



2019 | VOL. 1, Nº. 4

CAPACIOUS

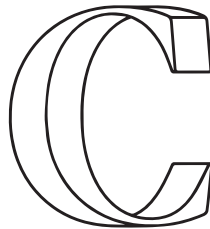
JOURNAL FOR EMERGING AFFECT INQUIRY

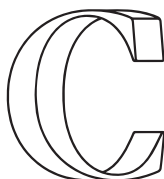


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CAPACIOUS

JOURNAL FOR EMERGING AFFECT INQUIRY





Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry Vol. 1 No. 4

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ISBN-13: 978-1083127464

ISBN-10: 1083127464

capaciousjournal.com



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The Radical Open Access Collective is a community of scholar-led, not-for-profit presses, journals, and other open access projects. Now consisting of more than 50 members, we promote a progressive vision for open publishing in the humanities and social sciences. What we have in common is an understanding of open access as being characterised by a spirit of ongoing creative experimentation.

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ca·pa·cious

kə'pāSHəs/ 

adjective

having a lot of space inside; roomy.

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. Secondly, 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.'

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Playing the role of a witch in La Notte delle Streghe, Miles Gerety, 2007
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AFFECTIVE POLITICS AND INVOLUNTARY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: BACKLASHES AGAINST #METOO



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Introduction

One of the challenges that you sometimes face as an affect scholar is the need to identify your own affects in relation to the material that you study. Sometimes your research even works as a catalyst for media events, folding you into affective intensifications being modulated through a range of interfaces. Intensifications that you could hardly have foreseen. Obviously, this ‘becoming your data’ poses a methodological challenge, and requires a keen eye to the ways in which affect is governed.

In the beginning of 2019, I published a research communication piece about the Danish news media's coverage of #metoo on Facebook (Reestorff 2019). Even though the piece was published on a scholarly website called *videnskab.dk* (translation: science.dk), I quickly received hostile and dehumanizing messages. The experience reminded me that sometimes, as researchers, we are forced to conduct an involuntary but necessary autoethnography. When you are drawn into an intense media debate, as I was, you are simply forced to consider the way in which you are affected and not least being framed and resituated in relation to your data. In the meshwork of affects that emerge in these situations it is crucial to find ways to rearticulate your research and insist that it is placed in the context for which it was intended. More specifically, I had to find a way to make categorical mapping and autoethnography merge in order to study the ways in which affect is intensified and governed.

In the following, I first introduce the methodology 'categorical mapping' and the key findings from my study of the Danish media's coverage of #metoo on Facebook. Then, I turn to the analysis and suggest that, what I will call, posthumanitarian journalism is tied to the governing of affect and to a democratic deficit in the debate concerning #metoo. Finally, categorical mapping and autoethnography are combined in the attempt to shed further light on the specific affective atmosphere that exists in between long-term pulsations of despair and the repetitive immediacy of angry outbursts. Understanding how affect is governed across media texts in intense affective environments can, hopefully, contribute to the reinvention of the democratic dialogue in what has been called the age of despair.

Investigating social news: categorical mapping

Many studies have pointed out that especially younger generations tend to get their news primarily from social media—from what has been called “social news” (e.g. Hermida 2012; Kerrn-Jespersen 2016). However, this does not mean that professional media outlets lose their importance. News shared online is often produced by professional media and shared on social media either by themselves or their followers. Yet, when news is spread online their affective dynamics are altered, simply because they are legitimized: not only by professional news media, but by also by friends and family. It is in this altered landscape of social news that my study takes place.

In a way, I was lucky to have conducted my study before the news media caught wind of it. I had conducted a systematic study before I was thrown into the debate myself. The study investigated all the articles about #metoo shared on Facebook by the nine major Danish news media (the two public service channels *DR* and *TV2*, and the seven newspapers *Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Information*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *Kristelig Dagblad*, *Ekstrabladet* and *B.T.*). I investigated their communication on Facebook, because Facebook, in Denmark, is the most used social media site both amongst the general population, politicians, and news outlets.

#metoo was the only keyword I used. If I had used more than one keyword, there would probably be more articles related to sexual assaults. However, I wanted to limit my search to one keyword in order to have comparable data between the media, and because a number of strong and repetitive refrains (Bertelsen and Murphie 2011) emerged over time: Refrains that only emerged as a result of #metoo. Therefore, I used #metoo as the sole keyword in my search. This choice also reflects the fact that my interest was not sexual harassment and assaults as such, but rather the ways in which sexual harassment and assaults are represented in relation to the #metoo-movement.

The methodology that I used is called categorical mapping (Fritch, Kofoed and Reestorff 2019). Categorical mapping was inspired by Adele Clarke's methodology of mapping and work on situational analysis (Clarke 2005). However, I do not focus on situational maps, but on laying out visually what was in the archive by categorizing the way in which #metoo was being addressed. This mapping was necessary to grasp what was in the archive: by means of mapping, for instance, positive and negative attitudes towards #metoo, the complexity of its reception, became visible and the otherwise intangible #metoo-stream became tangible.

The categorical mapping revealed that—in the period between October 1, 2017 and November 1, 2018—there are 371 articles tagged with #metoo. 138 of these were about the media and entertainment industry, while 74 were opinion articles. Of the 371, 104 expressed a negative attitude towards #metoo, and 66 presented a positive: By positive and negative articles, I mean articles in which the journalist, the news media, or the opinion writer reveal an explicit opinion on #metoo, or in which the update and the article is exclusively framed around a person that holds a positive or negative attitude towards #metoo. This is for instance the case, when *Jyllands-Posten* posts the article “Comment: Perhaps it is about time that the #metoo movement lie down to die” and writes in their Facebook post: “MeToo appears to have reached a point where the movement radicalizes to an unfolded gender war or lie down to die”, claims historian Henrik Jensen. What do you think—is it time to bury the metoo-movement?”

News Media	#metoo articles	Articles about the media and entertainment industry	Positive articles	Negative articles	Opinion articles
B.T.	24	13	2	9	
Berlingske Tidende	65	20	9	23	16
Dagbladet Information	63	12	17	14	13
Dr.dk & DR Nyheder	48	24	5	13	
Ekstrabladet	11	6		5	
Jyllands-Posten	44	18	5	16	10
Kristelig Dagblad	9	2	1	2	4
Politiken	70	17	24	15	31
TV2 & TV2 News	37	26	3	7	

There are many points to be drawn from the categorical mapping. Here I will merely mention five. First of all, only two Danish men were named in the articles and updates: Peter Aalbæk Jensen and Lars von Trier. Both are from Zentropa Film and Aalbæk Jensen's problematic behavior towards his interns, and Lars von Trier's controversies with Björk have been known for at least ten years – thus prior to #metoo. Besides these two, the articles primarily named international celebrities such as Bill Clinton, Kevin Spacey, and Asia Argento. This is interesting because it is often, including in the articles that I studied, raised as a concern that #metoo will destroy the lives of innocent men. Yet, in Denmark the tendency seems to be that names are not mentioned.

The second and third points are that #metoo was often covered as Hollywood and gossip journalism and in opinion pieces, and thus as something everybody is entitled to have an opinion about and not as something that necessarily demands political attention and action. This is problematic because articles that do in fact discuss sexual assaults as a social and political problem tend to be drowned in the large amount of gossip and opinion journalism.

The fourth point requires more data before a final conclusion is made. Yet, in the data there was a tendency to name male journalists in the posts while failing to do so when the journalist was female. Likewise, male scholars were celebrated in posts,

for instance when *Politiken* wrote: “the master thinker Fukuyama.” Furthermore, there was a disproportionate focus on women who are critical of #metoo. *Politiken*, for instance, had seven articles centered around Marianne Stidsen, an associate professor from the University of Copenhagen, who amongst other things claims that: “The feminist, left-populist totalitarianism is comparable to the wildfires that have been spreading across the country all summer.” Similarly, *Ekstrabladet* quoted the former porn star and actor Sussi la Cour for saying: “Where are women’s self-respect? Why don’t they say no?” As such these women are, to use Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) term, inserted as policing feminists. The problem is that hearing the feminist as police “is a way of not hearing feminism” (2).

This leads to the categorical mapping’s fifth point, namely that seven out of the nine media had more than twice as many negative than positive articles about #metoo. Thus, there was a significant negative distortion of the coverage of #metoo.

Affective governmentalization

The hypodermic needle model—suggesting that media content is simply transferred from the media and absorbed by its users—was, as we know, long ago rejected. Yet, not only content but also affect seems to flow back and forth between the news media and their users. Let us look at an example: there were 168 comments to *DR*’s article “#Metoo continues in Denmark: 132 female singers call for action.” 101 comments attack #metoo, 59 comments find #metoo necessary, and 8 comments are impossible to understand or merely attack others in the thread. The article is in itself neutral, which is also why it was not the most intensely commented-on article, and it does not mention any names of accused men. The comment field reveals that a number of refrains are recurring. According to Deleuze and Guattari the refrain is “a prism, a crystal of space-time. It acts upon that which surrounds it, sound or light, extracting from it various vibrations, or decompositions, projections, or transformations. The refrain also has a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that what surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity and thereby to form organized masses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 119). As this indicates, refrains form masses from that which moves and may even appear at odds. Thus, the refrains—depicted in the table below – fold affect, anger, and objects, and phrases that may or may not be related to #metoo into a shared intensity of repetitive refrains. Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie (2011) explain that a focus on refrains orients the analysis towards understanding the role of the refrain in the emergence of new territories, new functions within this territory, and the further refraining of this new

territory and new functions. A focus on refrains was thus not only a way to focus on words and language, but a way of understanding how affective mobilization and political territories are attached to the words (Fritsch, Kofoed and Reestorff forthcoming). At least fifteen refrains acted as catalysts for angry affects:

Refrains	Examples from the comment field
Time (24)	"If a smack in the bum is more than five seconds old it exceeded the statute of limitations"
Fame (17)	"All of the sudden I feel violated and contact eb, DR & TV2 to get my 15 minutes"
Pathetic (16)	"Shut the fuuuuuck up we cannot care less"
Violation culture (16)	"mass hysteria is 'in' at the moment" "nonsensical accusations"
Undocumented claims (16)	"If you accepted it when it happened, even though it was abuse, then let it go"
Smack in the bum (12)	"Women who come forward 5-10-15-20-25 years after a smack in the bum have failed themselves and their sisters"
People's court (10)	"people's court", "purgatory", "pillory", "cowardly people's court"
Real victims (9)	"F*** it is disrespectful towards the people who really suffer, Attention-horny nobodies"
Female sounds (8)	"shriek", "whine", "yell", "howling choir", "I cannot stand hysterical women who hiss and sharpen their nails"
Quit or leave (7)	"Stand by yourselves and show some courage ... I would rather lose my job and career and love myself"
Witch hunt (6)	"ARGH shut the f... up ... it is super sickening and it has developed into a witch hunt... Why did you let it happen?"
Extreme #metoo (6)	"frenzy of bloodlust", "tsunami", "tidal wave", "it is a flood that can no longer be taken seriously"
Anti feminism (5)	"girl stuff", "stupid geese", "hysterical bitches", "just stop the femi kvinfo [knowledge center about gender, equality and ethnicity] nonsense"
Media frenzy (5)	"#metoo and the media are bursting into self-oscillation"
Misconstrued flirtation (5)	"The by-product is that men are losing all their initiative and motivation"

The comments and the refrains reveal a specific form of affective intensive atmosphere. Without distinguishing between affects and emotions, Ahmed (2004) writes that emotions “are intentional in the sense that they are ‘about’ something: they involve a direction or orientation towards an object” (7). In the comment field, angry affects are certainly oriented towards #metoo, but also towards women more generally, the media, feminism, and the unidentified and allegedly innocent men. Furthermore, affects become “sticky” (Ahmed 2004) when refrains such as witch hunt and smack in the bum are repeated. It is as if these refrains capture and even transport affect. Donald Trump, for instance frequently uses witch hunt to defend himself against accusations, and to mobilize his supporters. Something similar happened in the comment field of my research: the refrain witch hunt was also, in this case, used to mobilize and intensify anger. Yet this mobilization was not in defense of one man, but of an undefinable “we.” It was the sum of these refrains and affective orientations that constituted the collective intensification of anger in the comment field.

The refrains provided the affective cues and orientations that allowed the crowd to be rendered into a public. In the context of Twitter, Zizi Papacharissi (2016) argues that tweets work as framing devices that allow publics to emerge because they provide a way in which people can “*feel* their way in to politics,” and thus “tune into an issue or a particular problem of the times, but also to affectively attune with it” (Papacharissi 2015, 118). Yet, in my study, when the users in the comment field felt their way into the politics of #metoo, they were not ‘in tune’ with #metoo. Their affects were oriented not towards #metoo, but towards the refrains that were sticking to it. This also entails that the comment field was not only about #metoo, but about the affective intensification itself. The mere fact that people write the same thing that several others have just written testifies to the fact that they invest their affect in the collective intensification. The collective intensification of anger appears to be the purpose when Facebook users are gearing each other up “for a passage towards a diminished or augmented state” (Massumi 2008, 2).

It is crucial to keep in mind that the refrains and the collective intensification did not emerge out of thin air. The article “132 female singers call for action” is, as mentioned, neutral. But the refrains used in the comment field could be found in many articles. For instance, *TV2* ran an article entitled: “Famous Danes are warning against frenzy of blood lust,” in which the Minister for Equal Opportunities claims that we “must be careful not to draw the victim card.” The movie director Ole Bornedal argued that: “It is difficult not to laugh when women feel traumatized 25 years after a smack in the bum,” and all the news media had updates and articles that mention witch hunts, people’s courts, or warn that we

must not feel violated too easily. Thus, while the comment field certainly was angry and intense, this was legitimized through the refrains found in the news media's articles and updates. This also entails that when the Facebook users in the comment field "feel their way in to politics," they do so through the logics of multiple media texts and interfaces. The Facebook users are imitating each other and media texts that they have encountered elsewhere. As such, the various refrains are mobilizing "imitative encounters" (Sampson 2012). This means that refrains and affective orientations are floating between media texts, and that the publics that come together in the attacks on #metoo are "affective, convening across networks that are discursively rendered out of mediated interactions" (Papacharissi 2016, 308).

The collective affective intensification fostered through the refrains were not simply about imitation. Different media texts impacted the Facebook users and they did not experience affect in the same way. One user, for instance, used her experience as a rape victim to dismiss the experiences of the singers and argue that, unless accompanied by aggravated assault and beating, sexual harassment and rape are not an assault. She writes that: "If violence is not involved we often decide for ourselves if we let it happen," to which another responds "You know what, I said no when I was raped this summer. It didn't help. He didn't give a shit." These two women are both rape victims, yet they experience the affective intensity differently and they use it to tune into the article and the singers' experiences in different ways.

The different roads into affect are even more apparent when a Facebook user wrote: "They are whining! They are free to quit, leave, not come back." To which another answers: "Wow, there are so many people in this thread that have not understood what metoo is about: power. As a starter I would recommend that you google privilege blindness." The exchange exemplifies the different forms of affectivity that can be involved in the affective intensification of an event and it corresponds with Brian Massumi's notion of differential attunement. He writes: "There is no sameness of affect. There is affective difference in the same event" (Massumi 2008, 6). Accordingly, collective affective intensification is shaped by each body and its lived past as well as by orientations towards specific refrains.

This has three consequences. Firstly, even if the Facebook users wholeheartedly disagree and enter into completely different affective registers when confronted with the article, they still contributed to the collective intensification of the event.

Secondly, seven out of nine news media had more than twice as many negative articles about #metoo than positive and the majority of comments in the comment field are negative and angry. In this regard, the study of comments revealed that while those holding a negative attitude towards #metoo felt their way into a public through a repetitive use of refrains, the positive attitude lacked these mobilizing refrains and thus, in the comment field, they appear scattered. Thirdly, this also suggests that the news media and their followers conducted an affective governmentalization (Reestorff 2017) of #metoo, in which they engaged in the governing of which affects are appropriate in relation to which bodies (Ahmed 2004). As such, the news media's Facebook pages became a battleground on which affect is governed and on which it is determined who are deemed legitimate players and which voices are heard in the debate about #metoo.

Posthumanitarian journalism

I have argued that there are at least five consequences of the negative distortion of #metoo. These consequences are related to depoliticization, deterritorialization, shame, the imaginary real victim, and the ironic solidarity of posthumanitarianism. I will not go through all of these consequences, but merely touch upon the ways in which the refrain that manifests as the 'imaginary real victim' is intertwined with what I will call posthumanitarian journalism.

In relation to posthumanitarianism, Lilie Chouliaraki has argued that a shift in emotionality has emerged, in which the truth-claims of suffering "move from an emphasis on suffering as external reality, to suffering as subjective knowledge, validated by psychological grounded criteria of authenticity" (Chouliaraki 2013, 173). Chouliaraki ties this shift in emotionality to what she calls the ironic spectator, who over-humanizes the spectator and dehumanizes the sufferer, who already lies outside the centers of power and visibility (Chouliaraki 2013, 187). This shift in emotionality is visible in the media coverage of #metoo on Facebook. When seven out of nine news media have more than twice as many negative articles about #metoo than positive, it reveals both a double mediation and a split emotionality. Whereas the articles that cover #metoo by focusing on what has happened to the victims of sexual assault are mediating their accounts and emotionality and the history of sexual violence, the articles that are proposing a negative framing of #metoo premeditate (Grusin 2010) what might happen to the people (primarily men) who are 'falsely' accused of sexual violence. The latter articles do not align the emotionality with actual victims, but with any potential future falsely accused. I am not suggesting that it would not be awful

to be falsely accused, but rather that it is interesting that through premediation the emotionality of the falsely accused is prioritized over the mediation of victims of sexual assaults and their emotionality.

The shift in emotionality also reveals a shift in journalistic practice. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) has pointed out that journalism draws on both a ritual of objectivity and a ritual of emotionality. Yet, when journalism is communicated on Facebook it is the ritual of emotionality that is prioritized. This is obviously an attempt to generate traffic and clicks. But, as my data shows, the ritual of emotionality also impacts the ritual of objectivity when articles are framed around the emotionality of premediated victims.

Thus, posthumanitarian journalism concerns both a double mediation and a shifting emotionality. This shifting emotionality is also pertinent when emotionality is placed neither upon actual victims nor the premediated falsely accused, but in the hands of the reader/viewer. The news media are constantly addressing their followers as ironic spectators by asking them to validate the truth claims that they themselves or their sources put forward. For instance, an article in *DR* reported that the Swedish Press Council has criticized some articles about #metoo, and *DR* asked their followers “do you agree with them?” As if the individual Danish reader even reads Swedish journalism or has knowledge about press ethics. A similar displacement of emotionality takes place when *B.T.* ran an article about a blogger and radio host and writes: “Kasper doesn’t get the #metoo-movement. ‘Idiots like me do not get smarter.’ Do you agree with Kasper? = yes = no.” When the news outlets constantly ask “what do you think?” or “do you agree?” it is obviously because they want to generate clicks and funding, but the result is also that the coverage of #metoo is posthumanitarian, and that #metoo and victims of sexual assault are presented as something that the individual reader/viewer can judge for truth-value.

The displacement of emotionality has consequences for victims of sexual assault. This is because, when the individual reader/viewer/journalist becomes the judge of what constitutes a sexual assault, the boundaries for what constitutes an assault are up for negotiation and constantly shift according to where the emotionality is placed and where the affective relations occur. This means that a victim might come forward, but they never know if they will be accepted as victims. Recently, for instance, a so-called hugging-therapist was convicted of rape. Yet,

even after the conviction he was invited to talk at the school of a famous Danish sexologist. When she had to defend her choice to invite him, she said to *B.T.* “‘I haven’t talked to the girl’ but ‘I know him. He is not a rapist. He just hasn’t been good enough to understand how the girl felt about it.’” Thus, even after the conviction she insists that her feeling is more valid than the woman’s experience and the court’s decision. Likewise, a Facebook user writes responding to the article mentioned above: “I can distinguish between assaults, real violations and self-absorbed nonsense. As long as violence is not involved, we most often decided if we let it happen”; the movie director Christian Braad Thomsen argued to TV2 that: “The #metoo-campaign degenerated into a media stunt with no content by covering everything from consummated rapes to sexual jokes.” This reveals that the refrain “real victim” is an imaginary trope that is constantly used to redirect the affect that might otherwise be directed towards the victims. The repetitions of the imaginary real victim entail that sexual violence is made to appear less significant (in the case of the hugging therapist it is, for instance, claimed that it was just bad intercourse and not rape) and that victims are often only accepted as a ‘real victim’ if extreme violence as well as rape has occurred. Yet if we maintain this narrow understanding of what constitutes sexual assault, we miss the point that sexual violence is often not about sex, but about social control. The refrain of the imaginary real victim is also displaced, because the victim can be shamed and thus no longer be accepted as a victim. This entails that posthumanitarian journalism contributes to the repetition and circulation of the refrain ‘real victim’, which becomes an affective point of orientation that can never fully be reached by victims of sexual assault.

Involuntary autoethnography

A little while ago the public service channel *DR’s* ran a review of the new cinematic remake of Stig Larsson’s crime novels, *The Girls in the Spider’s Web*. The headline stated that the reviewer was outraged about the film and that the main character Lisbeth Salander was being misused as an “unimaginative #metoo-bad-girl.” #Metoo, only a year after the movement took off, was being used as a derogatory phrase. According to the review, the degree of the violence of the sexual assaults portrayed in the film was one of the reasons to dismiss the ‘new’ Lisbeth Salander. The refrain ‘real victim’ was being used almost automatically in a subordinate clause. This reminded me of how exhausting I sometimes find it to study material concerning sexual violence and of Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) point that recognizing what has not yet ended is a slow, painstaking, and recurring step. Every time I enter into these research fields, I hesitate but somehow remain with the unsettling sensation. I am drawn to the material but also repulsed by it.

The recognition of the affective relation between the researcher and the material studied is important no matter which methodology you apply. But it is of course especially important when utilizing autoethnography. I did not set out to conduct autoethnography. Rather, I only began to utilize this methodology after I published my research communication article and began to receive vile messages and emails demanding that I should be sacked, declaring that I am a stupid little missy, a radicalized hyperfeminist, blank and whining, and suggesting that I support, for instance, lynching and should hang myself. It was these messages that made me realize that we sometimes, as researchers, are forced to conduct an involuntary but necessary autoethnography. When forced into media events that move across our research, news media, and social media, we must situate ourselves in relation to our own data. The messages did not pose a methodological challenge for my initial categorical mapping, which I had already done at the time, but they did make it clear that I needed to pay close attention to my own affects. Firstly, it seems pertinent to include auto-ethnographic reflections in relation to the study that I have conducted, secondly becoming a part of this kind of media event is research data in and of itself, and thirdly since I intend to continue these studies I must thoroughly think through my situatedness and affects in relation to the data.

One of the crucial points in autoethnography is that it serves to “strip away the veneer of self-protection that comes with academia” and make the researcher “accountable and vulnerable” (Denzin 2003, 137). This potentially destabilizes the boundaries between academic work and the rest of one’s life and breaks through the self-other dichotomy. Yet, while autoethnography contains elements of auto-biography, it goes beyond it; according to scholars such as Sally Denshire (2014), autoethnography engages in a critical reflection of the depersonalizing tendencies that come into play in social and cultural spaces that have asymmetrical power relations. While classic “evocative” autoethnography in the words of Leon Anderson (2006) runs the risk of self-indulgence, I attempt to utilize an analytical autoethnography in which the recording of my own affects is used to advance a theoretical understanding of the broader social phenomena in which I am only one of many participants.

Autoethnography is helpful to get a sense of the affective experiences associated with being subjected to the governing of affects. When people send harsh messages to you day and night you must be certain to silence your phone to avoid the repetitiveness of the ‘ding’, ‘ding’, ‘ding.’ The sound of messages arriving can

lead to discomfort and perhaps even make you avoid the devices and interfaces that you normally engage with. The messages are embedded in an environment that is “not just social, material and technological, but multisensory, charged with energy, emotion, and contingent on the activity of non-human organisms too” (Pink 2012, 23). In this case, the technology itself becomes a constant reminder of the possibility of the next vile message and as such the affective experience is shaped by the interface.

The vile messages were intended to make me shut up – to exclude me from the democratic public debate. As such they were essentially depoliticizing democracy. Yet even though this analysis is obvious, the messages got to me. After I received the first message arguing that I was stupid and should be sacked I didn’t want to let it affect me. But. It. Did. I was about to write a tweet about my research, my stomach made itself felt and I considered if it was really worth it. I wasn’t afraid, angry, sad, or any other specific emotion, I was just exhausted. I did write the tweet, simply because my self-identification as a researcher would not allow me not to talk publicly about my research.

The attacks that I encountered only took place in the timespan of three weeks. In this regard it is crucial to keep in mind that while I was in *Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende* and *TV2*, I did not get media coverage because I shared a #metoo-story, but simply because I reported my research findings. Nevertheless, the anger that I met resembles the anger that victims of sexual abuse are met with when they come forward. Therefore, my affective experience was shaped both by the fact that the messages targeted me, and by the fact that they made me feel my way into something that I cannot myself feel, namely how it must be to be subjected to vile attacks because you are a survivor of sexual assaults. I can feel myself into a relation to something that I cannot feel myself, but it is crucial to keep in mind that the concept of differential attunement, mentioned above, teaches us that we cannot simply equate affects on the grounds of a shared experience. Affect is experienced differentially. Thus, I cannot simply conclude that sexual assault survivors, who come forward, experience the affectivity of vile messages the same way as I do. To make such an assumption would be to ignore not only that different bodies are different points of entry to the affective experience, but also that the affects cued by harsh messages depend on whether you receive them because you are a researcher or because you are a sexual assault survivor. Autoethnography can be an important methodological tool, but we must not be blind to the privileges associated with our position as researchers – or to the fact that these privileges are primarily bestowed upon tenured faculty and permanent employees. Vile online messages are never enjoyable, but they are experienced differently when you – as I did – have the support of your network and a big research institution. Thus, it

is not only crucial that we are aware of our privileges as scholars, but also that we continuously expect of our research institutions that they provide support to academics – including non-tenured faculty and PhD students – who are targeted by these kinds of vile messages and media frenzies. Without this kind of support we run the risk of compromising our academic freedom.

Concluding remarks: rhythms, pulse and affective peaks

News media and their followers engage in a governmentalization of affect in which it is negotiated which affects can be oriented towards which bodies (c.f. Ahmed 2004). In the 371 updates that I studied, this negotiation rendered the refrain “real victim” an affective point of orientation that can constantly be displaced and thus never fully reached by victims of sexual assault. With that in mind, my autoethnography can only provide a minor theoretical addition. The results of the autoethnography obviously had a different foundation than that of the categorical mapping, but it has made it possible to identify and highlight changes in affective capacities (Larsen 2013, 60), to understand that the affective intensity of harsh messages are experienced and extended in the interfacial encounters provided by e-mails, messages, and tweets, and made it possible to feel my way into something that I cannot feel: namely what intensities arise in the public nature of coming forward as a survivor of sexual assault.

There is one final point to be made. I have previously written extensively about affective politics in culture wars and emerging forms of nationalism (Reestorff 2017) and I have also received harsh messages in that context. Yet the repetitiveness of the anger still gets under my skin. Every time it happens I am struck by the lack of regard for research and engagement in dialogue. In these moments it is as if different levels of affect merge: rhythm, pulse, and peak. Rhythm is intensity and repetition. Pulse is the basic beat of the rhythm construed by multiple intensities and affects playing together, “the pulse is not solid, but exists in the shape of uncertainty and that other intensities (it could be awkwardness, pleasure, fear) work affectively in relation to this uncertainty-pulse” (Kofoed 2013, 173, my translation) The peaks are a bit more complex. Nick Couldry has accused affect theory of neglecting the role of the media in the continuous reproduction of structural inequality and he argues that media events are centering performances of mediated communication focused on a specific thematic core (Couldry 2012,

x). Yet, without understanding the role of affect in relation to media events, we overlook the fact that many media events do not manifest as the centering performances described by Couldry. On the contrary, affective peaks manifest as affective overload in which both rhythms and pulses are intensified and in which refrains both center and destabilise the thematic core. Thus, while #metoo might be a thematic core, there is no centering performance. This entails that affective peaks are crucial aspects of media events because they expand the affective realm of possibilities and the refrains available in the continuous maintenance of the pulse.

The affective peaks are often the moments in which you experience the affectivity of the event most intensely. Yet, the experience of affective peaks, when on the receiving end of harsh messages, is cued by the long-term pulsation of despair bound by the repetitiveness of rage. This long-term pulsation is one of uncertainty, because you never know if and when the anger will erupt into more than the underlying pulse and if it will be directed at you. It is also cued by the rhythmic repetitiveness of intensity, the intensity that emerges and erupts into anger in the comment fields below almost every article on #metoo. Affect is being modulated and governed in between rhythms, pulses, and peaks. This is because these affective levels either provide an invitation to join in the collective anger against #metoo and the accounts of sexual harassment, or to be excluded from the debate or even become a target yourself.

