding environments I find myself in, making those environments also human-adjacent by my associations with them, and

possibly making myself less so through their association with me. In doing this, I hope to deepen understandings of how some interactions are privileged over others and how attention is produced in the field or how attention produces the field.

Driving as Relation

As previously stated, affect theory is broadly concerned with the transformations that occur in moments of contact. This is very much akin to the activity of driving itself. Drivers are required to enter a state of continual call and response with conditions that are constantly changing, and failure to adjust can result in frustrating or even deadly outcomes. In his study of traffic jams, physicist and civil engineer Boris Kerner (1999) discusses synchronized traffic flows, which occur when several cars across many lanes on a road are moving at generally the same speed. He notes that when there are changes to an existing traffic flow that has many vehicles, say a car abruptly changes its speed or merges into the existing traffic, there will be a slowdown in the overall traffic. Having been confronted with many a traffic slowdown myself, it is tempting to succumb to impatience and closely follow the car in front of you, either because you want it to speed up or to move out of your lane. However, doing this causes a fluctuation in the traffic flow that ultimately causes you and the cars behind you to apply the brakes, slowing the overall traffic flow. Counterintuitively, it is instead more effective to make allowances for the movements of a vehicle that disrupts a preexisting flow, by slowing down for example, allowing it to adjust to the collective speed so that the larger body of cars can maintain their forward momentum. How we react in moments of contact will have implications on the larger circumstances that we find ourselves in ways that will both effect ourselves and those around us. Approaching potentially unexpected interactions with an attitude of patience and cooperation can see benefits that extend beyond the initial bodies making contact.

Meera Atkinson (2018) has described affect as a "connective tissue between the human and nonhuman" (iii), and I will be exploring this space alongside the non-human body of my own car as well as other road fixtures that draw my attention–or the phonetically similar, *a-tension*, which I understand as a strongly concentrated and bodily felt moment of physical, mental, spiritual, and/ or emotional attunement that can disrupt moments of unawareness- through interaction. I understand *a-tension* as a labor of focus by recounting and theorizing

a series of moments on my drive to work. While going to work is peripheral to my research, it enables my research by providing me with a paycheck and can serve as a space where I am passively accepting conditions presented to me rather than having a specific research question be front of mind. In her article, "quiet theater: The Radical Politics of Silence", Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston (2018) explores the idea of "radical silence" as a way of generating knowledge in her dramatic storytelling sessions with Romani women in Poland. The space left in between different translations of the same story, or in the silences I experience when I consider how I come into relation with my surroundings, provides an opportunity for unsettling previously fixed distinctions of self and environment. Affective moments of felt understanding are infinitesimally brief, and yet are always already ongoing as a mode of engaging with one's experience of the world.

The opaque and plural nature of affect as a field of study makes it difficult, if not inherently impossible to identify as a solidly fixed object of discussion, and because of that I will use a narrative approach of elucidation in this essay going forward. As I have discussed elsewhere (Conte 2022), personal storytelling can serve as a vehicle for building community; and, this paper extends what defines community to include the human/nonhuman relations that also outline spaces and experience as worthy of notice. I will use personal storytelling to explicate the disruptions of my own expectations and discomforts in an effort to expose how my mind and body come into relation with my surrounding environments. Following recent explorations in literary anthropology that seek to both challenge how ethnography is presented and interrogate what writing and other modes of transmission can do in complicating and enriching understandings of the field (Culhane & Elliot 2017; Pandian & McLean 2017), I will intersperse my personal narrative with theoretical concepts I am using to understand my experience. I will abruptly switch between these literary and narrative explanations of my drive and the spaces between these transitions will require brief moments wherein you, my respected reader, will have to do the labor of switching between modes of transmission.

My hands grip the pliable rubber of the steering wheel as I sit at a red light. The traffic light is at the top of a hill, and today not only did I catch the red, but the several cars in front of me mean that my car is resting on an incline as I wait for the light to turn green. "That means that I'm sitting at like, what, a 40-degree angle?" I lean my head back against the head rest, nodding in time with the mu-

sic blasting from my car speakers, the vibratory hum of the idling of the engine shivering up my body. "This light is taking so long. I have about 20 minutes before class begins and I… Ah!" My foot is starting to cramp. I try wiggling my toes to release some of the tension. I'm jamming the brake pedal down so that I don't start rolling backward into the car behind me. "I like driving standard, but this is always the downfall. Hills. And I guess traffic. Haha, hills? Downfall? I crack myself up." The brake lights from the cars in front of me start flashing. "Finally, the green." Still pressing the brake pedal, I quickly shove the clutch pedal down hard with my other foot and throw the car into first gear. The cars ahead of me are starting to creep forward one by one. I release my death stomp on the brake and time my release of the clutch as I gingerly tap my right foot on the gas pedal. "Stalling now would not be ideal, the guy behind me is going to honk if I do. Geez, this hill is steep. I know it's early but come on, wake up!!" I release the clutch completely and, at the same time, slowly push down on the gas pedal, creaking forward in pace with the other cars.

The recognition of this event is focused neither purely on phenomenology, nor on discourse, but is rather a simultaneous experiencing of two (Reason & Lindelof 2016). In understanding ethnography through affect as a both sentient and embodied experience, I exercise various parts of myself to be in this space; my ability to physically operate my vehicle and navigate road conditions, my awareness and reactions to the presence of other drivers, my anxiety at the thought of being late or incurring the wrath of others, my ever persistent and eye-rollingly wry sense of humor. Through a continual call and response of slightly altering circumstances, I place my 'self' within a recognizable structure of identity or identities, in this case, one of which is being a capable driver on the road.

My foot strains against the gas pedal and I feel the weight of the car under me as I drive up and over the crest of the hill, and onward to the stretch of road leading to the highway. The engine revs, signaling me to quickly shift from first gear to second, from second to third. In my rear-view mirror, I see that the car behind me seems to be lagging. "Looks like he wasn't paying attention. I'm glad I'm not behind him, I'd probably get upset." I hear the whistle of the wind through the crack of my open window and the cold of it stings my face. It's December. "I thought there would be more snow on the ground, but there isn't really much. At least the roads are dry I guess, but it might not be a white Christmas. Christmas. I should really think about what I'm… Ugh, what's this guy doing?" I audibly exhale as the car in front of me begins to slow down, brake lights flashing a red warning. I feel frustration spike at the thought of a momentary delay. Looking ahead, I see a driveway on the right side of the road leading to a small industrial building. I try to look down the opposite lane to see if there is oncoming traffic.

"Maybe I can pass this guy… no, there's another car coming." The right turn signal light of the car in front of me begins blinking and I ease up on the gas, trying to leave enough space between us so that I don't actually have to push the brakes. The car turns into the driveway and I once again press down on the gas, a little harder than I meant to, and head toward the highway on-ramp.

Though my attention wanders to other aspects of my life or to different things I notice that are not related directly to driving, I am consistently drawn back to my role as a driver through moments of intensity, to potentialities of disruption in what I expect will come next (Massumi 2002, 26). I privilege these moments over the other mental, emotional, or physical intensities I experience because, despite my being a daughter/academic/gamer etc., in this moment, I have decided that being a driver is a more important role to attend to. These other nodes of identity do not disappear when I privilege one, and they may even be motivating my decision to privilege my current role. For example, I must go to work to afford gifts for my family, however those motivations are not explicit to me as I drive to work.

In her book, *Cruel Optimism,* Lauren Berlant (2011) describes the present as that which "makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else" (4). She goes on to say that what this present may become is a relational "cluster of promises" that sustain normative ideas of day-to-day life; however, these models of relationality may prove to be individually harmful or "cruel". Though I may want to think about what to get my family for Christmas, I cannot devote time to it if that *a-tension* disrupts my driving. My motivation for driving is to get to a place on time, another promise I have made, but this promise must also take a 'back seat' as I drive because I must work to be in relation to other cars on the road, any animals I might see on the sides of the road, and to the road itself. Other promises do not cease existing for me in this moment, but I do not give them equal attention and therefore am not attuning to whether or how they are motivating my current action or intention. By the fact of my driving a car alongside others, I am entering a social condition wherein I promise to drive 'well' and must therefore work to meet that standard of 'good' driving. My striving to meet this standard slightly silences other priorities I have and my emotional attunement to this activity, if guided by impatience, can enable me to disregard those I come into relation with who are not directly related to this activity.

My experiences of the present become centered around moments of intensity related to driving and the inconvenience caused by 'Other' people who aren't driving in the way that I expect them to or would like them to. My immediate response to the recognition of these events is to also do the work of trying to communicate this feeling by embodying this sense of frustration, even though I am alone in the car and the driver ahead of me cannot see my face or hear my frustrated exhalations. I perform my frustrations to an audience of one: me. Once aligned with my chosen priority, I unintentionally manage the display of my emotion to communicate a certain state of being that supports a predetermined objective that I have outlined for myself. In his discussion of drivers in L.A. getting pissed-off when other cars cut them off, Jack Katz (1999) discusses how these moments of frustration expose emotional meaning in everyday life. Examining an emotional response in a moment of frustration can inspire a person to orient themselves morally within the situation they're reacting to (48). When I am not in a rush, I do not provide similar demonstrations of frustration, even in cases where other drivers might be completely disregarding rules of the road. In this instance however, my performance reinforces a set of values I hold in that moment to myself. My frustration also results in my disregarding the circumstances of the driver who caused me a momentary delay. The tensions that present themselves to me during my drive, such as my reaction to a person turning off the road, are informed by larger circumstances of existence. However, I may not be consciously acknowledging those larger circumstances because of the stakes presented by the activity I am currently engaged in. Through closer examination, recognition of my reactions to disruptions I face can lead to a questioning of how or why I am responding that way. In this case, I can examine whether I am attempting to flatten or disregard the complex experience of a person who is not directly related to my primary goal and if that response is merited or aligned with my larger goals or intentions, rather than being confined to an activity that has displaced or monopolized my focus.

In discussing the temporalities of commuting, David Bissell (2014) draws on Bergson's notion of the virtual to critique a chronological accounting of time. Our capitalist models of production are structured around clock-based models of duration; however, the idea of the virtual, a pluri-bodied potentiality, suggests a folding or weaving of past and present that belies linear progression and can resist a capitalist chronology. Even though I take this road every day, every drive is different because "…each experience in time alters the constitution of bodies and milieus" (1950). Each time is constituted of different unknown potentialities, my own state of being included in those unknowns. In terms of ethnographic fieldwork, it is through doing the work of recognizing these re-constitutions or disruptions, leaving room for silences, and tracing the reactions and *a-tensions* that may lead to deeper understandings of a situation. The car turning into the driveway is following the rules

of the road. However, because that driveway does not fit into a predetermined idea of what *my* day entails and in fact causes me a five second delay in 'beginning' my day or keeping the promise of arriving at my destination in the time I am expected to, this moment of relational contact causes me frustration. Noticing this hiccup in what I expected might lead me to ask questions that expand the understanding I have of the space within this moment. Why did this seemingly inconsequential interaction frustrate me? If I am worried about being on time, why didn't I leave earlier? Well, I woke up late. Am I not considering my health enough? Am I overworking myself? Will doing that be beneficial in the long term? How? In the moment of this interaction, this car does not fit into the frame of what I have already chosen to care about in a way that will move my narrative forward. I am also not considering the toll that my selected preoccupations are taking on other aspects of my life, including the ways in which my 'self' is being depleted by the "cruel" attunements that I am attending to. By recognizing the tensions in my own reaction to this event, I am given an opportunity to question the value and logic of that narrative in a way I would not if I ignored my momentary frustration.

This decision of what matters to me fits into a larger discussion around a politics of care, which has been defined as "an affectively charged and selective mode of attention that directs action, affection, or concern at something, and in effect, it draws attention away from other things" (Martin et al. 2015, 11). In this moment I have chosen to direct care toward my career. I am performing frustration at the thought of being late to reinforce the importance of that objective to myself, but one of the factors influencing my tardiness is a lack of care directed toward my own health and wellbeing. Examining my frustrated response is an opportunity to question where I am placing value and enacting care and why. The work I do in resisting the desire to let these interactions pass uncritically by changes how I am considering my surroundings and how I am existing in relation. It provides an opportunity to notice a disconnect between a theoretical outcome and the lived reality in a way that can inspire the creation of a new research objective, or alternatively, to reconsider preexisting objectives that are not centered around my drive to and from the site of interest. The resulting form of labor shifts my attention, or *a-tension*, (in this case, my diverted focus caused by the literal tension in my body as I drive my car and worry about being late) from striving to meet an expected standard of what it means to drive well to also considering what these tensions I am experiencing might mean beyond the act of just driving.

CAPACIOUS

In giving space for *a-tension* to the body and the spaces it moves through, I am also providing myself with an opportunity to question the validity and value of the activities I'm engaged in. As I give awareness and energy to the singular factors I identify while driving, I am participating in a larger narrative of what it means to drive and am actively working to meet the conditions surrounding the narrative of this activity. However, this activity is not removed from time and space and I am doing this in conjunction with other commitments and intentions I am striving to achieve. By attuning to tensions or intensities that are present to me, I enact an affective labor of value and care that helps to locate and question my present identity and sensibilities of value. Doing the work of noticing what, why, and how I am privileging certain moments of intensity over a multitude of simultaneous others does the work of allowing me to better identify where and how I am in relation to the larger worlds I move through and what matters to me, both in 'important' spaces like a fieldsite and in more mundane spaces such as this moment of driving.

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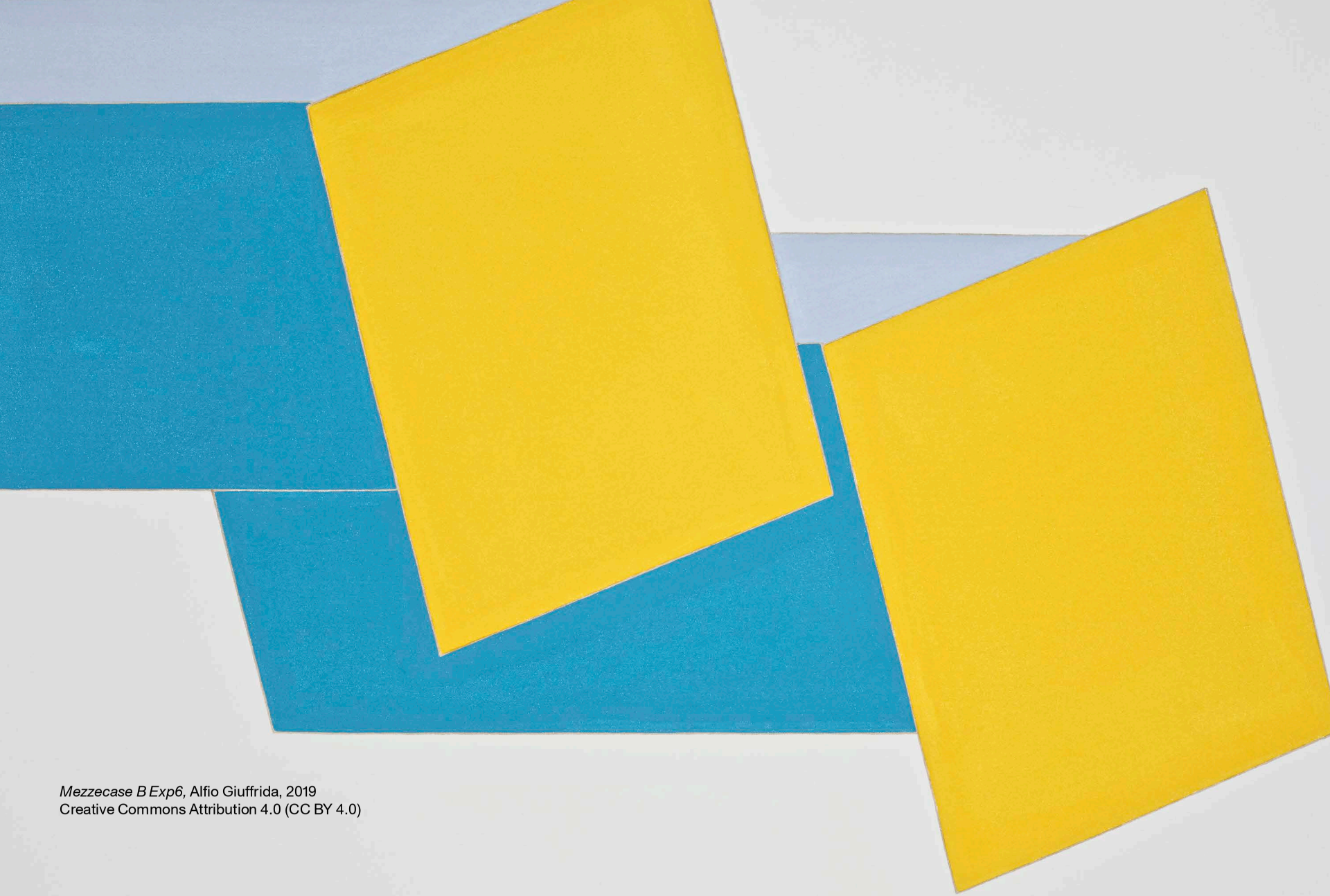

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HOW INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THEFT FEELS

Jordan Alexander Stein
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

Having your intellectual property stolen feels like nothing else. My story starts in 2014, when I did something that my fellow English professors sometimes do and undertook an editing project. The idea was to put together a modern reader's edition of selected writings by the New England Puritan minister Cotton Mather—a challenging and prolific writer, and one who hadn't seen an updated edition in almost half a century. It was a big job. The research and proposal writing took about a year and half, and in the summer of 2016 I got in touch with an editor, Martha, at a respected university press. She was encouraging and sent my proposal out to two blind peer reviewers. The first gave a green light, but the second review was thunderously, almost cartoonishly damning—generally approving of the project itself but, humiliatingly, insisting that I was unqualified to execute my own idea. Martha was no longer encouraging, and the university press turned me down. Discouraged, embarrassed, and then emotionally sidelined by the aftermath of the 2016 election three weeks later, I never pitched the project anywhere else.

There the matter rested until December 2021, when an advertisement email alerted me that the very same respected university press was to publish a modern reader's edition of selected writings by the New England Puritan minister Cotton Mather. It also had the same title I'd proposed. Surprised, a little confused,

I googled the website/catalog page and read the book description copy:

> Cotton Mather (1663–1728) has a wide presence in American culture, but very few people have ever read a significant portion of his work. The sheer volume of Mather's corpus makes it challenging. In his sixty-five years, he was responsible for some of the most important contributions to history, medicine, and theology in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in addition to having written some 450 books and pamphlets, hundreds of sermons, and thousands of letters. This wide-ranging volume includes topical selections on autobiography and meditation; New England history; gender, childrearing, and education; natural science and medicine; mercantilism and paper money; biblical interpretation; Salem witchcraft; race, slavery, and servitude; Native Americans and captivity; and pietism, world missions, and millennialism. This reader will serve as both a reference for scholars and a textbook for students and should help bring renewed attention to this important figure.

Disbelief starts in the body. As I read these sentences, my breath started to feel heavy, my laptop screen began to feel farther and farther away. Almost automatically, as if I were watching someone else do it, I closed my browser and went searching in my files for my five-year-old proposal. Its opening paragraph read:

> Cotton Mather is the best known Puritan you've never read. The sheer volume of Mather's corpus makes it inaccessible. In his 65 years, he was responsible for some of the most important contributions to history, medicine, and theology in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as well as having authored dozens of pamphlets, hundreds of sermons, thousands of letters, and, according to his modern biographer, "probably handwrote as much as any human being ever has." In addition to this unwieldy volume of writing, the carelessness with which some of Mather's texts have been reprinted means that the most available texts are not the most reliable. *A Cotton Mather Reader* seeks to gather selections from this voluminous corpus into a single, representative volume, which would serve as both a reference for scholars and a textbook for students.

While not identical, these paragraphs carried the same meaning, with sentences in the same order and more-than-coincidentally similar syntax. The overlap between my proposed volume and this actual one overwhelmed me.

Dumbstruck, I emailed Martha and for good measure queried George, one of the two editors of the new volume, with whom I was very casually acquainted. Martha repeatedly put me off ("I'm out this week with COVID and a quarantined family" ran one excuse; "thank you for noting that error with the copy!" ran another, as though I were reaching out after five years just to do her a favor). After several exchanges she finally asserted that the whole matter was likely a confusion between two distinct projects, "an inadvertent error" perpetuated by "a former assistant at the Press [who] inadvertently went into your proposal file rather than accessing the correct proposal for the project we ultimately signed." She really seemed to stress the inadvertent-ness. Martha's email cc'd George who nonetheless contradicted her determination to separate our two projects out, in a reply that volunteered that he'd been the author of the damning 2016 review of my proposal and "Subsequently" (his word!) proposed the forthcoming volume to Martha, the very same editor I'd worked with. In addition to unabashedly owning this conflict of interest like it was nothing, George's email took the time to remind me that "I was not impressed by your pitch."

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What I had wanted was an explanation and, maybe, something like amends—something that would restore the dignity and whatever else was taken from me in that disbelieving moment when I came across a version of what seemed so clearly to be my intellectual property repackaged as someone else's. Instead, I got the weird combination of a run-around and a braggadocious admission of what, by just about any definition, would be unethical professional behavior. It was difficult to know what to do next, because between the tiny community of scholars of seventeenth-century Puritanism and the not-for-much-profit world of academic publishing, my case was pretty singular. Thinly disguised thefts in these circles happen about as infrequently as people openly bragging about conflicts of interest. But it was 2021, so I did the thing that one does: I posted screen grabs on Facebook.

This, it turns out, was a very helpful thing to do. My social media contacts tend professional, and a post that waived the upside-down flag of academic distress yielded generous comments and DMs. People shared with me in confidence that they had been among the various readers for my proposal or for George's subsequent accepted proposal, or had ins with the university press, and in either case

knew from their work that some of my proposal language—that is, my intellectual property—had from the near-beginning been attached to George's project, though, as with the more public website copy to which I'd objected, nothing had ever disclosed its source as mine until now. In addition to being very kindly outraged on my behalf over what looked at best like supreme carelessness, but was likely more serious depending on how deep it all went, a few people expressed dismay that they had unwittingly abetted an apparent intellectual property theft by participating in peer or board reviews undertaken in what one person reasonably called "bad faith." (It is perhaps beside the point that from these communications with about a half dozen people who were directly involved in some stage of the review process, only George, the person who eventually got the job editing this volume, had expressed any objections to my doing it in the first place. Of course the situation might not be what it looks like, even though wow does it look like that.)

If I didn't want the runaround, and if no one was going to admit any kind of responsibility, let alone try to make amends, then it seemed like it was up to me to take some more weighty action. A fever of work set in. I began pulling together my evidence. I went back to the people who had reached out and asked what they were willing to say on and off record. I took meetings with law professors, colleagues, deans, university legal counsel, four senior humanities editors at different university presses, and multiple officers from the Association of University Presses. I wrote a ten-page, 5200-word informal discovery document, outlining what my intellectual property was and wasn't, and what had happened to it without my authorization, before identifying some questions that remained to be answered regarding who was responsible. Friends and colleagues (and my very, very patient partner) offered continuous support. Their overwhelming battle cry was "Sue! Sue!" But to do so, it turned out, was next to impossible.

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I feel strongly that my intellectual property was taken from me, but such is not an easy thing to prove before the law. Intellectual property theft is a complex, evolving legal area, one that federal courts seem almost deliberately slow to create precedents around. Further complicating my situation is the fact that I never edited the collection of Mather's writings in question, and so the volume that has now been published seems unmistakably related to mine—the same idea, the

same subject, the same title, and very much the same university press editor, to say nothing of the fact that George had full access to my proposal before drafting his—without exactly being mine. (On the other hand, the language of my proposal, used in the website ad copy, is almost without question my intellectual property as defined by the 1976 US Copyright Act; it was also taken off the website within two business days of my initial email query without my having to ask.) The readiest analog might be the incident from 2014 where Evgeny Morozov reviewed Eden Medina's *Cybernetic Revolutionaries* in the *New Yorker*, summarizing the book but scarcely mentioning Medina, creating a narrative that made it a little too easy for readers to walk away thinking her ideas were Morozov's own. (Social media outrage was about the only definitive response in that instance too.) Of course we borrow ideas from one another all the time, but where writing is concerned, sourcing, citing, and giving credit are standard best practices. The practice of citation gets more complicated, however, when the idea we're borrowing has no proof of concept—when it's something you said, or something you made me think, rather than something you wrote and published. While the theft of ideas that don't have a full proof of concept surely happens, it's also the grayest part of an already gray area.

If the law is ambiguous in my case, the house rules are too. Intellectual property policies feature increasingly in university governance, as you'll see if you head over to the website for just about any university. These policies outline who owns the research that happens on campus or by those employed there. In the absence of clear, uniform legal guidelines governing intellectual property at the federal level, university policies vary hugely by institution, in part because the kinds of research that happens at universities does too—ranging from large science or engineering programs where researchers may be eligible for patents to more classically academic environments where professors publish books that only other professors read. Policy gets more elaborate, and often more explicit, when a lot of money rides on the intellectual property. But it's probably safe to say not much money is at stake in the case of an edition of Cotton Mather's writings. And so it is perhaps no surprise that no university policy that I've seen makes clear sense of my situation.

From the perspective of a university, cribbing a written proposal for an idea without a proof of concept would fall more squarely into the category of academic misconduct. This comparatively modest category is an ethical one, governing things like cheating, plagiarism, or the catch-all 'academic dishonesty.' It would be cynical, though not exactly false, to say that universities only treat academic

misconduct as an ethical rather than legal issue because money isn't at stake. As long as you don't profit financially from stealing someone's idea, or from not giving credit, or from lying or cheating, we can call this a moral wrong—and those make good lessons, which, after all, are what universities are supposed to teach. Accordingly, the accused in a majority of academic misconduct cases would seem to be students, whose primary currency inside the university classroom is not dollars but grades, as well as the lofty ideas of merit and honor that go with them. In more or less the same ways, the rules for academic misconduct govern faculty too, in the rare cases when they plagiarize one another, falsify data, or pilfer from student research. And though academic misconduct is almost always adjudicated by the academic side of the university (that is, it reports up to the Provost or senior academic officer and not to HR), its purview can extend to staff, especially when their jobs put them into contact with university research. Or, at least, that's what I discovered when I launched an academic misconduct review against Martha, the university press editor who accepted a proposal from George despite his conflict of interest about which she almost certainly knew.

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When people take your intellectual property, they also take a lot of your time. I spent two weeks writing that ten-page informal discovery document, during which period I did almost nothing else. Between the writing and all the phone calls, emails, and meetings, all the reading up on case law and precedents, I feverishly donated at least 100 hours to the outcome of a research project I'd abandoned, however unhappily, five years before.

A compulsion to defend myself drove that work—to defend the integrity of my research as a professional, yes, but if I'm being honest also to defend against the more cutting, more personal senses of humiliation and shame that can accompany being taken advantage of. Working like this in the name of self-protection is arguably an academic skill, at least inasmuch as one of the frequently unspoken facts about the version of research I do for a living is that it can make a person feel rather vulnerable. Unlike the kind of researchers who invent or discover things, most humanities professors research well-enough known books and objects and people, with the charge to present them to, or interpret them for, larger audiences. The things I study are what they are, and my job is to make them interesting. To do this work successfully, I find, involves figuring out how to be interesting

myself. Ultimately I'm not the one up for interpretation, yet for most English professors there's often no "my research" without me. And that's some pressure. Like every job, it gets easier when you learn the ropes, but from point to point in my research career, with each new book or object or person toward which I turn my attention, I find myself very aware that I'll never know less about how to present this material than I do now. Who wouldn't feel a little vulnerable?