As such, all of us, including the news media, have a responsibility to pay close attention to the ways in which affect is being governed. Affective governmentalization, after all, inherently concerns access to and agency in the public democratic debate. Thus, we need to continue developing frameworks through which we can understand affective politics and its intersections with the current democratic and political climate. In doing so we must pay close attention to the ways in which affect is utilized to regulate and govern which voices are accepted as legitimate political players. Simply put, we need research that scrutinizes how affective politics contribute to the molding of both those in power and the mediatized democratic debate as such.

This, obviously, also means that we must continue to study the role of affect in relation to sexual assaults and harassment, i.e. further the understanding of the affective conditions that enable sexual assaults, abuse and harassment, and the affective intensities experienced by survivors. Yet, we also need to understand how affective politics can partake in bridging the gap between those who have

been victimized by, for instance, sexual and racial assaults and harassments and the mediatized democratic debate.

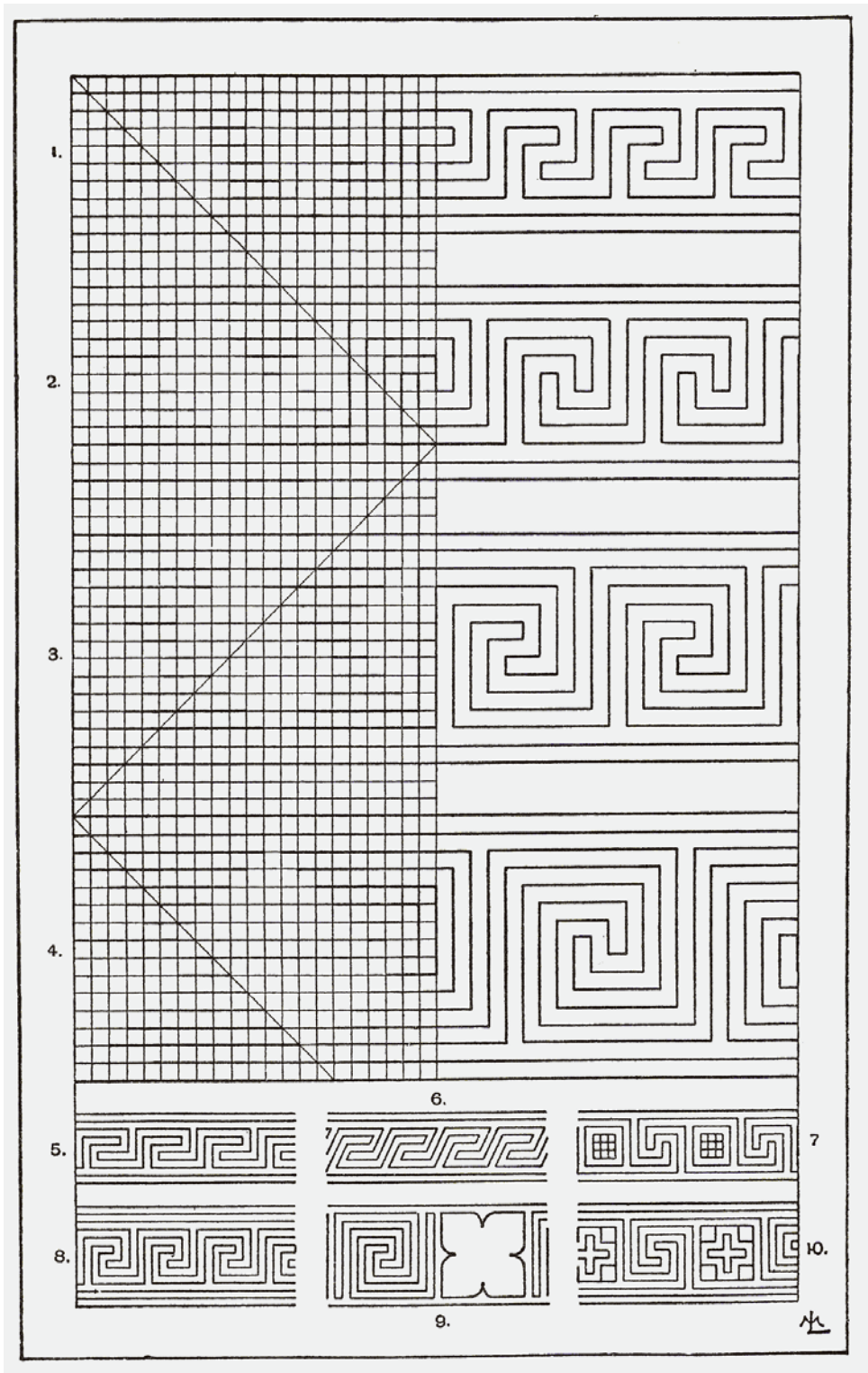
Scholars such as Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller (2019) have done important work to highlight how “feminist politics are positioned as a form of problematic ‘willfulness’, in which feminists must learn to manage and negotiate as they practice feminism in their everyday lives” (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller 2019, 25) and how, for instance, affective solidarity is at play when “diverse feminisms are being practiced, performed, and negotiated” (26). But even more research is necessary to understand the affective conditions and economies that facilitate the spreading (or lack hereof) of hashtags such as #metoo and not least people’s willingness or reluctance to participate herein.

Affective politics is, of course, not only utilized in hostile digital environments. It can also be the backdrop for, for instance, support and inclusion. But the current political climate in which extreme nationalism, reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at politically active women, and anti-feminist and anti-LGBT sentiments and assaults, are on the rise calls for further scrutiny of the role of affect in the exclusion of specific voices from public debates and spaces. In this regard it is crucial that we as scholars not only seek to understand the role of affective politics in the practices of exclusion and marginalization, but also scrutinize the role of the institutions that are sometimes understood to be objective, sober, nuanced and reflective – such as news media or academia. This also entails paying ever closer attention to the ways in which we are situated and affected in relation to and by our data.

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A Handbook of Ornament, Franz Sales Meyer, 1898
 (Public domain)



Saint Augustine Disputing with the Heretics, Vergós Group, 1475-1486
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

SERO SANCTITAS: AFFECTIVE CONVERSION(S) AS EFFECTIVE SELF- INVENTION



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ABSTRACT

For centuries, humans have been afflicted with an existential fear that their lives are on the wrong track or that they would need multiple lives to experience the one, perfect life. Interweaving personal memoir with critical theory, this essay argues that St. Augustine of Hippo solves this dilemma by creating multiple versions of himself in his autobiography *Confessions*. Self-invention by way of affective confession is our unexpected yet productive methodology.

KEYWORDS

affect, conversion, confession, self-invention, Augustine

“So, am I living too late?”
—The Finches, “Nightswimming”

“Things take the time they take.
Don't worry.
How many roads did St. Augustine follow before he became St. Augustine?”
—Mary Oliver, Felicity

The Unbearable Tardiness of Being

I've been late my whole life. My first year teaching high school English when I was putting my then-husband through seminary, I remember my assistant principal calling me on the first day of school. I remember this phone call waking me up. I remember shooting upright as the realization washed over me that not only was I late to school, but that I was now the teacher and this meant that there were students waiting on me for their education. Never mind that I'd stayed late in my classroom the night before, cleaning and organizing—over-preparing for their arrival. I pictured my new students seated at their desks, glancing at the clock while tapping their pencils. I envisioned my new colleagues' raised eyebrows. And I wish I could say that the teacher learned her lesson and that I haven't arrived late to any more significant life events, but lately I have been wondering if I am significantly late to my own life and, additionally and even more sickeningly, I am wondering if we are always late to our own lives.

I am not the only one dealing with this existential dread. Milan Kundera's novel rebuttal to Nietzsche's theory of eternal return, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* argues that because we only live once and lack “a second, third, or fourth life in which to compare various decisions” we cannot know which of our decisions are good or bad (1999, 222); “We can never know what to want,” Kundera posits, “because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come” (1999, 8). Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* also thematically grieves our lack of time. If Kundera mourns our lack of time for experience, Woolf mourns our lack of time for reflection. *Orlando* illustrates lives that are too short to have both the experiences and the time needed to reflect upon those experiences. Margaret R. Miles uses Woolf's claim to autobiographically lament in *Augustine and the Fundamentalist's Daughter*, “[a]lert as we try to be in our short lives, we just can't figure it out fast enough” (2011, 83). All these theorists seem

fixated and frustrated by existential lack: Kundera claims that we lack other lives by which comparison and thus prevention of mistakes is possible, and Woolf maintains that we lack the experiences and the time required to reflect upon those experiences, both of which are necessary for accurate vision and a consequent good life. How should we proceed then if, according to Kundera and Woolf, we are already late to our own lives? And consequently, if we are existentially late, how do we confidently make decisions to/that affect our future?

In perhaps a strange return, antiquity provides a solution to this modern dilemma. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine of Hippo models how to create a path forward. From his career to his conversion(s), Augustine makes his life decisions according to evolving affections. Although he prefigures the existential angst that Kundera and Woolf will later articulate, Augustine does more than anticipate: he navigates his own crises by creating and re-creating his sense of self. And if perhaps Augustine isn't unique in noting his own internal changes over time, he is exceptionally prodigious. Generous self-reflection allows us to track the eventual saint's evolving identity. Charting a life according to one's attractions and revulsions is a painful and sometimes contradictory process over the course of a lifetime. But Augustine writes himself/-ves by trial and error, as we see in the *Confessions*. Reading these autobiographical iterations is a complicated dance with time. M. B. Pranger notes in *The Artificiality of Christianity* that "the historian of antiquity and the Middle Ages faces the problem of literary immobility; time is bent, so to speak, and made curvilinear, so that it obeys the patterns and rituals of retardation and repetition" (2003, 21-22). Indeed, in Augustine's own words: "What is time? If nobody's asking me, I know. If I'm trying to explain it to somebody who asks me, I don't know" (2017, 11.17). Augustine sidesteps the time's inherent trickiness in *Confessions* by looking inward and then looping time to proceed.

By close-reading Augustine as he's written himself in his spiritual memoir, we find a way into the future. If Kundera argues we need more lives and Woolf says we need more reflection, Augustine's solution to angst is more selves. When encountering conflict in the outer world, Augustine looks inward to determine what he believes (and desires to believe) and who he can then become. When there is no theological solution at hand, he invents a rhetorical one. For example, as Phillip Cary reminds us in his book *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, when struggling with the tension of the soul versus the body, Augustine reunites the soul *with* its body; whereas, previous church fathers had located the soul inside of the body (2000). Fusing them together then raises flesh to the soul's level of value. And by citing three critical Catholic doctrines: creation, incarnation, and resurrection, he succinctly and brilliantly justifies this rhetorical choice (2000, 115). In so doing, he also invents a way to justify his personal decisions. More

specifically, as Augustine chronicles in his book, he struggled, as a young man and on into middle age, to resolve the tension between the lusts of his flesh with his desire to live a pure and spiritual life. And although Catholic clergy were allowed to partake in holy marriage, Augustine views even sacred union as fleshly entanglement. Thus, there is often a personal context to general exhortation. In this way, if we remember that Augustine was first a formally trained rhetorician before becoming a theologian and philosopher, we recognize *Confessions* itself as rhetorical invention. By way of confession, St. Augustine invents and reinvents himself, modeling a way for us to do the same. To accomplish this, he requires neither Kundera's multiple lives nor Woolf's additional time for self-reflection. What he needs, and ultimately finds, are his own invented selves. Over his lifetime, desires coalesce into fidelities, and these fidelities guide major life decisions. Major life decisions result in evolution of the self. Through his affective *Confessions*, Augustine effectively models that conversion itself is self-invention.

Confessions

"In the last fifteen years or so of Continental philosophical reflection," write John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon in their edited volume *Augustine and Post-modernism*, "God has been making a comeback among continental philosophers, and, along with God, (who, if the truth be told, was doing just fine without the philosophers), one of the West's most passionate and God-filled men, Augustine of Hippo" (2005, 2-3). We might question Augustine's resurging popularity. If Augustine's renewed and continuing significance is true, then his autobiography, *The Confessions*, deserves our renewed attention. Caputo and Scanlon argue that "Augustine's great achievement was to see that confession could be self-constructive rather than self-repudiation" (2005, 13).

In *Seducing Augustine*, Mark D. Jordan claims, "After he had been seduced three times over by Christian speeches, Augustine wrote two books about word and bodies. *Confessions* was the second of them, a sequel better than the original" (2010, 33). This sequel is better than the original, in my opinion, because *Confessions* offers what *On Christian Doctrine* lacks—a reliably unreliable narrator. Augustine is not the same voice in both books. And what I—and many others, I would guess—relate to most is his confessional voice of indecision and doubt.

Written centuries ago and rediscovered since by generations of scholars across fields, *Confessions* has taken on multiple functions over the years: for many people it is a primer on church doctrine, for some it is a precursor to spiritual memoir, and for others it is a cultural critique of a rival popular religion. Peter Brown, in his biography *Augustine of Hippo*, writes that “*Confessions* are quite succinctly the story of Augustine’s ‘heart,’ or of his feelings—his *affectus*” (2000, 163). Jean-Luc Marion, in his book *In the Self’s Place*, argues that “the model of the *confessio* [...] operates as an erotic reduction” (2012, 55). Margaret R. Miles, in *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine’s Confessions*, understands *Confessions* as a “text of pleasure” in Roland Barthes’ terms. She posits that although *Confessions*’ main concern is to “how to get—and keep—the greatest degree of pleasure,” the book also reproduces “strains, anxiety, and energy of the life they narrate” (1992, 9–10). From a meta perspective, Miles claims that “unresolved contradictions in a text create a pleasurable tension; they function to invite the reader into the text as a conversation partner” (1992, 64, 67). For me, reading the *Confessions* was an internal and ongoing conversation with someone I felt might understand my growing hunger and eventual loss.

I first encountered Augustine’s *Confessions* as a reading assignment in my History of Rhetoric seminar in graduate school. After reading it, I couldn’t stop thinking about how Augustine had abandoned his mistress and son to join the clergy, sending his family away to North Africa without money or provision. Even though he would later reunite and co-author with his son, I couldn’t imagine separating from my young daughters for religious reasons. In spite of my initial revulsion, over the next four years, I felt a deepening sympathy with Augustine. I couldn’t vilify the ancient Church father. His dualism, his Gnosticism, felt familiar to me. I, too, had been brought up in a religious home. I, too, had been taught to dissociate from my body. Moreover, I found, articulated in clear, precise language, the same interrogations that were taking shape in my own heart: Which career should I pursue? What do I believe? Who am I?

Initially, I was enamored of Augustine for his questions. But as I read and then re-read the *Confessions*, I began to see that when he encounters the eternal questions, Augustine rhetorically invents answers—solutions that work mainly for his own experiential dilemmas. That is, the answers he offers aren’t unearthed from Biblical texts or inherited from previous church fathers. Rather, he invents solutions that *feel* right based on his own lived experience, solutions perhaps meant to be generalized and extrapolated for others but still clearly personal and specific. Although St. Augustine’s answers would later be taken as religious dogma, we would do well to remember that they are at their core affective rhetorical inventions—created by and for a man embedded and embodied in a particular historical context and

designed to make him feel a certain way about his life. Thus, personal context often leads to general exhortation. But confession does more than effectively invent solutions to problems; it's affectively more constraining. Let us remember that Augustine was first a formally trained rhetorician before becoming a theologian.

Confession as production

In *Confessions*, between young rhetorician Augustine and elder theologian St. Augustine, there are many Augustines. Additionally, because Augustine is human, these Augustines sometimes contradict one another. He confesses his life in four longings: guilt, belief, critique, and struggle. Most obviously, confession is an admittance of guilt. Catholic confession serves to absolve the sinner of guilt and also as a catalyst to welcome him back into the community. Alternately, confession is sometimes an affirmation of belief; we publicly confess our collective belief in Catholic doctrine and church teaching. Augustine's *Confessions* is a record of both his personal guilt and his religious beliefs as they evolve over time. Confession additionally functions as cultural critique. We can understand confession as a declaration, not of personal guilt, but rather as declaration of the guilt of a group. In this context, the confessor creates a new network rather than rejoining the old community. Augustine embraces and then later critiques Manichaeism for its dualism. Collectively, these three types of confessions confess a life, and in his holistic confession, Augustine's evolution models how we might approach our own salvation, that is, with great struggle.

This last connotation of confession has the ability to produce, to transform. In "Composing 'Circumfession,'" Jacques Derrida writes that the function of Augustine's *Confessions* is "a matter of changing oneself, of transforming oneself. That's what perhaps Augustine calls 'to make the truth.' Not to *tell* the truth, not to inform—God knows everything—but to *make* the truth, to produce the truth" (2005, 23). Agreeing with Derrida's proposed function of confession, Virginia Burrus writes in *Seducing Augustine*, "As Jacques Derrida notes, the truth of a confessional declaration or avowal 'is not a truth to be known or ... revealed.' It 'does not consist only in lifting a veil.' It is, rather, a truth to be 'made' or 'done' (*facere*), as Augustine famously puts it, proclaiming to his God, 'I want to make truth in my heart before you in confession, and in my book before many witnesses'" (2010, 13). Making truth is not the same as discovering it. And making truth before an audience that includes deity seems more daunting still.

I felt Augustine's long reach across the centuries in my professional research on guilt and female bodies, but I felt it even more poignantly in my personal life. In Sarah Ruden's 2017 translation of *Confessions*, Augustine exclaims, "And where was I myself, when I was looking for you? You were right in front of me, but I had left myself and couldn't find me" (5.2). Later, in Book 8, he writes, "I had nowhere to go to escape from myself" (1963, 8.7), and, reading this, I identified with his contradictory nature. In graduate school, I simultaneously couldn't find and couldn't escape from myself.

Jean-Luc Marion emphasizes the idea of self as a place: "I inhabit a place, myself, where I do not rediscover myself, where I am not at home, where I am not myself. Exiled from the inside, I am not there. Where I am. I am without myself, late and lagging behind myself" (2012, 79). He quotes Augustine from *The Confessions*: "I remained for myself a *place* of unhappiness, *where* I could not settle, and from *where* I could not leave. Toward *where* could my heart flee my heart? *Where* could I take flight from myself? *Where* would I not always follow myself?" (2012, 283, emphasis Marion). This perception of self as place is more than a metaphor; it is a feeling of unease with the person he cannot escape—himself. I felt uneasy with both my old and new selves. I stood, liminally, in the middle of myself, looking back and forth and wondering which was really me. I understood, theoretically and experientially, that if Augustine could escape himself, he would not *be* himself. The double-bind for Augustine is that he addresses himself as a wholly unified self, when, in fact, his affectual experience is that he is fragmented, disunified selves. And these inward, plural selves are necessarily parts of his external, singular self. Thus, he is at once a self and selves. He is a place he recognizes and wishes to remain, but also a place he cannot escape, try as he might. I longed to feel once more at home with myself while simultaneously yearning for reprieve from my selves.

Paradoxically, I become more myself through learning new ideas, yet I could not find myself in graduate school. As my then-husband began to settle into a career, I became unmoored. I wanted stability, but, more than that, I wanted to remain free to keep growing. From my assigned readings, I learned that *history* was really *histories*. I took a seminar on Islamic Architecture, a concept of cultural intersections that I had never before considered. During summers while watching my daughters swim at the neighborhood pool, I tried to teach myself basic Latin.

Even worse than losing myself, while reading *Confessions*, I recognized myself as Augustine's foil: a woman, a mother, a lay-theologian-turned-rhetorician, a de-convert of sorts, arrived at through many de-conversions, just as Augustine became a convert after many conversions. Indeed, our biographies share further profound inversions. Augustine left an academic job in "the science of rhetoric"

(2017, 4.2) to become a member of the clergy. I left a position in the ministry and pursued an academic career as a rhetorician of science. Augustine left his family, his long-time mistress and their son, to become a leader in the Catholic church. I left the ministry because I gave birth to a daughter and wanted to raise her outside the strict control of Christianity and its abuses. Augustine left a fifteen-year partnership in efforts to live authentically, and I eventually left a fifteen-year marriage. For us, the challenge of becoming ourselves has required unanticipated risk and unexpected loss.

Conversion(s)

In *Augustine and the Fundamentalist's Daughter*, Margaret R. Miles reminds us that, theologically and historically, we have attempted to explain the conversion experience by two very different models: a cat-carrying model and a monkey-carrying model (2011, 131-133). In the cat-carrying model, God, himself, chooses the believer and constrains the conversion much like a mother cat carries a limp kitten in her mouth. Here, the kitten experiences neither distrust nor struggle. On the other hand, in the monkey-carrying model, the believer continually struggles in the conversion experience, similar to the way a baby monkey hangs onto its mother's back for dear life as she runs.

Although Augustine's conversion has been previously received and understood as the cat-carrying model with God as mother cat and Augustine as her kitten, Miles argues that it is more in keeping with the monkey-carrying model (2011, 130-145). To be sure, focusing on Augustine's climactic conversion in the garden at Ostia overlooks the aggregate *Confessions*, including Augustine's tortured language post-Ostia. Selectively remembering this singular Ostia moment when God-as-mother-cat picks up the limp Augustine-kitten in her mouth is neither an accurate nor complete description of his conversion experience(s). Miles underscores that "the *Confessions* is all about the gradual cumulative shift in his intellectual, emotional, and erotic attractions;" moreover, she insists that "the work of converting went on, as he narrates in detail, long after the climactic moments in the garden at Ostia" (2011, 144-145). While it might be, perhaps, literarily and theologically easier to label Augustine's conversion as a single event, his own language suggests it was a series of events and feelings that led up to Ostia. And additional events and contradictory feelings continued long after his Ostia conversion.

Furthermore, Augustine's affective language describing the Ostia conversion in Book 8 of *Confessions* feels more like a baby monkey gripping its mother's back than it does a carried kitten. We might especially remember his self-descriptions from Book 8 that resonate on both emotional and physical registers: "I wasted away with gnawing anxieties, compelled to put up with all sorts of things which I did not want" (1963, 8.1). Augustine describes himself as a "self against self," before admitting, "I was sick and in torture" (1963, 8.11). Additionally, he stresses that his conversion process was a continual struggle: "I tried again and I was very nearly there; I was almost touching it and grasping it, and then I was not there, I was not touching it, I was not grasping it" (1963, 8.11). This internal tension manifested externally, that is, physically: "I tore my hair, beat my forehead, locked my fingers together, clasped my knee.... I gave free rein to my tears" (2011, 133). If Augustine's conversion process were more kitten-like, we might expect his language and self-description to read a bit more like Martin Luther's famous prayer, "I am yours. Save me." But, as readers, we are unsurprised by Augustine's stress manifesting physically. Gravitationally speaking, we feel Augustine's weight, a heaviness he describes even after Ostia, "I was frightened.... The pack of this world was a kind of weight upon me" (8.5). Rather than feeling lifted up with so much support, he seems supremely aware of the possibility of falling, failing.

In May 2017, I graduated with a Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Communication, and Information Design. This degree took me four years to complete. I had previously supported my then-husband through twelve years of seminary to earn a Ph.D. in Theology with the first year of my studies overlapping with his last. During the last year of my degree, he relocated to a city in a different time zone for a new job that promised more money and better opportunities for growth. Although I supported his decision, suddenly, I found myself alone with two young children to care for and a ninety-minute (one-way) commute to my academic institution. I still needed to finish my degree and secure a job while teaching two sections of American Literature each semester and shepherding my daughters through preschool and kindergarten. The stress of too much to do with not enough time to do it manifested physically. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. I had migraines and stomachaches and panic attacks. My skin felt itchy all over my body, and no matter how hard I scratched, I couldn't find relief. My daughters' father wanted me to move with him, but I knew I had to finish. How could I get everything done—write the dissertation, graduate, and find a job? Should I just sell the house and join him, as he wanted me to? I lost twenty pounds. My friends said I looked great. I felt I was dying, disappearing. With big decisions to make and lagging behind myself, I was running out of time.

With Augustine's unbearable weight of conversion in mind, let us return to Kundera's complaint of a lack of lives and then to Woolf's lives of lack. I want to draw a perhaps non-intuitive connection here between the "lightness of being" and the cat-carrying model. Lacking in weight, this type of conversion would seem easy. And isn't that the promise of all kitten conversions? The convert will be freed of his burden (a term I intentionally use here to emphasize its heavy physical connotations). Yet, Kundera, in his novel, goes to great lengths to suggest that lightness is not the preferable mode of being. Indeed, his heroine Tereza is arguably the heaviest character in the book, emotionally speaking. The sensation of being easily carried versus tightly holding on is an important conjuring. We recall Tereza's vertigo and feel its inverse effect on Augustine—his perpetual fear of falling from Mother Monkey's grace. His affective language lacks the stability and security in being lifted up and moved by a mother cat. Rather, mother monkey moves her baby with frightening forward momentum to a new place in time and space. The baby monkey is terrified of falling and enjoys none of the security of being carried into its future. For the kitten, there is no awareness of the dangers of falling, but for the baby monkey, there is only that fear. Woolf's lament of lateness feels all the more urgent: if only we had the time to reflect on our experiences so that we would not repeat the same mistakes and so that we could prevent future ones!

Conversion as self-Invention

In his provocative book *You Must Change Your Life*, Peter Sloterdijk argues that Nietzsche enjoys a special temporal condition: he is allochronous, untimely, or, we might theorize, anachronistic. Sloterdijk makes his case by locating Nietzsche's true date as antiquity, but an antiquity that transcends our modern construct of linear time:

It is rather a kind of constant present—a depth time, a nature time, time of being—that continues underneath the theatre of memory and innovation that occupies cultural time. If one could show how recurrence defeats repetition and the circle makes a fool of the line, this would not only demonstrate an understanding of the point of Nietzsche's decisive self-dating; it would also fulfill the precondition for any judgement [sic] on whether, and in what sense, Nietzsche is our contemporary, and whether, and to what extent, we are or wish to be his contemporaries. (2013, 32)

I use Sloterdijk's constant present to bypass cultural time so that I may consider Augustine my existential contemporary. In *Augustine and Postmodernism*, Hent

de Vries uses Jean-François Lyotard's summary of confession "as a journey that goes backward so as to move forward" to similarly locate the ancient Augustine (2005, 85). De Vries' justification comes from Lyotard's posthumously published *The Confession of Augustine*, "The chase after the future through the past that drives and troubles the *Confessions* is only *possible* if, in the evanescence of these times, something withholds, is maintained, immutable" (2005, 85 italics original). Although a thorough exploration of what this persistent, transcendent time might be is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that the ancients self-located and have been located by others as our existential contemporaries. This reminds us of Kundera's and Woolf's complaints.

If Kundera requires multiple lives for comparison and Woolf requires more time for reflection, what Augustine via Miles' re-reading of his 'conversion' offers is an idea as beautiful as it is simple: our lives are not unbreakable linear timelines, but fragments of contradiction. Very few, if any, of us enjoy an existential signpost that we are ever aware of and continuously traveling towards. Rather, we anachronistically circle around loyalties—allegiances to family, institutions, careers, ideas, and values. Michael J. Scanlon reminds us that "[f]or Augustine, to live is to love—what is needed is the right ordering of love" (2005, 167). Jeffrey L. Kosky translates Augustine's thoughts on love, "Nemo est qui non amet: sed quaeritur quid amet. Non ergo admonemur ut non amemus, sed ut eligamus quid amemus," as "There is nobody who does not love. The only question is what does he love. We are not summoned to not love, but to decide what we love" (2012, 96).

I loved my daughters' father. I loved the idea of helping others by being in the ministry. I loved my daughters. I loved the new theories I was encountering in graduate school. I loved the safety of my old beliefs, but I also loved the shimmering, opening world. These loves felt at odds with one another. How could I remain the same and hold on to what I loved (my husband, my faith, my church) while also growing and learning to love these new possibilities (a career, new beliefs, the chance to raise daughters to have more experiences and opportunities than I'd been given)? The question was not how to stop loving, but which love deserved my deepest loyalty?

And further, what happens when loyalties change? As my values shifted, my loyalties evolved. I disagreed with the hierarchical, patriarchal values I'd been forced to adopt growing up in a religious family. And after I witnessed children and female abuse victims denied justice by the church, I could not maintain a leadership role in Christian culture. What if my daughters were someday the victims of abuse?

I knew their voices, innocent but small, would not be heard, would not be given weight. When Augustine remembers sending his mistress away, he writes, “The woman I’d been accustomed to sleeping with was torn from my side, because she was supposed to be an obstacle to my marriage. My heart, which had fused with hers, was mutilated by the wound, and I limped along trailing blood” (6.25). But I wasn’t a woman sent away with a child; I was the woman tearing myself away for my children. Still, I limped along and, in truth, am limping still.

A shift in belief and values has been sometimes understood as a de-conversion, but, I argue, that it could also be called a conversion. I extend Miles’ re-reading of Augustine’s conversion to *every facet* of our lives. Conversions are not only religious in nature. A contemporary reader might be tempted to dismiss Augustine’s *Confessions* as an outdated, outmoded religious autobiography. But this ancient rhetorician-turned-theologian can help us reframe the way we think about our own lives as they evolve and require change. Indeed, Augustine through his *Confessions* reminds us that life *is* change. And his solution to our lack of lives and to our lives of lack is confessional, anachronistic self-invention.

If Augustine’s answer is simple, it is not easy. My present self looks very different from my previous iterations, even as I feel that, like Augustine, my core identity remained the same. Growth entails risk. Augustine returned to his mother’s religion, but lost his son. I left my mother’s religion, but gained the freedom to raise my daughters in the way I thought best. Augustine sent away those he loved so that he could join the church. I left loved ones when I left the church because I couldn’t, in good conscience, hold those values anymore. I am all-too-aware that my internal questions—Who am I? Whom do I love? Which loves, ethically, deserve my deepest loyalty?—were never seen. And indeed, I did not want to be seen until I had invented authentic answers. My ‘de-conversion’ might seem like a singular Ostia moment, yet it is anything but. Externally, my family and friends asked me, “Why did you leave [your own life]?” And I could only answer, “I’m late.”

What does it mean to be late to your own life? For me, it meant a heart-rending divorce: finishing a dissertation, selling a house, finding a job, buying a house, and starting over in a new city with two elementary-school-aged children, largely on my own. I had outgrown the values I’d been born into and had once held. I

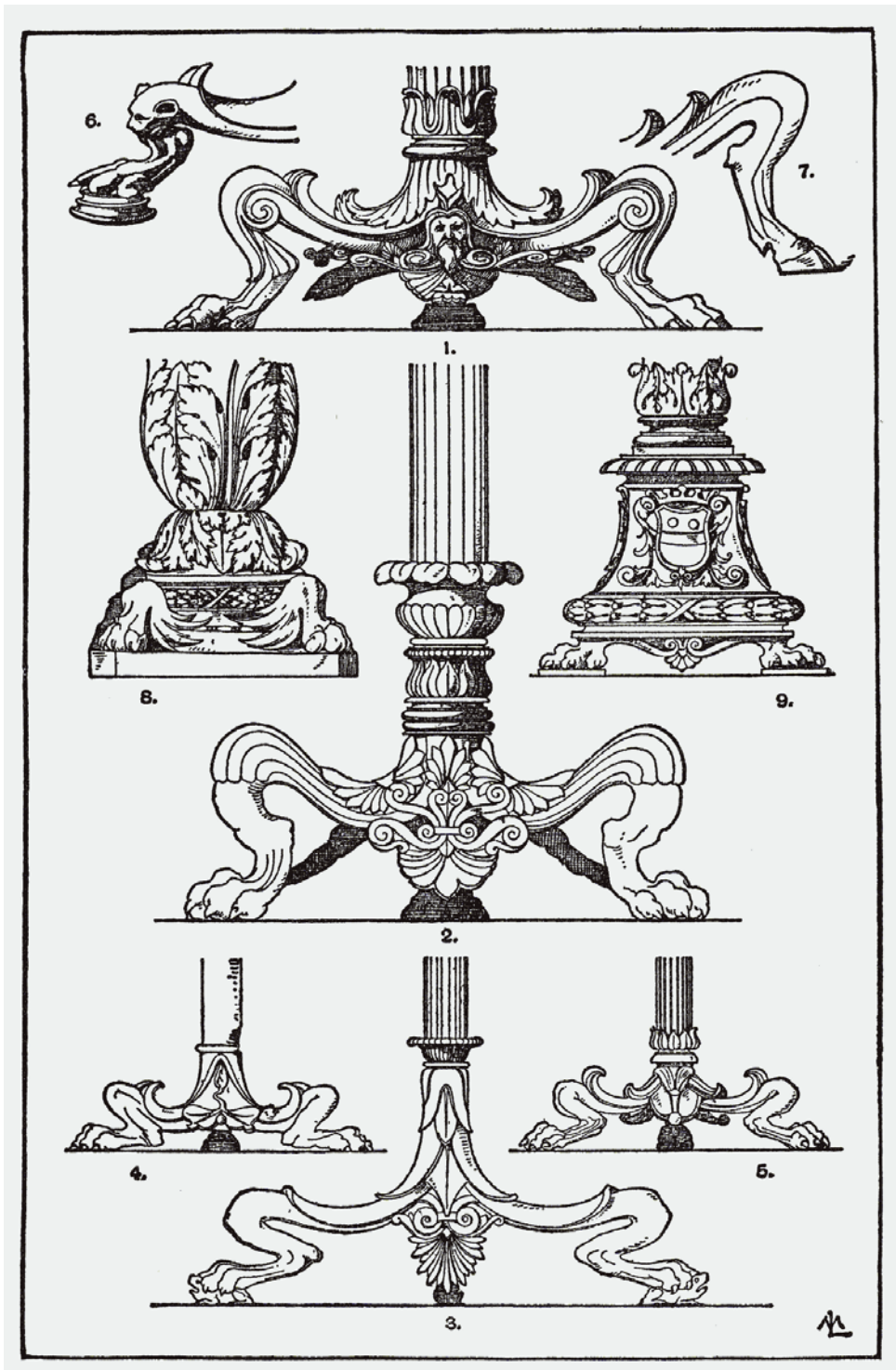
had changed. And this tardiness felt like shooting up in bed on the first day of school as a teacher with still so much to learn—or, perhaps, like a baby monkey, hanging on for dear life as time jostles her forward.

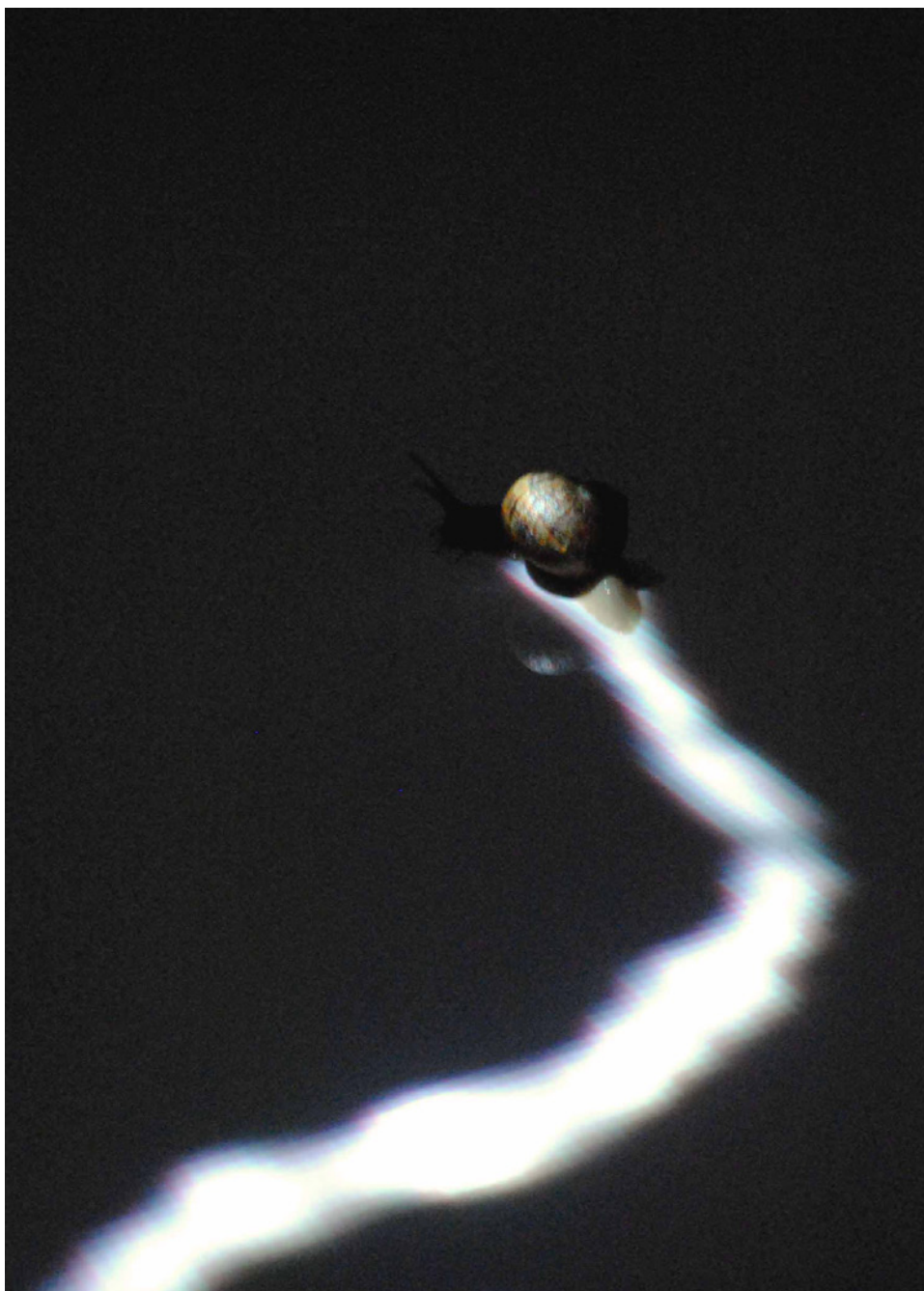
I return to myself, an inverse Augustine, struggling toward salvation.

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Oriente, Quiet Ensemble, 2012 (courtesy of the artists)
quietensemble.com

TO DREAM AS YOU



Mandy-Suzanne Wong

INDEPENDENT WRITER

ABSTRACT

Hearing suffering from the mouths of those who suffer can inspire an urgent sense of empathy in those who listen. Let's listen in to three radical artists who use sound to evoke empathy between human and nonhuman animals. In a sonic ritual based on activist videos, dave phillips draws the suffering of nonhumans in labs and slaughterhouses into his own body. Kathryn Eddy juxtaposes the grieving of farmed animals separated from their loved ones with an excruciating human loss. Italy's Quiet Ensemble follows garden snails in light and sound. All three artworks try to function empathetically, to act out and sound out empathy, with sonic collages bold and sudden, with polyphonic shifts and juxtapositions calling every perspective into question, summoning us to think beyond ourselves.

KEYWORDS

Kathryn Eddy, dave phillips, Quiet Ensemble, sound, empathy, animals

Neither of us meant for you to come with the post. I heard you before I saw you. Your foot tasted the invitation below you. Your shell push-scraped the BELCO bill above. I lifted the envelope, and there you were sliming up the local postmark. I was smitten. A storm raged without. So I googled what you might like.

Sometimes I think I shouldn't have. Probably you could stick to walls just as well as our concrete walls stick to our limestone roof. Should I have put you back outside? Or waited as I did for the storm to fly away? At the time it seemed



Bermudian snail (detail), Mandy-Suzanne Wong, 2011

right. Your diameter was a centimeter. Coincidence brought you close, making me “response-able” to you (Haraway 2016, 2). I believe response-ability means being capable of responding and taking responsibility for what happens to each other. To be response-able I had to dream as you. To dream as you was to be response-able.

So I learned you liked your lettuce slightly stale. As you liked your paper. I heard you before I saw you; you were a decomposer. To dream as you I must enjoy mushy paper with my whole body. To move is to taste, to touch is to bleed transparent slime, which like a virtuoso I must cultivate, configure, and cherish. I must

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experience time as a spiral measured by the growth of my shell. I must push my eyes out of my head and suck them back in at the slightest sound. I know you can hear what I can't hear. To move is to hear through your foot which is your stomach. You know so much I don't know. What Bermuda tastes like when it's stamped on an envelope, when it's a wall or hibiscus. How to walk with your tongue. It's hard to learn not to want to possess anything. Except the shell one must secrete for oneself.

It's difficult to know what empathy is beyond that empathy is difficult. Empathy is a struggle. A struggle to understand that I can't fully understand. Empathy is the novelist's lifelong struggle. Philosophers try to characterize it: Kathie Jenni and Lori Gruen, for example, who specialize in animal ethics. Jenni (2016) says empathy is my coming to feel something similar to what you feel (29). Gruen (2015) says "entangled empathy" is "a type of caring perception" that intently pays attention to another being, its experiences, and its expressions, sensing that we "are called upon to be responsive and responsible in [our] relationships" with them. Both thinkers agree that empathy is a process and a skill that involves perception, cognition, and emotion. To empathize with you, I must sense that you're in the grip of feeling. I must take the trouble to learn to recognize or imagine what you in particular might feel in your situation. And I must myself feel something. I must let myself be affected by you in your situation.

Hearing you cry out in distress distresses me. You're frightened of the storm, so I am too.

Or I'm not frightened of the storm because I know my concrete house. So hearing the storm's wrath and observing that you're no bigger than my fingernail, I may not feel like sliming for the nearest postbox with due haste. But knowing that you're probably in distress, though I couldn't hear you cry out even if you could, distresses me in my own way, compelling me to google how you might be comforted. Not because I pity you, not out of sympathy, but because your situation, our shared situation, our coincidence, distresses me differently than it distresses you. And yet we both share *this* distress.

I wonder if empathy's a kind of resonance. When I play B-flat on my piano, the B-flat strings shiver and the aluminum blinds rattle on the nearby window. Both are moved: strings and blinds. Staggered by the same blow, my striking B-flat, they're moved differently. Each distressed in its own way. But because they are together and attuned to one another, the blinds are stricken as the piano is and because the piano is.



Memories of a Fellow Traveler from "Requiem for Lost Souls," Kathryn Eddy, 2012 (courtesy of the artist)

Kathryn thought the tapes had drowned in a long-ago flood. But there they were in her basement. She'd just come back from interviewing sheep and goats in Maine. Her daughter Elizabeth was preparing to leave home for a place of her own. By coincidence the sheep had just endured their annual wrenching, the lambs taken from the ewes. Kathryn happened to record them crying out to one another, straining to hear one another from a distance. A week later, she found the tapes. Home movies by her husband John. John had died of cancer many years before.

All these concatenations of presence and absence, dread and loss. Kathryn tells me it was the sheep who inspired her to make a requiem for John. He was the cameraman, so his image wasn't on the tapes. Only his voice.

In Kathryn Eddy's quadraphonic sound installation, *Requiem for Lost Souls*, we hear her recordings of the bereft lambs and ewes, the audio from John's home movies, and recordings of Kathryn and grown-up Elizabeth speaking of loss and despair. The women's words overlap, all the voices overlap, the living and gone

collaging, coinciding with one other and with the ewes' and lambs' spectral calling, every sound haunted by every other. Convergences are not without meaning. Just existing side by side is a connection, an opportunity for response-ability. The human lost souls don't just cry out for each other. They cry out to the sheep with whom their voices collage, *We feel as you feel. We know you feel as we feel. We know it's complicated.*

Few humans can imagine a more crushing, more complicated loss than the loss of their families. Yet Kathryn coincides her own widowing and her parting from her daughter with what agriculture calls "sheep weaning." She places the most shattering tragedy humans can imagine in side-by-side correspondence with a systematic agricultural routine, a simple slamming of gates in which the humans involved convince themselves that nonhuman grief isn't grief—or it is but doesn't matter. Meanwhile grief is expected from human animals to the point where if a woman didn't grieve for her dead husband people would worry. Instead of polarizing us and them, Kathryn made John's *Requiem* because of them. Her sounds reach out to the sheep with ghostly empathic arms. Her *Requiem* gives grief a polyphonic, phantasmic, multispecies body. I hear grief, for all who grieve, collapse time and make it seem to last forever, making distance seem unreal and insurmountable.

"Who am I to say that a nonhuman animal's loss is not devastating to them?" Kathryn says. "Their reactions may be different, but that doesn't mean they're any less valid—and this doesn't threaten the validity and enormity of my loss in any way" (personal communication).

She endures what they endure. But differently. She connects their loss with hers. But she doesn't conflate them. She refuses to consume their loss with hers.

Empathy is tangled.

Video Action is an ever-evolving multimedia performance work by dave phillips of Zurich, Switzerland. It happens in the dark. A large screen displays found pictures: video clips taken by hunters, farmers, scientists, entertainers, audiences, and activists. The clips show nonhumans in agony. Mice and monkeys are electrocuted in the name of science. Whales driven to beach are speared en masse. Dogs in cages, *tanuki* on nylon coats, cats with brain implants, the murder of a circus elephant. Birds and fishes have their mouths cut off. Interspersed with the pictures are texts in all-white capitals against all-black backgrounds. They flash and glare and disappear. Below the screen dave phillips blends live vocals with



Video Action, dave phillips, Tokyo, 2006 (Stephane Perrin)

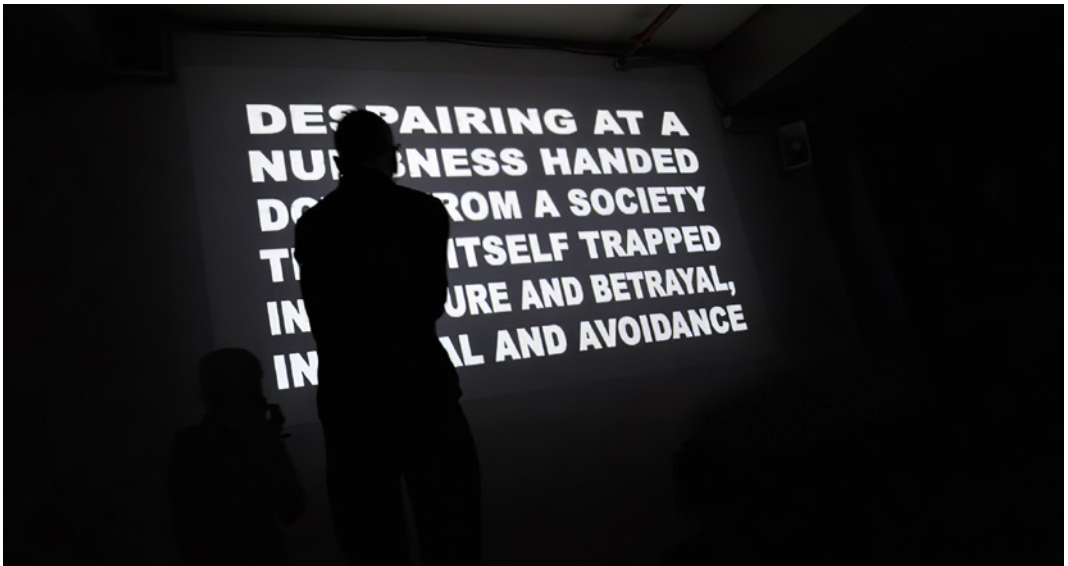


On the screen in the background, a *tanuki* (raccoon dog) is dismembered alive for its fur. *Video Action*, dave phillips, Toruń, 2011 (Agnieszka Zwara)

a real-time mix of field recordings. They include canine, feline, and porcine screams. And these screams resonate in the human body of the artist to the point that he himself screams in agony and becomes physically ill.

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dave describes *Video Action* as “an audio-visual exorcism.” It is himself that he is desperate to exorcise: the part of him that’s only human, everything in him that bears any relation to the beings who dismember *tanuki* alive for fur. Whatever inner thing it is that people believe sets us apart from other beings, generating the illusion that their bleeding isn’t our bleeding, their screams aren’t like our screams, and so their suffering isn’t suffering, dave tries to vomit it out of himself. In one version of *Video Action*, it seems that his body rips itself apart from the inside until, in the very moment that a macaque dies onscreen in a laboratory, dave himself cannot draw another breath.

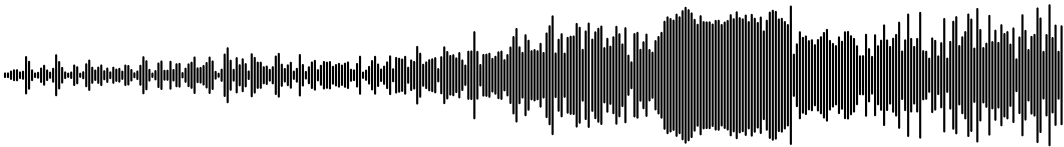


Video Action, dave phillips, Tel Aviv, 2010 (courtesy of the artist)

A scream is a bruised voice, a “meat voice”: “the very moment where humans and [other] animals take on a common voice—[is] the cry or scream ... it is shared with other species, both in instinctual immediacy and directness and in the sonorous event ... Screams demand urgent or empathetic responses and thereby create a concentrated social space bounded by their audibility” (Kahn 1991, 291, 345-7). Screams are “site[s] where bodies meet,” and *Video Action* is a gnarl, a concentration of contacts and coincidences (Broglia 2011, 85). Sound contacts image. Images of the dead confront living bodies. Real-time organic sounds conspire with sounds of the gone transmitted by machines. Intimate wet noises of dave’s living body collide with inhuman sounds collide with bleeding realities of suffering strangers from distant species and locales. And the screams of the other animals drown dave’s voice completely even though he screams so hard he

staggers. For dave, empathy is a deep entwining; an irrational connection so thoroughgoing we can't discern where others end and we begin, we begin suspecting maybe there's no such place. This is why dave lets other voices swallow his to a point where we can't make him out. His act in *Video Action* is his all-consuming effort not to "understand" nonhuman suffering, not to do the feeling for them or replace nonhuman suffering with human suffering, but to let the ghosts of their suffering consume him, rendering him abject.

Listen to [Video_Action_100901.mp3](https://capaciousjournal.com/video-action)
capaciousjournal.com/video-action



A *tanuki* dismembered while a man screams his head off, a widowing directly juxtaposed to sheep weaning—what if it's too much, too hard, and you just can't? Some can't bear it when reality is violent and violence is nonexclusive. They react by getting offended, and when we feel offended it becomes next to impossible to feel anything else. Self-righteous indignation drowns out everything. Particularly empathy for anything that takes part in the offense.

Or the opposite: empathy as a kind of bleeding, unleashing a flood of resonant fellow-feeling. You hear a dead man reminisce about a birth while sheep mothers scream for irrecoverable children. You internalize the anguish of the lost. What if that's unbearable in another way? "Vicarious trauma." "Empathic distress": empathy's "impulse to help" collides with paralyzing empathic anguish, "overwhelming subjects into inaction" (Jenni 2016, 27-8).

These are risks that empathic art must take. Risks we must take in listening. Tune in and bear the cost.

But maybe there's no cost. Maybe you don't hear these artworks as I do. Listening to art isn't like mistaking a zoo elephant's neurotic swaying for a dance. Art thrives on being heard or looked at differently. We don't even need to agree on what it is. In fact, empathy with nonhumans has to be a little rude to categories.

Including *human* and *nonhuman*. *Emotion* and *instinct*. *Expression* and *noise*. You can't dream as another if you're stuck in your own notions. Courage against categories is a chance for empathy.

But sometimes empathic feelings which ought to undermine stubborn categories risk encouraging their stubbornness. *I'm sure I feel as you feel, I quite understand because my sort of feelings and the terms in which I understand apply to everybody who is anybody*. Such overconfidence is always a danger. It's a way of becoming wrapped up in oneself.

Anthropomorphism: ascribing human feelings, thoughts, and antics to nonhumans. The risk of anthropomorphism is anthropocentrism: persuading yourself that if even snails feel as humans feel, want what humans want, and express themselves as humans express themselves; then human feelings, wishes, and expressions must be the only real kind. So if things don't scream like us or bleed like us, they don't suffer. But anthropomorphism can be a critical strategy too. The artist Lynn Mowson (2016) proposes "strategic anthropomorphism as a way of destabilizing anthropocentrism" by "extending our empathy and creative imagination to our fellow creatures."

It takes work to decentralize anthropocentrism while skating its edge. Art teeters there whenever it has anything to do with nonhuman animals. Empathy can also be hard work. It requires recognizing *that* others feel and imagining *what* they feel to the point of being emotionally involved in it. It takes going out of your way to learn about how others feel. Shutting up and paying attention while they express themselves. Making the effort to feel something about all of it. Something that makes you respond with care. Jenni says:

the more unlike us a suffering being is, the harder we must work to enter imaginatively into that being's world ... While we can never completely succeed—while we may achieve only incomplete and fragmentary experiential 'glimpses' of the misery of sensitive beings ... the 'experienced insight' that we can manage to attain through empathy is a far richer, deeper knowledge of [nonhumans'] suffering (35).

This careful, emotional, ever incomplete striving for flickers of insight sounds like art-making to me.

Some artists, like Kathryn Eddy, invite us to have a go at empathic striving. Some, like Dave Phillips, force us into it. Others try to make it easier. They imagine common ground.

You showed me no affection while we were together. Your eyes never once lit up in those five days. Not even when you scented old lettuce. I know you could hear me because when I idiotically snapped your photo, even though my camera was in Silent Mode you winced. But if you told me to shut up or that you liked the lettuce, you did it on a wavelength I couldn't hear. Or you did it with no wave at all; you secreted amino acids or something. Scientists believe most snails never communicate acoustically. Maybe if you'd wanted anything to do with me, you'd have tried to follow my slime trail. In which case I still wouldn't have known.

I wonder what you'd think of an artwork by Bernardo VerCELLI and Fabio Di Salvo, also known as Quiet Ensemble in Italy: *Oriente: è qui ora, che decido di fermarmi*.

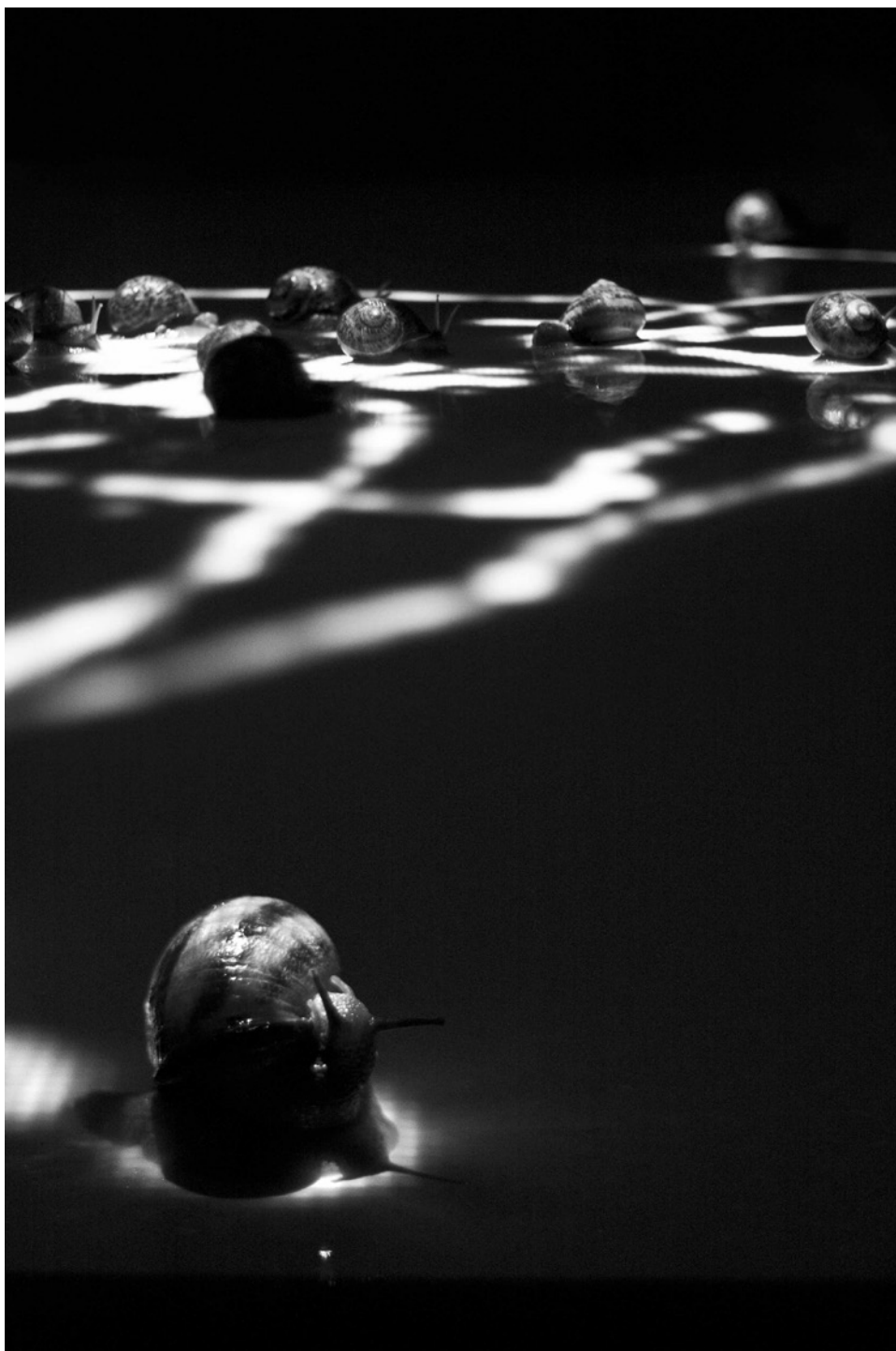
Oriente: it is here now that I decide to stop.