The reason I gave up weeks of my life to making a case against the people who took my intellectual property, therefore, was not because I wanted bad things to befall them, but because I was desperately trying to dodge the bad thing that was happening to me. That dodging, though, gave a conscious form to something it turns out I'd been doing for a while without realizing. Having to look back at the past five years of my career, I suddenly saw that I'd mostly stopped researching and publishing on Puritan writers. Nor in that time had I attended even a single one of the field's multiple annual conferences. All the Mather books in my office had been pushed into a corner where I now found them hibernating under five winters of dust. The humiliation I had felt years before as a response to the *ad hominem* nature of George's reader report had knocked me off my professional course. It had happened by no means necessarily, and perhaps not on anyone's part deliberately, but, I reluctantly found myself admitting, it had happened absolutely. Now, as I worked, I wondered sincerely whether it could still be possible to find some closure and, maybe, a way to course-correct. The 5200-word discovery document was written with care not just for the facts of what had happened, but with a sense of urgency for what might still be possible.

With the discovery document finished, I got in touch with the academic misconduct folks at the Provost's office of the university that lends its name to the press where Martha works. They asked for an hour-long meeting. They asked for my documentation. They listened when I said I didn't want to sue, or get anyone fired, or have the book pulped. They heard me say I just wanted the parties responsible to own up to what looked a lot like intellectual property theft and, if appropriate, apologize. They were kind, took notes, and seemed engaged. They said they'd call back in a week about next steps. They said I could then decide how to proceed. I left feeling hopeful. Maybe the time I'd put in was worth it. Maybe I had dodged something after all.

But they didn't call. I let two weeks pass before I followed up over email. Their prompt reply was that the case was under investigation and all matters under investigation are confidential and could not be discussed. This wasn't what we'd agreed to. I said I was prepared to respect the confidentiality of the process pro-

vided that I could discover its outcome. They said the outcome was confidential. I asked if they could at least let me know when the process was concluded—let me know, in other words, that there was an outcome. That too turns out to be confidential. I pleaded, and they said they'd see what's possible. Like Martha when she replied to my out-of-the-blue email after five years, the folks at the Provost's office acted like I put in the work on this case because I was doing them a favor. More than six months later they pulled me in for a second hour-long interview. I complied but stressed that I wanted to know the outcome, to have some closure. Another five months went by, after which I received a five-sentence email marked "Confidential." It concluded that the Inquiry Committee found that there was insufficient evidence of "plagiarism," and they now consider the matter closed. The email misspelled "consider." The more serious mistake, though, was that charge I brought forward had been intellectual property theft, not plagiarism. It appears they spent eleven months investigating the wrong thing.

I'll never know why the university switched the charges, but a few possibilities come to mind. It's possible that academic misconduct turns out not to be that serious after all, and the investigation was a blow off, more a formality than anything. Another possibility may be that academic misconduct is quite serious, and perhaps the evidence I submitted was alarming or damning enough to leave the university in a position where following through would mean it would have to admit too much. A third possible though more nefarious reason, which does not preclude either of the previous two, is that the institution closed ranks. Whether the case I'd made was serious or not, whatever needed to happen would happen inside of this university community. This is, of course, only a possibility, and it may not have been anyone's intention to make me feel external to my own petition for justice. But I guess my ego was wrapped up enough with the process that I will admit that having my 5200 submitted words mischaracterized in a five-sentence reply probably would have felt unsatisfying even if there hadn't been a glaring typo.

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We often speak about "lying and cheating" in the same breath, but they're not really the same kind of activity. Perhaps they have the same effect, but often they have quite distinct motives. People cheat because they can get away with it, because no one is going to stop them, because it's an easy way to get what they want. On the other hand, people usually lie because they got caught, because the truth is awful

or unbearable or hurtful, or because lying is the only possible way to get what they want. Taking my intellectual property is cheating. So is George's self-declared conflict of interest. But this kind of cheating is easily done because I'm nobody important, engaged in research that makes little money and gets little notice, and because if there is any accountability for this kind of cheating, well, as we've seen, it's confidential. No one ever has to look me in the eye. But when I pressed Martha and George about what looked to me like their cheating, it turns out I had backed them into enough of a corner that she at least seemed to prevaricate.

In the end, though, it's not the lies that I can't stop thinking about so much as one awkward truth, the line in Martha's email: "I'm out this week with COVID and a quarantined family." She wrote this, I believe, to put me off, but I have no reason to think she was lying about having COVID or a quarantined family. Even in my reply email where I made clear that I wasn't going to be put off, I nonetheless found myself saying "sorry you're dealing with that!" COVID is apparently not a fate I would wish even on people who hurt me.

It's not easy for me to explain to myself why I feel this sympathy, nor is it clear that feeling it is a good thing. Still, it is something I do happen to feel, and it seems to me all these months later that whatever kind of connection my sympathy sparks or is sparked by is maybe another version of what I was asking for when I wanted Martha and George to make amends. I thought and continue to think they were wrong to treat the rather humble bit of work that I do as a researcher like it was raw material to be extracted for their own ends. Their doing so cost me some dignity, made me doubt myself, and wasted a lot of my time. My response was to wish that some great unspoken but shared ethical standard would prevail over their infraction, and so my imagination pictured Martha, George, and I trying to figure out how to repair that breach of dignity and reestablish trust—to, in other words, figure out how to have a human relationship. We were all part of the same little academic world, after all. I guess I wanted the people who knocked me off course to have sympathy that they did so. My wish all along had been that intellectual property was something that could be adjudicated in ethical terms, but, as it eventually became clear to me, this wish turns out to be the most outlandish piece of the whole story.

The kind of humane restitution that I thought should come to me is poorly reflected in the ways that universities operate, and intellectual property is a symptom of the problem. If Martha lied to cover up her and George's cheating, well, what choice did she have? To apologize would be to admit fault, to implicate herself and possibly expose her employer to liability. Something more than an ethical relationship between us would suddenly have been at stake, and, miserably, that possible exposure

made an ethical relationship impossible. Universities meanwhile don't operate at merely human levels; they have more abstract things like brands to protect. From their perspective, this kind of dust-up wouldn't be about personal relationships, even when financial considerations are not involved. (Never mind that the university whose press Martha works for and which has published George's edition of Mather is so incomprehensibly wealthy, and again the money at stake would be so little, that even the upper-limit damages from any hypothetical lawsuit of mine would be to them about as negligible as a rounding error). More typically, the issue is about the priceless thing called reputation. Universities do not want to be seen as having done something for which any liability must be assumed. What universities seek to protect is symbolic. And they protect it very well.

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Intellectual property theft is a fairly new and still evolving story, and new stories require new genres. One of the problems I've had in coming to terms with what happened to me is how it has left me grasping after a genre in which to locate it. My allusion to the Morozov/Medina incident notwithstanding, our culture doesn't have something like "the intellectual property story," certainly not with the worked-out formulae by which it has situation comedies or superhero movies. There are of course plenty of ways to tell stories of violence and victimhood or of people who are subject to theft or violation, including stories where social institutions treat you as expendable in the moments you're already most vulnerable. Though elements of all these narratives are part of the story I've been trying to tell, they don't quite capture what I feel. Without the right way to talk about or explain or give a framework for those feelings, I'm stuck with something like, "one time a couple of people in my professional orbit did some pretty shitty things whose negative consequences were, as far as I know, littered across my life only." If there's a genre, it's not the victim story, but the story of what it feels like to be collateral damage.

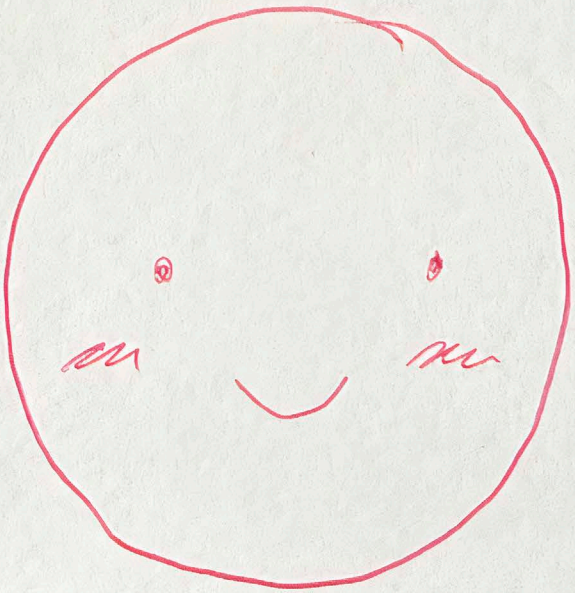
The overdetermined, almost ridiculous irony of the whole thing is that the unusually pinpoint-able origin of my attempt to put together a collection of Mather's writings was my curiosity about one of his associates whose life had become collateral damage in more ways than one. I date my interest in Mather to a 2002 essay by Professor Janice Knight about Mercy Short, a fifteen-year-old in 1690 who witnessed the violent deaths of her mother, father, and three siblings when French and Abenakis forces raided her frontier town of Salmon Falls in what's now

Maine. Orphaned, captured as a prisoner of war, redeemed after eight months, and then "freed" to a life of domestic servitude in Boston, by the summer of 1692 Short succumbed to a painful and violent episode of demonic possession brought on by the local epidemic of witchcraft. Possession caused her to hallucinate, to blister, and, in some combination of rage and sacrilege, to tear a page from a Bible. Short even lost the ability to speak, and the chief record of her experiences—the reason she exists to history at all—is a testimony penned by Cotton Mather.

Before reading Knight's essay, Mather lived in my imagination mostly for his theologically dubious treatise about the infamous Salem witch trials (well, that and for his brief cameo in the mid-1970s Marvel Comics Team Up series, opposite the Scarlet Witch, naturally). What I knew, in other words, was Mather as one of history's great blundering bad guys. Reading about his minstration of pastoral care to an endangered soul like Mercy Short revealed an unexpected side of Mather's personality. It defied everything I knew about his reputation to witness his display of patience and compassion toward a young woman rendered non-verbal by her encounter with two unthinkably massive traumatic experiences in rapid succession. I was touched to read that Mather even forgave Short for tearing the page from his Bible—touched enough to see that there was more complexity and far more room to appreciate this man than I'd assumed.

The things I study are what they are, and my job is to make them interesting. Here, I thought, was a rather special chance. How many people thought about Mather the way I used to, if they ever thought of him at all? Even among scholars the Mercy Short episode was not prominently known. Mather copied Short's testimony and titled it *A Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning*, though it was never published in his lifetime and the only printed transcription is in a collection of narratives of witchcraft cases, published in 1914 and long out of print. The unique and fragile seventeenth-century manuscript lives at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, but, not having been granted the chance to edit a volume of Mather's writings, needless to say, I never got to see it. Nor is it included in George's volume.

You're a Natural!



GREETING CARDS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

Craig Campbell
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

In 1971 it cost only 50¢ for an eight page list of twenty-five Greeting Card companies in the USA and Canada that were buying greetings, captions, and ideas from hopeful writers.[1] By 1976 the "Greeting Card Market List" had eighteen pages and cost $1.00. In that list, AMBERLY GREETING CARD COMPANY advertised: "We want all studio captions, including odd titles. Light on relative birthday. Friendship cards in the studio line are on the downgrade, so we are buying very little of this caption now. No mechanical gadgets. No conventional cards. Belly laugh humor, cut humor, and risqué are accepted." BRILLIANT ENTERPRISES of Santa Barbara, California was looking for message of a "highly original nature, emphasizing subtlety, simplicity, insight, wit, profundity, beauty, and felicity of expression….Messages should be of universal appeal, capable of being appreciated by all types of people and of being easily translated in to other languages." CREATIVE PAPERS, INC. of Keene, NH "Buys ideas for soft line, conventional, and inspirational cards. Everyday cards. Verses for animals in human situations. Pleasant humor, with country look." FEITH, STRAUSS & ASSOCIATES, INC. of New York, NY was paying $10 for their "Flubbies mini-card line" which was in need of "short, whimsical copy based on love, friendship, and I-miss-you lines." SANITA DESIGNS, INC. of New York NY buys Black oriented cards only. Studio, birthday, get well, all occasion, seasonal captions for Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day, Christmas, etc. Buys 'hip captions relating to blacks.'" SHOLOM GREETING CARD CO.,INC of Mt. Vernon, NY advertised that it "Publishes Yiddish/American humor cards and Hebrew greeting cards for all occasions" For their part, the corporate behemoth Hallmark was also buying (though at a significantly lower rate). They offered some advice for authors: "Brevity is the soul of wit, so eliminate all copy that has little or nothing to do

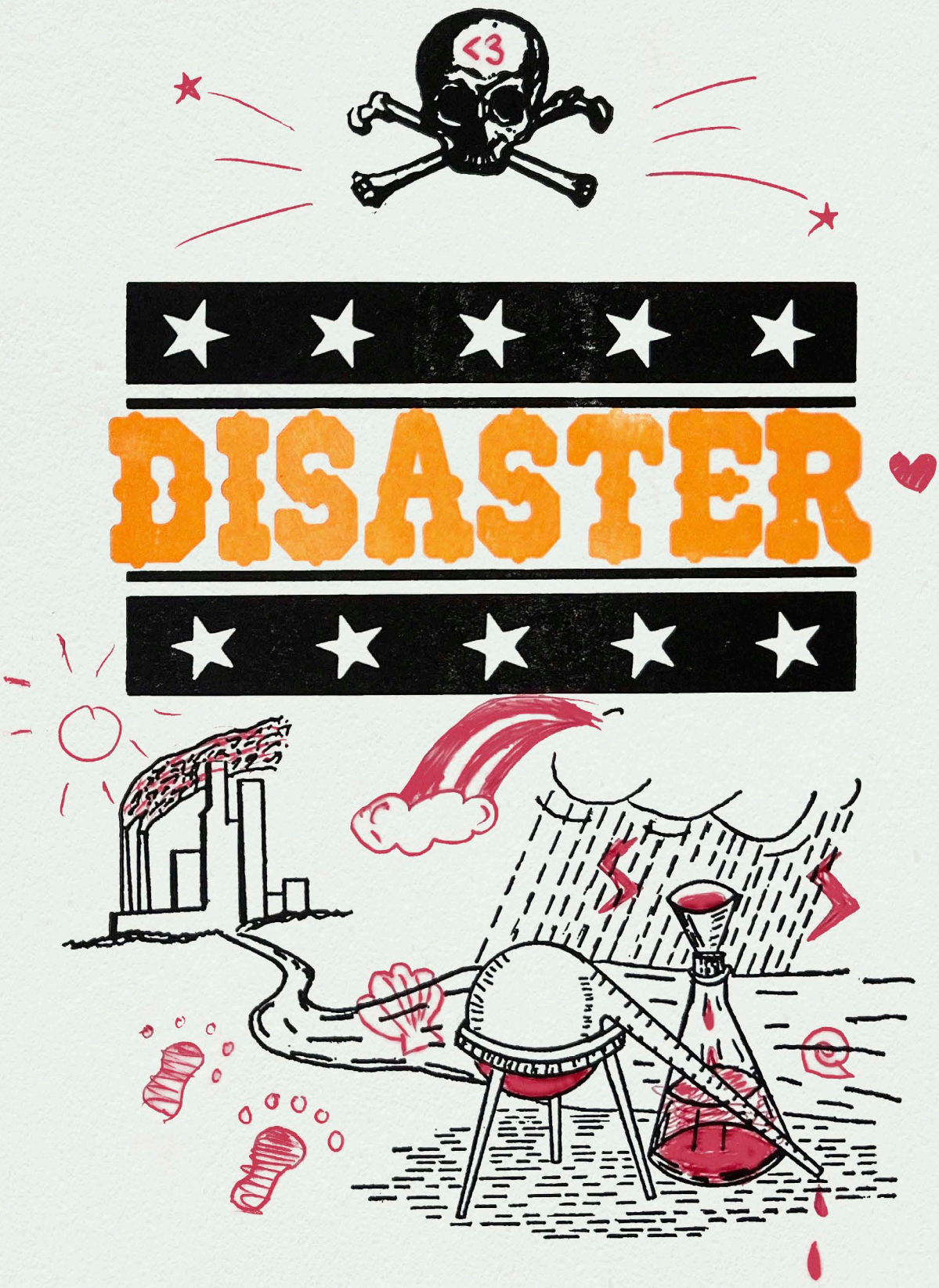
Hi the lil' leo in me,

I'm writing to apologize for all the single use plastic me & the tattooing community have created. We're trying I promise it's just that there is truly not many alternatives we can choose from. Biodegradable wrappings & dental dams are expensive while plastic is so accessible. Prideful? Maybe. Egoistic? Probably. Where's the line between sanitary & environmentally friendly? I'm trying I promise.

I'll be better,

Stacy N.

"You're a Natural!" Was made in one of our first design workshops in 2019. The card was donated by Stacy N. to our archive.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DISASTER

with either the greeting or the gag; pay close attention to the greeting, since a hilarious gag stands a greatly lessened chance of being bought if there is really no reason to send the card; avoid slams, and make the recipient laugh; don't hurt his feelings; avoid obscene reference; avoid ethnic and political reference; avoid archaic expressions; be funny, say something nice to someone, but in a funny way. For example, "We were going to get you two birthday cards…one from each of us…(inside is a drawing of a woman with man holding a yoyo)… but somebody spend his 35¢ foolishly. Happy birthday!"

In 2019, under the auspices of the Bureau for Experimental Ethnography, we launched the Greeting Cards for the Anthropocene project.[2] We sought to understand climate feelings first by making cards for an invented category of 'Climate Catastrophe' in the greeting card aisle of the local pharmacy. Second, we put the cards into the world by holding letter writing events. These events or composition parties set up a structured experience whereby participants were given prompts and addressees (your mother, yourself in 20 years, a species under threat of extinction, etc.). Participants were then encouraged to share their letters for our archive. Unsurprisingly, it is in these compositions that the project moves from an interesting concept to a fascinating intrapersonal activation. H. Joseph Chadwick, author of the *Greeting Card Writer's Handbook* describes the essence of the greeting card as a 'me-to-you-message.' The me-to-you-message might initiate a relationship or, more likely, it might contribute to maintaining one. In the context of our project the greeting card functions as an elaborate prompt unfolding into a broader conceptual scenography made up in the new structures of feeling emergent through variegated landscapes of social media and increasingly urgent calls for radical and transformative action. It is in this setting that writers encounter their climate thoughts within the constraints of the card and the moment. The lie of interiority is exposed as public feelings caught along the way of becoming positions, articulations, or just stories.

In this contribution to *Capacious* we feature three cards from our Climate Catastrophe series: "You're a Natural," "Love Like Plastic," and "Hey Earth Being!" We've collected cards left explicitly for our archive: private messages shared in public. "You're a Natural" features the message that Stacy N. wrote to "little leo in me" and left for our archive—evidence of everyday expression entangled in a culture of sentiments. It is a token of affection tethered to one of affliction and culpability in the shadow of grim weather worlds.

"Love Like Plastic" was a collaborative design by Craig Campbell and Hannah Hopkins (with input from Ian Ferris) in 2023. Designed around Valentine's day, we set ourselves the goal of developing a non-humorous card, something more conventional or even inspirational.

"Hey Earth Being!" was designed by Craig Campbell while on a residency with Power & Light Press in Silver City, New Mexico (2023). The card was inspired by Donna Haraway's call for interspecies care and kinship.


MAKE KIN
NOT BABIES!

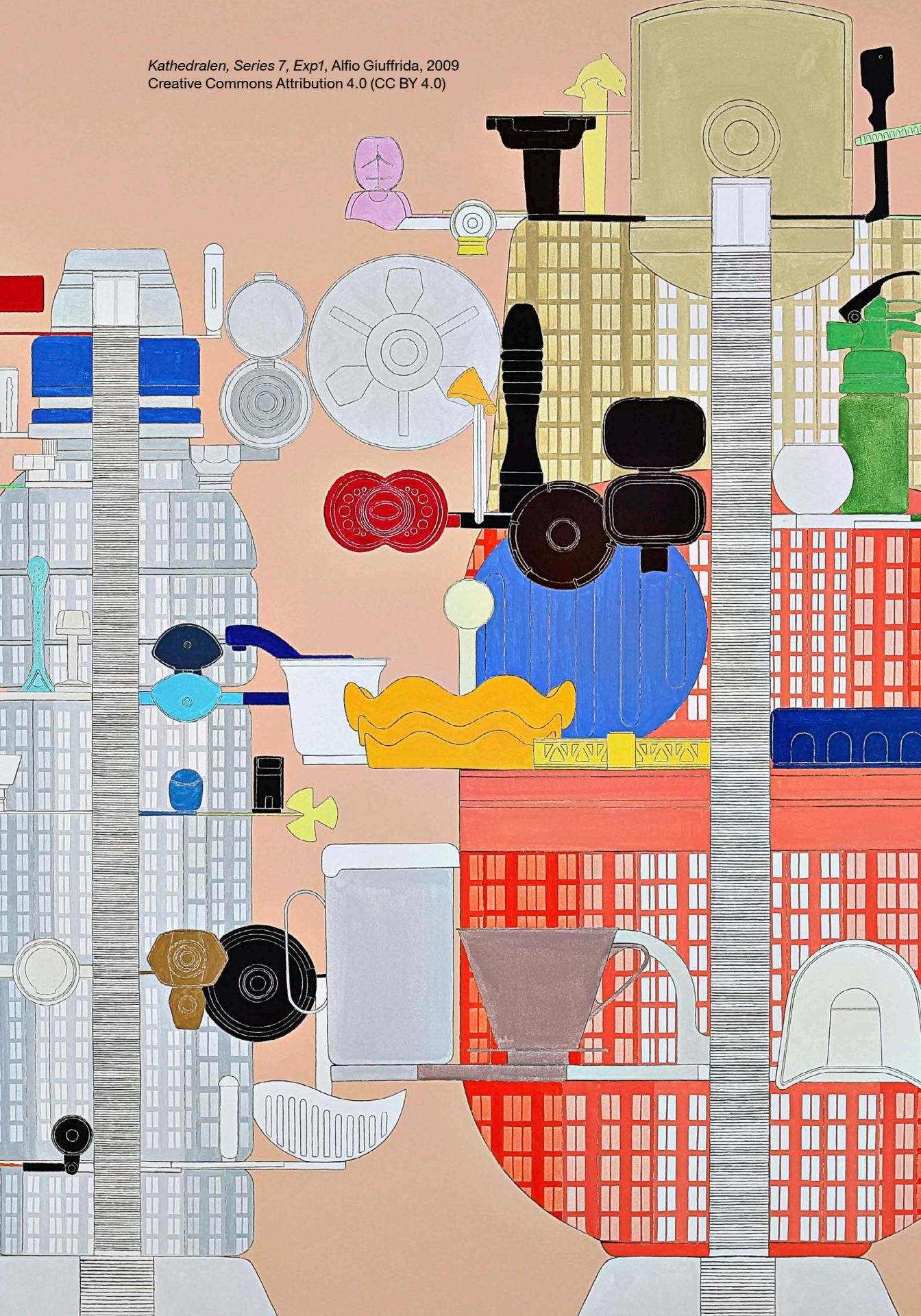
To our knowledge the Market List mentioned above is no longer compiled or published. Nonetheless, in the spirit of speculative critique we submit our entry nonetheless:

> BUREAU FOR EXPERIMENTAL ETHNOGRAPHY, 3501 Goodwin Ave. Austin, TX. 78702. Editor: C. Campbell. Interested in outstanding ideas for Greeting the Anthropocene line: Informal and everyday cards for catastrophic occasions. Lines are typically brief because all type is handset. Refer to Rob Roy Kelly American Wood Type Collection for typeface recommendations. Buys whimsical and humorous ideas. Also particularly interested in sincere copy but does not want to see traditional verse and poetry. No why-don't-you-write cards unless related to extinct species. Copy featuring expressions of hate and resentment will be considered along with calls for political action, monkey wrenching, revolution, violence against the petroleum industry, etc. Humor can be hard or soft, dark is welcome. Novelty and studio cards ok. Pays $1.25 for original ideas that are used.

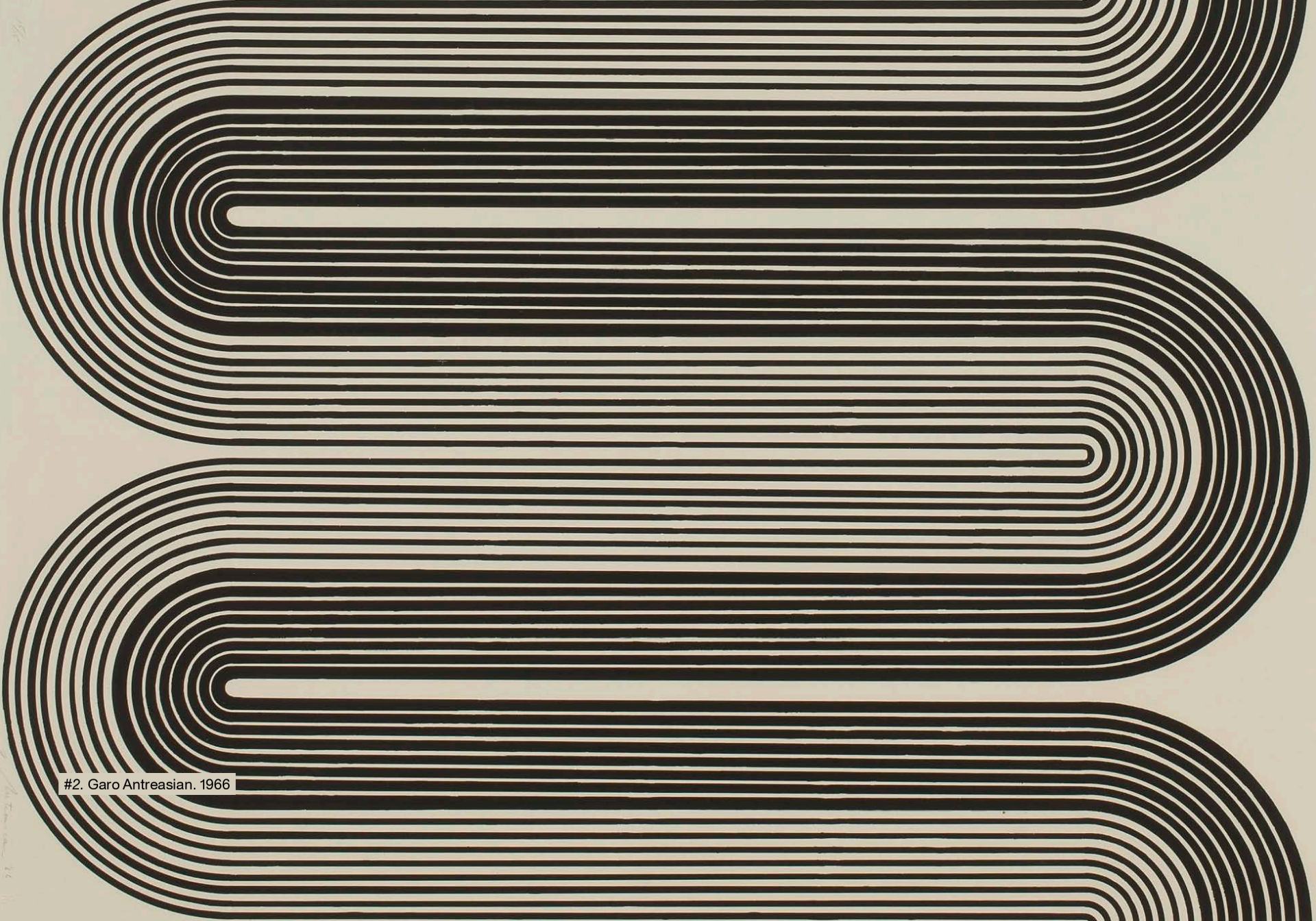
Endnotes

1. The list was also included in the rear pocket of the *Greeting Card Writer's Handbook*. Chadwick, H. Joseph. 1975. *The Greeting Card Writer's Handbook*. Second edition. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest.

2. Greeting Cards for the Anthropocene was originally a joint project with Craig Campbell (Anthropology), Casey Boyle (Rhetoric), and Kate Canales (Design). You can learn more about the project on our website: greetingcardsfortheanthropocene.net



Kathedralen, Series 7, Exp1, Alfio Giuffrida, 2009



#2. Garo Antreasian. 1966

THINKING ALOUD/ALLOWED: INCOHERENCE AS ADEQUACY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY AND ACADEMIC WRITING

Ying Liu
INDEPENDENT

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the place of narrative coherence in psychological wellbeing, psychotherapy, and academic writing. It includes a prelude that challenges coherence as a criterion of "academic rigour" in publishable papers and proposes academic writing as a process of "thinking aloud" about a research topic that is dialogical in nature and engages the self of the researcher. The main body of this paper illustrates the process of "thinking aloud" in the context of counselling and psychotherapy research. The first part of the main body questions the dominant emphasis on the benefit of narrative coherence, arguing that the demand for coherence can be a violent act on the core of a person's being that is permanently non-communicating and unknown as suggested by Winnicott. Drawing on Stern's concept of emergent self, the second part of the main body argues that the preference and obsession for the clever, articulate, and coherent academic voice manifests a borderline state of mind that has its root in the inability to contain the emergent sense of self. This paper also addresses both the impossibility and necessity for an individual to tell what is unspeakable and unknown.

KEYWORDS

narrative coherence/incoherence, psychotherapy, academic writing

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Prelude: Research as Thinking Aloud About Interesting Topics

In the process of doing my doctoral thesis, I submitted a journal paper on the topic of narrative coherence in counselling and psychotherapy where I raised many questions about this topic and chose not to offer "solutions." I relinquished the attempt to put the paper into a rigorous structure and, instead, allowed my writing to proceed as my thoughts did, which gave the paper a feel of montage.

The paper was sent out to three reviewers. It, interestingly, received distinct feedback from each of them. The first reviewer highly disapproved of the fact that I offered nothing on what the therapist should do with the client's experience that defies articulation and narrative, which made the paper of no interest to them, since they received no concrete guidance on therapeutic practice. The second reviewer saw the paper as well-argued and publishable. The third reviewer found the article 'extremely' and 'deeply' interesting and it provoked a great deal of thinking in them. They thus offered long comments that included their thoughts in response to mine, offering alternative ways of looking at the topic and their challenges to some of my arguments. As the third reviewer found that their thinking mainly took the form of a dialogue with me, they also provided detailed in-text comments that were dialogic in nature.

The editor summarized that the main concerns about my paper were that it lacked a clearly articulated thesis and structure, and that it needed more rigor and thoroughness for a published journal paper. What initially hit me the most was the editor's comment that the paper read like 'a casual conversation' in which I was "thinking aloud about interesting topics."

As I laid on my bed that evening, thinking about these comments, I realized that although I did not agree with the word "casual," what I was doing in that paper and wanted to continue doing in my future research was "thinking aloud" and having a "conversation."

Implicit in the concerns the editor raised is an assumption about scholarship as "rigorous," structured, and articulate. In fact, these have become the requirements for scholarship. If I were to make major revisions and resubmit my paper as the editor suggested, I would need to make my paper neatly structured and clearly

articulated in order to be included and accepted, not only by the journal but also the "academic world." Ironically, structure and coherence are required from a paper that critiques exactly the demand for coherence. In other words, a paper that argues for the inclusion of incoherence needs to wipe out its own incoherence. In this process of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and rejection, certain types of knowledge are privileged while others are silenced.

"Thinking aloud" indicates a thinking process that is laden with uncertainty and is shared with others. In this thinking aloud, I am sharing with readers, not the well-articulated, clever, and organized scholar that is required of me, but the "I" who raises questions from a personal place, and who seeks a dialogue with the literature in relation to me, and who struggles with (yet is somehow willing to embark on) the unknown, uncertainty, and incoherence.

While the presence and congruence of the therapist are stressed as crucial in psychotherapy (e.g. Greenberg and Geller 2001), I wonder why counselling and psychotherapy researchers, especially practitioner-researchers, must hide aspects of ourselves that are relevant to what we are researching. In my case, it is the inarticulate, the unstructured, and what might be called the incoherent.

It has been argued that counselling and psychotherapy research methods that are consistent with the type of therapy that is being researched need to be developed (McLeod 2001). I would like to argue that if the type of therapy that we do is process-oriented and relationship-oriented, there should be space for a type of research that is process-oriented and relational. So, yes, the following research paper is 'thinking aloud' (process-oriented) and takes you, my readers, through a journey that I do not claim to have mastery over and that is full of uncertainty, just like therapy. And yes, this paper is a 'conversation' (relational) where I want to meet you as, hopefully, a genuine person with my thoughts, feelings, strengths, and vulnerabilities, like we do in therapy.

Is this paper a "casual" conversation? If "casual" means no theoretical engagement, I would disagree. If it means that this paper lacks the type of "research rigor" that indicates absolute certainty, organization, and tidiness, then I argue for a different type of rigor. As the third reviewer recognized in my way of writing and my arguments, I argue for a different type of coherence that might not be valued by academic community, reviewers, and editors. I argue for a different type of research rigor that breaks the walls around academia. I see presenting this paper as a methodological experiment, looking for other ways of doing research that

is different from the traditionally rigorous scholarly voice and one that reaches towards a poetics of research (Hope 1971; Romanyshyn 2013). If "casual" means to have a conversation that is accessible to and engages with those who are not in academia, then it is exactly what I try to do.

The following paper's completion does not merely lie with my writing, but also lies with you, my audiences', reading (Ricoeur 1991). When reading the following paper, you might feel as frustrated as the first reviewer, or you might appreciate it as the second reviewer, or you might feel intrigued as the third reviewer and wish to participate in wondering about this topic yourself. Your response to this paper is an important part of this paper that is not yet written.

Rethinking Narrative Coherence in Psychotherapy

I struggled with telling stories of my own.

A part of the final assessment for my counselling and psychotherapy training required me to offer a coherent account of my personal and professional development. Although I knew that my training had changed me as a person, I found myself unable to articulate my change and development satisfactorily. Talking about my experience and putting it into the shape of words and stories tore the wholeness of my experience apart. While deeply touched by my peers' stories, I was envious of their ability to offer such clear and coherent narratives. I found it hard to tell a clear linear story of my development with a beginning, middle, and end. By then I had already experienced struggles in my personal therapy regarding telling my stories and articulating my experience. I always told fragments of memories instead of stories and was often frustrated by being unable to tell the therapist how I truly felt because the words felt inadequate or because I could not explain my feelings. At the end of the final assessment, I was left feeling inadequate, to doubt myself, and ashamed. I started to think of myself as someone having "no stories to tell."

In psychotherapy, it is often believed that the consistency of an individual's narrative is an important indication of their wellbeing (Angus and McLeod 2004). While the emphasis on narrative by different psychotherapeutic modalities and

the conceptual explanation of narrative may be different across various traditions of psychotherapy, the client's narrative expression has been regarded as essential indication of the client's reflexivity and agency (Angus and McLeod 2004). There is a fundamental assumption that the way we talk about our lives is closely related to, or predictive of, our psychological adjustment (Waters and Fivush 2015).

It is largely proposed that the sense of self is associated with the stories we tell about ourselves (McLeod 1997). Some writers (e.g. Bruner 2004) argue that our selfhood is created and recreated through narrative. Stories are a means through which we integrate aspects of self through time (McAdams and Janis 2004) and, thus, narrative functions to organize experience. Narrative coherence is thought of as linked to an individual's ability to sustain continuity, directionality, and meaning in life, and there is extensive agreement that individuals who speak coherently about themselves have higher levels of psychological wellbeing, and people who offer incoherent accounts of themselves have more psychological difficulties (Brockmeier and Medved 2010).

Incoherence in the client's narrative is regarded as a marker for psychological distress (Angus and McLeod 2004) and is written in relation to association with psychotic symptoms (e.g. Lysaker and Lysaker 2002, 2006), trauma (e.g. Guilfoyle 2018; Neimeyer, Herrero and Botella 2006; Tamas 2009), or illness (e.g. Frank 1998, 2013) in mental health literature.

These beliefs contributed further to my self-doubt and shame. Do I have a fragmented sense of self? Do I have a lower level of psychological wellbeing in comparison to my peers? I struggled with these questions. Meanwhile, parts of me rebelled against these beliefs. I had been content with the development that I deeply felt throughout my professional training. Yet, subjected to the demand for a coherent narrative, I felt inadequate. It was the demand for a coherent narrative that brought me agony. This drove me to write my thesis on the topic of narrative in/coherence. I used sandplay and writing as a means to explore the realm of experience that is unspeakable and formless.

During my sandplay sessions as a client, a shell repeatedly appeared in the sand-worlds I constructed. I called it "the scarred shell." It evoked strong emotions in me that I did not understand. While being disgusted by the scarred shell initially, I could not put it aside. As the sandplay sessions proceeded, the scarred shell took more and more central roles in my sand-worlds. A few weeks after I finished all the sandplay sessions, an event led me to connect with a traumatic experience in childhood that I had not been able to access experientially. I started to recognize

its impact on my life and to feel the pain my body had been carrying. For the first time, I cried for my hurt body. Thinking about the scarred shell again this time, I recognized those scars as scars of mine which I was disgusted by, wanted to avoid and get rid of, and yet somehow, I knew were important. Following this realization and recognition was a strong desire for telling. I wanted to tell the person who was involved in the event that led to my realization about the childhood trauma. In an ongoing internal monologue, I started to tell him about myself, my trauma, and my scarred shell. This monological telling continued for weeks. It helped to sooth the initial pain and allowed me not to feel alone. Reflecting on this process, I noticed that what happened in my imagination was always telling instead of dialoguing. I never imagined the other person's response or any dialogues between us. What happened in my imagination was always monologues. There was a strong longing to tell someone, to be heard, received, and recognized. However, I resisted any response from the other. I needed to tell but did not need any response.

My imaginary monological telling is similar to my experience of touching the sand in the sandplay sessions. When I wrote about my experience of the sandplay sessions in my thesis, I described the sand as an other who receives and accepts, who was simply being there, who does not wait: "It does not feel like it reaches out to me. It does not offer extended arms. It is being receptive but without being destroyed, intimidated, or scared by my feelings. It allows, receives, and accepts" (Liu 2019). Perhaps, the fact that the sand is always "being there, no expectations, nor desire to know" (Liu 2019) is one of the reasons why I have always been drawn to sandplay therapy.

I was looking for something similar in my monological telling and sandplay. Something that I lack in my relationship with others, even in therapy. I longed for an other who listens to me but does not respond, who does not even wait. It is an other and, at the same time, it is an other who does not have its own intention and expectation. It is an other who does not even possess otherness.

This other that does not possess otherness that I long for is perhaps what Winnicott (1963) called the "subjective object." Psychological maturation in the earliest formative stage of human growth cannot be taken for granted, according to Winnicott. It requires a facilitative environment in which a change of the nature of the object can gradually develop for the infant—"the object being at first

a subjective phenomenon becomes an object objectively perceived" (Winnicott 1963, 180). A relationship to a subjective object is related to the experience of omnipotence (Winnicott 1963). The subjective object is created and recreated by the infant (Winnicott 1963). The infant "creates what is in fact lying around waiting to be found" (Winnicott 1963, 181). While the creation of a subjective object is natural, it is made possible by a mother who permits her child to experience her care and physical presence as under the child's magical control (Fabozzi 2018). This presence of an object is non-intrusive and does not introduce a not-me to the infant. In both my monological telling and my sandplay, I was creating something that was waiting to be found. In other words, in my imagination and in the sand-world, I found the object that I created (Fabozzi 2018). Any response given to me from an other would feel like violation.

Winnicott (1963) writes that as the object changes over from subjective object to objectively perceived object, there is a natural change in the purpose and means of communication: "In so far as the object is subjective, so far is it unnecessary for communication with it to be explicit. In so far as the object is objectively perceived, communication is either explicit or else dumb" (182). Ogden (2018) interprets that explicit communication here might mean symbolic communication and "dumb" might mean not requiring words in conveying symbolic meaning, which can include communication in facial expression. In this sense, a narrative given to an other, which includes symbolic communication and conveys symbolic meaning, can be seen as communication with an objectively perceived object, an external object.

According to Butler (2005), an account of oneself is always given to an other. When entering into a communicative environment, a child is firstly addressed by others, which introduces the child into language, then the child in turn learns certain ways of addressing (Butler 2005). Narrative is generated through the individual's encounters in the social world (Skinner et al. 2001) and language "lies on the borderline between self and the other" (Bakhtin1981, 293). As Arsith (2011) writes, "learning and use of a language of a community can be undertaken as linguistic conformity, generated by the need for people to communicate and feel protected by the possibility of being understood by their peers" (15). Therefore, coherent, meaning understandable, narrative can be grasped as stemming from our desire to be known and related to, even at the price of distortion of individual experience. This resonates with Winnicott's (1963) two states of being that appear when communications with subjective objects and objectively perceived objects are achieved: "here then appear two new things, the individual's use and enjoyment of modes of communication, and the individual's non-communicating self, or the personal core of the self that is a true isolate" (182).

What strikes me is Winnicott's (1963) theory about the core of our being:

> I suggest that this core never communicates with the world of perceived objects, and that the individual person knows that it must never be communicated with or be influenced by external reality. […] Although healthy persons communicate and enjoy communicating, the other fact is equally true, that each individual is an isolate, permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound (187).

These words brought me comfort. I had always thought about my unwillingness to narrate some realms of my experience as resistance and my inability to produce a satisfactorily coherent narrative about my development, my life history, or my emotional life, as inadequacy. I thought that I needed to arrive at the 'coherent' place which would indicate some sort of development or improvement in me. At the same time, I was drawn by a sentence written by Montaigne (1927): "[w]e must reserve a little back-shop, all our own, entirely free, wherein to establish our true liberty and principal retreat and solitude" (237-238). Deep down, I longed for this little back-shop in which I could be entirely free from the foreignness of an other and the obligation to an other introduced by a narrative given to an other. I also wonder about this from a therapist's perspective. There is perhaps little doubt that relationship is paramount in psychotherapy. We believe that it is the relationship that heals. We see the value of therapy as two persons meeting each other in emotional depth. It is about understanding and being understood. It is about being together. As therapists, perhaps we expect our clients to feel safe to open up this "little back-shop" to us in the therapy room. However, can we accept or stand that the client has this place all to themselves, entirely free, also from us? Can we allow our clients to retreat and find solitude in the little back-shop of their own without seeing it as the client's defence or resistance? Can we allow the client not to talk, not to tell us their stories?

Winnicott (1963) seems to be saying that it is essential to allow and accept this little back-shop of our clients. He thinks that this non-communicating self at the core of each person is "sacred and most worthy of preservation" (187). Although this non-communicating self can manifest in pathology, Winnicott sees it as an integral part of healthy being which carries all the sense of real. Here, being real is "a state of being in which external reality is absolutely irrelevant" (Ogden 2018, 1292) and there is no communication with the not-me world (Winnicott 1963).

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Winnicott (1963) proposes that communicating with an objectively perceived object can easily be linked to a sense of false self that is developed to comply with the demand of an external object. Meanwhile, an active non-communication (in the form of clinical withdrawal in a therapeutic setting), i.e. secret or silent communication with subjective objects, is needed in order to restore the sense of real that is carried by the permanently non-communicating self. As argued above, narrative is generated socially and given to an other. To demand for a coherent narrative at all times, and pathologize what does not meet the criteria for coherence, is to annihilate this permanent isolation that lays at the core of individuals as stressed by Winnicott.

A sense of shame related to my incoherence always followed me, even when I was writing my thesis and preparing for conference presentations. I never showed my thesis to anyone except my supervisors and proof-readers. I avoided talking about my research with others, being afraid of not being able to articulate my arguments in a way that would make sense to others. Even before my VIVA, there were doubts I secretly held. I doubted whether this work of mine speaking from the place of incoherence were valid.

During an unstructured medium group in which I participated as a part of a group analysis training, I spoke from what was present in my body—my shaking hands, my accelerated heartbeat, the sense of grief coming from nowhere—without any understanding, explanation, and even attempts to explain. When I relinquished any attempts to explain or to organize fragments into coherence, I felt a sense of being real. Later in a smaller group, I offered a reflection on my experience in the medium group and tried to explain it based on my family history. Though my self-interpretation seemed to make perfect sense, it soon became inadequate for me. I thought I had betrayed my experience by containing it in an explanation. I realized that I needed to just let my experience be, without storying it—tracing its origin, thinking about cause and effect, and so forth. When writing about chronic anxiety, Gabor Maté (2018) writes: "We may believe we're anxious about this or that— body image, the state of the world, relationship issues, the weather—but no matter what story we weave around it, the anxiety *just is*" (335). This is my experience of storying what was happening in me. My experience came into being first and whatever story I created later could not contain the fullness of this experience.

Noticing that I was not ashamed by what was inarticulate and what did not make sense in me, and that I was assertive about these realms of my experience made me realize that I have now allowed a part of me to fully live. I realized that my thesis was a yearning for life from this part of me. It wanted to live, without

shame or prohibition. A few years of writing and being received by my supervisors and examiners helped to bring this part of me to life. My thesis is not against the utility of narrative so much as I realized, through the process of conducting my research project, how much I needed to tell and be received, even if the response I needed was often silence.

It became obvious in my thesis writing that I desired to tell and I wanted to be known. It was the impossibility of expression and the necessity to tell and be known that brought me difficulties. I often felt stuck in this liminal space. The theme of loss and grief became prominent in my thesis as my writing proceeded. Following the completion of my thesis, I started to mourn for family losses that had never been recognized and mourned by any of my family members. I mourned for the unborn life of my younger brother who was aborted due to China's One-child Policy at the time, for a 10-year separation, and deaths in my father's family due to the Cultural Revolution. I mourned for the life my parents did not get a chance to live and the bonds that I never had. I tried to locate the sense of grief and melancholia that resides in me via the glimpses of my parents' memories (as they casually shared them with me), I tried to speak about the life of my grief. I wanted to tell its story. However, I have never been able to tell the story of my grief and melancholia. No matter how much sense these "stories" I told make, they never feel adequate to me. In the effort of trying to narrate the loss, something is always lost.

I carry so many things inside that I cannot make sense of, that I cannot tell a story about. Perhaps I will never be able to. What has been passed on to me is not the stories, but feelings, the inarticulable, unspeakable, fragmented yet overwhelming, and often covered feelings. Kottler (2015) touchingly acknowledges that with regard to unimaginable evil and extraordinary inhumanity, for example what happened in Nazi concentration camps and China's Cultural Revolution, "there is no possible way to describe to anyone else what it was like, especially in such a way that the listeners can truly understand and accept that there is no possible way to ever fully recover or heal from such an experience" (132). In times like these, as Levi (1988) says in his memoir of his imprisonment in Auschwitz, "ordinary language cannot convey what happened there" (129). Having suffered from social violence, my family's history is not told via stories but embodied transmission of covered feelings across generations. When pain is not recognized as pain, when stories are not remembered as stories, when avoidance and repression become a family's

default way to deal with emotional disturbance, when something is too painful to remember, or when people live in a time when things are so distorted that pain has become the ordinary, how can we tell?

Implicit in the encouragement for clients to tell their stories in the therapy room is our belief as therapists that "the telling of the story heals the disruption and creates a future" (Watson 2007, 1284). A future with hope seems to be what drives us forward. Frank (2013) points out that the audiences of illness stories always seek to find solution to the chaos and find something good in the terrible. This helps the audiences to create a hope that if they were to fall into the same illness situation, there would be a way out. In this way, the audiences shy away from the horror and hopelessness: that something horrible like severe illness can happen to people and there might never be recovery. I wonder whether the encouragement of telling stories and reconstructing incoherent stories into coherent stories that make sense is also a way of creating that hope, a future in which what we cannot make sense will eventually make sense. When we reject a fragmented story, when we refuse to accept that an experience does not make sense, perhaps we are trying to shy away from the horror about the possible fact that we forever live with the unknown. When chaos stories are told, people do not want to listen (Frank 2013). When we see the therapeutic journey as a journey from incoherence to coherence, we are not tolerating the presence of the incoherence, not acknowledging that there are aspects of human existence that we might never make sense of. We shy away from it, just like the audiences of severe illness stories refuse to confront the hopeless horror these illnesses can bring.

What is often not addressed when we appraise narrative coherence is the acknowledgment of the inevitable failure of words and narrative form. It is perhaps seldom acknowledged by therapists to their clients, that I strive to be with you, but I cannot exactly be there with you; and sometimes, my presence itself can act as an intrusion.

Every storyteller is confronted with the question of whether they are being understood; if they are not, there is no point to tell the stories in the first place (McAdams 2006). When the stories do not make sense to the intended audiences, misjudgement and misunderstanding might happen, followed by conflicts and/or a sense of isolation and alienation (Singer and Rexhaj 2006). When stories defy the audiences' view about how the world operates, how human beings are supposed to think, feel, and behave, the audiences want to ask for more details for the stories to make sense or make up their own explanations, hypotheses, or theories to help them make sense (McAdams 2006). When this happens in psychotherapy, we, as the therapists and the audiences to our clients' stories, become an intrusion. Winnicott (1963) writes, "[a] good object is no good to the infant unless created by the infant" (181). He

emphasises the importance of waiting as subjective objects, until we the therapists become objectively perceived by the client in their own time, and if interpretations are made out of our own cleverness and experience then they must be refused or destroyed by the client. Winnicott (1963) warns us of the danger of violating the client's sacred, non-communicating core by suddenly becoming "not-me" for the client: "[…] we suddenly become not-me for the patient, and then we know too much, and we are dangerous because we are too nearly in communication with the central still and silent spot of the patient's ego-organization" (189). Winnicott (1963) thinks that we must allow the client's non-communication and our techniques must allow the client to communicate that they are not communicating.

Rethinking Narrative Coherence in Academic Writing

Summer 2022, almost six years after I completed my counselling and psychotherapy training, I met with a colleague from the same training cohort. Naturally, we started to talk about our training. When I was asked how I have changed over the years, one of the things I said was that I now have a stronger sense of self. I have developed a voice of my own, I said. I can now look back and see my own story of personal and professional development. Six years later, I finally feel that I can engage with the final assessment set in my counselling and psychotherapy training without a strong feeling that I am betraying some realms of my experience or tearing apart the wholeness of my experience.

In Daniel Stern's (1985) terms, in those years of counselling and psychotherapy training, an emergent sense of self was coming into being for me. Stern describes that from birth to 2 months, a sense of the world and of self is emergent for the infant. The infant experiences the "coming-into-being of organization" in this period (45) which is an experience of a process and a product. It is an experience of becoming, and a sense of self is forming. Stern stresses that this is not a state of non-organization. When talking about a state of undifferentiation in the infant, we talk about it from the adult observer perspective, when differentiation has been developed. Yet, "infants cannot know *what* they do not know, nor *that* they do not know" (46). The lack of relatedness between separate experience is not noticed and many separate experiences can exist with "exquisite clarity and vividness" for

the infant (46). This sense of something emerging remains a fundamental domain throughout human life (Stern 1985) and it is often present in the face of new experiences, transitions, and changes (Johnsen, Sundet and Torsteinsson 2018).

I often tell people that training to be a counsellor and psychotherapist has changed me as a person. Yet, when I was asked to give a coherent narrative about my development at the end of my training, I could not manage. The sense of change at the time was a global sense of becoming someone different from who I was before. This was a dawning experience that involved what was yet to be known. It would not be exaggerating to describe finishing my counselling and psychotherapy training as a new birth. Parallel to Stern's model of self-development, a new sense of personal and professional self was emerging in me at this stage. This emergent self preceded the sense of verbal self (Stern 1985). When I was asked to represent this experience of becoming in a coherent narrative, the global experience was inevitably fractured and poorly represented (Stern 1985), which led me to the feeling that something whole was torn apart and some of my experiences were betrayed by my words.

Standing from an adult observer's position, both the course assessment and I myself were requiring a verbal representation that did not fit my process of becoming. Being an adult who evidently had the verbal capacity to communicate with others in most circumstances, it was difficult to acknowledge and validate this pre-verbal emergent sense of self that, as Stern (1985) points out, is present in all learning activities. I went quickly into self-doubt, thinking that something was wrong with me. The requirement for a coherent account as a part of assessment is not unique to the training programme I undertook. Working as a lecturer in counselling psychology now, I find myself assessing students' assignments, research reports, and presentations against the criteria of "coherence." In order to abide by the university's assessment framework, I, as the assessor, now also demand coherent accounts from the students as evidence of certain achievements. While it is already acknowledged, by Stern and Winnicott in this paper, that what cannot be narrated or narrated coherently holds an important place in our lives, coherent accounts are widely regarded as evidence for academic and developmental achievement with little consideration of the equally important state of *becoming*.

While writing my thesis, the world of emergent self, in Stern's words (1985, 67), served as the reservoir that I dipped into for creativity. Looking back, I can see that my whole thesis was an expression of this sense of emergent self. Writing as a method of inquiry which I adopted for my thesis allowed the process of becoming. I wrote my thesis in "fragments" and each piece exists with, again in Stern's (1985) words, "exquisite clarity and vividness" (46). This absence of organization

and narrative coherence is not a lack of something essential but the emergence of something new. Similarly, sandplay also provided me with a space where something yet unknown could emerge without being urged toward words or any cognitive understanding.

When I as invited by the journal editor to rewrite and resubmit my paper in a more "rigorous" and structured way, it was this process of emerging organization that was unwelcome. Traditional academic writing requires the sense of verbal self which makes some of our known experience sharable with others (Stern 1985). In traditional academic writing, I, as the researcher, articulate what I know and communicate it to the audiences. In my writing and the audiences' reading, understanding can be reached. However, this understanding is limited to only one realm of human experience. Experience in other domains of self, including the emergent self, are irrespective of language and can only be seized partially in language (Stern 1985). When the domain of verbal self is considered more prominent, the other domains of experiences are alienated and become a "nether domain" of experience (Stern 1985, 163). In general, it seems that only what is logically written and articulated holds significance in academia. We engage with the verbal sense of self and relatedness in academic writing, forgetting other domains of selves that are also present throughout our lives and in which creativity can emerge. Stern (1985) urges us to acknowledge language as a double-edge sword and pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal development:

> It will be necessary to follow both these lines of development—language as a new form of relatedness and language as a problem for the integration of self-experience and self-with-other experiences. We must somehow take into account these divergent directions that the emergence of a linguistic sense of self has created (163).