They come by post from a snail farm in Sicily. Fifty of them. They work shifts. Twenty-five snails slime a plexiglass screen in a dark gallery while the other twenty-five wait in a terrarium. When a snail slimes along the screen, a computerized motion-detecting light-projecting system makes a spot of light appear on the screen under the snail's foot; and a sort of languid beep sounds softly from that very spot. Each snail is assigned a particular tone. All twenty-five tones are from the same minor triad spread out over several octaves.

The idea, say the artists (2014), is that every snail “generate[s] a line of light” as it explores the plexiglass landscape, “showing the memory of [its] passage” while an electronic sound shadows it in real time. At shift change the screen looks like a black and white Pollock. A “light drawing.” A “sound carpet.”

Unless nothing happens because twenty-five snails fall asleep.

Oriente never repeats itself. Because snails never repeat themselves. Quiet Ensemble (2012) writes: “*Oriente* wants to focus on the vital path that every being makes ... our paths, our choices.” And they don't just mean humans. *Oriente* is about snails making choices, snails doing as we do: snails *decide*. They thrive on the ability to choose. Just as humans believe we thrive on freedom. This is an empathic epiphany.

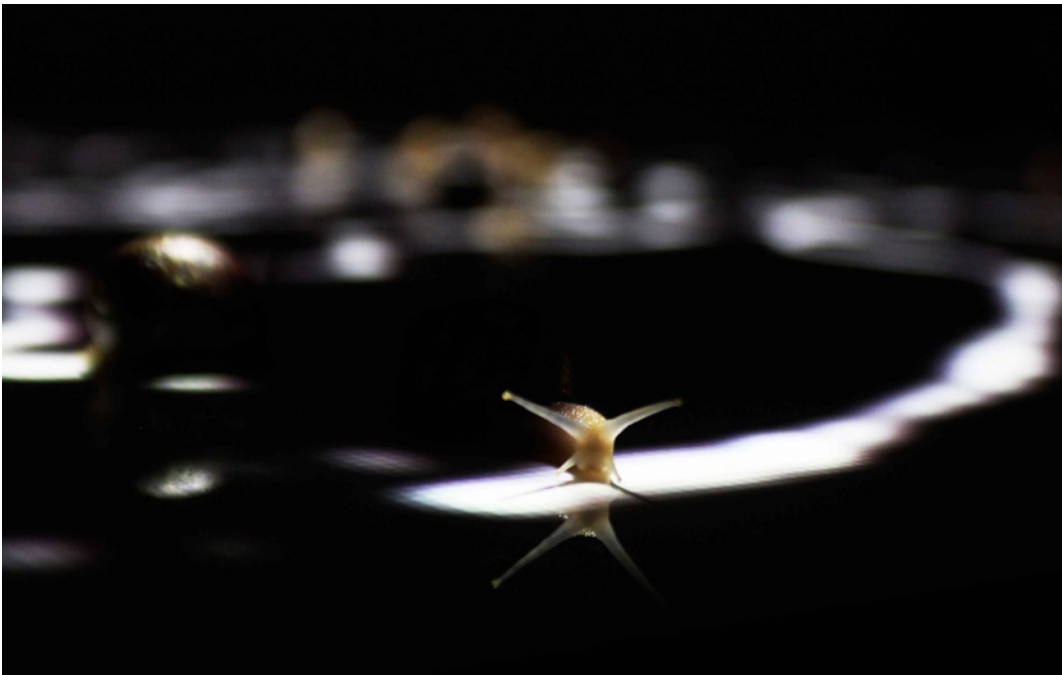


Oriente, Quiet Ensemble, Rome, 2012 (courtesy of the artists)

Oriente tries to nudge us to it gently. Its gentleness is its quiet familiarity. Trails in light on a flat surface. A minor chord, a staple of Western music. This is a beauty I feel I understand. And because these sounds are a snail's doing and I find them cozy, aren't these slow beeps common ground for us? *Oriente* translates snail-style traces into human-style traces. The secretions you would find intelligible become sounds and squiggles of a kind I find intelligible. *Oriente* re-oriens. So projection becomes proximity becomes care.

Doesn't it? Quiet Ensemble calls it a "network of consequences." But what if there's still an invisible chasm between us? *Oriente's* beauty is painterly. Musical. Familiar. And so instead of challenging established notions, it risks affirming them instead. I risk becoming wrapped up in what I already know, what I'd already learned to believe is beautiful. And whose beauty is this? Made for humans by humans. By historically, culturally dominant humans. Whose voices are those oozing softly from the loudspeakers?

Do you think the snails in *Oriente* feel its beauty? Perhaps their "sacrifice," taking to the plexiglass stage, will show humans that the beauty we find in our own



Oriente, Quiet Ensemble, Rome, 2012 (courtesy of the artists)

antics is nonexclusive to ourselves. But really. Sacrifice? The snails have no choice in the matter. The artists say on their behalf, *è qui ora che decido*—yet the decision not to be in the artwork is closed to them.

And so *Oriente's* orientation is a question. How might fellow-feeling become unfeeling? How close is empathy to domination?

Oriente's empathic strategy is the translation of snails' movements into electronic, Western-musical sound. In Kathryn's *Requiem* and dave's *Video Action*, human and nonhuman animal voices meet in unsubtle, unsettling coincidences without any translation of nonhuman sounds into human terms.

Snails may not communicate acoustically. But then again, they might. On a scale that we can't hear. They definitely make sounds when they eat, slime over stones or between envelopes, retract into their self-made shells. But what matters about snails is that they're living snails. Whether or not their goings-on say anything to us is beside the point. And this too is an empathic realization: resonating with nonhuman feelings requires misunderstanding. What Gruen calls "entangled empathy" involves "actively attend[ing] to animal voices" in order to "'hear' that the priorities of nonhuman animals differ from our own"; so that our efforts to be their "allies" don't amount to talking to ourselves, drowning out nonhumans with anthropocentrism all over again (Jones 2015). Any art that forces nonhumans to participate is complicit in that drowning.

To dream as you is to hear you and pay attention. Do myself the honor of hearing that you're a stranger. Listen for differences between us, which are what make you important. Hear how I misunderstand you. And allow this to affect me. Not despite the gulf between us but because of it.

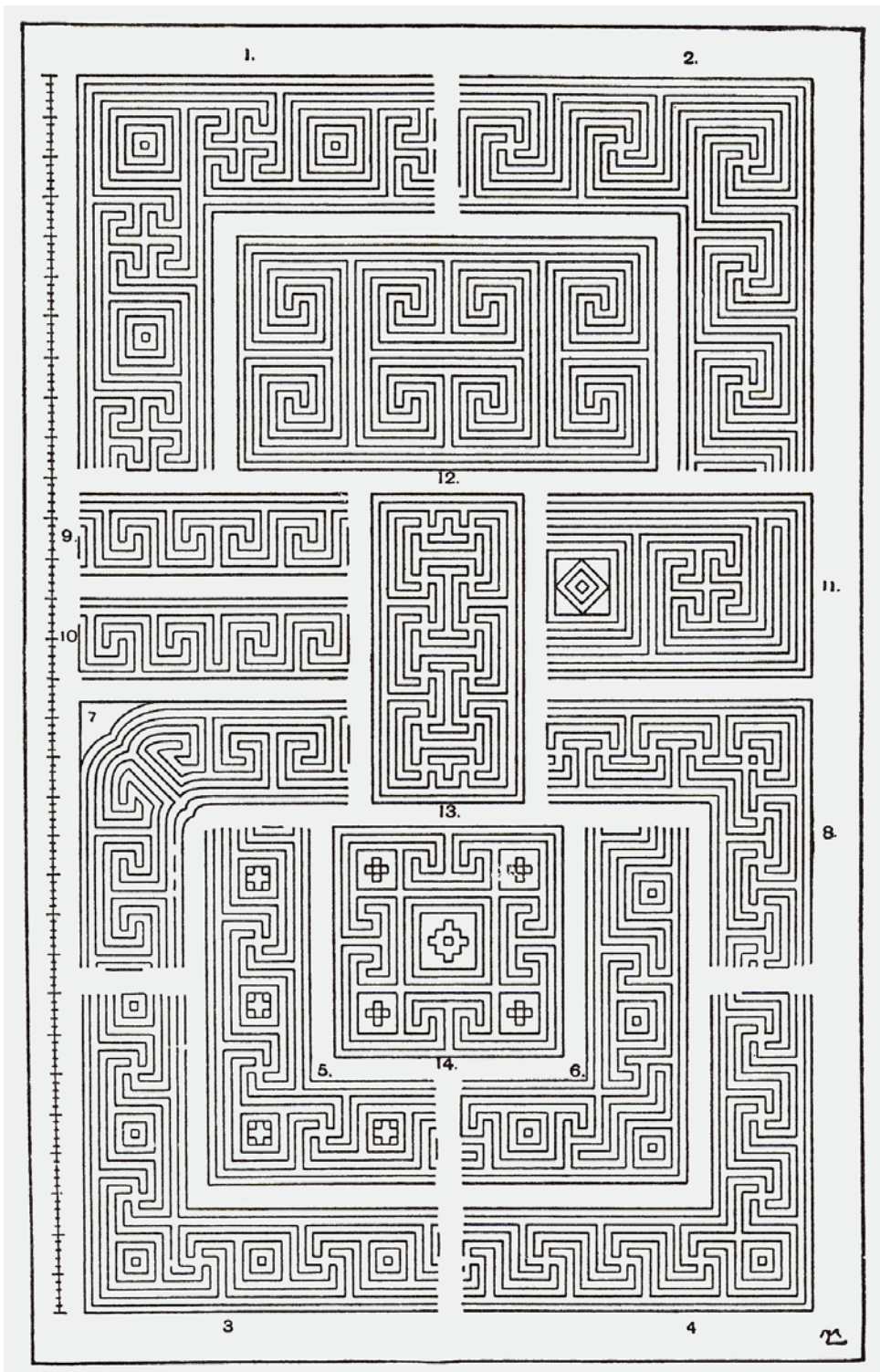
I saw you recoil when the sound of a muted camera grabbed you by the tentacles. I took the way you touch the light as something of you I could keep. Meanwhile you didn't understand I was trying not to make a sound. I didn't understand the vast scale on which you hear with everything you are. Sound struck—and we misunderstood each other differently. But that moment: in that moment of resonant misunderstanding, you winced with your tentacles. And I understood I had to let you go.

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A Handbook of Ornament, Franz Sales Meyer, 1898
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THIN ATTACHMENTS: WRITING BERLIN IN SCENES OF DAILY LOVES



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ABSTRACT

Thin Attachments brings personal memoir to bear on an affective geography of Berlin. In scenes of daily loves, the city's queers and Sufis, saints and strangers, lovers and research-partners cross paths at work, in cafes, at mosques, online, and in bed. Queer, migrant, and the religious are returning figures that coagulate in private rituals of be/longing and scenes of public intimacy. Insofar as thin stands for spectral depth and emotional traffic, it performs the task of engaging politics of time, sex, and religion in the city not in antagonistic terms but as critically coincident. Similarly, attachment in this work is that figure of affect, which brings us tad closer to the knowledge of how we might long and belong in shared unfamiliarity; of how ostensibly straight pasts and queer futures, sex and saints in Berlin constitute continuums otherwise implausible; of how delicacies of religious ritual echo precariousities of queer love. The result is a body of non-linear fragments that discover the sparse and surprising ways in which longings of places and people intersect and in so doing summon the city as though it were a crafty djinn, shapeshifting between its material, virtual, and imaginal forms.

KEYWORDS

queer affect, intimacy, belonging, Sufi, migration

Before the scenes

This is a first iteration of *Thin Attachments*, an on-going work on affection and the city.¹ In a mode of auto-theory, this writing delves into urban intimacies and inquires after the intimately urban. It constellates charged, porous, and haunted scenes of everyday longing and desire in the city of Berlin. As tenuously drawn as these are inextricably experienced, the fragments gathered here dwell in the promise that beyond its intimate textures, mining for affect in the city advances a localized interface of what is sensed with what is known (Gordon 2008). Queer, migrant, and the religious are returning figures in this work that coagulate in private rituals of be/longing and scenes of public intimacy.

Writing affect is a mode of inquiry (Gibbs 2015). A response as long as it is an affective attunement coterminous with radical alterations in my access to the city, first set into motion in 2016, six years after I had moved to Berlin and the year I started research with the Sufis of my neighborhood. It is predominantly borne of anxieties of the field, but it is most likely to have been nurtured in the numerous and now partly-lost conversations around those concerns, and which at the time I was having with friends, colleagues, research-partners, lovers, and strangers – at work, in cafes, at the mosque, online, and at times also in bed. A lot got blurred in the process, not least the lines I was carefully drawing between home and field, the work of life and fieldwork, between Saturday nights at the Sufis and weekend shenanigans in the *Kiez* (hood).

Inasmuch as attachment in this work refers to possibilities of contact and modes of attunement, thin does not denote weak or watered-down relations. Instead, it is a figure of potential; thin signals a scene's aptitude for spectral depth, affective input, and emotional traffic. Amid bare conditions of porosity, thin reminds us that there is a clearing outside linear time, that every now and then, an opening is created for feeling and knowing, knowing by feeling. In a similar vein, to the extent that Berlin stands as the primary setting, it also stands in for the urban whose boundaries are never sharply drawn. Trafficking specters of religion, sex and migration, Berlin in this work is a highly charged, impressed upon, ever-transient though material ground for affect, a vicarious geography that is felt beyond the here, summons multiple nows at once.

Fractured experiences of the urban are telling also of a migrant's queer labors of inhabitation, where the unfinished business of home-making must continually fluctuate between estrangement and permissiveness, negotiate both longing and belonging.² What is queer in this work is tied to questions of location. Yet it is not a thing that stems solely from place, in this case the city of Berlin, but inter-affectively generates a sense of place. It follows that queerness is not located, or for that matter, locatable, in one place any more than it is situated elsewhere; that it is not in any way more here than there, more now than before; that it is tied to the logic of cities and secularities in a way that it is unmappable in religious or non-metropolitan life-worlds; or that it is given to Berlin more than it is to Karachi, because the figure of queerness that *Thin Attachments* pursues is captured in the embodied-affective work of relating to habituated affects of a locality and thus also to one's location in it.³ In this regard, constellating affect's endurance in the city through the question of politically-inconsistent, thinly-configured, spectral attachments is to privilege felt labors of be/longing that willfully or not, mess with place's spatial logic, tweak its temporal orders, insist against the tyranny of straight place, or queer away "the sedimented conditions that constitute what is in place in the first place" (Gordon 2008, 4). And in its place, lay the ground for other ways of doing place, disrupting and intervening in its crystallizing pasts and presents, introducing awkward rhythms and less than ordinary repetitions in hope for other futures of place.

Nowhere in this work are such queer labors of/in place more sharply given than in cross-temporal and inter-corporeal intimacies that transact in dark rooms of religious ritual. Migrant Sufi longings for saintly contact gesture at the city's cruising cultures; cite distinctly-religious channels for erotohistriographies of another kind (Freeman 2010); and summon into presence Berlin's unlikely, immaterial or hidden religious topographies (Burchardt and Becci 2013).⁴ It reminds us that even privately conducted, doubly-interiorized rituals, targeted at mystical interiorities and practically confined to mosque interiors, bear the potential to profuse and kink spatiotemporal logics of the urban.⁵ In other words, Sufi hauntologies routinely brush against settled ideations of Berlin insofar as saintly traffic renders a place critically intimate with other times (Kasmani 2017; Rohy 2006; Taneja 2017); dilates its geography into imaginal elsewhere (Mittermaier 2011); and attests to the numerous "worlds that intermingle" in the city's folds, "but whose differences are never fully dissolved" (Lim 2009, 133).⁶ Attachments and affections serve to trace continuities, otherwise implausible. Its thin registers perform the task of engaging politics of time, sex, and religion in the city not in antagonistic terms but as critically coincident.

The most conspicuous of devices that this writing references is *flânerie*.⁷ Just as the advent of photography and film has fundamentally altered our perceptions of the city, new media makes similarly fresh demands of the *flâneur*. Virtual fora and online spaces continue to add new grammars to urban interactions; GPS-aided dating apps render the city dense with alternate and overlapping grids of desire, accelerating, at times impairing affective contact. As a form of city writing and in a modality of auto-theory, scenes of daily loves embrace the queer, variously mobile, and remotely intimate experience of the urban including modes of perception and patterns of consumption that result from advanced technological means to the city.⁸ However, the desire to write the city queerly through a register of feeling is not entirely met by listing gay amorous liaisons in the city, rich in affect as these might be in their own right. To constellate the sexual within myriad attachments of the urban is to discover how longings of places and people intersect in surprising ways; how intimacies are caught in episodic but abundant scenes of return that unfailingly summon the city as though it were a crafty djinn—elusive yet present, shapeshifting between its material, virtual, desirous and imaginal forms.

Thin Attachments brings personal memoir to bear on the material and affective geography of Berlin. It affords the “impropriety of the autobiographical gesture” (Gordon 2008, 41) only to render the author as another intimate figure in the field, around whom an assortment of attachments of the urban can gather. The scenes I describe are ultimately fraught, whether as sites of power and knowledge extraction or as interactive fields of their negotiation. Attachment in this work is that figure of affect that brings us a tad closer to the knowledge of how we might long and belong in shared terrains where none may exist (Ahmed 1999); of how ostensibly straight pasts and queer futures, men in Istanbul and saints in Berlin, constitute continuums however fragile; of how delicacies of religious ritual echo precarities of queer love. The result is a body of non-linear fragments, as subjective as these are and incompletely objectified, that constellate an always-in-emergence urban archive of public intimacy.

The work’s tryst with thin is confessedly derived from Ann Armbrecht’s account of ritual, place, and pilgrimage (2009). Her provocative yet sparsely elaborated idea of thin places remains a seductive force in this project. However, to the extent that ostensibly private feelings in this work continue to bear upon social and political formations of belonging in Berlin, it can firmly be situated in the tradition of the Public Feelings Project (Berlant 1997, 1998, 2011; Cvetkovich 2012). After

all, this writing is clearly influenced by Kathleen Stewart's writing on Austin (2007). Yet in its cross-meditations on sex, religion, and migration, it springs off every so often to pursue paths queer or less given than some of its forerunners.

In its barest sense, *Thin Attachments* can be understood as an unfinished project on be/longing in Berlin. At its poetic best, a love letter to the city, without end. Either way, it is a constellation of singular yet conversant scenes: daily loves in whose bloom stirs a migrant's longing to belong, and in whose telling, lurks the promise of reading Berlin otherwise.



Scenes of daily loves

No time for questions

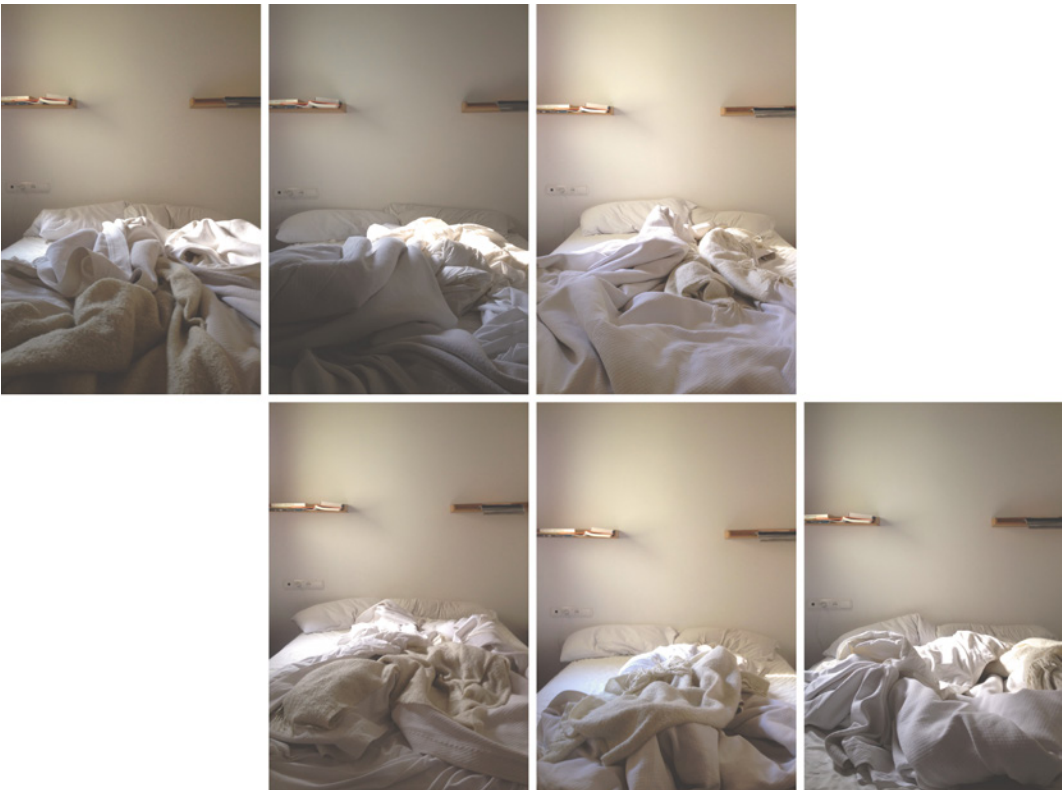
The first time he had noticed him was while he was reading his paper at the conference. He saw how a whole room of participants separated him from him. He noticed him the second time, when sitting in the last row he had raised his hand during the Q&A. But the time for questions was over. For the rest of the afternoon, he wondered what question he might have had about his research. He forgot to ask him even as he lay beside him, all night, snoring away like a cow in his hotel room.

Longing for love, in circles

A lyrically-buoyant circle of men has come to a still. Chants and recitations, odd screams and intermittent howls are no more. But the air is pregnant with its resonances. There is a sense of nascent repose. Smells of fragrant oils linger

on, even if in less pungent forms as sweat softens the contours of men's bodies, mostly men in their twenties who until moments ago were oscillating on their feet, singing hallowed praises, swaying rhythmically left to right and back to left, their forearms locked with one another. But no more. Tired, sweaty, overcome with feelings, the men are now seated on the carpeted floor, gasping. The puff and pant of heavy breathing is fairly audible; their bodies not upright like moments ago but curled up such that their heads almost meet the ground. Forty-minutes of an intense ritual are over in a room in Neukölln, longer than it is wide and oriented obliquely towards Mecca.⁹

A 5-minute walk from where he lives, is a mosque. He goes there every week, where 25-30 men gather around a Sufi master, who leads them into *zikr*, the Sufi performance of mindful remembrance of Allah. Some of these men tell him that there are other persons in the circle, ones he cannot see. And that when, with their eyes shut, they sing and chant praises of saints and holy men, holy men and saints appear, intimacies take hold, even if only in passing.



Not I but he

Berlin conjures up his past like no other city does. He's lived here for eight years but the specters that keep returning to it are from all over. So, he decides to write them into his text, making it porous, as porous as he finds the city. Writing Berlin, in his case, is stirred by resonances of multiple places, thickened by present pasts. He will one day notice similar hauntings in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's short story *Der Hof im Spiegel*, a labyrinthine entwinement of people and places, "something approximating postnational intimacy," in the words of her translator (Adelson 2005, 1). He will find comfort in the poems of Aras Ören that chronicle in the setting of a single street, *Naunynstraße* in Berlin-Kreuzberg, a far greater story of be/longing and survival, migration and arrival (1973). These will assure him that "Berlin is written in many languages, in many different places, and circulates at times far from the city itself" (Yildiz 2017, 206).

Eventually, he too will come to see how he is implicated in the scenes he describes for what is the migrant's act of writing the city if not an engaging with the city as a complicated home. But for now, when he refers to himself in the third person, not I but he, he follows Kathleen Stewart's technique of gaining distance from one's own subjectivity while recording at the same time the privileges and particularities that inhere in his cis-gendered ways of inhabiting Berlin. The texts he writes are not about him, though he is integral to their compositions. In a way, these act like artist Nina Katchadourian's Lavatory Self-portraits in the Flemish Style (2010), which are not selfies, as she claims, but other portraits of the self.

City Inside Out

He has been reading Diane Chisholm. Her reading of the gay bathhouse points to the ways in which the labyrinthine logic of cruising for sex mimics the architecture of the city in the way that it "interiorizes the passages and meeting places of the external city" (2005, 45); makes contact among city-goers safe yet retains, in fact magnifies, its cruising potentials and desirous contours: a kind of expanding, even testing of the *Erwartungshorizont* of the city. He loves this German word he had recently picked up. It literally means the horizon of expectations. But such inversion has extraneous impacts. Men emerging from the interiorized urbanity of the gay bathhouse return to the city transformed, with deeper knowledge, both of their bodies and the city, a kind of knowledge that renders them ever more skilled and adept at cruising the city. It all sounds expectedly familiar to him. In fact, even before reading this work, he had already begun thinking of whether or not what the young men did during *ziker* could be read in terms of a form of cruising, cruising for saints, as he had noted down in his field notes.

Knopfaugen (button-eyes)

He sees him again, this time after months. He is 3.2 km away. He closes the app on his iPhone without clicking. His heart longs for him still, he realizes.

“I’m so exciting” (insert French accent)

In *Bluets*, Maggie Nelson writes: “Fucking may in no way interfere with the actual use of language” (2009, 8). Yet he thinks of the cute Parisian chemist who in the thickest of French accents kept saying to himself “I’m so exciting” as they fucked. In that moment he had clearly held himself back curbing the urge to correct his grammar. And even though he must have reacted with some manner of smile, he had seriously deliberated whether or not to intervene in that exchange of passion and to tell him that grammatically speaking he would have had to be excited, not exciting. He had thought of the pros and cons of such an intervention. He marvelled at his ability to be cerebral when it wasn’t really necessary; to articulate a whole line of thought while having sex; of arriving at a decision, which he was meanwhile able to meditate upon; and equally at his generosity to suffer while making room for other pleasures to take hold in its stead. How strange that language could affect him to this extent, he would wonder a few days later. To himself, he would then say with a smile: “I’m so exciting!”

My Ungeheuer (monstrous) Neukölln

What Anjali had pointed out with regard to his Berlin fieldwork with the Sufis had stuck with him. He had struggled to fully grasp it even in the highs of that post-conference moment at Farina and Will’s home in Ann Arbor. If he remembers well, she had read his casual description of not having known the Turkish Sufis while living in the same neighborhood all these years as a kind of a disappointment with himself. How can it possibly not be also about you, Anjali had said with her signature ease even though her pentagon-shaped frames in bright red wouldn’t let a word go passed without charge. Come to think of it, his floral socks were equally impelling, whose daintiness, he imagined, had many a head turn too. Barely had he basked in the thought that he was overtaken by a feeling he couldn’t describe: was it the realization setting in that the Turkish Other in the German context was possibly a site for reading his own otherness? A kind of a mirror, not in the sense of reproducing sameness but a site of reflexive extraction. Or was it just hope that by watching himself watch others, objectifying himself alongside others, odd-fitting contradictions about himself would inevitably be revealed.

Späti (late-night shop)

There is a woman he sees almost every day. From where he usually sits outside this café on the street where he lives, there is just a line of three potted plants that separate the café from the *Späti*, where she sits, sipping tea. And just now as he is jotting down these lines, a man from across this plant line reaches out to him. Hasan from Morocco introduces himself and inquires a little bit about him too. “*Ich komme aus Pakistan*”, he says in German. In this moment, his eyes meet the eyes of the woman but they do not exchange greetings. “They will kill my father,” Hasan’s next words leave him stunned as he quotes Benazir Bhutto out of the blue from a TV interview aired on the BBC sometime in the late 1970s. Affected as he is, he immediately thinks about how a mere sound bite was enough to recollect an entire history. Hasan raises his hand towards his heart, shaking it to tell him how those words still stir his emotions. He also tells him that he lives right above the *Späti*. Even after he thinks the conversation is long finished, Hasan keeps interrupting his daily ritual of writing, offering German cultural trivia like how to end an email in German: MfG, he recommends from across the plants, *Mit freundlichen Grüßen* (with friendly greetings)!

The Potted Line

When Hasan asked him if he could join him at his table, the potted divide felt a lot more real to him. Mixed as it is here in this neighborhood, dog-owning, breakfast eating, coffee drinking *yukis*, or “young urban kreative internationals” as The Guardian (Dykhoff 2011) once described Berliners of Neukölln, hardly mingle with those that leisurely hang outside *Spätis*, speaking Arabic, Turkish, Romanian and what not. Yet certain intimacies were inevitable, for instance, on other days, when looking out from this café, framed by its window front, he sees passers-by, possibly his neighbors. Ones that are routinely caught in fleeting passages: For example, this woman dressed in *shalwar-kamiz* dragging a wheeled bag of groceries. Every time he sees her, he tries to quickly piece together the finer details of the cursory scene like the length of her *kamiz* or the precise cut of her garment, all cues that he thinks will lead him to assess whether she might be Pakistani or Indian, possibly even Bangladeshi. He is of the conviction that Pakistanis dress better but that’s beside the point. These neighbors, he notes, never stop at cafes, they hardly peek in. They just keep walking on.