I see this as an advice for academics as much as for practitioners. Especially in the field of research areas that concern human experience; if we only see what is organized, structured, and articulate as valid, the very real existence of other realms of human experiences will be pushed underground. Stern (1985) also points out that affect as a form of personal knowledge is difficult to represent in words. Language is often good at labelling or categorizing affective states but has a great disadvantage when expressing gradient information about the affective state which are pivotal in interpersonal communications (Stern 1985).

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Meanwhile, Stern (1985) acknowledges that, paradoxically, words in poetic use can evoke experiences that transcend words. Therefore, while being aware of the disadvantages of language, I never give up on words. On the contrary, I count on it for expression of what feels or is uncommunicable. This use of words, however, cannot be neat, 'rigorous', structured, and organized as traditional academic writing requires. Due to this, I often find myself struggling to find a place for these words to be seen or needing to change them in order for them to be seen. It becomes even more difficult when what I had to say was about the awakening of a hidden chapter of a family, or even national, history.

I wonder whether the preference, or perhaps even obsession, for the clever, articulate, and coherent academic voice manifests a borderline state of mind in academia, and even in the wider society, that has its root in the inability to contain the emergent sense of self and relatedness. What is often presented in academic journals is a state of 'is'—something is certain and conclusive. The state of 'becoming'—the uncertainty of what will come into being—is often not allowed. As many great psychotherapy theorists, such as Winnicott, point out, the development of self is only possible in the company of someone else. The capacity to integrate opposing internal images of self and other and to tolerate ambivalence requires an attuned relationship with the maternal object (Volkan, Ast and Greer 2002). I wonder whether the traditional academic environment fails to provide an attuned environment in which ambivalence can be tolerated. If the world of academic publication can give more space to what is emerging and uncertain, increasingly different types of knowledge can be developed, more stories can be told, and what was considered as a lack can be viewed as abundant.

(Not) A Conclusion

When I wrote my thesis, I questioned myself, why was I writing? Constantly experiencing the limit and inadequacy of language, and the resistance in giving an account of myself, why did I still write? As what is argued about traumatic testimony, when communicating my experience, the narrative form it takes lends to it a framework—coherence, structure, meaning, comprehensibility—which it lacks (Andrews 2010). Near the end of my thesis, it became clear to me that, despite the inadequacy, it was important that I did say it—the significance is simply that something is said (Andrews 2010).

While Kottler (2015) proposes that appreciation needs to be given to the need to not describe the indescribable and to be silent in the face of unimaginable evil and extraordinary inhumanity, some recognize both the impossibility and necessity to tell. In his diary about the life in the Warsaw Ghetto, *Cups of Tears*, Abraham Lewin (cited in Andrews 2010) talks about both the impossibility and the necessity of expressing his thoughts and feelings. In the case of melancholia, Leader (2009) recognizes the necessity of speaking about loss creatively in the form of language that suits each individual and to have a listener to address—a listener who can receive the communication of the impossibility. The emphasis on coherent narrative, from others and myself, had trapped me in a limbo. In my wordless touch with sand, my silent encounter with the sand-worlds, my 'messy' writing process, my repetitive imaginary telling, I freed myself from the external and internalized, explicit and implicit requirement and obligation to make sense, and to be consequential. It was important for me that the silent presence of the sand, the figures in the sand-worlds, the pen and paper, and the imaginary other did not expect or even wait. This has allowed me to express, connect to, and immerse in myself, in my own way and pace, in the presence of an other who is free of their own even slightest agenda, demand, and expectation.

This perhaps relates to what Winnicott (1963) calls "the urgent need to communicate and the still more urgent need not to be found" (185). In Winnicott's (1963) language, there is a need for me to hold on to a not communicating self while, at the same time, waiting to communicate and be found. He addresses both the enjoyment of communication and the need to not communicate. The need for narrative and language to communicate itself is a proof that we can never fully be with each other and that we are always to a certain extent left alone in some experiences of ours. Nonetheless, there is always the longing to tell and to be known by an other, despite the doomed effort of being fully known. As Edkins (2003, cited in Andrews 2010) articulates: "[I]t is both impossible to speak, and impossible not to speak" (155).

What is most significant, in my opinion, is that despite the inevitable failure of narrative, of language, and of being completely understanding, as therapists, we still try. We make an effort regardless. The message this conveys is a simple but a crucial one: I care.

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I remember when the sandplay therapist could not rescue me in a session where I was in panic about the scarred shell, what mattered to me was simply that she made an effort and she remembered the scarred shell's appearance in my previous sand-worlds. To hold onto the striving to narrate not the narrative itself, to hear narratives, coherent or not, is to show one cares.

There is something to learn from the sand: to receive without demand and to be silent. Wittgenstein (1922) says that if language is a tool that we use to communicate, when it fails, one can only be silent: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (90). Yet, we do not need to abandon narrative all together. There is another thing to learn from the sand: we can be together in the silence, together in our aloneness; and to listen to the unsayable, unnarratable and let them be.

I wish I could end this paper with a conclusion or solution of some sort, which perhaps stems from the demand for closure and structure and the discomfort of not having them. Therefore, I would like to exercise what I have been arguing in this paper: relinquishing the imposition of structure to something that is formless. As Wittgenstein says:

> the difficulty […] is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it […]. This is connected […] with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our consideration. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it. The difficulty here is: to stop (Wittgenstein, as cited in Genova 1995, 39).

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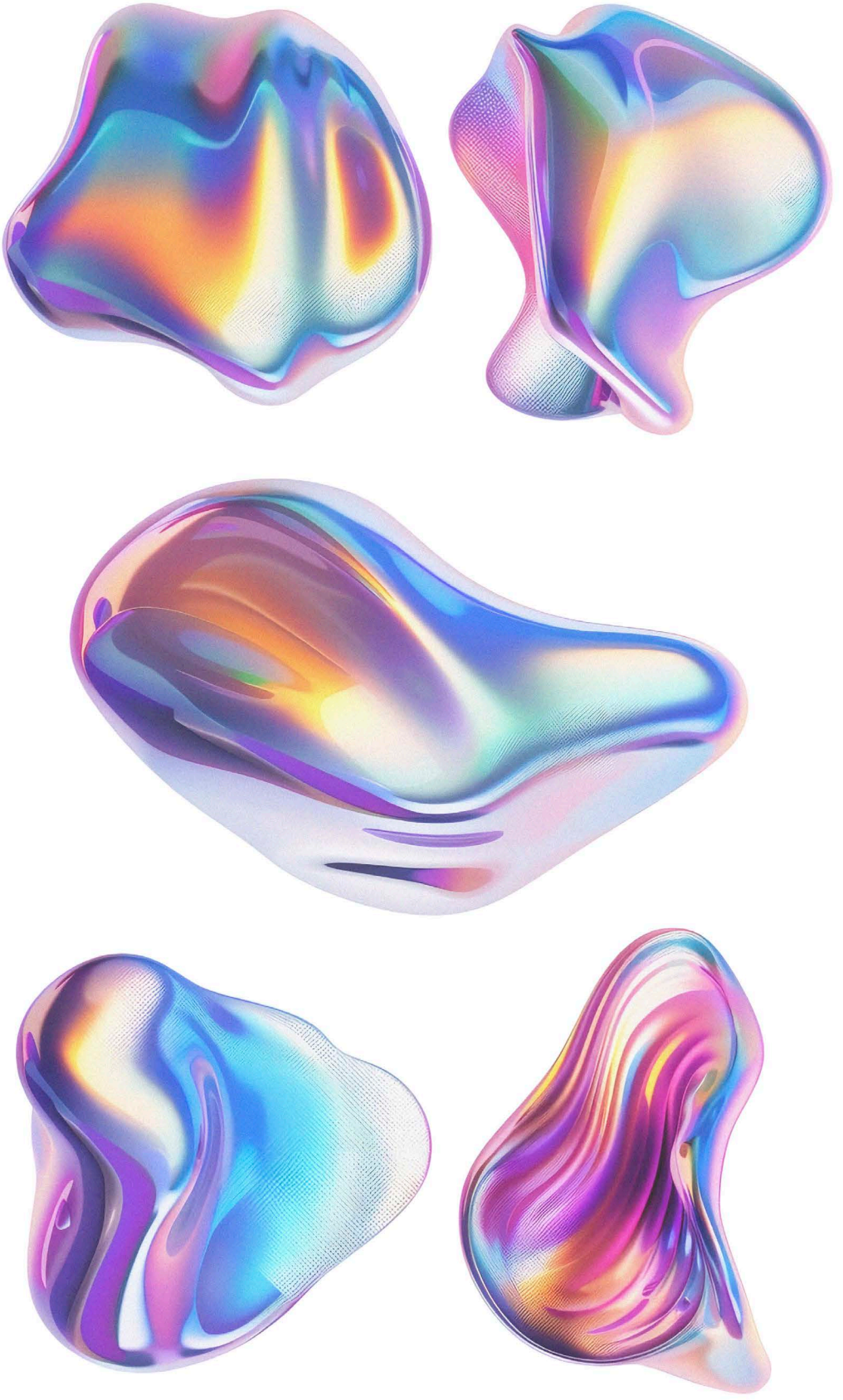

CULTURAL FORMALISM: THE ENQUIRY OF CULTURAL AESTHETICS

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The study of 'forms' is readily associated with the tradition of Formalism in art criticism whereby plastic modes of aesthetic expressions are central to its investigations. My interest in probing cultural forms stems from the question "how might the aesthetic focus of Formalism be applied to cultural analysis?" That is, if forms of arts receive heightened attention for their expressive configuration and manifestation, what about positing enquiries directed at forms of living and ways of life which are nothing short of aesthetic expressions? By asking this question I'm also offering a hypothesis about the concrete existence of 'cultural form,' and how it comes with the demand for clarifying certain attentions. Such accentuations orientate us towards discerning and describing forms of cultural experience. Hence a theory of cultural form emerges in marking out modes of attention that indicate certain interests and priorities. Indeed, I suggest that the body of work cohering around (impersonal) senses, affect, "structures of feeling," and social aesthetics has always already, to varying degrees, pertained to enquiries of cultural form. This essay draws on an array of theoretical work that invoke the aesthetic forms of culture and a mode of enquiry pertaining to cultural aesthetics.

'Cultural form' is not a neologism. Rather, it has methodological implications that shape up the ways in which cultural analysis is conceived and undertaken, not least the cultural politics instituted by a formalist mode of enquiry. This essay poses the question of what cultural formalism, by way of its aesthetic disposi-

tions (e.g. the mood of this enquiry) offers to cultural politics? The prominence of "politics of aesthetics" in Jacques Rancière's political philosophy is brought into focus (Rancière 2004). I suggest that the conceptual rendering of 'cultural form' resonates with Rancière's notion of "sensible" (Rancière 2004). This essay concludes with provocations around creating terms of politicization that re-focus the sites and stakes of cultural politics.

The Significant Form

Prior to discussing cultural aesthetics and formalist attentions applied to cultural analysis, I shall first turn to the tradition of Formalism wherein the association of aesthetic experience with art, and above all the form of the arts, is explicitly expressed. Revisiting what constitutes aesthetic analysis in Formalism, my focus shifts to how cultural analysis may take on parallel attentions which expand the productive lens of Formalism beyond art and towards an aesthetics of living experience. This is done through engaging with theorists—Raymond Williams, Caroline Levine, Ben Highmore, Sianne Ngai—whose work draws attention to the aesthetic forms of experience. The key tenets of Formalism were announced by painters and critics of the modern art movement who considered the 'form' of the arts to be the essential quality of aesthetic production. Exemplifying a mode of aesthetic criticism, the analytical focus of Formalism is directed at the plastic expressions of the arts and the sensory experience elicited by them. For the British art critic Clive Bell, the qualities common to all visual arts are rooted in their "significant form." Getting to the core of his formalist stance, Bell draws attention to a myriad of aesthetic productions whose "aesthetically moving forms" define characters of art (Bell 1913, 3). In 1913, Bell wrote the following:

> There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto 's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible - significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines

> and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call "Significant Form"; and "Significant form" is the one quality common to all works of visual art' (Bell 1913 [2011], 3).

Bell's rumination on "significant form" as the defining quality of art appears to transcend historical considerations. For Bell (1913), form is the essential criterion common to all art. Artistic forms are identified by the array of sensuous expressions (e.g. lines, colors) that render the material basis of aesthetic feelings. Formalism focuses on a realm of aesthetics materialized by artistic idioms and expressions, and the ways that they are arranged to stir our "aesthetic emotions." The emphasis on significant form underlines aesthetic knowledge produced by forms largely bound up with artistic productions. And as the interpretation of Formalism gets skewed towards descriptions of artistic forms, Bell's invocation of "aesthetic emotions"—implying that affective experience is also of an aesthetic nature—is largely overlooked. The theoretical purchase of Bell's formalist position hasn't been taken up much beyond introspective examinations of the arts (and the regressive bourgeois notion of 'aesthetic' attached to it).

In his essay "The Uses of Cultural Theory," Raymond Williams (2007) addresses the potential of employing Formalism for cultural analysis. Williams values the critical position of Formalism since it foregrounds the specificity of art forms, which as he argues, interpenetrate social actualities. The linking of "artistic specificity to the real and complex relationships of actual societies" should end the "formalist monopoly" accorded to art (Williams 2007, 167). Without being subjected to discursive narratives, "the great gain of Formalism" is acquired from detailing the aesthetic effects of artistic productions (Williams 2007, 167). Critically, it is in his mapping out of 'social form'—as counterpart to artistic form, that the relationship between art forms and cultural processes becomes clear. In the book *Marxism and Literature*, Williams (1977) invokes the palpable existence of social forms which take shape in affective qualities of experience. Contrasted with the sobriety of "official consciousness," or the "formally structured hypothesis of the social" of which the "fixed" and "deliberate" systems of institutions, belief and systems of explanation are deemed of significance in cultural analysis, Williams (1977) places accent on the experiential qualities of social relations—"a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange" (131).

Exercising a formalist attention towards living experience, Williams (1977) intimates the pervasiveness of cultural aesthetics. He states: "we are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought but thought

as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity" (Williams 1997, 132). Aesthetic expressions as such—feelings and affective elements, are not only expressed in the field of arts and aesthetic criticism, but also exist as cultural aesthetics. For instance, bearing a formalist's sensitivity to the styles and genres of literary texts, Williams suggests that as much as there are sensual forms in literature, e.g. the tones and inflections of literary texts, the prominence of the styles in ordinary acts of communication is also of an aesthetic matter. Indeed, the two forms may be contiguous with each other (Williams 1977). Analogous to the ways that the specificity of the arts demand heightened attention in Formalism, the affective form of living exacts aesthetic attunement practiced by social formalism.

Experiential qualities transpose as aesthetic structures. Williams (1977) highlights how affective qualities of experience procure, instigate, and maintain forms of interrelations deemed 'social.' Williams (1977) often also uses the term "structures of feeling" (or "structures of experience") to further elucidate his formalist disposition (the term 'feeling' is used loosely to suggest a whole range of affective and stylistic manifestations). As a concept, "structures of feeling" instigates analytical attention that considers and parses out the ways in which aesthetic qualities of living are at the forefront of social formations (Williams maintains that the aesthetic registers of social life are not epiphenomenon). Specifically, the rubric of the 'structures of feeling' stresses the capaciousness and sociality of the formal aspects of cultural processes. Social aesthetics are deemed capacious in that they prescribe modes of access, inciting and aligning compositions and relations, exerting "palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (Williams 1997, 132). As opposed to being seen as derivatives of social life, the affective/aesthetic qualities of experience are compelling forms of materiality that germinates sociality. They confer social structures when feelings, tonalities, and impulses become shared entities that shroud and occasion the interrelation of beings; 'structure' is construed then as permeation and mediation. The concept 'structures of feeling' advances the notion of 'social form' as not only traversing discursive categories of analysis but also crucially affording formal analysis that traces the effects of 'form' as they bear on the sociality of aesthetics. Social forms are congealed upon the patterning of experiential qualities. The sharedness of affectivity in collective experience marks out social forms.

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Cultural Aesthetics in Formalism

Occluded by the predominance of semiotics in establishing the social meaning of the arts, it is worth noting a resurgence in theories of formalist dispositions that seek to revive its pertinence for social analysis. Among contemporary aesthetes, literary critics call for a Formalism that unveils the sociality of literary forms. Literary critic Caroline Levine's (2015) broad conception of form is helpful for making sense of the connection: "'form" always indicates an *arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping*…Form, for our purpose, will mean all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference" (Levine 2015, 3). Echoing Williams' (1977) stance on the primacy of artistic form, Levine (2015) posits a rerouting of literary analysis in which texts are read "not as epiphenomenal responses to social realities but as forms encountering other forms" (14). In her book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Levine (2015) proposes that a social formalist approach to literary analysis considers the ways in which textual forms mirror the characteristic structuring of the sensual material world. Thus, we have literary analysis that traces the fashioning of literary elements (forms) within the context of the social, manifested as "hierarchies", "rhythms", "networks", and "wholes" (Levine 2015). Levine advocates a 'New Criticism' in literary studies when she suggests that social forms or "political structures"— hierarchies, rhythms, networks, and wholes have their resonant corollaries in literature and literary studies (Levine 2015, 14). She proposes to set up a correspondence between literary structures and the arrangement of ensembles of entities that make social forms. In order to demonstrate the sociality of artistic forms, we need to recuperate attentions that foreground forms of cultural life. Indeed, the fluidity with which these terms describe both literary styles and social structures intimates a contiguity of aesthetic experience. Hence, rather than speaking of social forms as "rhythmic" in the metaphorical sense, we need to emphasize that the manifestations of aesthetic qualities are actual.

If the lack of attention directed at cultural forms is attributed to a hierarchy of aesthetics where the arts preside over other forms of experience, then we should foreground a re-configuration of the aesthetics of social life at large. The cultural theorist Ben Highmore (2007) invites us to revivify enquiries of aesthetics through his idea of "social aesthetics." He argues that a radical re-imagining of aesthetics is an essential first step toward inciting its social manifestations. Instead of associating aesthetics solely with artistic forms, Highmore (2007) conceives "social aesthetics" as broadly pertaining to the "sensual insertion and immersion of bodily creatures in networks of material, sensate and affective force (which

might also be economic, political, and so on)" (n.p.). The sensing of the material world is no less a sensual experience than that afforded by the arts. Here, the accent of "social aesthetics" placed on sensuous materialities resonates with the tenets of Formalism. Just as the arts acquired idioms pertaining to their fashioning of forms (e.g. composition, texture, pitch), a formalist appreciation of social life demands vocabularies that inflect the affective form of collective experience and the orchestrated qualities of those forms, as feelings, moods, tones and such.

Highmore (2007) makes the point that the theoretical imagination of social aesthetics is grounded in "deep descriptions" that illustrate and perform "social formalism." To explicate the nature of endeavor, Highmore writes (2007): "Social aesthetics then might be thought of as an intensive formalism, dedicated to close-scrutiny, deep-description and speculative interpretation, with the goal of revealing culture from the inside (from the point of view of the nerves, the gut, and so on)" (n.p). What's being stressed here is the compelling force of cultural form—its tangibility as well as the capaciousness attached to doing formalist analysis. Cultural form is actualized at the phenomenological level—the outward, sensual material manifestations and expressivities; at the same, it's also about mediation and forces that underpin the ordering of cultural life. A formalist analysis of general ways of living assumes an intensity of aesthetic enquiry exemplified by Formalism. Through the cultural life that arises from a sharedness of qualities, a broad range of entities comes into the purview of aesthetic analysis, thus lending a democratic mood to the undertaking of "social formalism." This is the project that would fall under the rubric of "social aesthetics."

For a cultural formalist, the matter of social composition is realized in sensuous manifestations. This is to say that cultural experience is primarily constituted by an assemblage of things coming together through sensuous attachments and alliances. The American anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2014) strikes a formalist tone when she puts forward a mode of cultural analysis through the lens of "composition theory." A composition theorist is attuned to the expressivities that bring forth social formations, "A line, a refrain, a tendency, an icon, a color, a groove of habit or hope, or a rhythm or chaos of living take on qualities, a density, an aesthetic, become somehow legible, recognisable" (Stewart 2014: 119). Here, Stewart (2014) orchestrates the sensual qualities of social life which are made legible by the zealous descriptions of a social aesthete. Note that these singular expressivities may at once become convivial: color setting the tonality

of an encounter, or lines seizing up a kind of energy. Stewart (2014) considers "worlding" as processes of compositions within which the primacy of aesthetics are worthy of theoretical attention. Evoking Formalism's heightened reception to artistic forms, Stewart (2014) underlines how a cultural formalist may find access to compositions of the phenomenal world; she calls for attention to how "an assemblage of elements comes to hang together as a thing that has qualities, sensory aesthetics and lines of force and how such things come into sense already composed and generative and pulling matter and mind into a making: a worlding" (119). A composition is more than an aggregate of things; the capaciousness of aesthetic qualities prevails in the composition of the social world. Occasioned by sensual material forces, bodies are arranged in this way as opposed to that way so that attachments, constellations and permutations issue sensual forms. We are called up to heed to the qualities-cum-forces that curate an ensemble, a situation, or a span of historical life.

The efficacy of aesthetic forces (e.g. tendency, density, rhythm) renders a composition, that is, a worlding made discernible by formal analysis. As an object of enquiry, 'cultural form' has an atmospheric quality which induces social aesthetic dispositions. Stewart illustrates the actuality of 'cultural form.' And she does it by tracing out a correspondence between the object of analysis at hand and the aesthetic inclinations of a formalist, i.e. the objects of analysis in cultural formalism invokes aesthetic/theoretical dispositions and vice versa. Stewart (2022) writes:

> Cultural form is about how something that feels like something forms up, deforms, falls apart or decays. It's about aesthetics, the senses, the way that attachments and affects get magnetized to rhythms, tones of voice, qualities of light. It's about understanding objects of analysis as not just complex but ambient, atmospheric, synesthetic. Cultural form is what pulls things into the consistency of a laugh or an edge. A composition that throws itself together. The intimacy of a collective lunge for sensory design. An attunement that takes form. A world inhabited. An open ambit (n.p).

The expressive dimensions of things testify to their sociality. At the level of singularities—rhythms, tones or qualities of light—cultural forms are outward expressions that get diffused in the sinews of social (and writerly) compositions. We are reminded of this structural pull since expressive qualities spawn attachments (things being pulled into place or magnetized). Recurring affectivities and experiential qualities draw out aesthetic forms, and they surface to attention as "aesthetic categories" in Sianne Ngai's (2012) exploration of the "cute," the "zany," and the "interesting." The delineated "aesthetics categories" in Ngai's work serve as descriptors that aid imaginings of cultural aesthetics. Beyond notions

of "beauty", "sublimity" and traversing the tradition of singling out "aesthetics" from broader lived experiences, Ngai's conception of aesthetics is grounded in "senses" that mediate social relations. The three descriptors of aesthetic forms (i.e. the 'cute', the 'zany' and the 'interesting') stem from shared sensorium and sensual logics, and as such they become points of access to cultural analysis. Her analysis veers away from categorized spheres of experience: "the mass mediated postbourgeois public sphere", or "the global multitude and its immaterial labour," and the "private or domestic sphere" (Ngai 2012, 238). Ngai (2012) argues that the purpose of establishing aesthetic categories is to evoke "images of contemporary commonality" (239). Ngai makes explicit the structural connotation of aesthetic categories by demonstrating how they are categories of affectivities that saturate postmodern capitalistic conditions, that they get at some of the most basic dynamics that bind processes of production, consumption and the informational system.[1] Here, she notes the formative capacity of social aesthetics "call forth not only specific subjective capacities for feeling and acting but also specific ways of relating to other subjects and the larger social arrangements these ways of relating presuppose" (Ngai 2012, 11). Ngai's aesthetic stance exemplifies cultural formalist attentions in that it enlists descriptions of cultural forms which make visible the affective structuring of social relations.

"Politics of Aesthetics" in Formalist Enquiry

What does the focus on cultural form offer to the shaping of cultural political debates? If cultural aesthetics are central to its enquiry, in what ways might a "politics of aesthetics" be addressed by a formalist undertaking of cultural analysis? These questions invite discussions around the specificities of polity arising from cultural formalism. I maintain that theoretical attentions inhere in temperaments that are integral to the shaping of cultural politics. It is an attempt at being reflexive about the aesthetic disposition undertaken in cultural formalist enquires. Contrasted with the polemical heat of antithetical positions or the certitude of discourses (e.g. politics of race and gender), a cultural formalist disposition beckons enquiries of another kind. It is to ask, for instance, in what ways would a heuristic temperament in regard to the probing of cultural forms (an effusiveness felt in sensing and describing cultural form) procure politics of a different kind, of one that evades ideological conceptions of cultural politics?

This section attends and attunes to instances of cultural enquiry that operate beyond the discursive, and above all how they incite modes of doing politics with their own set of aesthetic dispositions. I am pursuing how a non-antagonistic temperament might engender cultural politics. In Roland Barthes' (1978) writing on the "neutral," for instance, the theorist is reflexive on the mood one carries with them when conceiving and relating to matters of cultural debates and politics. He considers the style with which he enters socio-political debate "to be looking for my own style of being present to the struggles of my time" (Barthes 1978, 8).[2] Barthes (1978) distances himself from the "weariness" he senses in discourses of ethics and politics. He ponders over how the "neutral" eschews themes readily associated with "doxa" and ideological construction of politics. He likens the mood of political debates to the indefatigable energy of banal conversations that elicits weariness. He writes, "the present-day world is full of it (statements, manifestoes, petitions, etc.), and it's why it is so wearisome: hard to float, to shift places" (Barthes 1978, 19). In the world that Barthes refers to, one is ordered incessantly to stake positions and counter-positions whereby "every object is converted by some analysis, interpretation, into the contrary of its name, of its appearance" (Barthes 1978, 125). Barthes saw the mood of "weariness" traversing an epistemological paradigm founded on dogma and readily divided opinions. In particular, the sensibility and discursive logic of "conflict" presides over knowledge production (oppositional groups and counterparts) (Barthes 1978, 125-6).[3] Diverging from the "ideosphere" of debates, the "neutral" encapsulates an array of temperaments and analytical orientations set out to "outplay the paradigm" (Barthes 1978, 8). For Barthes (1978), the neutral is charged with a "stubborn affect"; it's "an ardent, burning activity" which expands the basis for making theories and positionalities (7).[4] Relishing the non-coded, unclassifiable sites and states of being ("society doesn't recognise intensities" [Barthes 1978, 18]), the object of enquiry may arise from twinkling scintillations that are benign and ambivalent. The neutral assumes a mood/mode of enquiry founded on "intuitive, empirical exploration" (Barthes 1978, 17). Indeed, Barthes' "neutral" position befits cultural aesthetic enquiries that elude the grip of "ideosphere."[5] Marking out a space for a non-coded aesthetic analysis would foreground an idiosyncratic mode of pursuing cultural politics. One could go so far as to say that what is at stake in politics may only arise from the ardent explorations of cultural aesthetes.

Echoing Barthes' proposition for a 'neutral' paradigm of knowledge, the cultural theorist Jane Bennett (2020) expands the purview of what counts as political matters. In my reading of Jane Bennett's book *Influx and Efflux* (2020), I was struck by her ardent pursuit of politics which diverges from any fixed discursive viewpoints. Her analysis of Walt Whitman's poems and of their aesthetic evocation of political ethos instantiates a compelling approach for doing cultural politics.

As she follows Whitman's sensing of the phenomenal world in which forms and senses exude ethos of living, we are invited to explore a mode of analytical attention in which physical forms, styles of movement, and bodily configurations ("stylised mode of encounter") generate matters of politics (Bennett 2020, 65). Bennett (2020) likens this formalist attention to the act of "doting." To dote on things (how apt is the word doting for describing enraptured states of love and care adopted by an aesthete?), Bennett (2020) claims, is for one to engage in a "cultivated practice of perception": "As a cultivated practice of perception, doting pays slow attention to ordinary things in ways that accentuate our existence as *earthlings*" (65). It is a practice marked by a receptivity to visceral impressions and material forces operating beyond subjective wills. The doting attention of a poet, or in Bennett's case, that of a theorist, assumes a degree of intensity in following ordinary yet stylised encounters. 'Doting' sidesteps discursive judgement, yet it initiates a poetic assessment that no less eludes positions assumed in judgement. Bennett (2020) captures the force of poetic judgement in Whitman's line: "Judge not as the judge judges but as the sun falling round a helpless thing" (48). The sensibility of judgement-as-doting is such that "the pleasure of float" presides over "the pleasure of closure" (Bennett 2020, 49).

Far from being an indulgent pursuit that circumvents cultural politics, the compassionate heeding of physiognomy (bearing forms of experience) yields matters of concern that constitute a stake for cultural politics. For instance, in her analysis of nonchalant bodily postures that 'dilate' to outside influences, (2020) suggests that Whitman's poems invoke interests in bodily inclinations and movement styles that accrue egalitarian sentiments. Prompted by her sketches of gesticulations inspired by Whitman's poems, we are presented with "dilating" bodies that assume an affable nonchalance readying itself for being affected by the world. According to Bennett (2020), "dilate" is Whitman's term for "a body's capacity to open its pores to the outside" (15). Dilation alludes to an effusiveness notion of personhood that sympathises with others. In focusing on the form of a body in its interrelatedness with others, Bennett invokes a mode of attention that is at once pertaining to a politics of aesthetics.

Here, physiognomy is felt as a sensual inclination of the body which unveils manners of attachment, in other words, of styles of relating to others that make worlding compositions. Or in the case of doting over the physiognomic features of plants, Bennett (2020) suggests that descriptions of our encounters with their

bodily shapes and expressive tendencies enunciate a "solidarity" that expresses egalitarian sentiments. To investigate the shape of chicory root, one needs to assimilate their form, to allow "your inner plant to resonate more freely with the rhythms and styles of chicory" (Bennett 2020, 101). Again, we have a dilation of body at the ready for incorporating other living forms (doesn't this evoke the ethos of 'inclusiveness')? The orientation of building a sensuous alliance with the non-human institutes a form of politics that circumvents pre-established classifications of analysis. Doing away with discursive hierarchies and a polemicist mood of analysis, we see how vigorous phenomenological expressions await descriptions that substantiate the sensing of an egalitarian ethos: an egalitarian sensibility is inscribed in this analytical disposition from the outset. It necessitates explorations of the sensual forms of alliances which aren't just indulgences on the part of the empiricists but unveil influences and styles of attachments that politicize matters. Founded on sensual material sympathies, Bennett (2020) invokes a mode of analysis that makes the ubiquity of affective forces more susceptible to being inflected towards egalitarian politics.

There is a salient mood of openness in Bennett's pursuit of an affective, materialist enunciation of cultural politics. As social aesthetics are explored in ways to inflect and institute cultural politics, they invoke a field of enquiry that embraces aesthetics in cultural political analysis. While there is no short supply of attention given to examining political problems through aesthetic registers of experience, a theoretical approach summed up as "ways of practising politics that takes stock of the affective way power operates now" (Massumi 2015, 36), I argue, means that assumptions made about 'power' or 'politics' remain unchallenged.[6] Instead of tracing how power manifests as affective aesthetics, the ordering of attention may be reversed to uncover the ways that forms and shared sensual conditions prescribe what's at stake in politics. In times when the arts and cultural criticism are invariably hauled in front of beleaguered social conditions and crises, and as they are called up to represent political debates, it is worth examining the assumptions and terms of analysis that underline the "politics of aesthetics," not least for it to foreground the generative capacity of aesthetics for configuring political debates. By putting into focus the sentiments and dispositions of doing politics (Barthes' "stubborn affect" that refuses doxa and Bennett's reading of Whitman's aesthetic "doting"), I draw attention to discussions that widened the basis, assumptions, terms of analysis and not least the mood with which certain issues are addressed as 'political.'

When exploring the politics of cultural formalist enquiries, I suggest that the theoretical work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière is instrumental for thinking about how a formalist aesthetic attention is integral for setting the terms of practising politics. Within a large body of writing on the subject of aesthetics, Rancière refers to a realm of experience and knowledge that registers the sensuous form of living, which issues general ways of doing and making. The sensual condition of social life (i.e. aesthetics) is emphatically addressed by the Rancierian idea of the "sensible." In his book *Politics of Aesthetics*, the "sensible" is endowed with a distinct set of analytical orientations. It doesn't refer to felt senses; instead, it points to the sensual forms or conditions upon which sense perceptions take place, or the affective conditions upon which something may be felt and recognized in certain ways (Rancière 2006). To extend this line of thinking, his theory of the "sensible" also prescribes a relationship in which singular entities (e.g. social subjects) are made intelligible through sensual structures. Thus, 'singularities' are discerned through sensual logic. The singular-structure relation accentuates forms of partaking that makes the singular coincide with structure—for instance, in modes of perceptions that inscribe them in a commonality. Rancière's (2010) notion of the "distribution of the sensible" elucidates this: "a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed" (44).

For Rancière (2010), the notion of "sensible" is generative for instituting cultural politics; in his words, politics is activated by "instituting of a dispute over the distribution of the sensible" (45).[7] He elucidates the type of politics spawned by the "sensible"—"Politics revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 2006, 13). At first, his explication of politics may easily allude to the convention of identity politics couched in debates around cultural representation. Yet, the 'who', or 'what', in other words, the 'subjects' of politics, is far from pre-formulated identities, since these "singularities" are yet to emerge in analyses of aesthetics. At the heart of redeeming politics in aesthetics is the recognition that aesthetic forces and structures are *a priori* forms that determine the intelligibility of singular forms by way of how something presents itself as quality of experience. And the process of distinguishing a "singularity," to make it intelligible, or conversely in the case of it being obscured within structures of experience, engenders a "politics of aesthetics." Here, we have a conception of politics premised on sensual forms and logic of

senses that enable us to recognise actors and assemblages which may not fall into specific categories of identification. Senses, perceptions, and styles underscore the intelligibility of singular form—from the human body to vegetal bodies, from the arts to all manners of conduct in vernacular experience, the act of discerning singularities-in-structures on account of aesthetic forms and styles of partaking (not antagonistic but one is inscribed in the other) widens the terms of analysis pertaining to cultural politics. Indeed, probing of the "sensible" concurs with the structural notion of cultural form (structures of experience). Thus, the endeavour of instituting politics in cultural formalism is in the nature of unveiling the *a priori* forms of experience as they are emphatically considered as conditions, possibilities and determinations. In this vein of thinking, the formalist mode of doing cultural analysis is ineluctably political from the outset.

Within the ruse of intelligibility, we arrive at terms of instituting politics other than those established by antithetical positions. The disjunction of sensual forms, as Rancière evokes in the idea of "dissensus" ("the essence of politics is *dissensus*"), posits theoretical interests for configuring the ground for politics (Rancière 2010, 46). He explicates the concept as follows: "Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself" (Rancière 2010, 46).[8] The actuality of "sensible" experienced as the affective condition of living is always already a multiplicity. At the level of form, "dissensus" may be expressed as a rupture in the sensual form of experience, or as orchestration of heterogeneous sensual perceptual conditions. And the idea of a "gap in the sensible" call for analysis of aesthetic differentiations that are endowed with political significance (Rancière 2010, 46). Rather than oppositional stances in ideation, "dissensus" calls into attention senses and sensual structures that sustain, diminish, reinforce, or extinguish within the multiplicity of the sensible.

As cultural formalism contends with the "sensible," the idea of "dissensus" evokes formalist descriptions of the "gap" in the way that it seizes analytical attentions. Sensitivity to forms of being and relating is conducive for mapping out sites of "dissensus." Thus, the political is played out in the toggling of styles and characteristic experience of living. Looking at how the sensual fabric of experience is disturbed, or expressions that couldn't find their place in a system of perceptions, the mode of attention specific to cultural formalism is poised to uncover the 'subjects' of politics. "Politics of aesthetics" emerge in instances of divergent sensing of time-space, and the general incompatibility of affective inclinations, styles, and bodily orientations. A formalist description of "dissensus" is helpful for staking out politics in the vocabularies of hinderance, irritation, disorientation, and asynchrony. As emphasized in the notion of "dissensus," politics of aesthetics arises from relations of formal effects. For instance, social arrhythmia indexes

a sensual mode of inhabiting space-time that imply an 'Other' with which one couldn't coalesce without scrambling its own configuration. Arrhythmia suggests a jarring patterning of the sensible (arrhythmia as partitions of the sensible), or a gap of formal alliances. Considered as an idiom of cultural politics, it posits the foundational logic of the multiple rather than oppositional.

The sites and stakes of politics lie as much in divisions as in isomorphic relations. Take 'equality' as a foundational ideology that underpins cultural politics, the phenomenological similitude of forms and styles evoke equality not as something endowed to individuals but as agreeable forms that harmoniously co-exist and as such are 'recognized' by one another. Instead of it being an idea derived from the conception of hierarchies and its assumed counterparts, equality takes effect in sensual forms as agreeable sensibilities and forms that *affirm* a structure of feeling. That situations of equality aren't necessarily solely recognized in matters of representation (as in classified social groups ratified by governmental discourse and mass media); rather, equitable entities are identified by their analogous style of partaking in social life. Rancière (2004) notes the demonstration of equality in "banal" situations such as the simple fact that "two interlocutors can understand one another" (85). In this case, 'equality' is an affective affirmation that goes beyond shared linguistic tools, but in the dispositions, styles of inhabiting the world, and the sharing of sensual structures. The formal/affective effects of '(in)equality' are explored in the realm of politics of aesthetics. Conversely, 'exclusion' manifests when a fissure, a disruption of sensual structure marks out a singular entity from a shared system of perception—in the case of a commonality of senses failing to affect the singular, participation is kept at bay. 'Commonality' doesn't equate with 'low' culture; rather, it refers to shared sensual forms that predicate and provide effects of equality. Indeed, as cultural formalism is concerned with a commonality of senses, a democratic attention is already exercised in looking at structures of experience which provide access to communal life. Here, 'democracy' isn't indicative of an absolute ideology; it operates as an open-ended ethos that invites us to trace the ways in which affective conditions (i.e. cultural forms) occasion effects of equality. While the ideology of participation, inclusion, and equality keeps us in a closed loop of political reckoning, studies of cultural form are well placed for retracing aesthetic relations that wield ethical awareness, and it is done through pronouncing the sites, processes and formations which fall outside identifiable categories of political analysis. In doing so, it may radically redescribe terms of ideology (e.g. 'equality' as 'isomorphism') with the view of reviving spaces of political imagination.

CAPACIOUS

The interminable crisis of our times is often seen through the prism of polemical reasoning from presupposed ideological positions. Raymond Williams (1977) cautions against the jeopardy of doing politics via fixed forms of thinking as he stresses the fallacy of "taking terms of analysis as terms of substance" (129). The stable foundations of pre-established positionings, as often instantiated by identity politics (race, gender, human-nature divide in climate crisis), may easily overshadow the desire for redescribing forms of experience that elude the preponderance of power politics.

When we let fixed discourses dictate objects of analysis, as is often done at the expense of doting on things, we blunt our sensitivity to the ways in which politics resides with and operates through social aesthetic registers. The politics of cultural formalism is contingent, in the sense that the loci and stakes of polity aren't inherent in any social groups. Without making intelligible the affective structuring of experience and relations, the true grounds of doing cultural politics are still concealed. Beyond coupling ideological ethos with discursive interpretation of political struggles, the theory of a 'politics of intelligibility' (the meta-politics that persists in Rancière's politics of aesthetics) unravels cultural politics by way of illuminating sensuous forms and sensual relations (as it delineates the endeavour of cultural formalism). One could say that a "neutral" and yet ardent form of attention infused in cultural formalist analysis has always already performed a "disturbance" in the mood and orientations of doing cultural politics. And the mood of cultural formalism is germane to uncovering "dissensus" that then leads to political interventions. To make this point more emphatic, one could see the affinity between explorations of cultural form and the nature of political art. The latter is specifically conceived by Rancière (2006) as work that causes a "sensible or perceptual shock" without signification—"disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle" (63). Indeed, the undertaking of cultural formalism is precisely in the order of such works. Since the 'form' of living, or our multiple ways of life are also the condition that (dis) enables the intelligibility of entities, we may acquire a manner of doing cultural politics where 'terms of substance' orientates 'terms of analysis.'

Endnotes

1. "the domestic and commodity-oriented aesthetic of cuteness, the informational and discursive aesthetic of the merely interesting, and the occupational and cultural performance aesthetic of zaniness help get at some of the most basic dynamics underlying life in Western industrial societies. No other aesthetic categories in our current repertoire speak to these everyday practices of production, circulation, and consumption in the same direct way" (Ngai 2012, 1).

2. The publication of *The Neutral* was based on the eponymous course which Barthes gave at the College de France extended over thirteen weeks, from February 18 to June 3, 1978.

3. On the predominant discursive logic of "conflict," Barthes (2005) states: "That everything in the universe, in the world, in society, in the subject, in reality is formatted by conflict: no proposition more widely accepted: Western philosophies, doctrines, metaphysics, materialism, 'sensibilities,' ordinary languages, everything talks about conflict (about the conflictual) as if it were nature itself" (125-6).

4. See Roland Barthes, *The Neutral* (1978): "the Neutral doesn't refer to 'impressions' of grayness, of 'neutrality', of indifference. The Neutral—my Neutral—can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. 'To outplay the paradigm' is an ardent, 'burning activity.' I took the word 'Neutral,' nsofar as its referent inside me is a stubborn affect (in fact, ever since *Writing Degree Zero*)" (Barthes 2005, 8).

5. For Barthes (2005), the 'ideosphere' refers to the established discourse that is experienced as 'natural' and 'universal' (89).

6. Brian Massumi (2015) discusses the ways in which studies of affect yields politics. He notes: "The crucial political question for me is whether there are ways of practising a politics that takes stock of the affective way power operates now, but doesn't rely on violence and the hardening of divisions along identity lines that it usually brings. I'm not exactly sure what that kind of politics would look like, but it would still be performative, and it would resist personification in peak individuals. In some basic way it would be an aesthetic politics, because its aim would be to expand the range of affective potential—which is what aesthetic practice has always been about" (Massumi 2015, 36).

7. Throughout Rancière's writing on politics, he maintains the position that politics need to be uncovered as opposed to the readily established "purist" model of which "the relation between the political relationship and the subject get interpreted; that is, in the assumption that there is a way of life that is 'specific' to political existence, enabling us to infer the political relationship from the properties of a specific order of being" (Rancière 2010, 36).

8. "Dissensus" is a key concept in Rancière's political philosophy. He contrasts the foundation of politics instituted by the concept "dissensus" with the model of "communicative action" which presupposes "partners that are already pre-constituted as such and discursive forms that entail a speech community, the constraint of which is always explicable" (Rancière 2010, 38).

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DANCING IN THE SPIRIT: EXPLORING PENTECOSTALISM AT THE INTERARTICULATIONS OF AFFECT AND RITUAL

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ABSTRACT
Bringing together personal testimony and narrative with theories of affect and ritual, this article explores the interdisciplinary connections between affect and ritual, seeing the two as complementary. Affect explores how things feel, how bodies are acted upon and become actors. Ritual studies allows that movement, that choreography, to be observed and mapped out in embodied life. Theory comes from the Greek, theoria, meaning "to look at." Thus, I begin by looking at my own experiences growing up in a dynamic, spirit-filled church community and how those moments of worship have shaped and stayed with me. One of the recurring themes in this chapter is dance, which serves as an apt metaphor and method of engaging spirituality (praxis).

KEYWORDS
embodiment, ritual, Pentecostalism, dance, affect, spirit

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> Affect theory merges with LaMothe's call to begin studying religion with bodies, using our embodied practices, habits, and sensitivities to understand religious worlds.
>
> — Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power*

> Ritual is not a senseless activity but is rather one of many ways in which human beings construe and construct their world.
>
> —Ted Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge"

When I was twelve years old, my dad, a Pentecostal pastor, decided to add a Friday night worship service to the roster of weekly church meetings––the previous Sunday's neatly arrayed chairs pushed to the edges of the sanctuary in leaning, mountainous stacks. Another local preacher mocked: "Are you going to turn the church into a dance club?" "Why not?" my dad fired back. The openness of the room gestured at the possibilities of worship: space to dance. An invitation for bodies to congregate, shoulder to shoulder, in varying postures––arms raised or kneeling palms up. Sound flooded the interstices of the room, buzzing with the garbled sounds of singing, shouting, and praying. Streamers, flags, and banners flew as upbeat praise songs turned into slower anthems. There were blankets scattered about, as volume and movement ebbed and flowed with the music.

After a time, usually an hour or so, a holy hush would descend, which was a collective indication that the time of worship had come to an end. On those Friday nights, we gathered with no set agenda, no order of service––only an invitation to worship God however and by whatever means you were inclined. What held us in those occasions saturated with feeling has continued to hold onto me, a God-haunting that is as affective as it is effective to anchor, push, and pull bodies through the worship space and time.[1]

This essay reflects on affectively dense worship experiences and the consequent rituals that accompanied them. To do so, I suggest a conversation between theories of affect and ritual studies as a multifaceted framework for exploring Pen-

tecostal worship experience. The adjacency of affect and ritual demonstrate how these theories coalesce: how theory can bend and stretch beyond any Cartesian anxiety that bifurcated bodies into body/mind. Through their interarticulation, we can theorize via affect and ritual in the interstices of what remains elusive, just out of reach of cognition and language, complementing and augmenting other ongoing approaches to Pentecostalism. Affect draws attention to the extra-linguistic cues, feelings, and forces that shape and orient bodies in space, while ritual observes, explores, and charts the choreographic languages of the body. Dancing is the perfect example of this feeling-movement, as it serves as a theory and sways as a practice, taking seriously the sounds and sights of the space without foreclosing the possibilities for serious inquiry. Affect theorists have quoted extensively from ritualists,[2] but the connection between the two fields as an interdisciplinary method, especially regarding sound and space, has not yet received adequate attention.

Pentecostal permutations are unwieldy, potentially undermining the conventions and traditions of the spiritual practices of Pentecostal worship itself. While this approach is not fully sufficient to attend to the boisterous potential of Pentecostal worship, it does center the body as the locus of spiritual practice and interpretation. No one method can capture Pentecostal worship; nevertheless, an interdisciplinary approach is helpful to explore these languages of the body in their choreographic and extra- and para-linguistic manifestations.

Some scholars of religion reduce and relegate Pentecostalism to a historical aberration or doctrinal heresy.[3] Others, especially within theological studies, dismiss it as hyper-sensationalism or superstition (Pentecostalism is indeed sensationalist, though not in the pejorative way that is meant by the term). Others, such as anthropologists, use fieldwork and interviews to flesh out key insights and characteristics (e.g., Miller & Yamamori 2007, 1; Coleman and Hackett 2015). Still others try to inject it with philosophy in efforts to legitimize or situate it within larger historical movements (mysticism, holiness, revivalism) (e.g., Cox 2007, 1; Smith 2010; Castelo 2017; Alexander 2011). In what follows, I propose an approach that engages Pentecostalism in all its gestural, visceral, and corporeal potential, its paradoxical nuances, its messy ecstatic outbursts, ruptures, performances, contradictions. Approaching the subject in this manner allows for a more nuanced understanding of the felt dimensions of religious experience and the irreducibility between thought and action. I refer to this as feeling-doing, or doing-thinking, that organizes, informs, and teaches bodies.

On Dancing and Dignity

My dad's favorite sermon riffed on the story of King David: how he shamelessly danced out of his robe when the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol and physical abode of God's presence, entered Jerusalem; how he leapt and twirled, becoming 'undignified'; how his wife, Michal, daughter of Saul, despised his nakedness as she looked down from her high window onto his indignity. Michal's contempt was punished with barrenness. My dad's run-in with the local preacher underscores how embodied worship, specifically dance, has been historically criticized as primitive, dismissed as feminine, and racialized. It seems there is something odd and unsettling when certain men show emotion, especially when those feelings lead to expressions that do not comply with (hetero)norms.

My dad would dance as David danced, embracing the playful indignity of embodied worship experience. His eyes brimmed with tears each time he preached the dancing king: "Like David, our dancing church will bear much fruit." On many occasions I recall watching my dad limp as he danced and sung, sometimes while crying––a reminder of how deeply he felt his truth. He indulged in rather than rejected the invitation to intimacy and vulnerability, even at the price of losing his dignity. Dancing was such a staple in our church that we formed a dance team, The Spirit of David. I was one of two boys in a group of fifteen. In a short time, we began traveling and dancing, as we performed our choreographed numbers to popular Christian hip-hop and worship songs. Occasionally, others would tease me with homophobic slurs. Dancing has a way of resisting, of queering the norm, of refusing to be reduced.

How does it feel to become undignified? What is dignity but a performance of power and privilege from an honored position of being deemed worthy. Worthy of what exactly? Often, my dad would go up to the keyboard and sing one his favorite songs: "Slow dancin', swayin' to the music. Slow dancin', just me and my *God*" (Rivers, 1998) Of course, "God" here is substituted for "girl." People would twirl and step as if God was the leading partner in an intimate slow dance. The inversely proportional nature of shame and dignity is worth further consideration. As Schaefer (2022) flags:

> Dignity and pride have not been directly studied in affect theory and one might make the argument that they do not quite qualify as feelings, per se… But I think what we are seeing emerge in works by Bonilla-Silva, Ahmed, and others are the contours of a theory of how economies of dignity synchronize to race. The shame (and shaming) of one group builds the dignity of another. These are amplified by dynamics of class, race, and region. The feelings that circulate within this economy consolidate those same political dynamics. (258)

As Schaefer (2015) points out elsewhere, Emmanuel Levinas famously said "humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest––all the exotic––is dance" (qtd. in Schaefer, 262). It is dance, nevertheless, that we return to consider the interarticulation of affect and ritual.

Kimmerer LaMothe (2004) invites us to study religion with/in the body "as a kind of dance—as rhythmic bodily movement enacting a logic of bodily becoming *and* a cultural spiral of discovery and response" (2, emphasis in the original) Donovan Schaefer (2015) adds: "Affect theory situates religion in the ordinary… following the materialist shift, tries to think of religion as dance, as a surging of multileveled, deeply stratified bodies into the work that is not reducible to language… the music and the meaning are absolutely indissociable" (218). Dancing occasions movement that brings about an ordering; a cosmology is created. Returning to my anecdote at the beginning of this essay, I concur with LaMothe that dance serves as an important metaphor, a vital example of what religion means and what it does, and a form of embodied and bodily knowledge. Whereas many theorists and scholars of religion have historically discounted dance as inadequate or insufficient to express religion, LaMothe (2004) uses dance to unlock the affective and ritualistic components of religion that, linguistically and cognitively, conceptually and kinesthetically, constitute an ensemble of embodied processes (2-3). One dances religion into meaning: "The dancer dances her worship in the temple, creates the temple within her body, and dances the temple in her performance" (Narayanan 2003, 508, qtd. in Schaefer 2015, 192).

Theologically speaking, there is a Trinitarian flow and relation to LaMothe's (2004) cosmology—and the word Trinity, *perichoresis* in Greek, means rotation—read: dance—between the three persons of the Godhead. Dance animates, rotates, and keeps moving, spinning webs of interconnectedness to the point of indistinguishableness, of indistinction, to the point where the lines between dancer, dance, and temple blur. Dance, as movement, is feeling in motion, feeling

on display. It is learned and performed, even mastered. It is the subject of analysis from varying fields across the arts and humanities because it not only has meaning but is action. Something happens when one dances. It connotes more than words can convey. While theories of affect prompt one to consider forms of religion as dance, ritual also provides insights for imaging the connection between religion and dance and religion as dance.

Friday night worship was about getting the mood right: lights switched off, save for the red glow of exit signs at the back of the room. Even without a live band, we were pulled into a shared rhythm—blasting Hillsong worship tunes over the sound system, then pausing to offer a prayer, prophecy, or vision. Often, my dad would sit on the stage and cry and pray in tongues until the room began to stir. He was cued even as he cued the room. In that way, he functioned as a thermostat, affecting and regularly regulating the collective temperature of the room. Rarely, someone else would share a scripture at the beginning to frame the night. The music, accompanied by the effervescent sounds of ecstatic praise, was the primary driving force of the night. The room itself vibrated, buzzed, reverberated with voluminous sounds of music and movement.

It was there in the dark but warm space filled with voluminous worship music that I first danced with God. (Maybe it is more appropriate to say that I danced "in the spirit?") The experience evinced a progression: I began by clapping suspiciously. Then I swayed subtly. Until finally—once I realized that nobody was watching or judging—I jumped and spun about wildly. The affective mood of the room would shift as the fast-tempo praise songs transitioned to slower anthems and ballads. All the energy spent jumping around became more focused and concentrated in the body. The fast-tempo songs allow one to move through the outer courts with thanksgiving and praise; the slower songs brought about a collective reverence in the room that stilled and calmed bodies into slower movements and eventually more tranquil forms of worship.

My dad would speak of this slower time as an opportunity to 'soak' in the presence of God. People would transition from standing to kneeling, and eventually to laying on their stomachs or backs. On more than one occasion I—and several others—would lie on the floor until we eventually fell asleep. (To this day, I still consider it the best sleep I have ever had.) I remember the sensation of a warm

blanket enveloping me, as the sounds of people praying, crying, and speaking in tongues slowly faded. More than emotional outbursts and goosebumps, I felt, above all else, safe. I felt, in essence, at home. And I learned that this was what it meant to feel God's presence, to know God. The ritual knowledge of the event was learned as it was experienced. That presence, that is, the feeling of emotions ebbing and flowing in the room, is what we were all pursuing.