Right across is another café, tad fancier than this one, where the coffee is 20 cents more expensive and candles in dark interiors peek out of large windows, even during the day. Tables are hard to get, especially outside even though unlike a Parisian cafe, there isn’t much going on to gaze upon. A *Kinderwagen* (stroller)-pushing mother stops by to chat with a dog-owner. A scene of likely white intimacy, he thinks. Breakfasts continue. The light drizzle too. The leisure of

cafés is palpably different from leises of a *Späti*, it suddenly dawns on him. He is immediately reminded of his hatred for Zucchini cakes, which so often announce the hipsterness of cafés. There is one like that on the other street where the coffee costs 50 cents more, where Ashram-pants upend the outline of headscarves; vegan sandwiches frown at kebabs of the *Kiez* (hood). Annoyed by the thought, he returns to the scene that is now, back to where cheese platters, breakfast spreads, and bread baskets stop at potted lines; so does the eclectic style of mismatching furniture. But not always are potted lines legible, he thinks. By night on the same street candle-lit bars glimmer unlike game-rooms whose fluorescent glow outs them as men's-only migrant spaces. He never goes there.

In the thick of it, bare

For Heather Love, thinness of description involves “exhaustive, fine-grained attention to phenomena;” close but not deep reading (2013, 404). His own interest in thin insists on what is there in a scene, rather than what is not there. Curbing the urge for thick description is his way to chip on the edifice of anthropological truth and make room (he hopes) for other modes of thinking: Modes that do not simply rest on the been-there, seen-that-ness of the anthropologist; and thinking that is not entirely in service of positivist coherence and certitude. Thin, he thinks, lets us in into an already porous scene, it allows us to dwell in its passage as much as it eases a veering off to other scenes. It describes what's going on as opposed to explicating what's 'really' going on. Thin attachments it follows are attachments that don't stick, that do not last. Yet they bear a spectral depth; their charge lives on, returning, unfolding in other forms, arresting us ever so tenuously. Thus, to write in scenes is as much to capture the event of passing as it is to hold on to that which passes: intimacies of a scene that would not have arisen in the first place had it not been for this particular time and place.

Worlds of the Unknown Crying Man

As he walked through the door, he met him first in the mirror. Little did he know he was walking into the silhouette of the Unknown Crying Man. Affected as he was by the encounter, he couldn't quite recall the exact features of his face though he knew he had seen a face like his. After all it had flashed repeatedly across TV screens in 2001, when the Unknown Crying Man was accused of practicing debauchery, of offending religion. But there were 52 of them, caught. The Egyptian authorities had cracked down on a boat of merrymakers on the Nile. At the trial, 52 faces hid behind white tissue, covered in fear in fact, the

fear of being identified. The Unknown Crying Man stood out because he was doubly arrested; the camera's eye had caught him crying.

He knew what crying felt like. He was familiar with etiquettes of hiding. He had also twice tasted the fear of being identified. But this city wasn't Cairo, neither Karachi. And the year they met in the mirror, no longer 2001. Sixteen years on, he was a loosely-defined flâneur in Berlin and he was a melancholic dandy in Istanbul. So, on his second visit to Istanbul, he tried looking for the Unknown Crying Man. Some knew where he lived but none had seen him. If word on the street was anything to go by and if one were to buy into the life that artist Mahmoud Khaled (2017) had now imagined for him, the Unknown Crying Man was a recluse, confined to his Bauhaus-inspired home in socially-upward Cihangir, surrounded only by pictures of Giovanni Bragolin's famous kitsch images of crying children.

Only meters away from the home of the Unknown Crying Man, is an abandoned park. There, just the previous night, resting on the edge of a rock, he faced the Sea of Marmara. As he shared beers with Ahmet, he had felt the weight of the city surging behind them. Yet Istanbul sprawled to their left and to their right. From where they sat, they saw it in Asia; they saw it in Europe. He was unfailingly bewitched by cities that afforded vistas on to themselves, convinced as though of their own charms. Berlin, he knew, had no such airs. He had often described it as *malang* (mendicant) among cities. That night, the view of Istanbul that he liked so much felt so terribly burdensome. How does one turn away from a city as present and self-aware as Istanbul, he would say to himself without uttering these exact words. The rest of the time Ahmet and he would speak of a whole assortment of things: of ghost-like fathers; of the intimacy of strangers; their cocky preference for anthropology over sociology; of the nature of divine; and of *majzubs* (the divinely-attracted). All this while he feels a restlessness, perhaps for the reason that he was once again gradually coming to terms with multiple cities in one.

This neighborhood of dandies in Istanbul from where the city could admire itself in its own reflection was a far cry from the working-class neighborhood of the newly rising district of Esenyurt where he had met the Sufis a few nights prior to this one. So far it had taken him two hours to reach. But when he did arrive, a metro-train and two bus rides later, translator in hand, he found over 150 men chanting names of Allah, reciting praises of saints, immersed in sonic atmospheres, like the ones he had observed in Berlin. Here too, men were known to cry but for radically different fears. But they too, like the Unknown Crying Man were arrested, charged, moved to tears. It was both strange and peculiarly familiar to him.

*Maidan-e-hashr*¹⁰

They had spent time in Sehwan and in Paris but never in Berlin. So, when Delphine visited him for the first time, she asked him to take her to places in the city, which he liked. On the first day, he took her to a place he doesn't like. Unlike him, Berliners love the *Tempelhofer Feld*, a former airfield and now a flat stretch of nothingness. A place so devoid of trees and rid of any promise of shade that it reminds him of every description of the Day of Judgement, ones he had heard in Friday sermons during his childhood: when the sun would be at a distance of one and a quarter of a spear, when one would run for cover but to no rescue. On an afternoon in June, together, they looked for shade in the park and then moved on.

Writing now, not here

His writing saunters in and out of Berlin with little outcry. It also dwells in *Jetztzeit*, a chewed-over, here-and-now account of how places come to 'thicken' in their experience as migratory settings (Aydemir and Rotas 2008), turning dense ever so slowly in the traffic of dreams, memories, imaginations, and anxieties. So, he seeks in his writings the accumulated weight of these presents, just as much such writing "constellates multiple histories that do not usually get told together" (Yildiz 2017, 214). He writes, he realizes, only to re-engage with the city as text.

What doesn't stick, flees

Bir, iki, üç, dört ... or so counted the young men in Turkish, all as one, keeping score as they took turns doing push-ups. In this almost empty room in Neukölln, there was hardly much left, just the fervor of voices reverberating off its now bare surfaces and cold fluorescent lights that dodged contours of well-toned bodies. The setting, drab with a palpable ease, was almost pallid, yet none of this was routine. Vivid or spirited, too green or painfully yellow, words that he would've once used to describe this room were no longer imaginable. The Koranic calligraphy that had long adorned the walls was now buried in multiple coats of white paint. The last cycle of sonic chants and haptic rituals was already a faint memory. And even if the elderly sheikh, a mystical guide to these young men, was still in audience, an earlier mood of reverence was no more. In fact, the rolled-up carpets on which the men now sat had been removed only minutes ago, as if whose coiling had spectrally unfurled an air of playfulness. One after the other, amid bouts of praise and cheer, the young men showed off their physical prowess doing push-ups, their biceps taut against a naked concrete floor. In this moment, even the sheikh, who until now only smilingly watched, knew well that at some point,

he too, would have to take the floor. How remarkable were these moments, he had said to himself as he observed the space of the mosque gradually transform from a room of prayer to that of leisure, recording it photographically over the span of an evening.

The last features of the mosque had been dismantled, the boxes were ready to be moved. The concrete floor now bore traces of color. Faint but stubborn vestiges of the carpet had stuck to the floor; a memory far easier to arrest than the many immaterial trails lost to the eye of the camera. As leisure took hold in the room that day, departing from its air were rhythms of the body, sounds of joy and fear, and possibly the saints too who were known to haunt the room week after week. And yet, of all the traces of a mosque that the room now bore, this moment of leisure and laughter was most fleeting, he had thought; thin, least likely to stick to its surfaces, less likely still to be carried along in boxes. Much in line with Ann Armbrecht, he would later ask himself: how do we hold on to knowledge, especially once something comes to an end? (2009, 176).

Roast beef, rolling eyes!

There were days when he was reminded how German, imperfect as it was in his case, had settled into his ordinary ways of speaking. One has lived far too long in *Deutschland*, he once declared to his friends on Facebook, when one replaces intransitive verbs with *machen* (to make), unfortunately in English and to its further detriment when one inadvertently closes one's sentences with an open-ended word like *or*, just as Germans use *oder*. And then that *kleinen* (little) moment of horror, when he wondered if one day he too would sound like the refrain from Tracey Ullman's parody of Angela Merkel: "*Oh mein Gott, I'm rolling my eyes*" (2017).

He stood at the counter at Rewe asking for 100 grams of roast beef. Though he had done so in German, he had caught himself, like so many times before, germanizing his English words. He had learnt to make these little adjustments for the benefit of his listeners. He hadn't arrived at this decision consciously. It had as if of its own will crept into his ways of being in the city. It had often lent his German a certain kind of authenticity, the kind that comes with not pronouncing English words in any English way. So, on that day, as he stood before the counter, he asked for *Roast Beef* when in fact he had meant roast beef. Despite his German enunciation of the word, the German man at the counter picks the wrong sort of meat, the one he hadn't asked for, as if his generous gesture of germanizing was entirely lost on him. Disappointed, he uttered the same words once again, this time pointing to the roast beef ... to which the guy responded, *das ist aber Roast*

Beef! (but that is roast beef). This time he just rolled his eyes, and though he did roll his eyes in English, he was confident it couldn't be lost in translation. *Endlich*, he was *eine kleine* bit happy! (finally, he was a little bit happy).



Losing thread

He didn't quite register it at first. Only moments after, in the thin slice of space where his body briefly withdrew from his, he noticed a red line on the bed, a thread of a witness to rising intensities in a sun-filled room. How could he not sense it as it separated from his wrist, a rush of disappointment crossed his mind. It had been with him for four years and ten months to be precise. What's more is that in days leading up to this, he had thought about it. He had wondered how he would interpret it when the thread would finally part with him. It was old and brittle at the knots. It was showing signs of weariness. He thought about the fakir who had crafted it with multiple threads, prayed over its every knot and made him wear it as a parting gift when he left Sehwan. It had become a living memory of his first fieldwork, though it was meant to tie him to *Lal*, the Red Saint of Sehwan. He thought of his father who disapproved of it from day one, insisting year after year that he take it off. It had now left him of its own will. Weeks after, he still thinks of the meanings its undoing will take. Is this a call for him to return to the shrine of Sehwan, he wonders? He doesn't know what to make of it, so he asks Delphine. He wants her to say what he can't bring himself to say: that *Lal* is calling him. But when he asks her, she tells him: "You're now free!"

Missing Bani

He watches the leaves fall. From where he usually sits outside this café on the street where he lives, the scene is pretty much the same. Breakfasts continue on both sides of the street. A woman walks past dragging a wheeled bag of groceries, another familiar scene within the scene. She, however, is not Pakistani. The wind is colder, the sun scarcer than it was just a month ago. It is only late August. He watches the leaves fall. He doesn't smell autumn. Not yet. But then he was never sure of his olfactory aptitudes in the first place. He misses Bani. When she left for Karachi less than a month ago, he couldn't really understand why someone would want to leave Berlin in the summer. Precious, he now sees it slipping away. He writes her a message on Whatsapp. He's anxious to hear what she thinks of his prologue to *Thin Attachments*. He usually bounces his ideas off her, mostly because she has an oddly superior talent for sifting through academic bullshit. She tells him she loves the title. He's now sure she hasn't read it beyond the title. He misses her even more. He watches the leaves fall.

The teary moons of Istanbul

When she caught him crying in a church, he didn't know how to explain his tears. It was their first week living together and they had decided to spend it in Istanbul. It was there she had named him the maker of dreams. And dream-like it was. January and icy cold. They were young and full of hope in a city of new beginnings yet each one of them scarred, each one of them burdened with dreams of their own. On an afternoon stroll one day, when he had briefly drifted from her, he had found some comfort inside a church. Places of worship had always had a way with him. As he sat on the old wooden pew, alone, he felt searing towards him what had passed and the gush of what was yet to come. On the muddled borderlands of sensing and (not really) knowing, his eyes teared up. He couldn't contain the surge. He may have cried like a baby.

Twelve years, 9 months and some 10 days later he was back in Istanbul, this time by himself. When he found himself at the home of the Unknown Crying Man, he knew he too had cried in Istanbul. Then a week or so later, without actually wanting to, he stumbled upon the same church. He did not go inside. He did not cry this time. But in returning to the scene years later, he had come closer to his past and to Istanbul, a city where, as he would eventually read on a plane back to Berlin, "*jeder hatte ein bisschen Mond in seinen Händen*" (everyone had a little bit of moon in their hands). In the company of Özdamar's writing, he would begin to see why in 2005, in Istanbul, their dreams had appeared like planets within reach; why many moons later the future still shined here as if it stood at arms-length. "The moon was so big as if it only lived in the Istanbul sky, loved just

Istanbul, and polished itself each day for this city alone. Wherever it looked, all doors would immediately open to let it grow into them. Wherever one grasped, one caught hold of the moon.” (Özdamar 2005, 68, author’s translation).



“I decided to fly to Australia. I left my boyfriend (emoticon: sad face).” Late one night in a Whatsapp message from Bali, his Italian neighbor informs him of the breakup. He sounds composed but hurt, defeated almost. The next morning, he meets his neighbor’s ex to receive the keys to the apartment, who explains to him which of the keys are to which of the doors, which of the plants require more water, which not. He’s never been good with plants, so he nervously listens, trying to catch every detail even though he’s clearly distracted, all this while, wondering, why the stranger he thinks he’s never met looks oddly familiar. As they walk out, his neighbor’s ex hands the keys over. He sounds composed but hurt, defeated almost. Turning the corner of the street, he hears him say: Please don’t tell him about us!

Thinking through thin

To bring memoir to bear on geography is to consider how time binds the narration of one life to the many affective mappings of a city. In pursuing the matter of *Thin Attachments*, he points to tentative mappings as much as to shapes of relating intimately in the city that do not transact in values of density or tightness; these are intimacies that dwell in their infirmness and which even in their nursed, stretched out or temporally drawn illuminations betray what is futural in the logic of be/longing; or which flourish, or at times only endure with little or no optimism in what Berlant calls “intimacy’s long middle” (2014, 22). Thin is what survives in and of relating on a map without investing in the stability or coherence of objects that comprise those relations (Edelman 2014, 30). It speculates less in objects that map than in affectivities and affections that make up modes of relating to those objects, whether those are acts of pursuing or disinvesting, the condition of being drawn or desiring withdrawal.

See you?

From the moment he opened his eyes on that Saturday morning, he knew something was amiss. Even though he had imagined it otherwise, his body had drifted away from his through the course of the night, a tad further apart than it was possible on a 140m-wide bed. He made him coffee in the morning. They took it

in the kitchen, commenting, how unremarkable its taste was. When he walked out of the door, he kissed him ever so lightly on the lips, touching only to un-touch them again. See you soon, he said, as though it was an inadvertent speech act. He didn't believe him, not one syllable, but he knew that it was the right thing to say in that moment. Later that evening, he stood in a circle with Sufis as they sang praises of saints and holy men. He wondered, like he often did in the circle, how one could see with eyes closed. "He sees you, you don't see Him, we're all together, it's love," a Sufi follower had once explained to him. That night, as he closed his eyes – eyes he was told were *Knopfaugen* (button-eyes) – he too saw, as Sufis would, though not a saint but him. It ought to have been love indeed. And when, at the end of the ritual, the sheikh raised his hands in prayer, he raised his hands too. After a long time, he had caught himself praying, this time for him and him. That week they drudgily chatted on Whatsapp. Then on Friday, he received the break-up message. A prayer in the city had not come true.

Endnotes

1. Thin Attachments is an independent line of work resulting from the author's joint project with Hansjörg Dilger and Dominik Mattes. It is carried out in the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre, *Affective Societies* at Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). It was first presented at a workshop *Migration and Discrimination* organized by Cornell University (2017) in Berlin, and most recently at the *Capacious* conference (2018). This writing is indebted to its research partners and interlocutors, allies and reviewers.

2. While migration is relevant to the author's experience of the city, the work does not assume a stable category of the migrant or that access to socio-economic privileges and political-legal frameworks are equally available to all migrants.

3. For queer in the suburban, see Tongson (2011); for a critique of Affect Studies' US-centering drive and Queer Studies' geopolitical flattening, see Arondekar and Patel (2016).

4. My queer reading is not entirely reflective of the politics of the Sufi group. My participation in the ritual, however, makes queerness not external to the field but co-constitutive of it. For a discussion on the author's fieldwork, see Mattes et al (2019).

5. For place-making and belonging in Berlin vis-à-vis Sufi rituals of remembrance, see Dilger et al (2018).

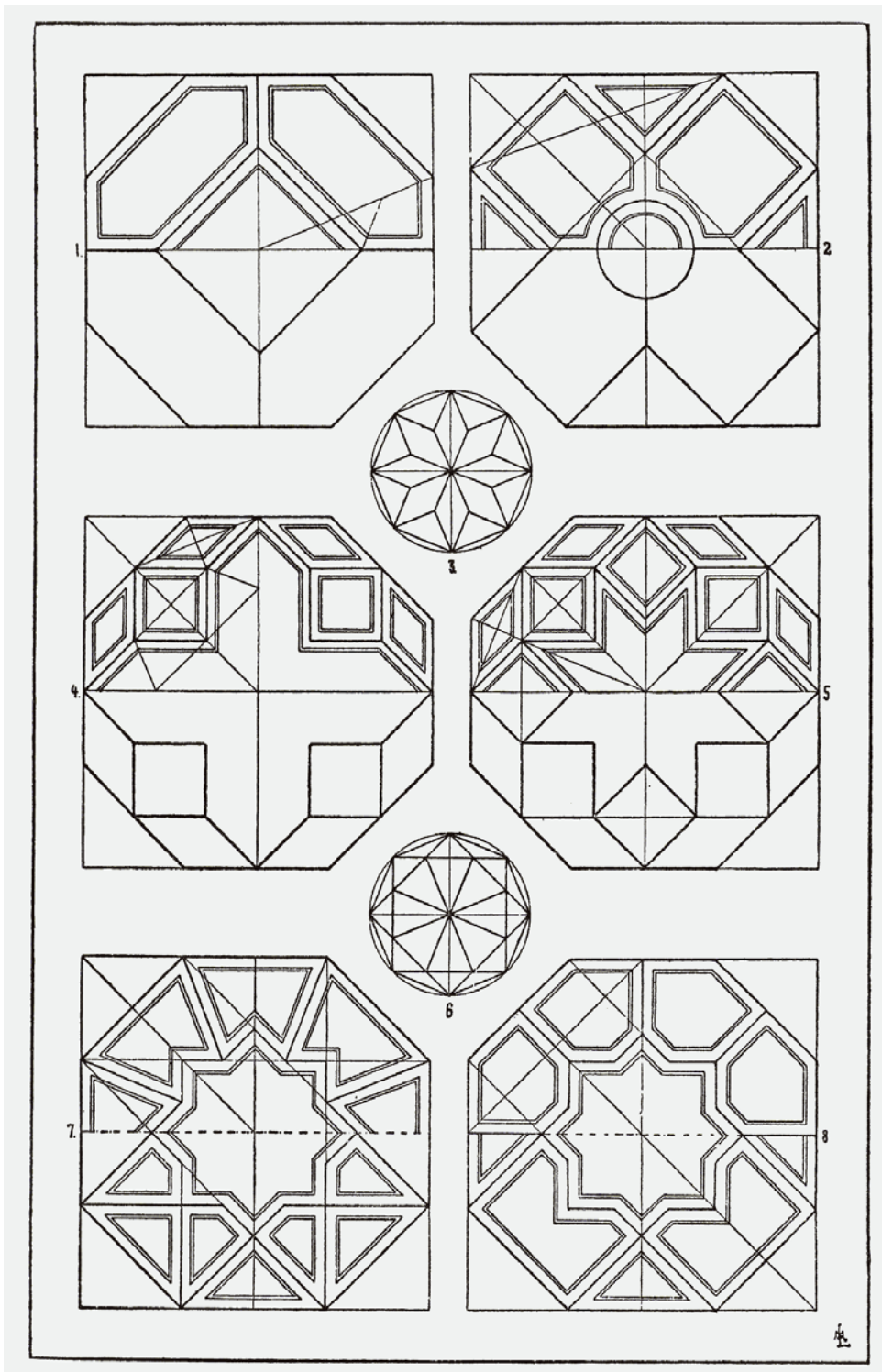
6. I refer to Lim's (2009) concept of immiscible temporalities with regard to supernatural agency and translation of non-coinciding temporalities in fantastic cinema.
7. For a queer reading of Walter Benjamin, see Chisholm (2005), Introduction.
8. For remote intimacy or non-simultaneous transmission of sentiments through tele-mediating devices as a praxis for queer of color suburban residents, see Tongson (2011).
9. Neukölln is a district in Berlin known for its multi-cultural residents.
10. The ground where Muslims believe they will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement

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King Ragworm (Alitta virens), William Carmichael McIntosh
from *A monograph of the British marine annelids* vol. 2, pt. 2 (1910)

TALKIN' TRANSINDIVIDUATION AND COLLECTIVITY

A Dialogue Between Jason Read and Jeremy Gilbert



Jason Read and Jeremy Gilbert

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Editor's introduction

Buzz! These *Capacious* 'dialogues' are, after all, true fly-on-the-wall experiences. Because sometimes you just want to hover omnisciently and eavesdrop up-close when two really smart people are deeply engaged in a conversation. Especially when they have been thinking and working along near parallel lines. Especially when you have a chance to catch hold of their insights as they arrive at tantalizing intersections or maybe catch a glimpse of the tiniest wedge of light separating them. Especially when their to-and-fro is so thoroughly attuned to many of the transformations of our times... culturally, philosophically, politically.

Jason Read and Jeremy Gilbert have kept more than a compatriot's side-eye on each other's work over the last several years. Their own substantial uptakes from Spinoza, Marx, Deleuze, and Simondon guarantee that they have long dwelt

in and felt their way through the other's arguments, and of course they have previously intersected on conference panels (like #affectWTF in 2015) and in edited collections. Sure, Jason tilts slightly more toward Spinozist philosophy, radically reconceived anthropology, and Etienne Balibar while Jeremy inclines in the directions of cultural studies, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen. But their intertwined conceptual trajectories and capacity to complement or complete each other's train of thought is what makes this dialogue so invigorating. Even better: they get right down to particulars, and elaborate what is at stake around the whole matter of transindividuality, provide some fundamental orientations and then map them onto the present conjuncture.

Indeed, across the length of this exchange, you may be able to conjure up a few affect-y coordinates to be adopted along the way toward non-fascist living (à la Michel Foucault's preface to *Anti-Oedipus*). Such as:

- Refuse to believe that subjectivity or individuality is synonymous with interiority.
- Collectives/crowds/groups can subsist and sustain beyond any and all individual relationships with leaders and can do so without fear of dissolution.
- Because everything and every body are affected by external relations, what we (in the West particularly) understand as possession and property must be completely redrawn.
- Multiplicity and singularity can be (in fact, are) intimately conjoined—without falling into inherent performative contradiction.
- A body and one's very sense of self are uninterruptably inhabited by and unbounded by other voices/bodies/events/histories/technologies. This is a source of what we regularly call 'creativity' and, even further, is a key determinant for the coherence of belonging (and, thus, should not be a cause for alarm or pathology).
- Relations are composed and continuously reshaped through movement in difference as much as (actually more than) any process bent on divulging shared essences or origins.
- The future belongs to the collective although rarely with the same imagined form and content as collectives-past.

But there are any number of potentials to be drawn from the conversation that follows. Among his own enumerations for living a non-fascist life, Foucault said, “Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of forms and domains for the intervention of political action.” Yeah, maybe this one as much as ever. As you’re soon to discover, this dialogue is an intensifier of thought and its analysis is a multiplier for intervention. Commence buzzing.

—Greg Seigworth, co-editor-in-chief

JEREMY

What, in your terms, is transindividuality, and why does it matter?

JASON

It seems to me that it is impossible to answer these questions separately. How the term is defined is, in some sense, part of how or why it might matter. To take the most basic definition, the one that I often rely upon for a quick explanation, we could say that transindividuality is a way of addressing the mutual constitution of the individual and the collective. That is, rather than see individuality and collectivity as a kind of zero sum game, in which individuality is developed through a refutation of collectivity and collectivity through a suppression of individuality, it is necessary to understand the way in which collectivity is nothing other than a particular way of being individuated and individuality is a particular articulation of collective habits and ways of being. Defined in such a way the concept already matters to some extent in that it gets beyond individualistic or wholistic accounts of social behavior, beyond either reducing everything in society to a sum total of individual choices and decisions or reducing individuals to the effects of social processes and relations. Of course, it is the former that is more of risk in our contemporary context in which various individualisms, methodological and political, are dominant.

However, the limit of this particular definition of transindividuality, which more or less corresponds to Gilbert Simondon’s definition, is that it is too abstract, too philosophical, in that it posits that we are always already transindividual, always already situated in collective and individual relations. What such a concept cannot explain, cannot account for, is: why precisely at this time, at this moment in history are we in the grip of so many individualistic philosophies and imaginaries? Why do we, and I realize that this is fairly proscribed ‘we,’ limited to a place and time in history, see ourselves as individual? So much so that to suggest otherwise,

to indicate the collective or shared basis for this or that sentiment always invites anger or frustration. It is for this reason that I have found Marx's formulation in *The Grundrisse* to be an important formulation of the transindividual *avant la lettre*. As Marx writes:

Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a 'political animal' not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside of society... is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other (Marx 1973, 84).

It seems to me that transindividuality cannot just be asserted as an abstract definition of the human condition without exploring the means by which individuation (and the formation of collective existence—but we do not really have a word for the formation of collectivities do we? “collectivization” wouldn't work) is itself historically articulated and transformed, something like *a mode of* individuation (and collectivization). Such a mode would encompass not only concepts and imaginaries, not only ways of conceiving, but also ways of acting, affects, compartments, etc. Thus, transindividuality as a philosophical concept must necessarily be completed and problematized by transindividuality as historical and social concept. In undertaking such an examination it becomes clear that the standard divisions and hierarchies between politics and economics, base and superstructure, get rearticulated in different ways. Muriel Combes, in her book on Simondon, refers to what she calls the intimacy of the common, the way in which collectivity is not something out there, part of some public sphere, but is necessarily intimately lived. Or, to frame it differently, as Deleuze and Guattari wrote, desire is part of the infrastructure. These slogans frame in a pithy way the same thing that we see all around us as transformations of the economy and the state that reverberate in intimate ways: such anxieties and fears become the basis for politics. Transindividuality matters not just because it rearticulates the division between individual and the collective, but also the political, economic, and the subjective. This not only makes it possible to grasp the present, the historical conjuncture, which seems to resist the standard divisions of politics and economics, but to think of different ways of transforming it as well.

JEREMY

Alright so transindividuality is both a general ontological and phenomenological condition—it is simply the way things are; yet it is also an aspect of the general ontological condition that particular modes of thought have a particular tendency to occlude or deny (I presume you would agree with this—I think it’s already implicit in your comments), and it is something that is experienced (or not) in specific ways under specific historical circumstances.

Given all that (and do say so if you disagree with it)—do you think there are specific historical reasons why some people (well, us) are, or should be, particularly interested in the question of transindividuality at the present time? Is there anything going on with the thought of transindividuality other than the perennial critique of individualism, that goes back at least to early modernity, arguably much further (to the earliest extant writings of classical Buddhism, for example). This isn’t a leading question. I’m not sure myself. I don’t really have a problem with it if all we are doing is maintaining that perennial critique and updating it for our own time. I’m interested to know if you think anything more than that is going on.

With regard to your comments about us needing to know how individuation occurs—I agree of course, but it could be suggested that we already do know this, and that a great deal of modern psychological and sociological thought has been concerned with this question one way or another. We have multiple models to choose from or to borrow from, and a long history of theorization on this issue, if we want to understand how individuation and individuality are produced. What does the thought of transindividuality add to that history, or how does it help us to select models from it that might help us to answer the questions that you raise?