I would wake up either when the lights were turned on, usually after 10 PM, or earlier if someone started 'laughing in the Holy Ghost,' which was frequently followed by an unpredictable amount of time where a few trickling laughs multiplied in persons and volume until most in the room would be laughing uncontrollably. These periods of laughter were contagious and often followed periods of intense worship that included sobbing and what I have come to understand as lament. I realized, even as a child, that the degree of crying and emotion often was occasioned by laughter in equal measure. When worship was over, we would head to the local greasy spoon restaurant for another one or two hours of fellowship, which was a testament to both our southern culture and Pentecostal tradition. There were many occasions when we did not leave our beloved restaurant until well after midnight. People would come in from night clubs and a night out drinking at a bar. My mom would joke that we were all drunk, too, but off the 'new wine.'

On Ritual Knowledge

I recall this anecdote to say that Friday night worship in the sanctuary constituted a way of knowing for me—knowing God was knowing *how* to experience or encounter God. Knowing God was feeling God and vice versa. Pentecostal knowing comes from personal experience. Perhaps that is why times of intense worship were described as 'intimacy with God.' There was a way of achieving this intimacy. I watched and learned from others. I listened to the songs and to the words of those praying and singing around me, how their voices inflected what they were saying as they talked to God and waited for God to respond. I found in music the ecstatic power of feeling all the way alive. Sundays were like Fridays in a milder manner. But I lived for those Friday nights, when, in a dark sanctuary, I would lose and find myself once again in God. This period of life was short-lived. After a church split and denominational dispute, we moved away. I did not dance much in my subsequent teenage years. The wonder and joy

I experienced on those Friday nights was a thing confined to the past, memories unthought of, until I visited The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries' bi-yearly meeting in 2017. That was the only time I felt those familiar feelings again. At first, I tried to resist, but eventually I gave in, even indulged.

While growing up Pentecostal instilled a sense of wonder, it also brought about a sense of skepticism. Consider the phrase, "Don't make it a doctrine." Perhaps puzzling jargon to the outside observer, but for those of us *in* the community, these five words carried a caution. If Pentecostalism is considered, as Harvey Cox (1995) has argued, a protest against man-made creeds and the coldness of traditional worship, then these words serve as a careful hermeneutic for interpreting worship beyond the event. Meaning, as my mother would warn, the worship experience itself could become *like* a doctrine, and doctrines are made to be followed. When confronted with the need for doctrine in the church, she would rebut: "Someone with an experience is never at the mercy of someone with an opinion." Here, of course, opinion is synonymous with doctrine or authoritative teaching. The comment exposes her roots in the Oneness movement, a non-Trinitarian sect within Pentecostalism.

Given the repetitions that occur in Pentecostal worship, I was raised to be fearful that the novelty of the Spirit, i.e., the capriciousness and capaciousness that proliferate in these Spirited-filled spaces, could be squelched if it became too regimented or rehearsed. Or worse, the lack of feeling could be a bigger problem like unconfessed sin or a spiritual sign that something was awry. When things would begin to feel 'stale' or 'dry' in the collective aura, the preacher or worship leader would cry out to God for a fresh word or outpouring and renewal. The emotional temperature of the worship experience served as a gauge for and guide through the open-ended service. At any moment, the Spirit could take over, shifting the mood in the room even as it edited the order of worship in real time. Doctrines, as such, are not as flexible and therefore not as useful for the shifting, unpredictable dynamics of Pentecostal worship.

Because of the interplay between emotion, spoken word, text, and personal reflection, Pentecostalism does not force anyone to choose between learning through embodied forms of knowledge and more philosophical processes of knowing. One does not simply study Pentecostalism; one is enveloped in its cosmology.

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That it is not systematic does not delegitimize it as a theology or preclude it from theological reflection, even though it does separate it from Western categorical distinctions of theology as shaped from Enlightenment understandings of the term. Whereas Western notions of doctrine have largely led to organization or systemization, Pentecostalism is a critique and reversal of the methods of Western theological thought and is usually wary of hyper-intellectualized projects. Doctrine and theology are still important parts of the tradition, but there is a deeper reliance on performance; a rhythm, a *perichoresis*, a dance, constitutes a methodology for embracing Pentecostal spirituality. As my mother still contests: "I can't explain it, but I know deep down inside what is true." In this way, Pentecostalism is different in kind from theological approaches found in many other theological traditions. This project attends to this difference in ways that trace the contours of Pentecostal theologizing without reducing it or comparing it to other purportedly more 'formal' traditions.

Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes (2014) suggests that religions are "little nourished by disembodied reflection, and it is a mistake to assume that dancing one's religion precludes thinking about it" (1). Grimes is alluding to what is offered in LaMothe (2004), namely that dancing—as the choreography of the body—is indissociable, inextricable from thought. Perhaps dancing, itself, can be thought as a form of feeling-doing or doing-thinking? The line between thought and action is eschewed in the dance. Attending to Grimes' assertion, what might it mean for one to find 'nourishment' in religious reflection? An example is necessary. In the Hebrew Bible narrative, God feeds the children of Israel in the desert with manna from heaven. Manna, here, more than miraculous daily bread, is a question: "*Ma'n Hu*?" (הוּא מָן), meaning, "What is it?" The nourishment is found in asking the question as much as eating or consuming the miracle bread. Partaking of the bread is the act, asking the question is the reflection. It is why in Deuteronomy the writer informs that "one does not live by bread alone; but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (8:3 NRSV). Meals and food are a vital and ubiquitous part of social and religious life and feature as a way of connecting the daily needs of people with hunger for more, for meaning, for spiritual food.

If religions find little nourishment in disembodied reflection, then Pentecostalism represents a case in point for embodied reflection—bodily-knowing-seeking-understanding––informed by the needs and desires of the body, and subsequently moves to contemplation and reflection. Theology, thus, is an embodied exercise, a fleshy practice: the Word becoming flesh. "Dancing in the Spirit," the title of this article, builds upon what Maia Kotrosits (2015) calls 'sense-making,' a hyphen-

ated phrase that evidences how "thinking and feeling are hopelessly interwoven experiences" (3). We may think of the hyphen as a way bringing together things that are neither fully commensurate nor opposites; the hyphen seeks to bring together seemingly disparate things.

Perhaps Dancing in the Spirit can be imagined and studied as an example of holding the tension of experiential knowing and theoretical, intellectualized, logocentric projects without wholesale accepting or rejecting each other. I propose extending Kotrosits' (2015) notion of sense-making into a performative register; dancing suggests ecstatic possibilities of Pentecostalism and the interpretations of it are anchored in and performed by the body: "To say we 'make sense' of something, for instance, is to accord an intuitive, bodily, and non- or beyond- conscious force to knowing. Knowledge arrives as an 'impression'" (4). Knowledge arrives as an impression, which is to say, in a felt (sensate) or registered manner.[4] Sense-making that does not take into account performance, that does not factor in the corporeal movements, gestures, posturing that occur, is incomplete. Thus, sense-making is triptych of feeling-thinking-doing in which it is unclear where one ends and the other begins.

For Ted Jennings (1982) "Ritual is not a senseless activity but is rather one of many ways in which human beings construe and construct their world" (112). He gives three 'moments' in the noetic (noetic, as in the amalgamation of intellect and perception) functions of ritual: ritual as a way of gaining knowledge, ritual as the transmission of knowledge, and ritual performance as a display of the ritual and its participants to an observer who is invited to see, approve, understand, or recognize the ritual action (113). "Dancing in the Spirit" embraces these moments and suggests engaging in religious experience under the assumption that it is spirit, or the Spirit, that animates it. It opens the door to an interdisciplinary conversation between theories of affect and ritual studies to explore Pentecostal worship experience as an occasion of bodies being pushed and pulled by affective rituals. Like those Friday nights when we churched, this method turns down the lights and invites us to feel the music and be willing to move where the dancing takes us.

Endnotes

1. This article is in furtherance of my research, which was published in my book (Watts 2023).

2. For more on this connection, see Schaefer (2015), LaMothe (2004), Grimes (2014), and Ahmed (2015).

3. This denomination focuses on the doctrinal aspects of Pentecostalism, which it seems to be an adventure in missing the point: "In this series of articles, we have tried the Pentecostal movement in its basic roots and tenets. We have considered its history and origin; its emphasis on the special gifts of the Holy Spirit; and now its view of the Christian life. And in every case, having been weighed in the Bible's balances, it has been found wanting. It fails the test of what constitutes orthodox Christianity... [O]ur conclusion has to be that this movement is not a great blessing for the church, but a dangerous heresy" (Engelsma 2018, n. p.).

4. For Sara Ahmed (2015), 'impressions' highlight the contact of material forces—bodies, objects, etc.—that literally 'press' upon bodies: "To form an impression might involve acts of perception and cognition as well as emotion. But forming an impression also depends on how objects impress upon us… An impression can be an effect on the subject's feelings; it can be a belief; it can be an imitation or an image; it can be a mark on the surface" (6).

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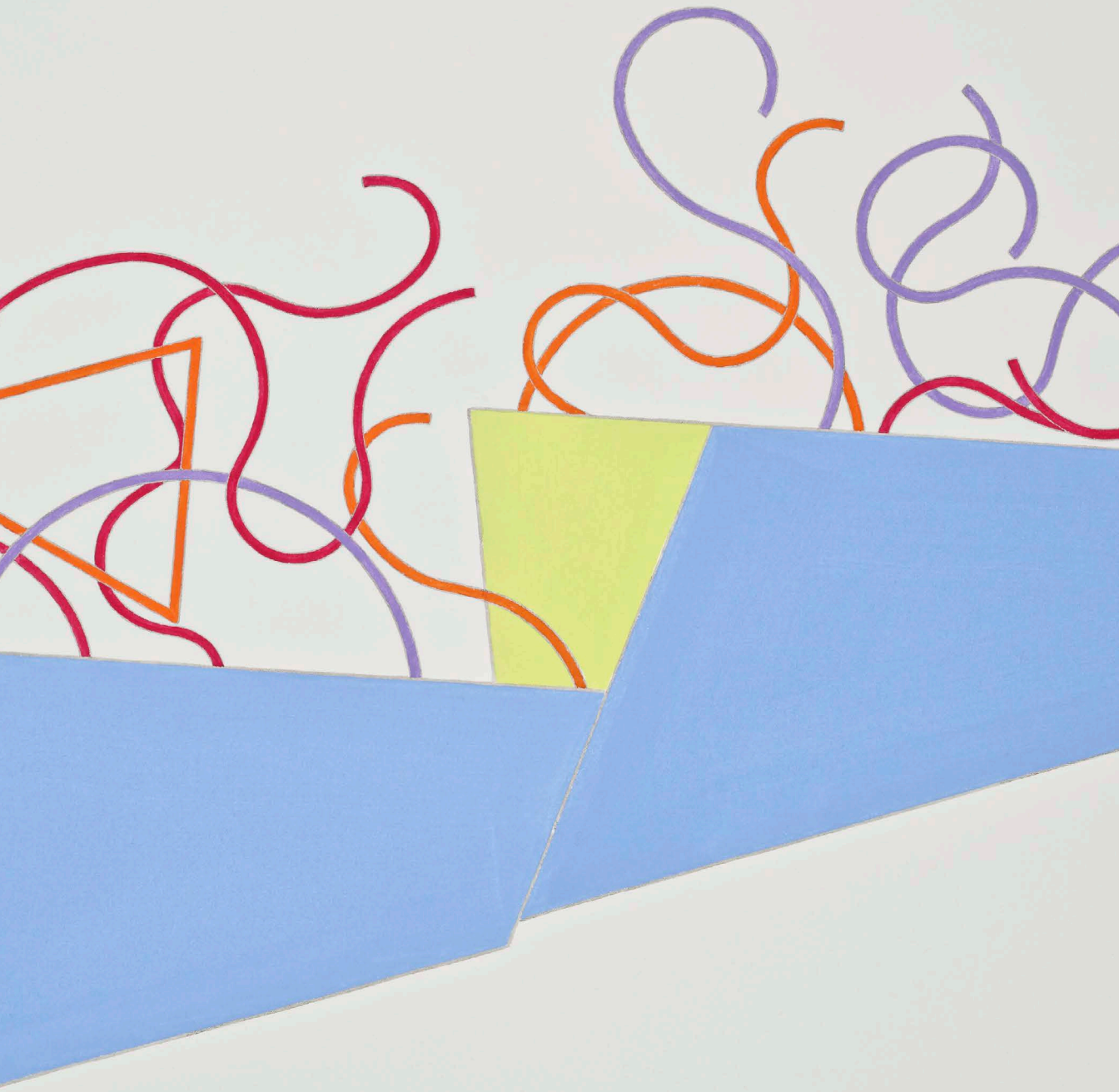

Container Exp6, Alfio Giuffrida, 2019

Book Review: **FELTNESS**

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Springgay, Stephanie. (2022). Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art & Affective Pedagogies. Durham: Duke University Press, 224 pages, $25.95 (paperback)

I have been considering the appropriate start for this review for a while now. As usually happens when referring to affect theory literature, there is something ungraspable, unintelligible, that we cannot effectively name while facing the in-between-ness of affective intensities. There is no doubt that Springgay's book has affected me to the core, leaving me with this feeling, a metaphor maybe, written in the margin of the book's last page, in scrawled, emotion-filled handwriting: "*Feltness* is one of those works that crack the thick walls of academic chambers, letting in glimpses of light that push us to crave the warmness of being, growing, and dwelling with others."

In this book, the central statement is that feltness, that is, a (material) practice of intimacy, is a crucial source for the disruption of the increasing neoliberal reforms, universities' marketization, and the educational system's focus on impact factors and quantitative measures of productivity which treats pedagogy and research as a corporate-orientated accountability process rather than an act of education. For Springgay, feltness is the condition for executing radical pedagogy, that is, a pedagogical practice committed to resisting the colonialism, patriarchalism, and binarism of disciplinary social categories and power hierarchies.

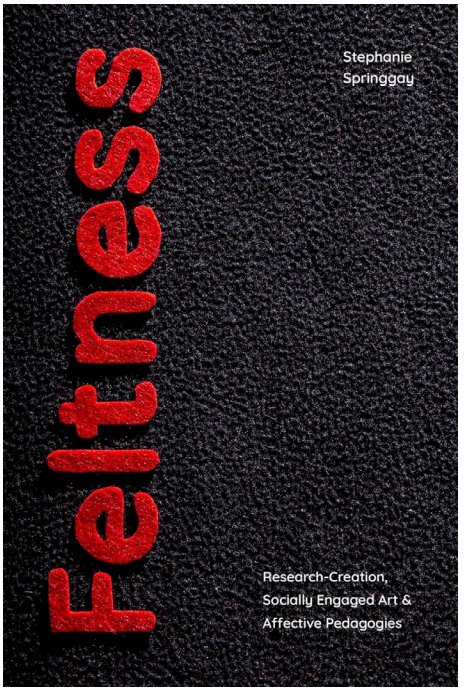
To resist the social norms framed in so much of Western society, radical pedagogy practices utilize ethics and politics of relationality, setting intimacy as its praxiological axis. For Stephanie Springgay, "intimacy conjures radical relatedness, reciprocity, and care" (8). This conjuring or invocation of the animacy of bodies (Chen 2012) means that there is someone or something to relate with, to love, to be angry with, or to feel along with, thus breaking the isolated competitiveness and goal-centered ontology of neoliberal academic research work, while recognizing the embodied, fleshy, sensorial and frictional aspects of becoming subjects—or researchers, for that matter.

As an intimacy practice, feltness involves being close, getting together, assembling reciprocally, and attaching to others' bodies with a sense of familiarity. Whether hand-felting textiles, experiencing our being, having touching encounters, or facing human and more-than-human entanglements, people are becoming, simultaneously, individual subjects and one of the indistinguishable fibers composing the tangled fabric of the social world, and, from then on, we are "becoming with," and "always imbricated in all that we touch and that touches us" (10).

Therefore, intimacy becomes an inventive and creative process of becoming, in which mastery and systematized scientific knowledge are no longer at the center. Instead, the intimacy practice of feltness focuses on what leaves us feeling uncomfortable and perplexed, always pushing us to wonder and raise questions and not look for answers, thus serving as a breaking point for how we have comprehended research processes and researchers' identities.

Feltness: Research-creation, Socially Engaged Art, & Affective Pedagogies leaves us with at least three great propositions. Propositions, not instructions. As the author has stated in this and other writings (Springgay, 2015; Truman & Springgay, 2016), a proposition is a kind of entity that activates many potentialities. Because propositions are a hybrid of potentialities and actualities, they do not offer prescribed information, norms, or rules to follow but highlight conditions of emergence, such that, even when a proposition is false (not conforming to social rules), they can continue affecting those who have experienced it (Murris & Bozolek 2019).

The first proposition made throughout the book is the impact that working with intimacy practices could have for late capitalist Western societies. Specifically, there are two main issues to address: the evaluation of art in education and the neoliberal ideal of academic subjects. Regarding the first point, one of the author's critiques about developing pedagogical artistic initiatives is that, thus far, initiatives have focused on evaluating the aesthetic value of art compositions based on, for example, whether they sustain or resist the hegemonic logic. The main problem is that having such an evaluative emphasis goes against what these initiatives seek to disrupt; the conception of art is a process made and achieved by experts and then comprehended only by certain people and produced in specific (isolated) places where creativity can flow. Thus, by creating, or even discussing, such evaluations of artistic production created in transformative pedagogical contexts, art practice's radicalism is coopted to sustain the power relations already present in prestigious artistic circles.



To change the aforementioned issues, Springgay proposes using art for research-creation and radical pedagogy to revolutionize our labor ethos. Whether we are academics, educators, or artists (or everything at the same time), Springgay urges us to muddy the procedures and methods we have learned over the years and step into a speculative realm of thinking-making-doing: that is, to let go and consider the rhythms, movements, and intensities of affects emerging from artistic, creative, and educational settings and encounters. Moreover, she asks us to abandon typical discussions about art and academic research, such as whether we need training to do art or if what we are doing as social researchers should qualify as art (or not). In contrast, Springgay stresses that the main point of research-creation is to "expand the dimensions of knowledge and research methods both critically and politically and as radical pedagogy" (23). This poses a major challenge for those of us who understand art as a hopeful and crucial agent for research and educational transformation. Springgay's work invites us to strive to do better, push boundaries, and break free from traditional social and scientific constraints, as well as the egotistical academic imperative of showcasing research creations and seeking personal validation.

Additionally, regarding the ideal of neoliberal academic subjects, as we can see throughout the book, the feltness of research-creation will lead to a view of research and pedagogical practice that questions the supremacy of adult, white, male, and able-bodied subjects. Through the concept of *depremacy*, the author emphasizes the need to decenter and strip away the supremacy of Western canons of knowledge, arguing that the continued legitimization of whiteness sustains violent, oppressive, and genocidal practices towards those who do not fit in the hegemonic subject ideal, e.g., children, women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, immigrants, or people with disabilities, andtherefore discarding their knowledge production experiences. To achieve *depremacy*, Springgay compels us to question the epistemologies of research and knowledge production: Who has set the norm? Who benefits from such a norm (and who does not)? What is legible as knowledge (and what is not)? Which practices sustain such norms? Springgay offers us her experience with a feltness research-creation as a starting point to tear away the veil that masks academic supremacist practices.

The second proposition made by Springgay is, in the words of Murris and Bozalek (2019), to queer our researchers' bodily boundaries. Throughout the book, we can sense the author's proposal to go beyond our bodily limits and find the possibility of creating new words and forms of existence within encounters that induce discomfort and perplexity. Following Murris and Bozalek (2019), when we commit in mind, body, and soul to post-qualitative and affective research we face, and deeply experience, the queering of ourselves every time we encounter and assemble with human and non-human entities. In each encounter, we blur a little of what we thought we were and would be. As Karen Barad (2014) says, in every intra-action, there is no difference between bodies; there is only a difference situated-in-the-(re)making. Thus, there is no more binarism between me-other, but a Me-and-Other, a body superposition, a becoming, here-there, now-then, this-that.

Thus, feltness leads us "to live without bodily boundaries" (Murris & Bozalek 2019, 3-9), which means to be open to being affected by (non- and more-than-) human bodies; to accept that not all knowledge can be known or articulated; to have the courage to queer the privilege granted over the years to a supremacist ethos; to elude and resist control; to feel at the edge of delirium; to put oneself at risk of losing oneself but to sustain the curiosity for thinking and doing differently; to hug the awkward moments when we long to go back to the security of

binarism and its limits; to care differently and recognize our vulnerabilities, limitations, and sensibilities; to be open to equality with every entity and to consider agency not as a human ability; to appreciate that the researcher is always part of what is being researched; to let go of objectivity and neutrality; to light up the creative and speculative research that is willing to break, disturb, cheer, resonate, fuel and reimagine everything (we think) we know and feel.

We must embrace (the anxiety of) the threshold, the loss of privileges, and the vertiginous blurring of boundaries. Such an endeavor posits, as does affect theory itself, the need to change our onto-epistemological framework for understanding the social world and its bodies, as well as ourselves and our work (Barraclough 2021; Strom 2021). As with affect theory—and in line with the post-human and new materialist approach of *Feltness*—we need to be willing to comprehend ourselves as entities that become with and transcorporeally expand through a sensory and sensual permeability of affective activity, moving between "multiplicities of human-non-human, material-discursive elements …, [disrupting] the logical binaries that are at the heart of western civilization in its current form: body/ mind, self/other, person/ world, human/nonhuman, and so on" (Strom 2021, 3).

Finally, the third proposition posited in Springgay's book strengthens the manifestos of various affect theory authors (Ahmed 2017; Brennan 2022; Berlant 2011; Berlant & Greenwald 2012; Clough 2008; Fleig & von Scheve 2020; Fotaki et al. 2017; Seigworth & Gregg 2010; Massumi 2010; Lara et al. 2017), setting political implications for affect theory, research-creation, and radical pedagogy by centering on collaboration as a felt and radical practice based on feminist care ethics. For Springgay, collaboration is more than just coming together and being in common or merely sharing an encounter or a symbolic gesture. As she states, all those forms of collaboration are based on independent care relations that do not dismantle "the structures, knowledges, and research conventions that have created careless institutions, states, classrooms, and communities" (26). In contrast, the author advocates for a practice of collaboration based on doing-in-common, recognizing the tensions, the not-as-planned outcomes of research, the sometimes erotic affective forces. That is, the affective creative breath of life and the uncanny of the classrooms and artistic-research settings, all of which can be linked to what is foreign, different, abject, uncomfortable, colorful, and diverse.

Thus, through this feminist claim of muddling through with other spaces/bodies/ subjects/worlds, Springgay unfurls the politics of affect as tactics of intersectionality. That is, connecting the queer, decolonial, race, gender, and class aspects of affective inquiry– to continue troubling the "colonial values and tastes" (5) and "the whiteness" (2) of art, research, and artistic-research by focusing on ways of

living, learning, and being-in-common. As a born and raised Latin-American academic, this work moves me to continue developing a culturally-situated and sensory affect-based theoretical-methodological research that might respond to the emerging qualities of the places I call home—which, no doubt, can be extended to other places around the globe marginalized by Eurocentric, Northern and White geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2005).

Regarding the latter, one of the things that bitterly echoed while reading the book was the feasibility of conducting feltness-oriented research in countries where the value and validity of academic knowledge are deeply intertwined with traditional scientific theories and methods. Concretely, one of the author's privileges was the possibility of being funded by a national institution to develop her research proposal. It is also true that such financing of research sets several limits and might raise a lot of skepticism and doubt among critical researchers. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that *Feltness* demonstrates what can happen when we "poke the bear" of traditional androcentric, colonialist, white, adult-centric, and ableist academic research and knowledge production. However, such a chance in other countries, like mine, might not even be on the table. The lack of funding for these kinds of projects has forced us to propose research that we would rather not do but are forced to or to propose research that might run parallel to the funding for a project that we are really passionate about. Even though the latter might not sound like a bad idea, having two projects running under the resources and time established for one risks promoting the hyper-intensification and extensification of work, thus deepening the precariousness already present in (our) neoliberal academic life.

To close this review, I would like to cling to the silver linings of Springgay's propositions, the felt title on the cover, and the delicious-smelling printed pictures of the artistic creations done in different public or educational settings. As Strom (2021) states, we do not need to understand the theory on an intellectual level before our bodies experience the feeling of the corpo-material-affective production of knowledge. This is how I will keep experiencing/feeling *Feltness*: its openness to the unknown and not knowing, which Murris and Bozalek (2019) call 'epistemic humility', and how we can artistically and radically learn to affect the world in order to dismantle the neoliberalization of everyday life, education, and academic work.

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Book Review:

DELEUZE AND THE PROBLEM OF AFFECT

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Cross, D.J.S. (2021). *Deleuze and the Problem of Affect*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 304 pages, $27.95 (paperback)

A couple of months ago, being a typical teenager, I embarked on a roadtrip with friends to Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to hike. After around five hours of hiking under an intolerable sun, my friends and I decided to begin the nearly two hour drive back. During the drive back, my friends and I participated in an hour-long listening session to a variety of songs by The Weeknd. While I hadn't listened to much of The Weeknd before, the music that emanated from the car speakers at full blast combined with the pitch-black color of the night sky made me experience the most powerful sensations I have ever felt while listening to music. These sensations were not solely due to the music itself, but instead were mostly due to something that escaped my grasp, something that had to do with the general atmosphere and ambience. On the one hand, I wanted to change the music as the intensity of the sensations demanded movement from my body; remaining sedentary became virtually unbearable. On the other hand, I was still, nevertheless, enjoying the excessive pleasure I felt from the music and wanted to continue listening to it. It is this ambivalence to affect, at once unbearable and extra-pleasurable, which characterized my most fond memory of that trip.

The lack of explicit discussion regarding the ambivalent attitude possessed by many theorists towards affect contributes to its slippery nature. The predominance of ambivalence is brilliantly highlighted in *Deleuze and the Problem of Affect* by D.J.S. Cross. Through scrutinizing and illuminating the shifting descriptions of affect from Deleuze, a thinker who laid the foundation for much of contemporary affect theory, Cross deftly centers Deleuze's own ambivalence toward affect, promising and threatening his philosophy at the same time (Cross 2021, 8, 12, 34). Cross depicts how affect is a problem in Deleuze's philosophy, how it exists simultaneously as a fundamental element to Deleuze's system and a liability to it (Cross 2021, 18, 104). To convince readers of this claim of ambivalence, Cross lays out at least one significant example in most of the chapters comprising the book. I will further highlight a few of these examples in order to illustrate the importance of this work.

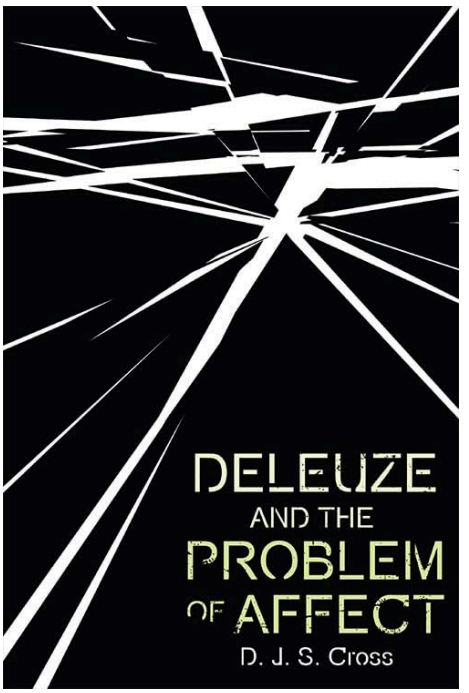
In the first chapter, Cross examines Deleuze's treatment of sensibility, or what is called affect in his later work, as the very origin of philosophy since sensibility is the first faculty to grasp difference, granting it the title of the "royal faculty" which anchors the entire facultative chain (Cross 2021, 22, 33, 45). However, since philosophy depends on sensibility initially grasping difference, sensibility exists as a threat, as a liability; there is always a chance that sensibility doesn't grasp difference in time, that it loses intensity to the qualities that cover it (Cross 2021, 58). In this way, sensibility simultaneously engenders and threatens philosophy as a whole. A similar example is illustrated in chapter six, where Cross outlines Deleuze's tripartite schema of knowledge: the movement from affect to concept to percept. Although affect is at the bottom of this chain, affect remains indispensable to the entire system, as thinking begins only after the passage from affect to the second and third genre of knowledge (Cross 2021, 211-212). Thus, there will be no thinking, no philosophy, without affect; everything is at the mercy of affect, which designates affect as the problem of philosophy (Cross 2021, 213). To give one last example, part of the conclusion examines Deleuze's ambivalence toward affect in *The Logic of Sense*, where the affective depths are, on the one hand, indispensable to the surface of 'pure thought' while being, on the other hand, a threat to it as affect may rip through the surface itself (Cross 2021, 250). Deleuze is usually perceived as a thinker who privileges and illuminates the importance of affect. Cross provides a much needed reminder, through examining the nuances and complexities in Deleuze's system, that affect is a

more complicated element than most realize: fundamental to this system yet simultaneously threatened by it. In addition to bringing forth a careful analysis of affect's position in Deleuze's system, Cross clarifies common misconceptions about Deleuze's work, even my own.

For example, Cross describes how Deleuze and Freud—a thinker that Deleuze often held at a certain distance—both reach a similar impasse while attempting to directly confront affect's ambivalent nature in its totality (Cross 2021, 230). Furthermore, Cross illustrates how Deleuze initially forsook Spinoza – a thinker praised the most by Deleuze—for Nietzsche in *Difference and Repetition* because Spinoza's system remained, for Deleuze at that time, minimally transcendent due to his proclamation that substance is indifferent to and independent from modes (Cross 2021, 157-8). Deleuze's momentary swerve from Spinoza to Nietzsche still remains largely ignored by Deleuze commentators. However, Cross also depicts how this detour from Spinoza is rather brief, how Deleuze subsequently placed Nietzsche and Spinoza on equal grounds in the final chapter of *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988), and eventually elevates Spinoza above Nietzsche as the 'prince' of philosophers in *What is Philosophy?* (1994). In this book, Deleuze describes how substance is not indifferent to modes, but, rather, how they share a relation to the common plane of immanence (Cross 2021, 160-165). In fact, Cross illuminates how Nietzsche's position in Deleuze's system eroded as time moved on; Nietzsche's initial position as the sole figure who embraced difference-in-itself in *Difference and Repetition* is described as someone who partially reinforced arborescence by the time of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (Cross 2021, 161-3).

Following the frequent changes in Deleuze's thinking across time, Cross emphasizes how Deleuze's thought is at once homogeneous and heterogeneous. Homogeneous in the sense that an ambivalent attitude to affect is present throughout Deleuze's entire career, and heterogeneous as Deleuze's outlook on his own work and the work of other philosophers changed over time. For instance, while Deleuze designates Spinoza as the prince of philosophers, Cross also emphasizes how Deleuze moved beyond Spinoza on the topic of affect. While Spinoza's concept of affect is, according to Cross, limited to the passing between two states of an anthropomorphic, individual body in which the nature of the body remains unaffected, Deleuze's conception of affect takes place between two heterogeneous bodies (Cross 2021, 195-7).

Moreover, with regard to the topic of Spinoza, after talking to many self-professed Deleuzians, I find that Deleuze is regularly perceived to be a thinker of immanence, as someone who privileges pure immanence over any sort of transcendence. Contrary to this proclamation of pure immanence, Cross clarifies how Deleuze, while he may not desire to admit it, at certain points in his theory describes how immanence cannot exist without a constant contamination by transcendence and vice versa (Cross 2021, 174). Alexander Galloway has described certain interpretations of Deleuze as "Google Deleuzians" (Galloway and Berry, 2015). These Deleuzians see everything as an open system constantly interacting and making connections; they see the world as 'rhizomatic.' Even though this perspective amended by reading the introductory plateau in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that is not the point. This perverted interpretation is probably spurred by the fact that Deleuze and Guattari themselves usually refrained from admitting that a pure rhizomatic structure cannot exist in actuality. Cross effectively highlights this matter by outlining how the rhizome cannot exist without a strain of arborescence, how the rhizome is unthinkable without arborescence (Cross 2021, 169-170). The notion that immanence cannot exist without a constant relation, without a constant contamination with transcendence also highlights a problem that I had begun to face in relation to previous ideas of mine. During the fall and winter months of last year, I relentlessly worked on a paper concerning the relation between Deleuze's thinking and the psychedelic experience of ego dissolution. What I came up with was the notion that ego dissolution describes an experience of becoming in which one confronts pure immanence. Upon reading Cross' careful analysis regarding Deleuze and Guattari's reluctance to admit that pure immanence cannot exist, I realized that my original thesis did not work and that I would have to revise it by acknowledging that the purity of immanence is an illusion.



I realized that even the concepts that I was using carried certain connotations that I wasn't completely aware of. Take, for example, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the body without organs. Forgetting Deleuze's admission that he and Guattari did not agree on what the body without organs was (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 17)—which already hints at an ambivalence contained within the concept's formulation—the usual understanding of this concept proclaims it to be an anti-productive sphere of potentiality that is filled with intensities in opposition to the organism. Contrary to this usual interpretation, Cross digs deeper to understand the ambivalence hidden within the idea's formation. Although many understand the body without organs in opposition to the interconnective organization of organs, or the creation of the Self, Cross points out that the anti-productive quality present within the body without organs simultaneously refuses and elicits organization. That is, Cross elucidates how Deleuze's commentators usually neglect the fact that the body without organs simultaneously refuses the organization of the unconscious into an Oedipal mold and permits it. Cross illustrates how it is only through the body without organs that the Oedipus complex can come to exist (Cross 2021, 256–8).

Cross hints at a larger issue plaguing Deleuze's entire philosophy: the problem of the Self (Cross 2021, 76–7). While Deleuze advocates for the destruction of the Self throughout his bibliography, Deleuze never reached a point where the Self could be absolutely obliterated; he never overcame this impasse regarding the Self's demise. Even when Deleuze attempts to overcome Hume's impasse regarding 'contemplation' in his first book,[1] Deleuze, as Cross points out, ends up discovering that contemplation simultaneously leads to the dissolution and sustainment of the self (Cross 2021, 94). However, highlighting the problem of the Self is merely one major insight in a book where Cross illustrates many important aspects in Deleuze's philosophy. Overall, through illuminating both the ambivalence perpetually present in Deleuze's treatment of affect and the many overlooked features of Deleuze's philosophy, Cross provides an extremely important, well-argued book; one that is sure to provoke further discussions regarding both affect and Deleuze's general position in the history of philosophy.

Endnote

1. While conceptualizing "contemplation," Hume reaches an impasse regarding the existence of the Self. According to Cross (2021), Hume attempts to reconcile the existence of the Self with his discovery that "the mind never perceives any real connection among all our distinct perceptions" (74). This is the impasse that Deleuze attempts to overcome in *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991). Note: *Empiricism and Subjectivity* was published in English in 1991 by Columbia University Press. The book was originally published in French in 1953.

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Book Review:

THE OTHER SIDE OF EMPATHY

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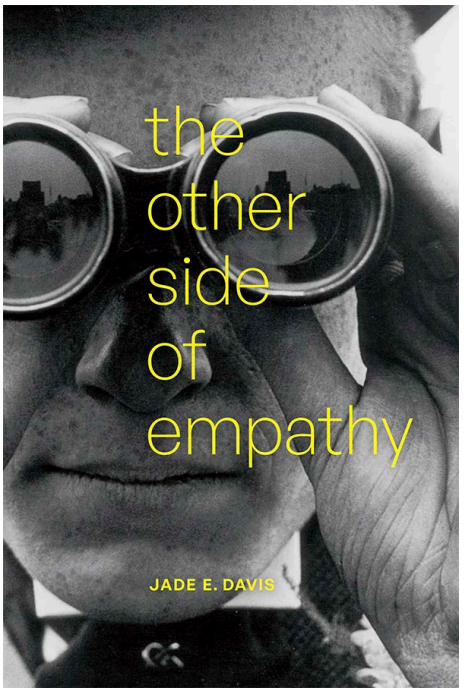
Davis, J. E. (2023). *The Other Side of Empathy*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 136 pages, $23.95 (paperback)

While I was reading Jade E. Davis's new book *The Other Side of Empathy,* search algorithms were conspiring to suggest content I would find useful and relevant to the concepts they assumed the book involves. Social media posts, YouTube videos, and Google-prioritized articles identifying their content as 'self-help' or 'healing' all weighed in on popular conversations that are currently shaping empathy culture in a similar tone. They identified the dark side of empathy as the potential harm of over-empathizing for the empathizer's psyche, implying that their 'feeling into' the suffering of others places them in a compromised position, while utterly erasing the experience of those subjected to the empathizer's gaze from the equation. It is precisely this empathy culture, with its canonized emphasis on the importance of the empathizer's feelings, its lack of substantial engagement with the other side's personal and collective histories and the unjust power relations this hierarchy inscribes in affective encounters that Davis powerfully criticizes in her new work.

Empathy remains a relatively new concept. It entered the English dictionary in 1909 as a translation by British psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener from the German concept *Einfühlung,* used in German aesthetics as a means of describing the state of feeling oneself into a work of art (Lipps 1903). The last two decades

involved a lot of trial and error in theorizing the mechanisms of empathy and evaluating what it can do as an affective and critical tool. *The Other Side of Empathy* shows itself to be one of the most passionate, innovative, and well-argued investigations of the underexplored facets of empathy in recent years. This book subverts and then forces us to re-evaluate comfortably fixed ideas around what empathy actually does: both for the two parties it inescapably involves as well as the oppressive systems the polarity between the empathizer and the individual or group, subjected to the empathizer's gaze, sustains when racial prejudice is involved.

Expanding on social psychologist C. Daniel Batson's (2009) ideas of empathy as egoistically motivated, Davis argues that empathy is not merely a means to the empathizer's joyous relief, but a tool of attenuating white guilt. Claiming to occupy the Other's pain manages the empathizers' distress levels, undermines the necessity for change and radical transformation, and "maintains the supremacy of those with power" (95). Davis manages to delve much deeper to excavate ideas beyond what cognitive science scholar Fritz Breithaupt did in his work, *The Dark Sides of Empathy* (2019), which explored how and to what extent empathy can nurture deeply unsettling and destructive behaviors. Breithaupt placed emphasis primarily on the empathizer's perspective. As her book's title indicates, Davis dares to reach further and shed light to the other side, which has been repeatedly and historically silenced.



Powerful, provocative, and urgent, *The Other Side of Empathy* re-negotiates popular liberal views that frame empathy as an all-encompassing, versatile panacea, capable of bridging social and cultural gaps. Davis contests empathy's seemingly unquestionable value and inherent potential as a critical tool in affect and cultural studies. In particular, she examines how empathetic encounters work when racial biases are involved. Influenced by Sarah Ahmed's (2014) idea of internalizing the Other as a means of understanding and reaffirming the superimposition of the self (2), Davis illustrates that

"[e]mpathy is appealing because, in reinforcing the passivity of suffering people, suffering people are left behind and reduced to their circumstances and oppression" (7). Davis considers empathy as a convenient means of avoidance, because "by focusing on the experience of the Other, by going further and claiming to occupy it, the empathizer does not have to confront their culpability in reproducing social injustices, oppression, and marginalization" (7). Her unsettling assertion sheds light on the very palpable ways empathy can become a way of re-inscribing colonial narratives and ancestral trauma onto groups and people in a way that forces them to remain subjugated, silenced, and dehumanized. The empathetic gaze is framed by whiteness, denying its objects their full humanity, and refusing to recognize their multifaceted experience by limiting it only to their suffering.

Davis forces us to face how dehumanization and injustice are inextricably woven into the very fabric of empathy as it is currently practiced. Her work illuminates that occupying the role of the empathizer is not only a position of the privileged, but also a position that allows them to re-establish and sustain their power. Davis cites, as her major influence, political philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who, in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2007), claims that "it is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject" because "[t]he colonist derives his validity, i.e., his wealth, from the colonial system" (2). For Davis, the empathetic gaze retraumatizes subjects by objectifying them, while allowing the empathizers' feelings of distress to fizzle out quickly, not resulting in any substantial approach or recognition of the Other, let alone in any form of restorative action.

What shines through in *The Other Side of Empathy* is the author's eloquent and disarmingly immediate exploration of how archives, photography, new media, and technology are employed as ways of re-visiting past narratives of suffering, "often through the reliance on or imposition of empathy as the catch-all affective turn" (8). In the chapter "The Other Side of Human Zoos," Davis makes a disturbing parallel between nineteenth-century exhibitions of colonized people in Europe and the U.S. and contemporary archival material from museum shows that look back on those exhibitions without escaping the same colonial framing of their exhibited subjects. Both function as human zoos; they ask for the audience's sentiments while failing to properly contextualize the histories of the people they exhibit, thus dehumanizing them by turning them into suffering objects ready for consumption. Through Davis's investigative dive into the history of the photographs included in the archival material and her effort to fill in the gaps of their decontextualization, it becomes apparent that reproducing the silences and uncertainties in subjugated people's stories only reifies their dehumanization and renders empathy a hollow response.

Some of the book's most inspiring passages appear in the chapter "We have names," where Davis performs the radical and inspiring work of recontextualizing colonial photography, uncovering and expanding on the collective and personal histories of the people captured in the photographs and the limiting narratives that accompanied them. She attains a profound recognition of their multifaceted lives and personalities, rather than dwelling on the feelings these images are capable of reproducing based on imagined suffering. Reading about the personal narratives of Héiliani, Jacob, Lisbeth, and Mina, and discovering information about the conditions under which each photograph was taken allows us to imagine them as fully-fledged personalities and creates space for narratives of humor and joy to be explored for the first time. This way, Davis succeeds in demonstrating how restorative work can reformulate and allow for a different kind of past to become part of historically subjugated people's narratives, a past beyond "wounds that remain open in the present," a past that forces the empathetic gaze to "give up the fetish of the wound" (Ahmed 2014, 33).

Perhaps the most innovative perspectives on empathy and current technological trends that highlight the breadth of Davis's expertise appear in the fittingly titled chapter "New Media and Emerging Technology Kills Us All, Though." Through an examination of recent augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence projects that necessitate or claim to facilitate empathy, Davis illustrates that it is not only the Other, but the self that becomes dehumanized in technologically mediated empathetic encounters. She highlights how these emerging technological tools "erase the need for the Other altogether" and purport self-dehumanization through digital twins that render the self as Other, promoting "colonization at its ultimate efficiency" (88).

Although Davis claims this book is "an attempt to rethink the technologies of empathy," "to decolonize a popular affect," and "to find other, complex emotions that are more meaningful and truly transformative," (14) she delivers her first two promises to a greater extent than the third one. However, despite not delving into these concepts in depth or proposing more concrete ways that such 'complex emotions' could be implemented, she proposes that "the task of decolonization must start with radical love of the self and the Other" (11). Davis uses as her stepping stone Caswell and Cifor's theorization that placing responsibility on the individual is a means of avoiding the hard work that needs to be undertaken, and more emphasis should be placed on the meaningful subversion of oppressive institutions

and structures (33). She insists that a project to decolonize empathy should involve a radical process of unlearning, which includes shedding off the ways in which we approach affective encounters to make way for "mutual recognition," (97) even if that means giving up the need to understand. This process involves "an active Other, equally engaged and valued in the process of meaning-making" (97). It involves working towards establishing a mutual ability to recognize and respect the context of each other's suffering and to create space for experiences of joy, humor, and love that can become an equally integral part in our recognition of others' personal and collective narratives.

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Grayscale Sea, Matt Hardy, 2019

SKETCHES ON THE AFFECTIVITY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Before the revelations of #MeToo, rape existed. It still exists. It will exist for the foreseeable future. But what of those who have experienced sexual violence and come out the other side? What of these 'survivors'—how are their lives altered? In this piece of work, I use vignettes inspired by Kathleen Stewart's (2007) method in *Ordinary Affects* to explicate on how it *feels* to be a survivor. Drawing primarily on the postphenomenological framework of Sara Ahmed (2014), I combine both longer academic screeds with shorter, creatively written yet autobiographic scraps to capture the various states of affectivity central to survivorhood, such as shame, anger, abjection, and anxiety. Flashbacks run as a theme throughout, both in the very text itself but also in their importance to the experiencing and re-experiencing of trauma, in their nature as catalysts for recollection and feeling. I also explain, using Berlant (2001), my understanding of trauma as a 'slow death.' These sketches, then, reveal the messy, entangled nature of the emotions of survivors, whilst leaving room for a conversation to develop within the fields of affect theory and trauma studies.

KEYWORDS

survivorhood, abjection, rage, anxiety, shame, stigma

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This paper is not a paper. It is instead a set of writings constituted as a series of vignettes—an approach very much inspired by Kathleen Stewart (2007) in her *Ordinary Affects* —relating to the affectivity of sexual violence survivorhood, or, more casually, how it *feels* to be a survivor. These vignettes are non-linear, because trauma weaves its way through time, punching and jabbing like a boxer, to the rhythm of its own feet. Some of these writings are creative, while some are more traditionally academic, to demonstrate the ways in which such violence escapes the confines of our tongue. There are many other issues that I could have attempted to attend to alongside these impressions, but I have focused only on emotions—fleeting, fluid, foaming, fermenting, fixating—because they deserve the space to themselves, to occupy our minds and bodies in solitude. Emotions are, quite simply, important. It is time we listened to them. It is time we listened to survivors, too.

I must, however, attend to the main theoretical basis of this work before beginning in earnest, and highlight my debt to the writings of Sara Ahmed, particularly in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Ahmed's postphenomenological theory is the driving force for many of the more academic considerations here: quite simply, her work has been a way through which I have thought about my trauma (although I am, of course, also indebted to the work of other authors, as shall be seen). As such, it is necessary to give a quick debrief on the central components of her work to make sense of what follows. Key to Ahmed's (2014) work is her writing on 'affective economies.' While the term may make it sound like it is the affects themselves that circulate, Ahmed (2014) is at pains to show that, in these economies, emotions do not circulate but their *objects* do (11). These emotions are not *caused* by the objects themselves but are instead *shaped* by their contact with them, showing that emotions therefore do not exist within the subject or object themselves, but as *a relation between them*. Instead, emotions are indebted to an economic functioning which means that their objects accrue 'value' the more they move around (Ahmed 2014, 44–46). These affective responses themselves are therefore *not* random or free. They are, in fact, deeply wedded to a series of associations to objects-as-signs, and the systemic nature of this is what allows certain affects to become 'stuck' to certain objects through intentional repetition,[1] making it *appear* that this particular object elicits a 'natural' response (Ahmed 2014; 2010). Affect, therefore, is not the free moving, utterly capacious thing that a lot of affect theory designates it as. It is instead deeply tied to objects (which include concepts, thoughts, and ideas just as much as physical things) in a way that is dictated by the affective economies—the social environment—which we inhabit just as much, if not more, than our own

personal associations and ideologies. Objects therefore become associated with affects because of their movements throughout the social world. This allows us to not only have our own personal orientations ("relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness'" (Ahmed 2014, 8)), but also to be informed of the 'correct' collective response by the affective communities we inhabit (Ahmed 2010). Certain objects, then, become attributed as "feeling-cause[s]" (Ahmed 2010, 28).

Before continuing, one other note: I advise readers to be aware of the upsetting nature of many of these vignettes. I deal, explicitly and graphically at times, with sexual violence (of course), but also flashbacks, death, suicide, sex, and self-harm. While these were unavoidable to me, you the reader may make a choice as to whether or not you engage. But if or when you do, you are bearing witness to atrocities. I was not prepared to experience such things, but you can be. That is the gift I grant to you.

✦ ✦ ✦

A Miracle

I was fucking. The sex is good: for a time, I am able to forget my body's particularities, its memories, its borders. I give in to pure sensualism as orgasmic bliss rolls through me.

And then I roll over and I'm on my front and I'm back in my body and it's a body that's been breached and the awareness of my cunt is my only perception and I roll, roll, roll backwards in time to another place, another face, being ravaged, torn to pieces, tears silently rolling down my cheeks as I want to scream but I can't, I can't, I can't I can't I—

"— need to stop." It was only for a second, but paradise turned into Room 101 and there was no going back. He exits me immediately and asks if I'm okay. I lie and say I am because how can you vocalise to a lover that for a moment you were frightened that your "no" might mean fuck all to them, too?

Suppress the gags, the convulsions, the tears: they are for a past that is no longer present.

Lie in his arms and remember it is a miracle you can fuck at all.

Crisis Back in Time

Crisis is boring. Crisis doesn't actually exist. Like Lauren Berlant (2001),[2] I draw on the idea of *episodes* over *events* that occur in spatiotemporal environments where time occurs differently for those consigned to the slow death of trauma.

Berlant (2001) describes slow death as "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (95). It "occupies the temporalities of the endemic" (97) and "is neither a state of exception nor the opposite, mere banality, but a domain where an upsetting scene of living is revealed to be interwoven with ordinary life after all" (102). Is this not the position of the survivor? Their deterioration was forced upon them, perhaps again and again, at the moment that someone made that decision for them. And while perhaps the first is an event, the others quickly become episodes, a part of insufferable life that becomes ordinary, a constituent feature of living towards a death that might be welcome respite or might be a tragedy, or both. The first, however, is the creation of a spatiotemporal environment bound up with a number of unbearable affects that must, on the other hand, simply be borne.

This environment has a curious relationship to the past. As noted above, Berlant (2001) uses the word 'endemic' to describe its relationship to time. Endemic, I should note, has a number of related meanings, but here I believe Berlant draws on the epidemiological to describe a situation or set of situations that persist within a population, "generally having settled to a relatively constant rate of occurrence" (dictionary.com, 2021). It is constantly happening to us. Even if it happened only once, it continues to reoccur. Why? One word: *flashbacks*.

In a reductive and spectacularising view, flashbacks constitute crisis. But when they are so persistent, they become part of everyday life. There is not a single day that goes by where I do not remember, to some degree, the face of my abuser. It is common for me to fully descend into the past, a screaming wreck collapsed on the floor, fetally positioned and rocking away to remembered rhythms. They are so normal for me that they are typically forgettable, simply another one having happened. As Berlant (2001) writes, they are situated "within a zone of temporality marked by ongoingness, getting by, and living on, where structural ine-

qualities are dispersed and the pacing of experience is uneven and often mediated by way of phenomena that are not prone to capture by a consciousness organized by archives of memorable impact" (99–100). I simply do not need to remember because they are a part of life. Why file them away?

But how does this come to pass? Simply, the past leaks into the present (and the future, too). To draw on Berlant (2001) again, this "*crisis ordinariness*" (101, my emphasis)—a phrase I find particularly useful to describe the predicament of the survivor—is situated within "the historical present as a back-formation from practices that create a perceptible scene, *an atmosphere that can be returned to*" (100, my emphasis). As Gregory Seigworth (1999, n.p.) notes, "the past isn't something that you can cast off and leave behind. Instead, the past continues to persist right alongside the present." The past is right there with you, seeping in, sliding about. It is inescapable as it forms us and parts of the environment, the habitat, the spacetime we live in.

It should be impossible to travel through time. Yet, still, we do. This is trauma as slow death, as crisis ordinariness, as the perseverance of ordinary life through the ugliness of affects, memories, and experiences that one would rather not have but simply puts up with, gets on with, forgets and remembers and forgets again because you have to park it. You must, lest it take over. And when it does? That is what constitutes the episode, what others label as crisis but is just the thing that happens again and again that, actually, one is simply rather fed up with. A conglomeration of affects descend—all the ones I describe here—into a pile of shit that we must wallow in for a while before we crawl, again, back through it. Perhaps we don't smell so fresh, but that's what happens when you have been made to slowly die instead of thrive, like neoliberal capitalist ideology promises us before, during, and after enacting the violences upon us that makes such thriving impossible. Yes, trauma is slow death, and crisis? Crisis is boring.

Morning Routine

I am so very tired of it all.

The sleepless nights. The nightmares. The waking up to the sounds of myself screaming out. The fear first thing in the morning. The awkward urination, to limit sensation. The difficulty washing myself. The grimacing as my towel dries me off. The gagging on my toothbrush, and not because I'm brushing my tongue. The dark circles. The picked-at cuticles. The discomfort with nudity. The trials and tribulations of dressing. The painting on a mask. The erring before leaving the house. The nausea as soon as my foot crosses the threshold.

Yes, I am tired. When can I rest?

Fear and Anxiety

I thought I saw him again. Number one: my first rapist. All my worst fears, embodied. I see his face everywhere, of course. Any man with a passing resemblance: a certain shaped nose, perhaps, or the geometry of a jawline.

On the subject of fear, Ahmed (2014) states that it

> does not reside positively in any particular object or sign. It is this lack of residence that allows fear to slide across signs and between bodies. This sliding becomes stuck only temporarily, in the very attachment of a sign to a body, an attachment that is taken on by the body, encircling it with a fear that becomes its own (64).

It is this that allows my 'quasi-psychosis' (as a psychiatrist called it) to slip and slide across any number of people, as the "fear works by establishing others as fearsome insofar as they *threaten to take the self in*" (Ahmed 2014, 64, emphasis in original). Yes, that is what frightens me: that again his forked tongue might work its magic, reeling me in only to be gobbled up and spat out all over again.

Ahmed goes on to state that fear is based in futurity: it is the anticipation of pain *in the future*. But she does also consider fear's relationship to the past, and this is where my focus falls. It is through past associations—whether my (the subject's) own, or those picked up through affective economies—that allows fear to become messily attached to an array of objects, including those only tangentially related to the feared one itself.

When fear does this, it becomes a way of life. When fear becomes a way of life, it transforms into anxiety, whereby "[a]nxiety becomes *an approach to objects* rather than, as with fear, *being produced by an object's approach*… One thinks of more and more 'things' to be anxious about; the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (Ahmed 2014, 66, emphasis in original). Through 'hypervigilance', the subject amasses more and more signifiers that become associated with the trauma. When these are encountered, they act as triggers for a fearful response that pulls the subject away from the trigger and into themselves. It is this anxious relation to the world which can be said to structure the traumatic experience, so that the individual understands the world as full of potential threats that must be constantly warded against. Trauma, then, alters the very way that an individual navigates and exists within the world.

Vigilant

My eyes are everywhere, scanning for signs of danger. They flit about so much that my vision has motion blur. I take in every detail of the space. I note all the ways out. I'll have 50 exit strategies planned before you can even start to say 'paranoia.'

And the sound—oh, the sound! I can hear every single one in the universe so close that they feel as though they're hammering away in my head. But I can't try to block them out, because then how will I hear if someone's coming? How will I know his approach?