JASON

I think that I have two answers to your first question. First, with respect to the general criticism of individualism it seems to me that transindividuality, as I am attempting to articulate it, differs on two counts. It seems to me that the perennial criticism of individualism would be the assertion that the individual is just an illusion, a kind of “worm in the blood” to use Spinoza’s phrase, thinking itself as an individual when it is just a part of a whole. As Spinoza writes:

Now let us imagine, if you please, a tiny worm living in the blood, capable of distinguishing by sight the particles of the blood—lymph, etc. and of intelligently observing how each particle, on colliding with another, either rebounds or communicates some degree of its motion and so forth. That worm

would be living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe, and it would regard each individual particle of the blood as a whole, not a part, and it could have no idea as to how all of the parts are controlled by the overall nature of the blood and compelled to mutual adaption as the overall nature of the blood requires, so as to agree with each other in a definite way. Letter 32 (Spinoza 1995, 193)

In this conception it would seem that individuals are, in truth, simply parts of a larger process, having no reality other than an illusory one shaped by their own misconceptions. In contrast to this, I would argue that individuals are real, but their reality does not negate or contradict the transindividual relations which they are part of. To illustrate this we can turn to Spinoza again. When Spinoza writes that “[d]esire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection to do something” (EIIIDef.Aff.I), there is an assertion of a singular and unique striving of every individual. The essence is less a shared quality than the quality of diversion. However, it is also important to stress, and this takes us back to the worm in the blood example, that this striving is determined by any given affection, by its relations, encounters, etc: the entire social and historical world. Lastly, and this is something that I think that I have not stressed enough in my book *The Politics of Transindividuality*, individuals—flesh and blood beings that begin and end at the skin—are not the only individuals; what we call, for lack of a better word, collectives, are individuals as well, having their own consistency and particular striving. To return to the worm in the blood, it is not so much that the worm is not an individual, but it is not the only individual, and not the entirety of the process of individuation.

That is my first response. My second response is to suggest that there is a change in the very nature of individuation. Of course this is always the case. The conditions of individuation are always changing with cultural, economic, technological, and political transformations. Each new transformation of the conditions of individuation, from the dissemination of print to the rise of the culture industry and consumer society, have been grasped as such radical transformations of individuation that they seemed to be its destruction. Thus it is necessary to resist, as much as possible, the spontaneous tendency for every historical period to see itself as utterly novel, as either unprecedented destruction or creation. However, as I have tried to argue, the changing nature of work and consumption has exposed the nature of individuation in ways that are somewhat new. There is both a lot of anxiety and optimism about this, and if one wanted to, one could assign the

proper names of Bernard Stiegler and Paolo Virno to this anxiety and optimism; the first sees the commodification of individuation to be its utter destruction, while the latter argues that the increasing artificiality of individuation, its production, opens up the basis for its innovation and transformation. Read together, and with a bit of a long view about individuation, it is possible to see some of the new dimensions of individuation, even if these are not total destruction or creation.

Lastly, it seems to me that thinking in terms of transindividuation is different than simply another description of the process of individuation; in the sense that transindividuation is always about what exceeds this process, both in the sense of the formation of a collective individuation, or the individuation of collectives, but also the preindividual relations that exceed any individuation. These relations are the basis of transformations both individual and political. This seems to me to be the ultimate test, or gamble, of thinking transindividuation—that it makes it possible to rethink and rearticulate the relationship between individual crises and collective transformation, the constitution of new types of organization, in an age of utter fragmentation and isolation.

So, Jeremy—my last response seems to offer a good place to turn it around and start asking you questions in that it turns the discussion towards something more explicitly political. One of the things that I liked about your book *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism*—and this is something we discussed before— is that in reading it I felt that we were covering the same ground but at different angles and with different references (and many of the same ones as well).

So, the first thing that I want to ask about is your notion of ‘Leviathan logic’ because I find it to be such an expansive concept, underscoring that it is not just a matter of individualism. As you point out, Leviathan logic can think beyond the individual so long as society, the state, or whatever is represented as a meta-individual. So first I want you to clarify what you mean by Leviathan logic, and especially why this notion of the meta-individual is as critically important as a critique of individualism?

JEREMY

Thanks—a great question. The term Leviathan logic explicitly refers to Hobbes’ idea that society comes into existence only because all of the individuals that compose it agree to delegate their personal sovereignty to a single individual or institution that then exercises complete sovereignty over the entire society. ‘Leviathan’—the giant—is Hobbes’ rather poetic name for this singular structure

of sovereignty. The idea is famously illustrated by a picture in the book, that shows a single, giant crowned figure drawn in outline, and inside the outlines, dozens of small discrete humanoid figures compose its body (I can never look at this without thinking of the Wicker Man...). The giant figure is the state/society (and, for Hobbes, there really is no distinction between the state and society); and the little figures are the individuals who compose it. Hobbes notoriously posits that in the absence of any such singular locus of social authority, then human existence would remain in a wholly asocial 'state of nature,' that would just be individuals running around fighting with each other in the 'war of all against all'.

Historically this is very important, because as far as we know, throughout recorded history up to this point, whenever people had tried to imagine or posit a pre-historical, originary state of human society, they had assumed that people originally must have lived together in peace and harmony, without the same hierarchies and divisions of labor that characterized 'modern' (i.e., post-paleolithic) societies. It's not that everyone always assumed that human society had originally been a primitive-communist utopia; but pretty much anyone who had bothered to make any kind of claims about how they assumed pre-historic humans had lived, made that claim. So when Hobbes comes along and says that no, the state of nature is actually some kind of libertarian dystopia, it is a big break. This also initiates the historical period which in many ways we are still in, in that a certain bourgeois social (or anti-social) imaginary informs the most influential ways of thinking about the nature of the social, that serves to naturalize competitive market relations and private property.

None of that is my original argument—this is basically the argument made by the great Canadian political philosopher, C.B. MacPherson, whose book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* is still a classic. In a nutshell the point of that book is to undermine the story of political philosophy that is so popular with liberals, and especially those who venerate the US Constitution as the great founding document of modern liberty. According to that story, even though Hobbes was obviously a horrible person, good ol' John Locke and his followers were the true fathers of modern enlightened liberalism, with their belief in separation of powers and limited state sovereignty. MacPherson says—no, those are minor differences and what Locke and Hobbes have in common is much more important than what divides them. And what they have in common is their underlying founding assumption that societies are composed of individuals, rather



Leviathan frontispiece, Abraham Bosse, 1651
(Public domain)

than individuals being produced by their societies, and that all social relations are founded on property relations. So in some ways Leviathan stands as this founding concept for a whole set of ideas about the nature of the social that still inform both liberalism and neoliberalism today, and that are indissociable from the rise and global dominance of the capitalist class.

Okay, so that only explains about Leviathan. What about 'Leviathan logic' then? It might be useful to say something about where this idea came from. I think I first started to think about this when reading Freud on group psychology. Freud has this model according to which groups only come into existence because each individual makes a personal identification with the leader of the group. If the leader dies or disappears, the group disperses and ceases to function (or actually, the members incorporate an imaginary version of the leader into their psyches, but still, the basic point idea is the same—no leader, no group). Freud sees this logic at work in major social institutions, and his examples are the church and the army.

Now, it's always important to note that Freud does sort of acknowledge that there are other kinds of groups and that there might be groups in which libidinal and social bonds between members of the group are as important as those between the individual members and the leader. But he doesn't give any examples or try to explain what the psycho-social mechanisms informing them might be. Freud is directly borrowing his model from Gustav Le Bon, a French liberal anti-socialist, who was totally in the Hobbes tradition and thought that democracy could only lead to mob rule. So despite Freud's qualifications, there is this strong emphasis in his text "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" on these kinds of leader-centric groups as being the default model of what all groups or collectivities look like, and how they function. And "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" is not some minor text in the Freudian corpus. It is basically the place where Freud works out the most important and lastingly influential of his fundamental models of the human psyche (the tripartite model that divides the psyche into id, ego, and super-ego).

I was very struck by what seemed to be the anti-egalitarian and anti-social implications of all this when I first read 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,' and this reading was confirmed soon after when I read Mikkel Borch-Jacobson's classic study, *The Freudian Subject*, that makes a similar critique, as part of a very detailed deconstruction of some of Freud's philosophical assumptions (and his determination to differentiate psychoanalysis from hypnotherapy, which

Borch-Jacobsen argues Freud can never do fully successfully). In fact it seemed to me that the model Freud (and Le Bon) were putting forward was pretty much exactly the same as Hobbes' model of the Leviathan. In all cases the basic logic of the model was the same—the group only comes into existence by virtue of the personal identifications that individuals make with the leader, or the central symbol or idea. There are no lateral bonds between members of groups.

There are two basic problems with this idea—an empirical problem, and a political problem. The empirical problem is that it's just wrong. Not every group situation on any scale is like that. That's not to say that Leviathan logic never obtains. Clearly there are recorded instances in which killing a general caused the whole army to disperse. But clearly there are other instances in which it didn't. And the political problem is pretty simple. The upshot of Leviathan logic, and it is absolutely the assumption of Le Bon and Freud, is that all forms of collectivity are tendentially fascist. And of course, that is what liberals think. This is why from the time of Hobbes, through the drafting of the US Constitution to the era of the Clintonite Third Way and beyond, the primary concern of liberals is always to protect individual rights and property from the threat that might be posed to them by democratic mobs (whether those democratic mobs are rioting or striking or just voting in elections, whether they are voting to leave the EU or campaigning for Bernie Sanders to socialize healthcare). And that is why you really cannot advocate for a politics that believes in either democracy or socialism as positive possibilities, while remaining attached to this model of group-formation as being the only one that ever obtains. To be a socialist or a democrat, you have to allow for the possibility that sometimes groups can be constituted by lateral relations between members, not dependent upon an actual or symbolic leader. I think the reason people like Zizek end up going down so many dead ends is that they don't get this. They want to hang on to this Freudian model of subjectivity and group-formation but still somehow be socialists or democrats. Well, you can't. The model is deeply allied to the liberal model and it precludes the possibility of any actual democracy or positive understanding of collectivity—which is why Zizek ends up with his absurd apologies for Leninism and Stalinism, for example. That's why it's important to recognize Leviathan logic, to see its limitations, and to be prepared to try to think beyond them.

JASON

Second, I want to ask about some of the more political approaches you take to individualism and meta-individualism. I want to ask how you see the question of individualism and meta-individualism playing out in contemporary culture and politics, specifically about neoliberalism and what often gets called populism,

or right populism, as two different articulations of individual and collectivity. It seems that we are living in an age in which politics is reduced to a conflict between interest driven individuals and the specter of a national or ethno-national collective. How does thinking through transindividuality offer a way out of this, or, put differently, what is the prospect of the non-fascist crowd today?

JEREMY

Okay, so to explain the term 'meta-individualism' first. This is very closely related to Leviathan logic. The Leviathan, the giant person made up of lots of little people, is a meta-individual. It's made up of lots of individuals. But when those individuals come together, do they form a random crowd, a multi-headed hydra, a chaotic mass, a complex rhizome, a beautiful fractal? No—they form a great big singular individual who looks just like a big version of one of them. It's an individual on a different scale—it's not a different kind of entity by virtue of being composed of multiple units, according to Leviathan logic.

Now, my argument is that part of what is at stake both in the bourgeois idea of the individual, and in the image of the meta-individual, is a straightforward inability (or refusal) to recognize the immanent multiplicity of phenomena: that is, to recognize that they are always mobile aggregations of micro-phenomena, and are never actually simply stable, unique objects, however they may appear at certain scales.

When this mentality, that cannot think the multiple, comes into contact with social phenomena—groups acting together, social institutions of any kind, collective action on any scale—well, it can see that what is happening is more than one individual acting in concert with other individuals. But when it thinks about how they act together and what they might do, all it can imagine is that they will act together in the same way that it assumes individuals to act—as a coherent unit with a homogenous and uni-directional will.

This is why the liberal imagination always assumes that any kind of collectivist politics will always degenerate into authoritarianism—the violent mob, the Stalinist dictatorship, the Maoist cell, the fascist crowd, the remorselessly assimilating Borg: this is what the liberal imagination (and to some extent, the mainstream Western philosophical imagination going all the way back to Plato) assumes all collective agency looks like. Whereas, in line with my earlier comments, I think that any democrat and any socialist (anyone who isn't a Stalinist, anyway)

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must allow for the possibility that groups acting together can at least sometimes be characterized by an inherent complexity that they don't try to suppress, by creative unpredictability, by a pluralistic capacity to express their immanent diversity. It is surely true that sometimes the revolutionary dictatorship declares a terror and executes all non-conformists, exhibiting Leviathan logic in reality. But sometimes the opposite happens—sometimes the commune declares freedom of conscience for all and lets a hundred flowers bloom (one thinks, for example, of the incredible wave of aesthetic and institutional invention in the immediate wake of the Russian Revolution).

We can see a clear illustration of some of these themes being played out in contemporary politics if we look at the debates over Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party in the UK, and the movement that emerged to support it. An endlessly repeated trope of centrist anti-Corbynism is the belief that that movement is nothing more than a personality cult centred around the person of Corbyn—that there is no more substantial movement, that there are no real democratic relations between the people who might be seen as participants in the movement. This is demonstrably empirically untrue—but many of the commentators repeating this assumption clearly cannot imagine a universe in which any other form of mass collective action is possible.

One point of clarification is called for here—and it relates to some of your earlier comments—around the status of the individual as such, in the frame of reference that I'm elaborating. For me it's important to pay attention to the precise terminology here. The individual of the liberal imagination is exactly what its name implies: in-dividual. It cannot be divided. It is not composed of any internal relations; it may be affected by external social relations, but it is not ultimately constituted by them. It is not multiple. Its private interior life is unique and ultimately inaccessible. It cannot be separated from its property. It is almost certainly always male, white and bourgeois, because nobody else can be that fully abstracted from all social relations and survive (of course, neither can the white bourgeois male—but he thinks he can and dreams of being allowed to).

This individual is pure myth. John Locke did not come into the world alone. He came out of his mother's womb into a universe of social relations that preceded him and that was fully constitutive of him as a person.

That doesn't mean he wasn't a unique person. From my perspective it is perfectly possible to say that we are all unique singular persons. But being a unique singular person is not necessarily the same as being an 'individual,' in the classic sense. The unique singular person is unique by virtue of the fact that nobody else occupies

precisely the point in precisely the same network of social relations that they do. But that's not the same as being an individual as such. The 'individual' is unique because they are in-dividual, indivisible, non-relational, whole.

Of course, as you rightly imply in some of your earlier comments (I think), we live in a social world composed of institutions that both assume the individuality of the individual, and do everything they can to enforce it, and to make us feel that we can only experience ourselves as individuals and ought only to experience ourselves as individuals. We are forced to experience ourselves as individuals even if we realize that on some level, the experience that is imposed on us is artificial and can never actually correspond to the full complexity—or even the mundane material truth—of lived reality. Of course those are realities that we have to deal with: politically, psychologically, culturally and institutionally.

Anyway—that's why individualism is bad. By individualism I don't mean necessarily any particular ethical or political stance—I simply mean the belief that we really are 'individuals' in the sense that I've used the term (just as 'racism' is basically just the belief that there really are human 'races'). In this sense, the thought of the multiple is always the real opposite of individualism. So 'meta-individualism' names what happens when that same individualist, anti-multiple mentality encounters phenomena that are self-evidently collective in some sense. It can see that they are bigger than single individuals; but it can only assume that they will behave like giant individuals.

Now, to come to your question about populism. I've talked a lot about the 'liberal imagination.' But part of my argument is that the liberal and conservative imaginations actually share some of these basic assumptions. The conservative imagination agrees with the liberal imagination that the only alternative to a society of disaggregated individuals is a society in which those individuals are composed by social institutions into a hierarchical, homogenous unit. Trump's vision of what it means to make America great again, to move on from the disaggregating and dislocating effects of decades of neoliberalism, is to recompose America as an imagined national community defined by cultural homogeneity and traditional cultural hierarchies. And the neoliberal 'centrists,' the legatees of the Third Way (who, incidentally, I still think may pose a greater medium-term threat to decency and civilization than the proto-fascists to their right, simply because they are so much stronger in certain respects), are determined to keep insisting that the only choice that really exists is between these two poles: be-

tween the meta-individualism of the homogenous nation and the pathological individualism of the (highly regulated, highly administered, highly contrived) neoliberal war of all-against-all.

I suppose I should elaborate on that last point somewhat. For Hobbes the war of all-against-all is a kind of abstraction that may never have actually historically existed. It's not something you actually want to happen—that's why you invest the state and/or the monarch with full sovereign authority. For the neoliberals, by contrast, the ideal social state is in fact a kind of state-sponsored war of all-against-all, in which attempts to create social peace, to build communal institutions, to create relations of egalitarian reciprocity, must ultimately be punished and defeated (because, if we don't, we will...well, what would happen? According to Hayek, we would slip inexorably into Stalinist tyranny...I think for most neoliberal policymakers, it's that we would find our economies ceasing to be 'competitive,' and would get swallowed alive by the Chinese hordes swarming over us led by their tyrannical Communist overlords...oh, wait, it's the same story after all...). You asked about how I see some of these ideas playing out in contemporary culture. Well, these are by now clichéd examples but only because they're good ones. Just think of how reality tv, and so much popular music culture, presents us with a vision of a world that is, and could only ever be, this kind of vicious war of all-against-all. That's (meta)individualism manifest in concrete ideological forms.

Alright, so how does thinking the transindividual help with all this? I would say that transindividual thought is simply *the* necessary corrective and counterweight to this kind of individualist and meta-individualist thinking: a mode of thought that would keep us trapped forever in a conflict between liberals and neoliberals on the one hand, and conservatives on the other. I think in some senses, as your book shows very clearly, when we talk about the transindividual, we are not talking about a wholly new idea; we are merely drawing out and making newly explicit one aspect of radical thought—one that has been fundamental to the radical tradition throughout the history of capitalist modernity. This aspect is its implicit or explicit rejection of individualism and meta-individualism, and its consequent insistence that we can think of both singular persons and groups on all scales as productive multiplicities, characterized by an immanent complexity that is not pathological (as individualist thought tends to assume), but is in fact the condition of possibility for all creativity and democracy.

The logical upshot of all this, for me, is that to think about politics from a transindividual perspective is to fully grasp the necessity for political forms that are promoting collective creativity, without trying to reduce or deny the inherent complexity of collectivities on any scale (from local neighborhoods to nation

states to the whole planetary biosphere). In practice this means that when formulating a political alternative to neoliberalism, demands for participatory and deliberative democracy should not be treated as luxury add-ons to a socialist or social-democratic programme that wants to effect social and economic change, but can basically take or leave all that radical democracy stuff. They have to be built into the demands and the program. This is very important. I would say that right now, for example, the default position of many supporters of Corbyn and Sanders is that what's important is to rebuild and extend the welfare state, workers' rights, and the institutions of economic equality, whereas democratic reform (be it in governmental institutions, workplaces, or wherever) would be nice, but it isn't necessary. I think this is understandable, but a categorical mistake.

I was dismissive earlier about those centrist and right-wing commentators who claim that Corbynism is nothing more than a personality cult. But in fact, in the UK right now, there is a real difference of opinion within the Corbynite left over this issue; over the issue of whether Corbynism is, or should be, anything more than a passive movement to have Corbyn elected Prime Minister and to have his government enact a centralized programme of social-democratic reforms, focused on the nationalization of key industries and services. There are certainly elements of the Corbynite left, especially those closest to the Communist Party tradition and the Morning Star newspaper, who think that this is all Corbynism should be, and see no problem with the idea of a wholly centralized project to use the highly centralized British state to build socialism in one country. There are others who want Corbynism to be a mass democratic movement building a radically democratic form of social democracy that would encourage the spread of co-operatives, decentralized management of public services, democratization of workplaces and of public institutions, etc etc. The latter is the logical political correlate of transindividual thought, and it requires transindividual thought at certain times in order to fully get to grips with the obstacles that it faces, in the form of individualism and meta-individualism on many scales.

The radical tradition, as I understand it, has always been about trying to overcome the supposed dichotomy between equality and liberty; it has always been about trying to use democracy to maximize freedom for all, rather than limiting freedom for given individuals. Today, any successful radicalism must be both populist and radically democratic. And I would claim, against many other commentators, that it is possible to be populist without being meta-individualist. It is

possible to aggregate a large number of different social constituencies, identities, interests and demands behind a common program, and to identify clear lines of demarcation between that coalition and its enemies (and this is essentially what ‘populism’ means, according to Laclau, who knows as well as anybody), without then asserting that the internal differences within the coalition be suppressed in the name of some overarching identity.

This is all possible, so long as the enemy against which that coalition is ranged is the right enemy. If it’s against foreigners, immigrants, feminists, or even liberals—then of course the identitarian logic of meta-individualism will kick in, and any such populism will degenerate into authoritarianism. But if it is clearly ranged against the real enemy of human flourishing—capital and its agents—then the coalition can and must retain its character as a productive multiplicity. Today, in the age of networked communications, as commentators like Hardt & Negri have been pointing out for years, the material possibility of finding forms of organization that enable large number of people to co-ordinate their activity democratically is greater than ever before. From this perspective, the chances for non-fascist crowds, for populist collectivities that are democratic and pluralist in character, has never been stronger. But that is exactly why our enemies will continue to bear down on us with everything they have—from the far right (and from the economic sectors now aligned with the conservative, nationalist right—extractive industries and real estate), and from the neoliberal power centers of Silicon Valley and Wall Street. Ultimately, I think that transindividual thought is important not just because it is clever or right or nice, but because it is a necessary element of our struggle against these enemies, who will do everything in their power to turn us into individuals, or metaindividuals, or both, if we do not stop them.

JASON

Jeremy, your point about the individual being indivisible raises an important point about transindividuality that I had not stressed enough, even though I mentioned it at the outset here, and that is the way in which the concept cuts both ways against individualism. First, and most obviously, it works against the tendency to think of the relation between the individual and the collective as a zero sum game, stressing instead their mutual and intersecting constitution. Second, and just as importantly, the individual is no longer indivisible, but is itself constituted by preindividual relations. That word “preindividual” raises all sorts of questions: how can something be preindividual? Wouldn’t it make sense to think of the individual as made up of something necessarily smaller, some kind of component parts that would be individual? Hobbes to some extent does this, breaking human

beings down to the senses and impressions that form the basis for individual and political existence. It is not just that his Leviathan, the sovereign, is made up of people, but that those people are in turn made up of senses, ideas, and chains of reasoning. To risk a cryptic summary of his argument, individual people make up the meta-individual of the state but those people are in turn made up of desires and, most of all, fear. It is the latter that holds the sovereign together.

Preindividual is not some basic atom of individuals, but, as the word suggests something that is in itself not yet individuated. This is because it is relational. Aside from Simondon's own examples of crystals and such, there are two philosophical examples of this concept of the preindividual. The first example, unsurprisingly, is Spinoza. Part Three of the *Ethics* dedicated to the affects begins with some rather basic definitions of joy, sadness, love, and hate. The basic nature of these definitions would seem befitting Spinoza's assertion that he is going to treat "human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (EIIIPref). After all, geometry begins with basic definitions only to arrive at more complex figures. However, as much as the pictures of affective life become more complex, taking on the ambivalence of relations constituted of both love and hate, fear and hope, they do so in a way that stresses the fact that these basic definitions are less basic units than orientations that exist only in their relations. In the closing propositions of that part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that there are as many loves and hates "as there are species of objects by which we are affected" (EIIIP56) and "each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of one from the essence of the other" (EIIIP57). Or, put differently, love and hate, joy and sadness, do not exist, at least in the sense of some kind of basic building block, what does exist is a particular composition of loves and hates. It is in this way that they are preindividual, which is also to say that they are preindividual to the same extent that they are transindividual. It is impossible to account for an individual's affective composition in isolation. In a different vein, Paolo Virno has argued that the basic components of collective and individual life: customs, languages, habits, and fashion all share this preindividual nature. Taking a cue from Ferdinand de Saussure, Virno argues that languages, customs, and habits are, at their very basis, nothing other than a system of differences and, in that sense, preindividual. A given way of speaking or dressing is nothing other than an articulation of these differences, taking its meaning and signification from these relations. This means that the preindividual is always in excess of what is individuated: there are always preindividual relations

that persist, affects are always ambivalent, and one's particular habits and way of speaking cannot be rigorously separated from others. Simondon writes that "a subject is an individual and other than an individual" (2005, 260, my translation).

Why does this emphasis on the preindividual matter? Well, as you say, "to think politics from a transindividual perspective, is to fully grasp the necessity for political forms that are promoting collective creativity, without trying to reduce or deny the inherent complexity of collectivities on any scale." In other words we need to move beyond the people, the party, or the proletariat as a kind of meta-individual, acting "as if with one mind." I agree, but I would also add we need to think of political subjects, for lack of a better word, as something other than individuals, as bounded and autonomous wills and minds. We need to think the condition of politics to be not so much individuals, but the preindividual conditions of individuation.

To illustrate this we can take two recent examples, one negative and one positive. Starting with the negative, there has been a great deal of discussion about social media and its influence over elections in the US and elsewhere. Some kind of anxiety about the loss of autonomy and subjectivity accompanies every new technology: internet, television, novels, even writing. This anxiety is perhaps an effect of a restructuring of preindividual conditions, as ways of thinking, feeling, and living that had previously been rooted in traditions and as the inchoate backdrop of daily life becomes the target of manufacturing and dissemination. As the examples above suggest, every new technology fades back into this inchoate backdrop: one generation's dangerous new technology is the next generation's normal. Despite this eternal recurrence of technophobic alarmism, there is something to be said for the intimacy and immediacy of social media. There is something new, albeit not unprecedented, in how much of what we think, feel, and experience is exposed to the transformations of the culture industry.

Before concluding that we are living in an unprecedented era of control, it is worth considering another current example, that is the increase of anti-capitalist sentiments and sensibilities. Words such as socialism and communism, and the general sense of sentiments and sensibilities about capitalism and society that they indicate, all of which were thought to be relegated to the dustbin of history, have returned, at least as memes on social media. The long economic depression of 2008, the emergence of a generation caught between increased debt and decreased opportunity, and the new unofficial lines of communication that have exposed state violence, to name a few conditions, have in part paved the way for sensibilities, opinions, and beliefs that would have been unthinkable years ago. Recent political transformations from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter

and #Metoo are as much about the communication and dissemination of bits of information, new words and vocabularies, and new sensibilities as they are about explicitly political ideals or philosophies. That is not all there is of course; there are also organizers, protest in the streets, and occupations. But, just as Simon-don argues that every subject is inseparable from a kind of preindividual cloud or milieu that persists alongside it, we could argue that every transindividual political movement necessarily entails a preindividual milieu of ideas, language, and sensibilities. There is no guarantee that these sensibilities will manifest in more explicitly political directions, become the part of transindividual collectives and identities. They could always dissipate as a sensibility or be channeled into a new meta-individual, a new party, that would claim to represent them. To draw these two points together it is possible to say that there are new conditions for both subjection and subordination in contemporary culture and technology, new pathways of control and new directions of rebellion.

The individualist philosophies of liberalism render both of these more or less invisible, concealing the first and making the second something of a mystery. Individualist philosophies that begin with an individual's will or choice begin too far downstream, effectively ignoring the attempts to control and shape opinions, choices, and wills. This is another aspect of a logic that could be called Hobbesian: Hobbes begins with the reason and choices of individuals as the starting point of consent and authority, making it clear that he is absolutely indifferent to whatever promises or threats, hopes or fears, lead to those choices. A decision arrived at under a threat is just as free as one arrived at through a promise. As Hobbes writes:

Fear and liberty are consistent: as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will; it is therefore the action of one that was free: so a man sometimes pays his debt, only for fear of imprisonment, which, because no body hindered him from detaining, was the action of a man at liberty (Hobbes 1994, 204).

Much of the thinking of the modern pundit class follows a similar logic: the opinions of the people are taken as a given without any discussion of the conditions of these opinions, conditions that include everything from economic austerity to massive state and private ideological campaigns. Fear continues to be the passion to reckon with. On this point, the centuries-old opposition between Hobbes and Spinoza is useful, not just in terms of their debate about the multitude but also their respective philosophical anthropologies. For Spinoza we are born conscious

of our appetites and ignorant of the causes of things, including, ultimately, the causes of our appetites and desires. Spinoza does not see freedom behind every decision, even those that would seem coerced, but sees determination where most would assert freedom. As Spinoza writes,

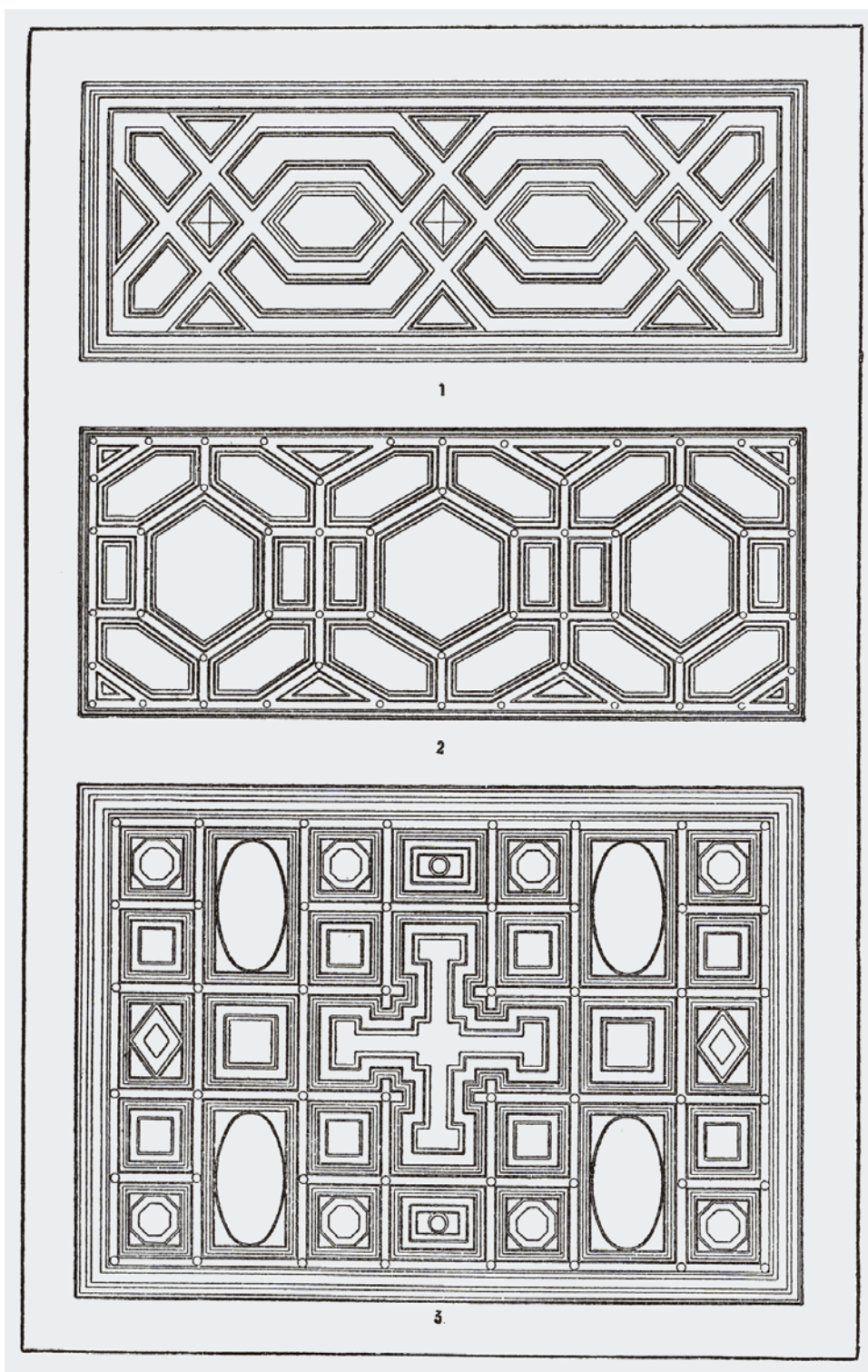
So the infant believes that he freely wants the milk; the angry boy that he wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. Again, the drunk believes it is from a free decision of the mind that he says those things which afterward, when sober, he wishes he had not said...Because this prejudice is innate in all men, they are not easily freed from it (EIIIP2Schol).

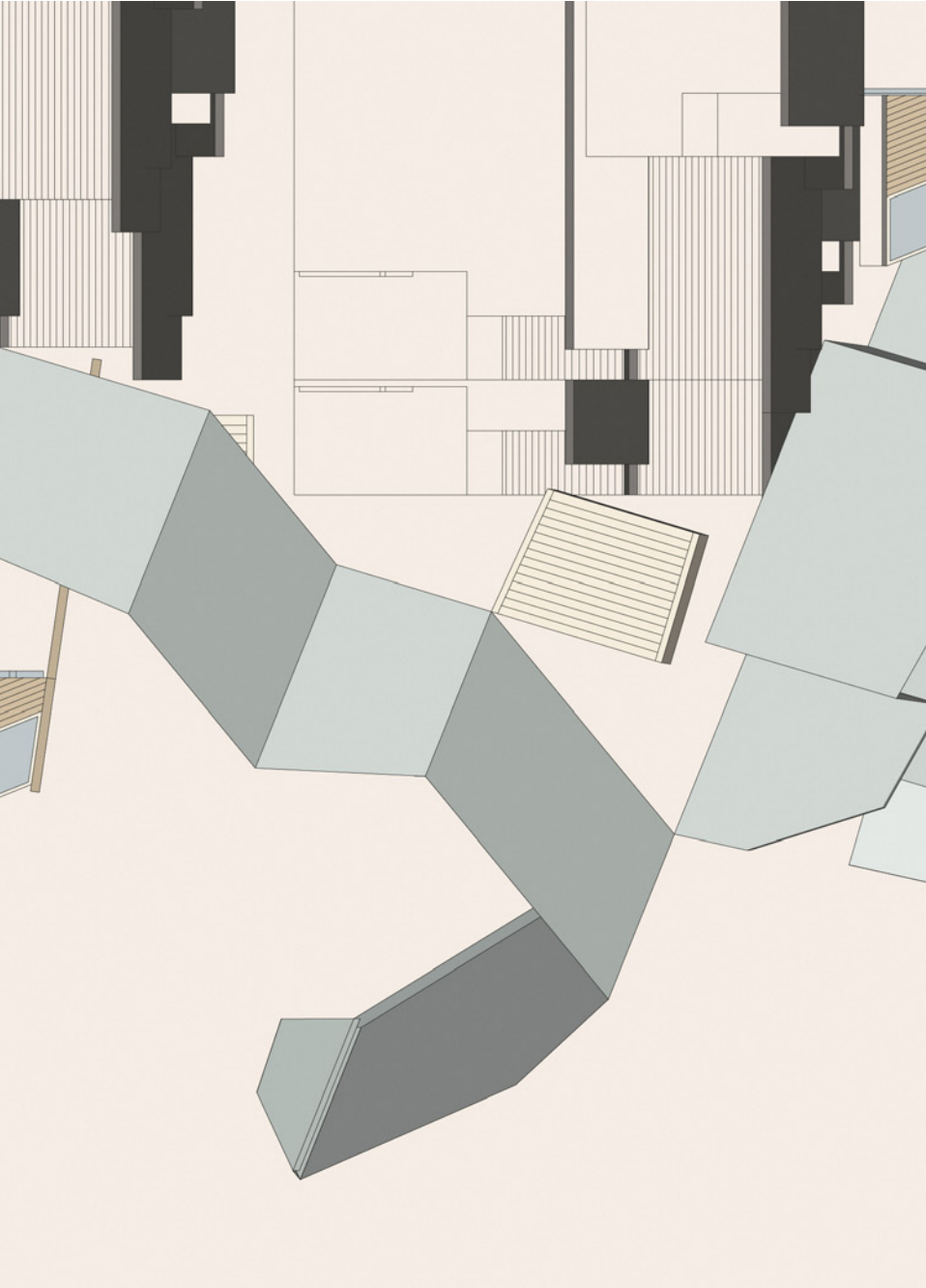
If a Hobbesian anthropology is one that is most compatible with an increasing spiral of fear and authority, then I would argue that a Spinozist anthropology, or ontology, is one that offers the possibility of being determined otherwise. We first have to grasp how much we are determined, our desires and ideas shaped by the world around us, in order to begin to see our capacity to act on the world. We have effects in the exact same manner that we are affected. Or, framed in terms of individuation, starting with the individual, and taking it as a given, often means starting from what is already an effect of the manufacture and manipulation of preindividual sensibilities, while starting from the transindividual is a way to not only understand why and how particular desires come into being but ultimately to transform them.

So I would argue that there are two political problems that come to light from the perspective of the transindividual. The first, as Jeremy argued, is a matter of creating a radical politics that is liberatory not just in its goals, its ends, but is also liberatory in its means: contesting authority and expanding democracy in the workplace and the home as well as the public sphere. The second is matter of transforming preindividual attitudes and vocabularies that form the inchoate backdrop of subjectivity to something that would constitute the basis for collective and individual action. This is in some sense a question of political organization, but, as much as it seems like a classic problem, it is worth noting that this problem always happens under new and different conditions each time—different ideological, economic, technological, and cultural conditions. There is no need to mourn the old meta-individuals of people, party, or proletariat; they are products of other conditions, and the new transindividual relations that displace them offer the possibility of new more creative and democratic possibilities of organizing.

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RECONFIGURING AFFECTED LABOR AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE



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ABSTRACT

Through engaging with the concept of ‘noncollaboration’ this paper suggests that labors of being affected—where value is generated through seducing workers, consumers, employers, brands, and audiences in concert with the atmosphere of the product—provide insightful and illustrative instances for noncollaboration on the ground. ‘Affected labor’ constitutes both a primitive, intrinsic feature of social and cultural life—including the life of the mind—and a central lever with which capitalism functions and extracts surplus value from the temporal grip that feelings have over the body in the ‘heat of the moment’. That capitalism increasingly relies upon engaged ‘players’ being moved by one another means the product presents a key sphere for noncollaboration; the act of being affected contains a latent wealth of possibility as to the range of directions to move in thereafter. Such an opening for noncollaboration is developed in this paper as a logic of subversion: a paradigm shift to feeling affected. In exploring empirical and hypothetical examples of, and potential for, harnessing the creative logic of being affected, this analysis renegotiates the essential place of the individual in critiques of neoliberalism.

KEYWORDS

noncollaboration, affected labour, assemblage, capitalism, feeling

Freedom in chaos

The production of desires and affective ecosystems that contemporary values are generated from aren't recognized through a traditional principle of equivalence. Yet these desires, affects, subjectivities and so on predate productive application in the capitalist context (Eden 2012; Virno 2007). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (1994), for example, explain the potential of the immaterial skills that are exploited in many contemporary labor settings in terms of the innately self-organizing and cooperative capacities of "living laborers", because their cooperation and the "association of producers" more generally form subjectively and independently of capitalist maneuvers (282-283). Rather than the logic of capital predicting the product, "[c]apital becomes merely an apparatus of capture, a phantasm, an idol" (Hardt and Negri 1994, 282-83). While employers' appropriate value out of living labor, such labors—communicating well, embodying aesthetics and ethics, reproducing cultures, being affected, and so on—are also inherent aspects of living life irrespective of the category of worker, employer, consumer, audience, follower etc. (Cameron 2018; Eden 2012; Hardt and Negri 2000). Rather than the traditional Autonomist version of revolt—through the proletariat unshackling themselves by *negating* and refusing their conditions of labor (Exodus)—Paolo Virno (2004) envisions proletarian emancipation through the *affirmation* of creativity, cooperation, and 'species-being': that is, one's innate desire to produce and to create while refusing certain forms of appropriating work (Hardt and Negri 2000, 362, italics own).

In a kind of proletarian paradox—where freedom almost resides within the chaos of work—the majority of the skills required in labors that produce (immaterial) value actually predate capitalist time. This signals a key break in the Post-Autonomist tradition that has developed since around the 1990s: from 'Exodus' as the necessary refusal and negation of work, to 'Exodus' as individual affirmation and appropriation of the specific freedoms within work as life and labor continue to blur in immaterial production. Central Post-Autonomist figures Antonio Negri (1994) and Paolo Virno (1996, 2004) suggest their revised project of Exodus as a way for people to reappropriate their social creativity and generate self-ruling multiplicities, separate entirely from the state but not necessarily from their labor (Hardt and Negri 1994). The authors respectively foresaw Exodus as a process of noncollaboration: exercising labor power as a means to refuse the conditions of labor through affirming rather than negating work (Eden 2012; Hardt and Negri

2009; Virno 1996). Rather than conceiving a desired utopia or final destination, noncollaboration happens locally in states of becoming, like materialism more broadly, that sees being as a subjectively constituted set of localized practices in time and space (Patton 2003). The question Virno proposes we ask of any given space of labor, then, must be specific to that locale: “how we can act to modify the relations of force within *this* social organization of time and space” (Joseph 2005, 32, emphasis in original). For Negri (2008), noncollaboration is characterized by “creative separation” and “the consolidation of a new structure of existence, a new ontological figure” and “metamorphosis,” which together communicate the central idea that desires can and should create new bodies because “[s]ubjectivity is not a facticity, it is an imperceptible departure” (101-105). And the point of departure of the new social subject is not immaterial production as such but its materialization in the subject’s flesh” (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006, 3). Noncollaboration, then, describes one’s simultaneous appropriation and affirmation of the creative desires that are put to work in ‘living labor’ as points of potential and transformation, while redirecting, augmenting, rejecting, and reconstituting its ‘ontological figure’ and the economic advantages born out of exploiting creative ‘species-being’ (Negri 2008, 101-05; see also Hardt and Negri 1994, 2000). But how does noncollaboration function without falling into traditional modes of antagonism or refusal, such as in the protest model that appears largely unsuccessful in curbing systemic inequities in contemporary times; how do we noncollaborate with capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2017)?

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (2013) concept of assemblages—as born out of the “flow,” yet very much a diversion from the general ‘flow’—provides a useful conceptual framework for thinking about noncollaboration (473). Assemblages form as individuals express themselves and cooperate according to their difference; as arrangements of “traits deducted from the flow,” each embodying multiple individualities and expressions that are dependent upon their connection with other coordinates (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 406). Assemblages are predicated on the coming together of differences to form new bodies. Individuals that make up assemblages refuse to fit the measure of a majority: they are “minoritarian becomings,” centered around individual transformation and renegotiation of their desires, while also facilitating unconstraint and empowerment to achieve present ones (Tampio 2009, 393). For Deleuze and Guattari, the question we ought to ask ourselves is: how to balance chaos and order such that one’s creative force and potential to transform (the creativity of immaterial labor and affirmation of a wide range of forms of work) can prevail, without violence and the risk of harm to collective life (negation, refusal, symbolic violence etc.)? Henceforth, Deleuze and Guattari revise the more romantic conception of revolution as in the “bloody historical events” (Patton 2003, 24) and overt rejection, dismissal, and refusal

in acting against majority capitalist systems and modes, towards a potentially more workable and practical use of a “very fine file” being used to open up its vast possibilities (Tampio 2009, 384–385). It’s unclear, though, how the fine art of balancing pursuit and restraint of desire—in the exploration of subjectivity as difference—can be achieved in forming abstract assemblages and in using a “fine file” to noncollaborate (Tampio 2009, 395). By asking what happens if different actors within the assemblage get re-represented/redeployed/reconfigured as a sight of resistance, this conceptual essay expands and illustrates what noncollaboration means on the ground, utilizing empirical, anecdotal, and hypothetical examples of everyday life instances of, and potential for, redirecting “the flow” and harnessing the creative logic of “affected labor” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473).

Noncollaborating with affected capitalism

Contemporary capitalism is built off an economy of desire that recognizes the strength of short-term pleasure, affect, as a vulnerable point of weakness; an invitation to pull at the affective heartstrings of consumers during that moment of “this-ness” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 3; see also Massumi 2015). It runs off the ephemeral nature of being moved preconsciously—by sensorial atmospheres and visceral feelings happening within the body during interaction with other bodies, ideas and objects. Indeed, the value, atmosphere, vibe, and aesthetic ethic of the product and brand—the immaterial value—functions very similarly to derivatives in measuring finance as highly immeasurable and fluctuating abstractions; here, “a complex web of conversions among a wide range of forms of wealth” produces an abstract benchmark of value so that, for example, the future of a currency can become a reified tradable commodity (Hardt and Negri 2017, 165). Derivatives are continuously being calculated in accordance with the unpredictability of demand and supply—and the combined behaviors of consumers, audiences, workers, employers, atmospheres and market fluctuation more generally—as production increasingly takes place in the moment, or what Michael Hardt (1999) terms “Toyotaism” (Hardt and Negri 2017). Toyotaism, as a development beyond the organizational model of ‘Fordism’ and later ‘Taylorism’, structures efficiency in production through elastic and horizontal production lines: decision-making is made in the moment and autonomously, and according to situational influences and forces at play. Together, derivatives, being affected, and the Toyotaist period more generally, are situationally determined responses to the variety of pleasures made by *both* producers in a kind of tango with consumers/investors/audiences

(Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2017). The on-the-spot ‘this-ness’ of contemporary production creates new forms and vibes, uniqueness, thoughtfulness, and authenticity in accord with the range of engaged “players” whose interactional dynamic sculpts the product and its immaterial value (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 3). Moreover, such affects cement their point of difference that is required to retain value in saturated liberal markets.

Work in this sense *is* consumption, and vice versa: workers need to be seduced in order to seduce others, invest in the (probably precarious) job, communicate the product’s vision, and, ultimately, be better workers. The affected assembly of audiences, workers, employers, brands and consumers—in concert with the atmosphere of the product—often draws its value out of enabling the formation “assemblages,” or a “constellation of [...] traits deducted from the flow” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of political subjectivity *is* the assemblage, because it actualizes freedom in such a way that allows for community and agency in what they describe as a “garden more than a tree” and growing as a “network of intersecting and conflicting assemblages” (Tampio 2009, 385). Reified or not, born out of capital or not; the “garden[s]” or zones of production/consumption still harbor, nurture and feed expressive (political) subjectivities, *because life and labor are increasingly indistinguishable* (Tampio 2009, 385). Maurizio Lazzarato (2009) describes work (and unemployment) as the “overall” or “mass effect” of the living breathing multitude of intersecting, reciprocal and coproducing knowledge/power structures, subjectivities, and affects that jostle and rely upon each other for value articulation, in a process of “mutual presupposition.” (113). Like Toyotatism, mutual presupposition depicts the ensemble of subjective practices that cross wires and call on each other to help produce a common vernacular—meanings and values that constitute “form[s] of life”—that cannot be reduced to any one person or thing (Hardt 1999, 98; Lazzarato 2009). That affected capitalism enables the formation of assemblages, which represent political subjectivity as “being in-itself,” renders such labors as interesting spaces to gain necessary insights into new modes of noncollaboration, given that immaterial products “are a form-of-life” (Hardt 1999, 98; see also Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

Subversion through a paradigm shift to feeling affected

The delicate balance of desire for transformation as well as desire for care—that is, the pursuit of creative potential without harm to oneself and others characteristic of both assemblages and noncollaboration—can be systemically traced through the

sensation of affecting and being affected. Theorizing affect means theorizing the realm of the momentary, or what Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) describe as the “this-ness” of everyday life (3); affects represent collisions and a type of push in the world (Thrift 2004). In line with the local and environmental nature of noncollaboration and assemblages—as subjective and material practices born out of place and space—affect cannot be isolated or taken out of context, for as the authors put it: “affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2, emphasis in original; see also Clough 2008;). It is the friction or collision, the points of confrontation between a body and other bodies (or a body and object) that give way to the resultant affect in accord with the time and space in which it arose (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). Benedict de Spinoza (1996) impresses affect as being a collective structure as opposed to an individual faculty: it requires the collaboration of bodies and objects because the potential of the body is defined by its forces of encounter (Brown and Stenner 2001; Deleuze 1998). Furthermore, the extent to which affects—as “forces of encounter”—influence the person is addressed in Spinoza’s (1996) statement: “for all the ideas we have of bodies, indicate the actual constitution of our own body more than the nature of the external body” (112). A priori and preconscious, affect is defined by a transformational, fleeting and collaborative function that is contingent upon the situation in which it arises (Clough et al, 2007).

The way that the body receives feeling during each force of encounter, or affect, depends on how the mind strives to understand that feeling through past feelings of a similar kind, in the form of ideas (Spinoza 1996). This striving to understand feelings in the body represents a form of human desire or essence, but, crucially, striving—or what Spinoza terms “*conatus*”—should not be confused as a subjectively fixed essence. Rather, the desire to self-preserve is a bodily force that is constantly undergoing mutation and augmentation according to the dynamic range of “ideas, signs and images as impersonal, non-subjective, autonomous *conductors* of power, affect, as well as being part of the scene of subjectivity itself” (Williams 2017, 352, emphasis in original). The will to self-preserve, then, is a subjectively impressionable sponge subject to the chaos of every moment. Less of a conceptual category and more of an active mode of existence or striving, *conatus* is the outcome of the relations of bodies and objects, ideas, and atmospheres, rather than formed prior to the affect or collision (Williams 2017). It is through being affected—the passage from one state into another—that the person will come to experience heightened or lowered sense of will to act (*conatus*). Moreover, the history of one’s experiences of feeling helps to define their affective attunement in

the present: past feelings, joys, and traumas of a similar kind are woven into the fabric of the person's mind, becoming nostalgic triggers the present, rendering feeling both a deeply private experience as well as ontologically dependent upon the coming together of opposing bodies and objects as a community project. In this way, the vaster the persons range of experiential references—their history of relations with other atmospheres, environments, bodies and objects—the more plurality and experience of difference they have to draw from in responding to those feelings happening in the present moment. Conversely, if the person has many experiences but they are all of a similar kind, they will have less plurality and experiences of difference to draw from when they reason with the feelings happening in their body (Deleuze 1988; Spinoza 1996). Whether joyful or despairing, being affected triggers a slight—even fleeting—shockwave of recognition or empathy; in being moved by something, to feel variations of pleasures and pains, the body is responsively recognizing, briefly empathizing with a feeling, subject and idea, and preconsciously drawing on its own experience in striving to understand the feeling and reinforce their own ideas. Thinking in the moment, expanding experience, informing the *conatus*, challenging ideas, reactions and limits, are all, then, openings for “accessing a greater creative force in transcending oneself,” through being affected, as well as being a highly lucrative source of contemporary value and manipulation/exploitation (Tampio 2009, 386).

What if one saw oneself as being affected across all spheres of everyday life, given that immaterial products “are a form-of-life” (Hardt 1999, 98)? A psychic paradigm where people—irrespective of their being observers, users, and/or consumers of capitalism—recognize the level at which their “affected labor” constitutes, modulates and reproduces mass material effects and ‘the flow’, acknowledging that they are being affected, may expose the well camouflaged ethics governing our propensity to feel (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). If we saw ourselves as seduced and empathetic to certain subjects more than others—if the paradigm was shifted to understand work, communication, creativity, consumption, love, (un)consciousness etc., as actually requiring us to affect and be affected—would new vectors for noncollaboration, that is more assemblages, begin to form outside of the flow more frequently? But the paradigm shift must be foregrounded in the individual's power as actually “infinitely surpassed by the totality of the external world” because the preconscious sponge of our mind collects sediments of past feeling; that which Sigmund Freud (1997) understands as affect's “pre-individual” basis (Sharp 2007, 749–750). However—within the surpassing totality of the collective unconscious, that pulls and pushes affected bodies into developing their subjective ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’—all engaged players' awareness is critical in the paradigm shift required to noncollaborate by feeling affected (Sharp 2007). Brian Massumi (2015) clarifies that, while there is no total affective autonomy,

there certainly is an autonomy in terms of confrontations and dealings with affects as potential avenues for freedom. Consequently, recognition of the causality and co-dependency of affecting and being affected, and the value being derived, would provide a useful way of thinking through contemporary uncertainty. To recall Anthony Carnera's (2012) significant point, "affects [*sic*] is what activates us, what connects us with others and thereby confront us with our own limits" (80–81). Even by simply recognizing this, we "actualize affect's resistant potentials" by revealing its forces of control over the body and its ultimate intensity: pleasure and 'the moment' (Hynes and Sharpe 2015, 116). That is, if employees, employers, consumers, audiences, passers-by, and observers—i.e. affected laborers—were aware of the value and potential for manipulation that their being moved brought to mainstream economics through noncollaborating with it, perhaps the cycle of acquiring pleasure in the moment that is widely reported on would be intercepted and diverted, and, perhaps, a more transparent principle of equivalence would acknowledge such labors, revealing the *actual* immaterial assembly-line and law of value.

Noncollaborating through a paradigm shift to feeling affected doesn't simply infer that one is literally affected by the material world at the whim of their passions, indeed, merely reacting to feelings can actually reinforce division and cause harm. For example, an impassioned political audience reacting to affects felt within party politics—buying the t-shirt, rallying, consuming and communicating shared ideas, and otherwise laboring to produce the same political product that they passionately consume—may not always be a "constellation of traits," widely informing the *conatus*, creatively separating, expanding the range of experience, or thinking in the moment (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473). Such affected labor isn't so much organized according to multiplicity and *difference*, as is a key aspect of assemblage-thinking (and noncollaboration), but rather seems to be based on affectively contagious versions of *sameness* (Deleuze and Guattari 2013; Negri 2008). While being affected in this example strives to self-preserve (*conatus*), it doesn't appear to be informed through finding the common element in difference, and, in this way, may not diversify experiences and ideas through plurality in ordering the affects (Spinoza 1996). Moreover, whereas noncollaborating with being affected suggests the limits and triggers in affected capitalism as potential points of one's subjective departure and reappropriation of "species-being" through a psychic presence, thinking in the moment in some such impassioned political audiences appears to be in the form of harboring and sealing ideas, succumbing to the moment of passionate 'this-ness' (affect) (Seigworth and Gregg

2010). And, although in both cases joy in ‘the moment’ increases a person’s power to act as evident in the sorts of empowerment impassioned audiences may feel through being affected, it is the range of experiential ideas from the past that help negotiate the “margin of manoeuvrability” in the present—what the idea has in common with other ideas constituting the person’s mind (Massumi 2015, 19; Spinoza 1996). This difference in *conatus*—as informed by sameness or by range—helps to delineate between what Spinoza terms ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate ideas’, where the former requires a person’s accessible and varied archive of experience and their resultant knowledge of the thing affecting them in seeking to understand the cause (Spinoza 1996). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) emphasize the subtle balance of both restraint and pursuit of desires for liberty, freedom, metamorphosis, assemblage-thinking, and creative transcendence: unrestrained, experimental pursuit of desire without harm to oneself and others. Many impassioned political audiences in postmodernity, like the MAGA base, however, appear to pursue desires and act on behaviors that may be harmful to others, through physical and symbolic violence etc. In contrast to noncollaborating with being affected and practicing assemblage-thinking as is suggested in this paper, the impassioned political audience: strives to self-preserve through sameness, may be harmful to others, appears to succumb to the passion of the moment as an endpoint or climax, is vulnerable to “inadequately” ordering the affects, and tends to disproportionately pursue desires more than balancing and negotiating their meaning and restraint (Spinoza 1996).

Noncollaboration through feeling affected —when one acknowledges being affected is being made vulnerable as well as potentially uplifted —may, then, be approached through one’s presence in a personally reflective sense, rather than being present in terms of the toxic and pornographic desire cycles of a rampant consumer society or an impassioned political audience gone rogue. Liberation from the vulnerabilities faced by feeling capitalism, like Deleuze’s minoritarian subject, might mean something related to an internal and psychic presence (Tampio 2009, 393). Feeling affected recognizes the potential to act within each encounter or collision, as both a potentially highly manipulative market threat as well as a new pathway, vector or “deduction from the flow,” to move in a new direction and order feeling according to experience, difference and “species-being” (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 473; Hardt and Negri 1994; Spinoza 1996). Recognizing the way being affected is a major source of capitalist value may prompt heightened embrace of the moment, the moment that is usually snatched up by a precarious labor market, to become one of resistance, reasoning, and negotiation with certain affective intensities in the pursuit of specific freedoms and opportunities in being affected, ‘living labor’ and ‘species-being’ (Hardt and Negri 2000). By ‘being present’, and in doing so recognizing the potentially new

directions enabled by being ‘woke’ to feeling, one is potentially less vulnerable to the subjective pitfalls of thinking overly ideologically (Spinoza 1996). The ephemeral logic of postmodern, or Toyotaist, production demonstrates the way pleasure and the moment hold a stronger control over the body’s capacity to act on those feelings and, in this way, one’s awareness around the vulnerability to being temporally affected could aid the ordering of the abundance of sensorial shocks and feelings experienced in the (capitalist) moment, as well as informing alter-economics (Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000; Spinoza 1996).

Far from a biologically-reigned turn to the individual as assumed to be in some total control, noncollaboration through feeling affected is not to say that it is solely up to the individual. For, as Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe (2009) qualify, “[b]y assuming ourselves to be masters of our bodies and their passions, knowledge of the real order of causes eludes us” (7). With the same vehemence, it isn’t enough to write-off passions based on their ultimate unknowability; indeed, the project of Freudian psychoanalysis is to expose the unconscious in full knowledge of its uncontrollability and impossibility (Cohen 2005). Without appreciating the empathy and recognition toward a specific subject through being moved in the first place, the experience of confronting “our own limits” is potentially detached from and obstructed (Carnera 2012, 80–81). Indeed, this is why Deleuze and Guattari (2013) describe liberty as a transgressive type of freedom that is concerned with the transformation and overcoming of habitual desires, as well as unrestraint to pursue desire in the felt moment (473). When such freedoms abstract and transgress social boundaries, they form assemblages, or “gardens” formed separately from the flow of things. The transformation of ones’ desires develops in accord with the tendencies of ones’ “inward forces” (Tampio 2009, 385). Perceiving feeling and acknowledging the affect things have on individuals, groups and societies is increasingly a requirement for those living in postmodern liberal economies and who are, at the same time, required to affect others in such wide-ranging jobs and industries as, retail/sales, hospitality, education, finance, health services, tourism, media/culture, public service, business and technology.