If I am not vigilant, who else will be? If I do not stand as my protector, who will? If I do not remember, who might?

Underwater

It can come from anywhere, but it is usually the media that does it: triggering content when you least expect is like a punch to the gut. All of a sudden, I feel like I am underwater. My vision, however, is homed in ahead of me, unable to stop fixating on the cause of my current trouble. I struggle to breathe, chest heaving up and down. I am brimming over with tears. I need to leave. I must leave. I do leave.

Upstairs, in the bathroom now, hunched over the toilet bowl, trying not to retch. I shudder from the effort of it. The tears are now barreling down my face. My mind swims, a mixture of what I have just witnessed, and what I have suffered before.

Remarkably, I keep it together—just enough, at least. This is not always the case. Sometimes I descend, full pelt, into the memories of those things I'd rather forget, living them out like they were happening all over again, because they were, they *are*. But not tonight. I go back downstairs.

The Abject

> 'I' want none of that element… 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since [it] is not an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself* (Kristeva 1982, 2, emphasis in original).

Julia Kristeva[3] might be talking about soured milk, but the retching that she describes sounds eerily familiar. When I return to those quiet moments of distress and desperation in what the psychological sciences call a 'flashback,' I am beset by an inability to control my gag reflex. I always know when it is about to begin: my throat spasms, I cough and splutter, and before I know it, I am on the floor, dry heaving and screaming, rejecting that which forces itself upon me again.

"The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (Kristeva 1982, 1, emphasis in original). If this is the case, then surely the paradigmatic case of abjection is not spoiled foods, nor bodily fluids, nor corpses, nor ritual impurity—all of which Kristeva makes a case for—but rape itself. Although she does mention the rapist as an abject figure she does not linger on this point. But the act is clearly that which "disturbs identity, system, order", that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982, 4).

With respect to our identity as embodied, autonomous individuals, our skin serves as the edged border of this body and we "feel these edges as belonging to the outer flanks of [our] personal self, as providing the covering for the core of this self" (Casey 2012, 247). So, when this edge is breached without our consent, the act immediately takes on the characteristics of the abject encounter.

Rape "is a sexually specific act that destroys… the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood" of the victim (Cahill 2001, 13). As such, it

> should be perceived as an assault on the whole body-self of the victim [which] can mean the destruction of the person one has become up to that point… [i]t cannot be assumed that there is one aspect of that person's being that is untouched by the experience of rape. There is no pristine, untouched corner to which to retreat" (Cahill 2001, 130-133).

As such, it is not hyperbole to claim the victim's sense of self meets its end when they are raped, utterly destroyed through the wicked will of another.

An end to self. For that is what the abject threatens, is it not? It is "a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (Kristeva 1982, 2). And annihilated I am. The self has been broken apart entirely by the act of rape. And while "I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (Kristeva, 1982: 3), the new self is not one that I recognise as me. The new self is, itself, abject: a creation entirely of my own unmaking underneath the careless hands of a violator. As Bülent Diken and Cartsen Laustsen (2005) note, "[t]he rape victim often perceives herself as an abject, as a 'dirty,' morally inferior person. The penetration inflicts on her body and her self a mark, a stigma, which cannot be effaced" (113).

It is this dual abjection—the abjection of rape and the abjection of self—that is reaffirmed in the flashback. Retching, screaming, clawing at the skin, slapping away at phantomic hands, convulsing along to the rhythm of the remembered rape: both primary acts of abjection are restated in their repetition, one that is carried out *without* the will of the subject, as a *negation* of the subject's sense of self. That which is reiterated by this repetition is precisely that which the subject wishes to avoid the most, lest this time the eradication becomes permanent.

Abjection of the subject does not exist solely in one's own eyes, however. Our perceptions of self are deeply intertwined with the social. As Margrit Shildrick (2002) demonstrates, that which is deemed abject or monstrous is that which exposes the vulnerability of an enclosed, individualised and autonomous self: "[f]or all that the monster may be cast as a figure vulnerable in its own right by reason of its own lack of fixed form and definition and its putative status as an outsider, what causes anxiety is that it threatens to expose the vulnerability at the heart of the ideal model of body/self" (54). The monster threatens precisely because of its vulnerability to harm, as it is this vulnerability that demonstrates to the monster's interlocutor that they, too, are vulnerable. The rape victim/survivor, then, becomes a monster within society. Whether seen through the eyes of pity or disgust—a relation that is always ambivalent in the case of the monster (Shildrick 2002)—they are abjected by others just as much as by themselves. The affectivity of abjection, then, becomes a structuring part of the experience of survivorhood.

Broken Bodies, Broken Minds

A man approaches. He asks for a cigarette. I begin getting my things together, ready to give him the components so he can tailor make his own. But then the questions begin, touching as he talks: why the walking stick? Do you hurt? Would you like a massage?

Immediately I am brought back into the consultation room, the look of resigned recognition of the face of a diagnostician as soon as the rapes are revealed. Being told that your body broke because of trauma is something one cannot unhear. While I have since developed conditions that are likely unrelated, there is a constant and literally painful reminder that I can never escape his touches. I am forever marred by him, marked by him. The body/mind split is a cruel joke.

Shame and Stigma

As Peter Hacker (2017) notes, shame does not have to be caused by one's decisions and actions. Instead, it can be elicited "by what is done to one by others and by what they force one to do" (207). As Dan Zahavi (2012) notes, "[o]n many standard readings, shame is an emotion that targets and involves the self in its totality. In shame, the self is affected by a global devaluation: it feels defective, objectionable, condemned" (305). This shame does not exist solely during the moment that causes it: instead, its temporality drags on, so that we "may also feel the episodic emotion when lying sleepless in the small hours of the morning" (Hacker 2017, 209).

As Zahavi (2012) goes on to explain, "Sartre argues that shame, rather than merely being a self-reflective emotion, an emotion involving negative self-evaluation, is an emotion that reveals our relationality, our being-for-others" (306). There is clearly, then, a social element to shame. Although we *can* experience it when on our own, it is still constituted by the feeling of what it would be like to be exposed before others (Zahavi 2012; Hacker 2017). When I feel ashamed, it is because I feel the judgment of others impressing upon my skin (Ahmed 2014), even if those others are purely imaginative: I recognise that this would be their response because of my knowledge of the objects circulating in shame's affective economies (cf. Ahmed 2014). It is through this that shame "induces conformity to social norms" (Hacker 2017, 212).

It is here that we can turn from shame to stigma. Erving Goffman (1968) states that stigma is "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (9):

> While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind… He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma (Goffman 1968, 12).

Goffman goes on to distinguish between two forms of stigma: a discredited and discreditable personhood. In the former, the stigma is always evident; in the latter, the stigma is *not* immediately evidenced and is not already known by the stigmatised person's other, but, crucially, it may be discovered. The ways in which the stigmatised person is treated is instructive of how social norms can be violently

imposed: fundamentally, "we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human" (Goffman 1968, 15) and this leads to treatment such as discrimination, the use of slurs, the policing of the individual's affective responses to this behaviour and, I would add, the risk of physical violence.

In the case of the rape survivor, we are dealing with an instance of discreditable stigma. While the survivor may attempt to conceal this fact, it will become more and more difficult to do so throughout relationships of all kinds—that is, unless the survivor is 'outed' by another individual, or unless they choose to actively disclose this information (as can be a tactic of stigma management) (Goffman 1968). Before the eyes of the other, I am revealed in my failure to conform to a social rule: *do not get raped*. Because I have failed in this, it is *my* fault, *my* shame to bear. In their eyes, my rape exists as an ever-present component of my identity and it is this that marks me as a social aberration.

But what links this stigma to the feeling of shame? As Goffman (1968) notes, the affectivity of being stigmatised often involves feelings of "self-hate and self-derogation" (18) and these are listed by Zahavi (2012) as common components of shame. As such, shame and stigma are deeply interwoven phenomena: to have something to be ashamed of is to have breached social norms and therefore be stigmatised; to be stigmatised is to experience shame before others. The burden of being stigmatised leads to its symbiotic shame existing in the episodic manner described by Hacker (2017) above.

Whether on my own or with others, I will periodically feel ashamed of the fact that I have been raped. I feel it flush into my cheeks. I feel it in the pit of my stomach. My mind rings with the sounds of imagined others chastising me for my sin. In both stigma and shame, "the world recedes and the self stands revealed" (Zahavi 2012, 313) and it is in this revelation that "I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other" (Ahmed 2014, 106).

Dark and Still

My lover wants to go to sleep now, so he turns off the light. How can I say that I'm not ready yet? How can I say that my mind is filled with madness? I lay down but everything feels too close. I sit up, back towards him, stifling my tears. It doesn't work. I go downstairs, out into the garden, to have a sneaky cigarette. Everything is dark and still, and for the moment all there is is me and my fear.

The cigarette is over all too soon. It didn't help; it never does. I struggle to lock the door and only manage to—my hands shaking—after a few attempts. I climb back up the stairs and crawl back into bed. He asks if I am okay, and I finally say that I am not.

Tendrils

Everything has become desaturated. Tendrils that usually reach out into the world lazily snake themselves away. I lay in bed, coiled up like a hedgehog but not nearly as spiky: bereft of all fight, but not flying or freezing either. Just simple nothingness. There is no point or passion to anything. Languid. Listless. Leaden. Today I do not survive; today I merely exist.

Pain and Depression

Some days I feel close to death.

The diagnoses that psychiatry has imposed upon me are not terminal. But the affects that they attempt to name (and those they cover over) may one day kill me, just as they have many others. Indeed, they almost have done so on numerous occasions in the past. Psychic pain—whether depression, fear, rage, shame, or something else altogether—can be lethal. But we cannot forget that this pain is not actually individualised, not merely existing in the subject's interior. As Ahmed notes, "[i]t is through sensual experiences such as pain that we come to have a sense of our skin as a bodily surface… as something that keeps us apart from others, and as something that 'mediates' the relationship between internal and external" (Ahmed 2014, 24), giving the *illusion* of ourselves as bounded individuals. This is further facilitated by the psychological disciplines grasp on the discourse of emotions, which means that their particular manipulative mapping of the affective economy of signs allows the subject to become overladen with feelings that cannot be recognised as emerging from connections elsewhere.

But this is precisely what we must recognise. While these emotions may be felt as something we possess, they are not cut off from the world around us. When I am experiencing psychic pain, it is not because of some inherent pathology. Some*thing* or some*one* has caused this. Perhaps the cause is multiple—and it is here that I resonate with Ngai's (2005) conception of 'ugly feelings', as those experientially negative affects that are defined by their ambiguous attachments.[4] However, this ambiguity does not mean that an orientation is non-existent: instead, it points to being *overwhelmed* by attachments, as the subject reaches towards and shrinks away from multiple objects at once.

As I opened with the lethality of affectivity, let me stick with that emotion most commonly associated with this: depression. When I am depressed, I experience the whole world through a relationship of negation. I turn away from everything, even those attachments that would usually initiate joy and push me out into the world, and it is in this movement that the affect seemingly stabilises on myself: *I* am the problem. But when looking at it this way, what we see is that the problem is actually a hostile world. A world turns hostile when actions within it have been experienced as such, and there is arguably no survivable action that is more hostile than rape. Out of the pain of rape, I fortify the boundaries of my body: "[p]ain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and

outside, and it is through this transgression that I feel the border in the first place" (Ahmed 2014, 27). These borders keep being turned inwards and away from the world, shrinking further and further within myself until the world that I hate has become so small as to only encompass me: *I* am the loathed object. As I turn further and further away from myself-as-world, I more quickly and closely approach death. To turn completely away and abandon all connection with the self is the movement when the ideation of suicide often comes actualised as an act of self-harm. The hostility of the world, then, is felt as a hostility towards the self, and it is this enmity that brings me towards the brink of death.

Bound or Unbound?

Neoliberal capitalist ideology tells us that the self is a bounded object, (Blackman 2008) enclosed by the edges of the body but, crucially, is a personality that *inhabits* a body rather than *is* it. We feel the edges of our body through contact with the social world, including with other people, and as discussed above, sensations such as pain teach us these edges.

But can the self ever truly be bound by our will? Are we truly the autonomous subjects like we are promised? Rape proves otherwise. The violent forcing in of the outside to the inside is a reckoning in understanding that free will has always been a disgusting myth to impose. We quickly realise that we are indeed embodied minds precisely at the moment we are entered without consent, that the body *matters*.

No, the self is an embodied creature that finds itself constantly interacting with the world and others, and being interacted with in turn. Sometimes these interactions are violent, sometimes they are kind, but they all evidence the capaciousness of ourselves as selves, as we constantly reach out beyond our 'bounds' to be a being-in-the-world, and as our 'bounds' are constantly interfered with.

The self is not bounded, but sometimes we like to think it is. Sometimes we like to think we have control. But there is very little control in this world. The traumatised subject, the survivor, knows this all too well.

Lines

> Lines become the external trace of an interior world, as signs of who we are on the flesh that folds and unfolds before others… If we are asked to reproduce what we inherit, then the lines that gather on the skin become signs of the past as well as orientations toward the future, a way of facing and being faced by others (Ahmed 2006, 18).

Follow the lines on my skin like a treasure map, but you won't find anything golden. Faced forwards or backwards, the orientation is still the same. It does not quite unfold so much as unfurl, the external reckonings of interior battles. They might never have left wounds themselves, but these may as well have been placed by their hands.

Absence

Sometimes, I feel absolutely nothing at all. It can go on for days, weeks even. It is the absolute absence of any discernible emotion or sentiment. Like a vessel awaiting its fill, I wait for anything to make me feel. I await the energy washing over me as I embody some affect or another. But no, it does not arrive.

Perhaps this anticipation of a feeling, this numbness, does constitute a feeling in and of itself. It certainly structures my orientation towards the world. It is in moments like these that I will flail about wildly within my surroundings, searching for anything that might stir something. Perhaps I'll choose cheap booze and casual sex, like I did so often when I was younger. Maybe this time it'll be self-harm as I scratch or burn away at myself hoping that the pain will jolt something into action. Or I will instead languish in it, feeling the relief of not having to deal with all those ugly sensations that can send me into a tailspin. No matter what course of action I choose to take, it permeates the way in which I navigate the world, interacting with objects and others minus the usual interest that comes from more manifest states of emotion.

Perhaps the absence of feeling is the most hideous feeling of them all.

Grief for Oneself

Matthew Ratcliffe (2017), writing on grief, questions whether someone can mourn something other than the death of a person. Is it the same sort of loss? Of course not. There is certainly something phenomenologically different about the experiences of loss after death and the loss of, say, a prized possession, a home, a relationship. Or one's own life.

But that does not mean that we do not grieve. We still maintain the "world-directed intentionality" of grief (Ratcliffe 2017, 155), that object-related ambiguity that makes it such an ugly feeling (cf. Ngai 2005). It remains "a complex emotion the ingredients of which include other emotions" (Ratcliffe 2017, 156), such as depression, anger and hopelessness. It lingers on as "temporally extended", existing as a process (Ratcliffe 2017, 158)—another sign of ugliness. And "it is clear that profound grief involves a pervasive disturbance of how the world and one's relationship with it are experienced" (Ratcliffe 2017, 164).

I have lost so much because of him. Whatever life I might have been on the path to lead is gone now, never able to return. To be sure, it might not have been a better life, but I still grieve for it every day. In times of acute mourning, the entire world seems full of empty promises; promises for what could have been, if only that had not happened. Perhaps I would have been an award-winning journalist working in the fashion industry, as I once dreamed of being. Perhaps I would have nurtured my language abilities more, and now I would be bilingual at the very least. Perhaps I would never have tried to kill myself, not even once. Perhaps I would have met the love of my life and not fucked it up with how broken I am. Or perhaps it would just have been someone else who raped me instead and set me on this path. Grief of one's own lost lives is full of these 'perhapses', not all of them as enchanting as one might expect.

Darkness Creeps Up

Darkness creeps up inside me. It clouds my vision. I am a husk filled with unrepentant hatred.

How dare they take and take from us? How dare they cause the harm that they do?

My breathing is laboured now. My pulse quickens. I cannot stand the agony of this feeling. It is purely unproductive in its entirety. I can get nothing done. I can stand no one's company, not even my own. I pace around, trying to find an outlet for all this hurt, all this rage, all this loathing. But there is no appropriate outlet. There is only the pain of it all.

Cesspit

I am a cesspit of rage.

My body is on fire and I am burn-burn-burning away.

I try to write through the anger. But there are no words. Language was not created to give form to a fury born from trauma. The visceral reality of it cannot be captured. The sickness it causes. The physical anguish. The fleeting, darting, shifting, fighting thoughts. The fists balled up so tight that they start to ache, knuckles white as snow and a heart even colder.

What am I supposed to do with this? What is anyone supposed to do with this?

Rage

Writing on being transgender, Susan Stryker (1994) states that "like the [Frankenstein's] monster as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist" (238). I have already demonstrated that the rape survivor is monstrously abject, to both themselves and the affective community. What does this say, then, about the survivor's rage?

Like J. Keeping (2006), I would state that anger is "a profoundly *moral* emotion", for it "is the intuition not merely of a wrong, but, more specifically, the intuition of a wrong which is at once a violation of expectations. Anger occurs when we conceive a wrong as a wrong that *ought not to have happened*" (479, emphasis added; 478, emphasis in original). However, they go on to state that "[a]nger is tied to a sense of violation, not of our bodies or our rights in the sense that rape is, but a violation of expectations or obligations" (Keeping 2006, 481). But I disagree: a violation of bodies or rights is *precisely* a violation of the expectations that others are obliged to respect one's body and rights. In this sense, rape is primed to illicit rage from those subjected to it. Rape becomes a feeling-cause (cf. Ahmed 2010).

As Stryker (1994) goes on to say about the phenomenological experience of rage, "[it] colours me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart. It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival" (244). Keeping (2006) continues that "[i]n anger, as with all emotions, our whole world changes: it takes on at once an intensity and an unfriendliness. The wind blows too hard, the sun shines too bright, all is sharpness and straight lines" (pp479–480). This offers the beginnings of an understanding of what it feels like to experience anger towards injustice. In a state of anger, I am in a position of 'against-ness' to the world (Ahmed 2014): like depression, the world is experienced as hostile, but unlike depression, this does not result in a corresponding turning away from it. Instead, I stand in a relationship constituted by an aggression *towards* it. "Anger hence moves us by moving us outwards: while it creates an object, it also is not simply directed against an object, but becomes a response to the world, as such" (Ahmed 2014, 176). My response to a hostile world is not to shrink away into myself, constituting myself as the hostile object. My response is to confront it, head on, with a red-hot fury that wants to see the world, *this*

world, a world that causes so much pain and oppression and tragedy, burned to the ground. I am consumed by the affect, and I direct myself to multiple points at once, meeting their threatening presence with one of my own.

It is in its morality and in its ability to remain orientated towards the world that anger can become transformative: "[t]hrough the operation of rage, the stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power" (Stryker 1994, 249). I become powerful in so much as I acknowledge my state as abject and stigmatised, and settle on fighting against a world that makes me so. As Ahmed (2014) notes, "[a]nger is creative; it works to create a language with which to respond to that which one is against" (176). It is through this experience of anger that I pinpoint injustice, a crucial step in expressing that which I am opposed to. Anger may not always be an articulate emotion—it is difficult to speak with a throat and a mouth that only wants to scream—but it is still instructive. Rage will keep you alive. Rage will keep you fighting. Rage will keep you awake when your eyelids start to droop. Rage will keep everyone and everything else away, distractions that they are.

And now it becomes apparent that anger has its downsides. For in anger, my response to a hostile world is to attempt to become equally hostile towards it. In this, although I may be consciously turned towards a large array of objects, the 'background' to these orientations is the many things which I must turn away from in order to sustain my furious attachments (see Ahmed (2006) on phenomenological backgrounds). If I am not careful, anger may very well burn all of those bridges to the parts of the world that I usually hold dear.

The line between transformation and destruction is a difficult one to walk.

Endnotes

1. By 'intentional repetition,' I refer to intentionality in the phenomenological sense as that which connects subjects to their objects, and therefore moves the subject out into the world. This may or may not be felt as intentional in the sense of common parlance, as something the subject actively seeks to do: thus, there is an ambiguity inherent in the term.

2. This essay from Berlant (2001), while groundbreaking and crucial to my analysis of trauma, is about 'obesity' as an ongoing form of slow death. Unfortunately, Berlant failed to engage in the emerging yet prolific field of fat studies, something their analysis would have

deeply benefited from. I do not have the space here to summarise fully why, but fat studies has been at pains to show that 'obesity' is, indeed, a slur and that fatness is not something to be denigrated, particularly due to its ties to other oppressions such as antiblackness.

3. It should be noted here that Kristeva is a psychoanalytic theorist, which is a tradition that I would typically not engage with due to its pathologising force. However, her work on abjection is one of the most famous on the nature of disgust. I choose to draw on the more phenomenological accounting at the very beginning of *Powers of Horror*, as opposed to her later attempts to map her readings of Freud and Lacan onto the subject matter.

4. By 'ambiguous attachments,' I mean orientations either towards or away from multiple objects at once with no single one exerting enough strength to render it predominant. It therefore appears as though the attachments underscoring an 'ugly feeling' are ambiguous in the sense of them being unclear or difficult to ascertain as the cause for the feeling, because they are so numerous and weak.

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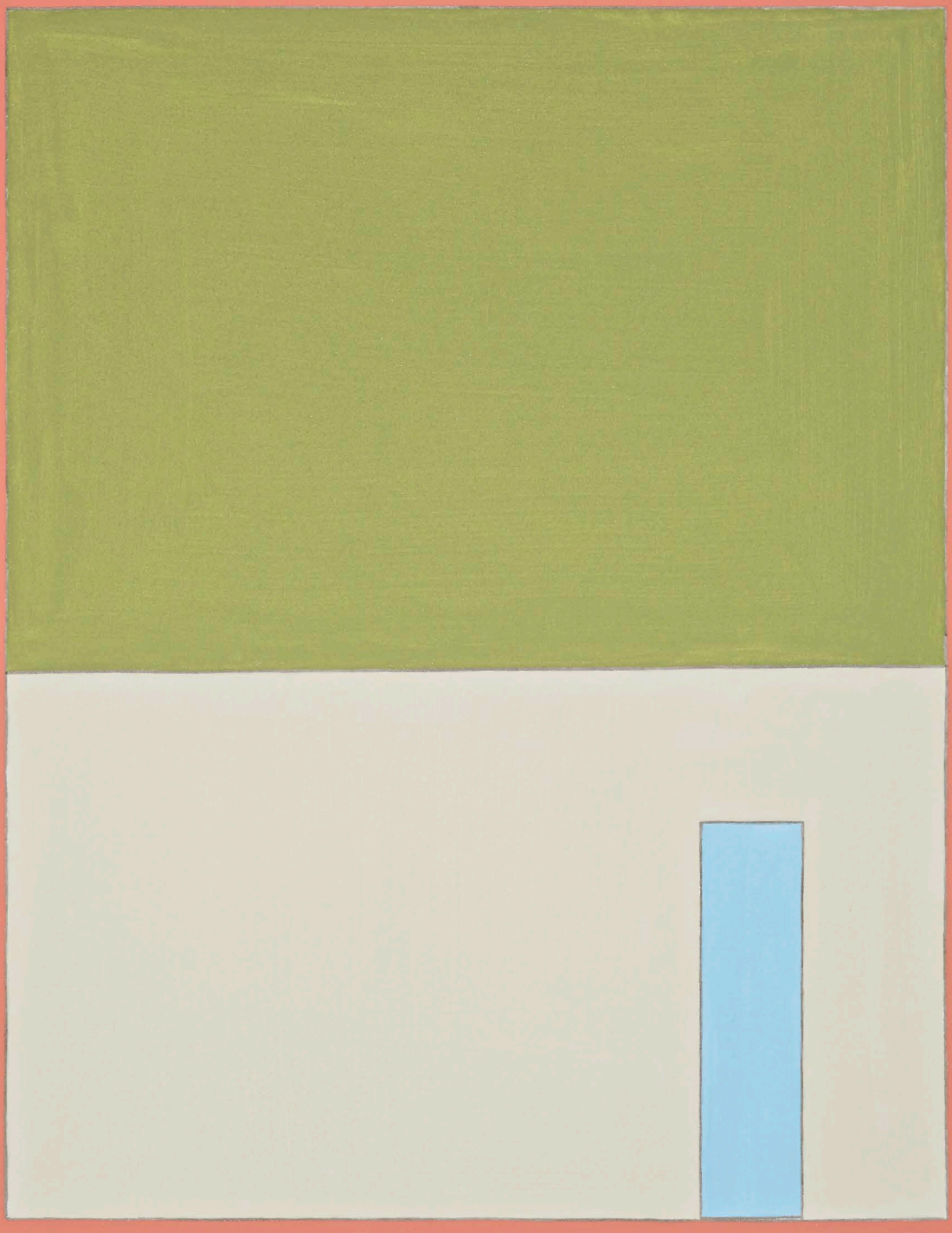

Casolari Exp1, Alfio Giuffrida, 2019

Afterword

EVASIONS AND ESCAPES

Asilia Franklin-Phipps
SUNY NEW PALTZ

Spring, mixed media, 2023

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p.82
May 2023
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Left: *Contemplation*, mixed media, 2023
Right: *Memory*, mixed media, 2023

Left: *Openings*, mixed media, 2023
Right: *Which Way*, mixed media, 2023


Fig. 2
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Left: *Foliage*, mixed media, 2023
Right: *Massachusetts*, mixed media, 2023


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Left: *Neon Shapes*, mixed media, 2023
Right: *All Day I Dream*, mixed media, 2023


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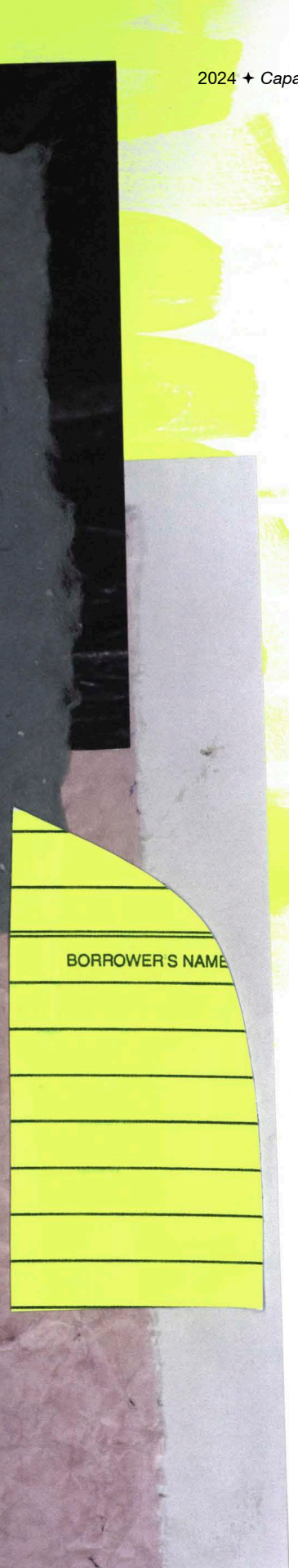

Due Date, mixed media, 2023

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COVER IMAGE

Wassermelonen vor einem Supermarkt,
Ugur Akgöz, 2006

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