Conclusion

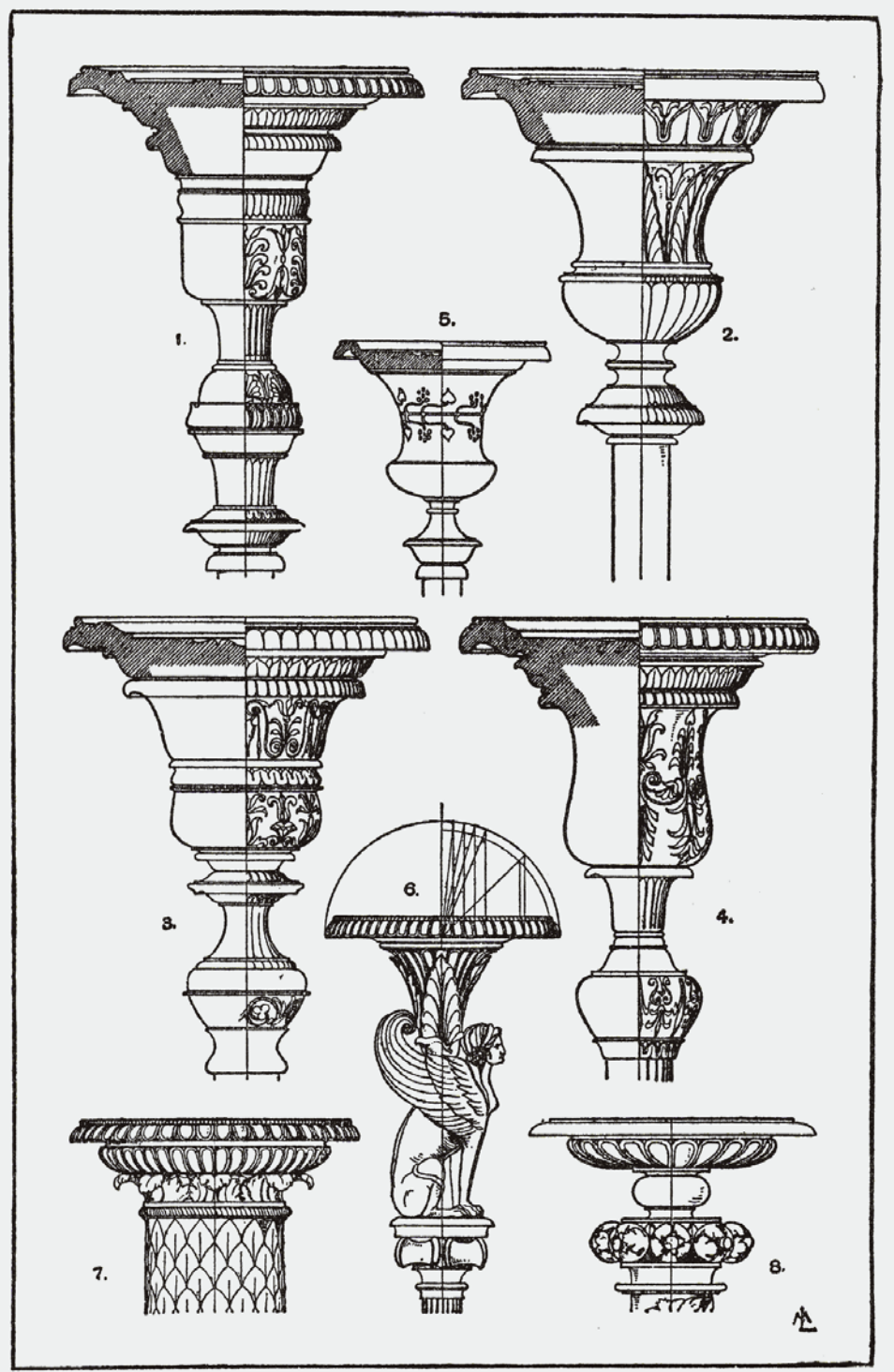
Labors of being affected present interesting opportunities for noncollaborating with capitalism and practicing assemblage-thinking, given the indistinguishable nature of life and labor in postmodernity, as is exposed in Post-Autonomist think-

ing of Hardt and Negri (1994), Lazzarato (2009), and Virno (1996, 2004, 2007). Indeed, the concept of noncollaboration is foregrounded on the recognition that production and work, in their broadest senses, are innately creative, desirable and liberating elements of living life, only they must be affirmed and appropriated by individuals themselves. And, while assemblages are not theoretically linked with production, capitalism and work, assemblage-thinking does provide insight into how we might think of noncollaboration on the ground; affected capitalism, like assemblages, works off seducing on a multidimensional plane that traverses the conceptual boundaries of consumer, worker, employer, audience, follower, passer-by etc. Like noncollaboration, assemblages—as cooperative pluralities that form separately from ‘the flow’ to form new and alternative ideas, forms and practices—are intrinsically creative practices found within the struggle for liberty and freedom (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). Affecting and being affected happens both within capitalism and irrespective of it; being affected from moment-to-moment invites the opening to move in a new direction, negotiate with feeling, and expand the experiential archive with which feelings are related to one another and made nostalgic. The abuse of the moment in contemporary times reflects the fragility of feeling in the moment—as a point of weakness easily appropriated by capital and ideology. Therefore, this conceptual essay has suggested renewed attention be placed on noncollaborating with affected capitalism through exercising precisely that which has been put to work: the creative pursuit of desires, the opening-up and expansion of *conatus*, and assemblage-thinking through a paradigm shift to feeling affected (Williams 2017). Noncollaboration through a paradigm shift to feeling affected would understand work, communication, consumption, love, (un)consciousness etc., *as requiring us to affect and be affected*—that is, our ‘affected labor’. Rather than a deterministic approach to the individual as assumed to be rational and in control, a paradigm shift to feeling affected accepts the uncontrollable challenges of desiring and feeling, to emphasize the experiential value of feeling honestly and ‘being present’ in moving toward assemblage-thinking. A paradigm shift to feeling affected deploys “affected labor” to redirect its beauty and potential; and divert the “flow” of things (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 406).

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BAD TEACHER [WORK-IN-PROGRESS].



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1. Interview.

An interview scene would be perfect here.

2. Lesson-planning.

I want to think here about the object of the bad teacher— particularly in film, but also in literature and television. The bad teacher, I will argue in this piece, speaks to us of failures, particularly queer kinds. She (for the bad teacher *is* normally, although not always, a woman—more on that later), is usually at an angle to the institution she works for. Which is where, sometimes, the bad teacher in the representations I’ll consider is also the *good* teacher, the one who speaks truth to the power of the academy. The bad teacher doesn’t teach what’s on the curriculum, and she makes herself (or is made) abject in moments where the institution tries to ventriloquize through her body. She cares about the wrong things and is sometimes careless. Perhaps she doesn’t seem to care about her institution enough or doesn’t care in the right ways. The bad teacher complains about the institution and, in complaining, is potentially cast out of the institution (even if, nominally, she remains within it).

As Sara Ahmed (2017) has put it recently:

A complaint is thus framed as a *failure of integration*: as not being willing to put aside your differences, as a failure to love, a professor say, or a department, or a university. Integration can mean in practice the expectation that you should put up with forms of behaviour that negate your existence. ('Cutting Yourself Off')

The bad teacher is also, potentially, a bad object of study—as Naomi Schor (1995) puts it, within the academy, certain objects are variously raised as good and others as bad (she uses the example of “dead authors” as good and “experience” as bad—we might want to think about what our own academy’s versions of these good and bad objects are). Making a bad object choice, Schor (1995) writes “is risky business at worst and at best a means to go beyond certain impasses, to read at an angle, to be an intellectual bad girl” (xv).

Lesson #1

Michael Caine is a bad teacher as Frank, the drunk professor in *Educating Rita* (1983), sad and flailing under a glitter ball at a disco whilst his students either watch or try to dance with him. [More in this section then add another lesson before lesson #2 that fleshes out the concept of the bad teacher].

Lesson #2

The bad teacher is not taken seriously; she does not follow what Judith Halberstam (2011) calls “the tried and true paths of knowledge production.” Instead, she is “frivolous, promiscuous and irrelevant” (6).

Lesson #3

Rita in the Danish Netflix series of the same name (why, so often, is there a Rita in these bad student/bad teacher texts?), is a bad teacher who smokes in the students’ bathroom, whilst reading their obscene graffiti. In one such scene, she sees that someone has written “Rita is fucking the prencipal [sic]”. She takes her marker out and corrects it to “Rita is fucking the principal” [get ref], walking “the tried and true path of knowledge production” (Halberstam 2011, 6).

What do we learn from this?

Is there teaching here?

A teacher can walk “the tried and true path of knowledge production” in one way (Rita is there to correct her students’ spelling mistakes, wherever she might find them—her work is not just in the classroom, she is there to correct their obscenities as well as to mark their exercise books), whilst also deviating from it in another. In correcting the graffiti, Rita is teaching beyond the classroom.

Over-work

Is it disciplining, what she does?

Is it significant that it’s the word “principal” that is misspelled?

Boundaries

Where is shame in this scene?

In *Rita*, the bad teacher can’t help herself—from fucking the principal, from correcting her students’ mis-spellings.

What is the spelling mistake doing here?

She’s a bad teacher (she’s having sex at school!) but she’s also a good teacher (she still corrects the students’ work). Indeed, she corrects their work, even when their work is to shame her.

She’s not really supposed to be there, is she? In the toilet?

“Rita, there are rules at this school and they also apply to you.”

“Says the principal who’s just fucked me.”

There are several ways to be fucked by your principal.

Lesson #4

On Facebook, I pose a question: How is the neoliberal university like bad sex?

Lesson #5

“There’s always some bloke above you convinced he’s really good at what he’s doing when he’s demonstrably not” answers one friend.

Lesson #6

“We have to dwell in the wet patches of various senior management 'initiatives' (the results of various managerial fantasising)” responds another.

Sick leave [interlude]

You are 3.22 am
 you are six days unopened
 you are I know you're off
 but
 you are home visits for abscesses
 cannulas catching on essay piles
 nail welts in the cubicle
 you are cortisol infertility
 flapjack fat belts
 you are sertraline crying behind the office door
 you are sciatica snags on the lectern
 can you make something out of this?

Lesson #7

In his book on humiliation, Wayne Koestenbaum (2012) writes “to study a subject is to humiliate the subject and to humiliate oneself by the process of studying it” (19). I wonder whether this is why we want to see portrayals of bad teachers. Do we want to see the person who makes us study humiliated in order to relieve or at least shift the humiliation we feel as students, both for ourselves and for our objects of study? Is this why we want to see teachers brought to their knees?

Lesson #8

“When did it become acceptable to write of a colleague's work 'this is self-indulgent crap' or 'put this manuscript in a drawer and don't ever bother to come back to it'—both comments I have read in the last year on colleagues' work” [Ros Gill, 14].

Things universities say:

You are unprofessional.

This work is too impressionistic.

Don't take it personally.

We are worried about you.

We are worried about you.

We are so worried about you.

You have it easy.



From the series "Liminal Spaces," Adam O'Meara and Mike Downing, 2012–2017

Lesson #8

Eva Green as Miss G. at the end of girls' boarding school drama *Cracks* (2009) is a bad teacher; all her glamour and mystique undone because she fell in love with a student, sexually violated her, killed her, and was then cast out of the school—in part, by her once-adoring students. Now, exiled and undone in a nearby boarding house, she moves around her regulation three items on her bedside cabinet in a humiliating reenactment of the students' dorm rules. Meanwhile, we see her old student acolyte sailing away from the school, face to the sun.

Lesson #9

Sex turns good teachers bad or makes bad teachers worse.

Lesson #10

What would it be like to see Robin Williams having sex in *Dead Poets' Society*? It wouldn't have to be with one of his students (but how, too, would that be?). But what if we just saw him having sex? Say, after the "Captain, my captain" scene? I don't think I've ever watched a Robin Williams film where he has sex.

Lesson #11

In films, when a male teacher almost has sex with his female student(s) but doesn't, it makes them flawed and complicated and sad. Cf: Richard Dreyfuss' character in *Mr Holland's Opus* (1995); Michael Douglas' character in *Wonder Boys* (2000).

I don't know what to do with *Oleanna*. All the reviews seem to be on the teacher's side.

Lesson #12

An apocryphal scene from the bad teacher archives: it is the 1970s in a north England school and a male teacher makes his students stand in the wastepaper bin when they give the wrong answer.

The bad student makes the bad teacher. The bad teacher makes the bad student.



Lesson #13

The wrong answer is dirty, it is surplus. It makes a scene out of learning and out of teaching by humiliating both, so needs to be put in the bin. Putting the student who has given the wrong answer in the bin with it is just the next logical step.

Lesson #14

I will not write this correctly.

Lesson #15

[[There needs to be a link here—going back to the wastepaper bin? Something that connects the bad student and bad teacher with bad feeling??? *Oleanna*???]]

Lesson #16

To work as a researcher within the humanities, certainly in the U.K, definitely at the moment, is to engage in an unwilling *pas de deux* with bad feelings. This is particularly the case if one's research tends towards the capacious: being composed more of connective work between different fields, time periods, and forms (rather than the “drilling down” work that often and too frequently now characterises the only option for institutionally and culturally legitimised academic research)—if you are, in other words, interested in lots of things. The managerial and disciplinary rhetoric directed at researchers working in looser, associative, eclectic idioms of interest often begins with gentle chastisement (“you're too scattered,” “you need to think about your brand,” “I'm worried about you,” is the language of the manager-who-cares) ranging to punitive measures (the threat of exclusion from the REF, the stymying of the kinds of allowance—such as paid leave—that allow researchers in the humanities to do their research, and general although maybe subtle ‘black-sheeping’ within a department) which has as its apex the withholding of opportunities for promotion.

Lesson #17

In Mark Merlis' 1994 novel *American Studies*, esteemed literature professor, Marxist and closeted queer Tom Slater writes a barely-coded paean to homoeroticism in literature—a kind of *Between Men* for the 1950s. Upon the publication of his book, he is kicked out of the Party for being “irredeemably apostate” (107). Writing the wrong kind of book—too queer, too subjective but also too Marxist—he outs himself twice: once from the closet, then from the Communist Party. In a final cruel twist, he pleads the Fifth when hauled up to a HUAC-type board, is blacklisted by his department, and commits suicide, alone in a rented property furnished only with [quote the thing about the furniture]

[[Do I want to expand this? More about teachers committing suicide?]]

Lesson #18

Bad teachers: those who dwell in “the areas beside academia rather than within it, the intellectual worlds conjured by losers, failures, dropouts and refuseniks.” Halberstam (2011) says, of these areas, that they “often serve as the launching pad for alternatives precisely when the university cannot” (7).

No alternative is imagined for Tom Slater, though, in *American Studies*—or no living alternative, at least. But maybe the bad teacher can make alternatives happen, like Halberstam imagines.

Lesson #19

In films where the bad teacher has been good for the students in some way, the bad teacher still has to leave by the end. *Mona Lisa Smile*: Julia Roberts’ art history teacher (the Wikipedia page has it as “History of Art”—as if incredulous that such a discipline could exist, let alone be taught by a woman), in a cab heading for Europe as her students cycle alongside her, waving her off. The students have learnt that art extends way beyond that featured in their textbooks and that gender need not be destiny. The audience has learnt that a female teacher cannot expect to have non-marital sex, or unorthodox relationships with her students, and still hold on to her job.

Lesson #19

Do we really want to imagine alternatives to the school and the university as they currently are? Or do we just want the bad teacher to shake the disciplinary scaffolding so we can watch it fall, reaffirmed, back into place?

Lesson #20

I’m giving a second-year introduction to the novel class in the year after finishing my PhD. I’m teaching 18 hours a week and I’m constantly frayed and cramming preparation moments before I spit it out again in jittering, grasped-at extemporisations on this or that text, and questions I rarely wait for my students to answer. In front of me, a student is sleeping, and the rest of the class looks bored—knees and fingers bounce under the tables, phone screens light up and are

barely concealed. I have posed what I think is an easy question—something about the gothic and *Northanger Abbey*—but nobody is answering. I let the silence unfurl for a while until, on an exhale, I say, “You know, you don’t *have* to be here. If you want to leave: just leave.”

Now, I hear in this the same torquing of defiance and pleading of the soon-to-be-left lover. Then, I think: maybe this will wake them up into being good students (what did I mean by this? Compliant students? Students who wanted to respond in ways that felt good to me?) Maybe this will remind them that they chose to come to this class today, to do something called studying or learning or reading—with me.



Lesson #21

A male student pushes back his chair, gathers his stuff, walks out of the room. The rest of the class shuffle and, for one elongated horrified moment, I wonder if they are all about to leave. We all watch his back as he departs, then their eyes go back to their desks and phones, as before. The silence returns.

Lesson #22

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has a lot to say about moments of failed pedagogy. Reading Silvan Tomkins on depression, she talks about these “depressive dramas” that, as teachers, we play out with our students. “On the one hand,” Sedgwick writes, our students “can function for us as ‘substitute *parents* who are to be impressed [and] excited’ but whose ‘boredom, [...] censure, and [...] turning away constitute an enduring threat and challenge” (Tomkins 1995 cited in Sedgwick 2006, 1). Likening the scene of teaching to that of psychoanalysis where sometimes she is the analyst and sometimes her students are, she describes herself “floundering all too visibly in my helplessness to evoke language from my seminar” as if she is “a patient being held out on by 20 psychoanalysts at once” [*Teaching/Depression*—get page ref.].

The moment in my *Northanger Abbey* classroom teaches me never to remind my students that they could leave, because then they might. [[Can do something more with this, using the Sedgwick.]]

Lesson #23

The bad teacher sometimes works as a scapegoat—shifting the badness of education from the structural to the personal and the individual. *The Slow Professor*, in particular, has explored how educational structures work to make the individual feel bad, feel like a failed academic.

The Slow Professor (2016): “It turns out we were not constitutionally weak or unsuited for the profession. Reading the survey [talk about survey] was like opening a window. We shifted out thinking from ‘what is wrong with us?’ to ‘what is wrong with the academic system?’” (2).

Lesson #24

Should I be writing something else?

Lesson #25

The bad teacher reminds her students that they are paying for this.

The bad teacher doesn't remind her students that they are paying for this.

Lesson #26

When, in *Educating Rita*, Frank says to Rita, "all I know is that I know nothing," what are we supposed to believe? That it's true? (So then why is he teaching her?) That he's displaying humility about his own learnedness? (Does this make him a better teacher -all the more learned for his modesty?) Or, that this is a test—of us, the viewer, and Rita? Will we recognise that this is the Socratic paradox? Will we learn the lesson?

Lesson #27

Later on in the film, Frank is drunk and giving a lecture which consists only of Rita's lines before she began to learn what learning was. [sample quotes here] Rita watches through a crack in the doorway but she doesn't look obviously humiliated, as one might expect. Is it, then, that Frank is using Rita's lines to ridicule the genre of the lecture and, thus, the fundamentals of the university itself? Or does the film want to us to see Rita seeing how far she has come (but, then her rise is Frank's decline)? Is this some kind of Prospero-Caliban role swap moment where the teacher becomes the untutored beast?

Lesson #28

Prospero is a bad teacher.

Lesson #29

The bad teachers of yesteryear, like Frank in *Educating Rita*, are not bad for the same reasons or in the same ways as the bad teachers of today. There's something bittersweetly nostalgic about the fact that Frank hasn't published for years and has still been allowed to keep his job.

Lesson #30

I read books about the university and about teaching and I feel bad. I pick up bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, hoping it will make me want to teach again and it just gives me a new vocabulary for the guilt I feel. What will shock me back into wanting this?

Lesson #31

A friend sits in a meeting, at another institution. Surrounded by white Oxbridge men, she feels how Canadian she is, how not of their world. Someone is saying something about how gender studies should not be a part of the core curriculum. Heads are nodding in assent.

Lately, she has been taking her strong body to aerial silks training. She has been finding new shapes in the air, winding her feet into taut binds of fabric, learning to hold and flex and reach all at once. Now, breathing in the dank coffee air of today's exercise in institutional self-legitimation, she imagines herself suspended over the meeting table, her arms stretched in fifth position up to the artex ceiling. On an out breath, she unfurls, her body knotting and unknitting into the silks, spiralling down. Her colleagues are chastened and loving in the face of such brio.

It is clear that the meeting cannot continue after this display.

Workloading

When will you learn your lesson?

not for you

Footnote this

Footnote this

Remember to

That one who needed

At the conference, when they said
I prefer to use this method of
Can you just
CC/BCC/CROSSPOSTING
the notes of the minutes of the notes of the minutes of the
consortium sandpit
sandpit
sandpit

Interview: redux

He is called in to speak to his new Head of School. It will be a nothing meeting, he thinks. All he has to decide is whether to present himself as a well-disciplined and compliant colleague or present himself. He wears a badge that says 'We Not I' to signal that he is collegial but also in gentle opposition to the neoliberal university.

They are all assembled when he walks in: the new boss, the old boss, a woman from H.R. He sits down, pours himself a glass of water, watches his left-hand shaking, feels a bubble of laughter start to rise in his throat.




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White Chalk Powder Explodes in Slow Motion (Take 2), Cinestocklibrary, 2019
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NECROINTIMACIES: AFFECT AND THE VIRTUAL REVERBERATIONS OF VIOLENT INTIMACY



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ABSTRACT

What is the work of racialized trans death in structuring white trans life? Tracing the chalky encounters of 'ordinary' racialized violence, this article extends Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics to bear upon the centrality of racialized trans death in organizing contemporary trans life. In particular, this research analyzes how the circulation of necropolitical affects— what I have termed trans “necrointimacies”— coheres a morbid sense of belonging through fear, trauma, and the consumption of racialized death in rituals of trans memorialization.

KEYWORDS

necropolitics, necrointimacies, trans, race, affect

chalk board [chawk-bawrd] *n.* A smooth hard panel, usually green or black, for writing on with chalk; a blackboard.

—Oxford English Dictionary

Over the past few years, I've found myself inspired, and some might say obsessed, by chalk's inherently paradoxical qualities. On one hand, chalk animates the psychic pulse of life; its powdery residue evoking memories of fiercely-contested hopscotch games, the velvety echo of blackboard erasers, or the stained remnants of childhood's innocence outlined in the hopscotch grids gradually fading on sun-bleached sidewalks.

But, on the other hand, chalk often indexes the morbid abjection of those anonymous bodies whose wretched outlines signal the violent territory of a crime scene. Used to mark the rough outline of a body's awkward position in death, chalk marks allow for a visual representation of violence without the gruesomeness of its lived materiality. This practice of showing a body without actually showing *the* body has always had a dramatic effect in its deployment for the purpose of capturing the public's imagination. At once poignant and cartoonish, chalk outlines are sanitized spectacles that, in outlining the figure of abbreviated life, animate the psychic pulse of death.

As a template for harnessing affect—for inviting a sort of public intimacy around the universal hard-wired fear of mortality—the chalked outline marks the symbolic abdication of space once occupied by the now-deceased body. However, because the outline can only represent a void left by the corpse, the chalked outline imputes presence while simultaneously conjuring up absence. Put simply, when one knocks at the door of these chalk outlines, what one finds is that there both is and is not a body home.

So, let me begin by tracing a rather zig-zaggy path back from an unfinished end. Between March 2008 and December 2018, almost 3000 trans people were murdered globally as a result of anti-trans violence. The brutality of their deaths serve as a stark reminder of the expendability of trans lives: 1145 trans people shot, 577 stabbed, 306 beaten, 104 strangled or hanged, 72 stoned, 59 asphyxiated or suffocated, 45 decapitated or dismembered, 44 tortured, 40 burned, 37 cut along the throat, 36 run over by a vehicle, 36 other, and 481 not stated (TGEU 2018). These figures represent the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Absent from the list are

those whose deaths were unreported, miscategorized, or those who, by virtue of their expendability, simply went missing.

In 1999, following the murder of Rita Hester in Allston, Massachusetts, Gwendolyn Ann Smith organized the first Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) vigil to honor the victims of anti-trans violence. Since then, each year on November 20th, trans people have gathered at TDOR vigils to publicly mourn the victims of the annual toll of violence and to “express love and respect for [trans] people in the face of national indifference and hatred” (Int’l TDOR n.d.). While the scope and nature of these vigils differ slightly depending on where you attend them, TDOR vigils are now international commemorations that memorialize the lives of trans people who have died as a result of violent, transphobic attacks.

I became actively involved in organizing and speaking at Canadian TDOR vigils, in Kingston and Toronto, Ontario, between 2002 and 2010. In Kingston, Ontario, the usual practice was to organize volunteers to lie on the ground so that chalk outlines could be traced around their bodies. Once an outline had been traced upon the ground, the name of a deceased trans-identified person—and, occasionally, the means by which their life was brutally cut short—was usually written in the empty void created by the lines. Although the number of outlines drawn varied from year to year, the victims of transphobic violence were always overwhelmingly trans women of color.

It was in Kingston that I started to feel the first stirrings of what I later came to recognize as a fraught ambivalence, not only to the tension between the narrativization of trans life and trans death, but also to the ritual-esque function of the TDOR vigil. As a trans person of color at a predominantly white post-secondary institution, I was often called upon to either read the list of names aloud or to help prepare for the event by drawing chalk outlines around the university campus. On one such occasion—as I lay on the ground, waiting patiently for a member of the campus queer society to trace the outline around my body—I found myself grappling with the implications of my own involvement with the politics of TDOR, particularly in terms of the narrative erasure of race in shaping anti-trans violence (Figure 1).

In the very act of offering my own body as a placeholder whose traced outline represented an ‘other’ body, I was also faced with the traces of a representation that could not be contained within the outlines of my own body contours. In that moment, the chalk outline was both a literal tracing of my body and an abstracted

sign whose traces exceeded their intended utility—an instant where my body, to transpose a Massumi-ism (2002), was as immediately actual as it was virtual, and where that virtual body was simultaneously rendered actual. The gap between the symbolic body traced upon the cold concrete and my brown trans body was one that could not be bridged through this single act of commemoration. Certainly, I was afforded a measure of privilege that was denied to the memories of those we now mourned for. My identity as a young trans man was navigated with

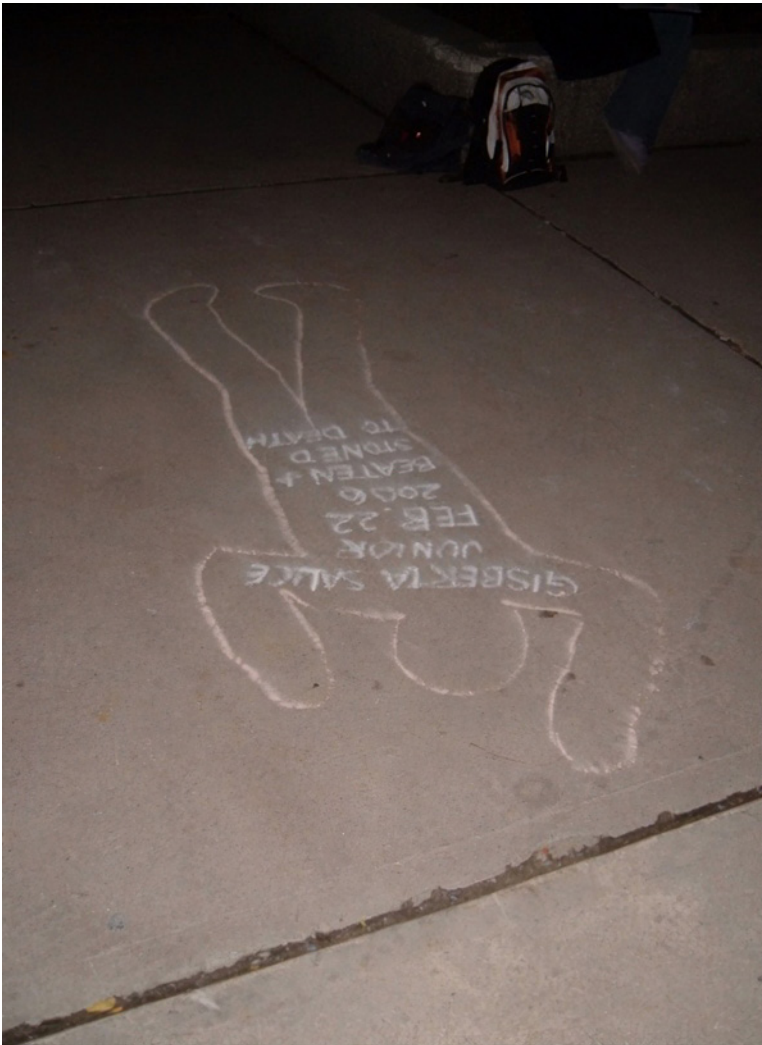


Figure 1. Chalk outline, Queen's University, 2006 (photo by author)

greater ease than a number of trans women I knew. Furthermore, what privilege I had was compounded by my normative ascriptions of future entry into middle-class respectability by virtue of my status as an undergraduate student at an elite university in Canada. In that near-all-white space of trans remembrance, the presence of my brown, post-colonial body was simultaneously in excess of, and inadequate for, the demands of trans remembrance. The ritual recitation of the names of the dead made me wonder about the haunting presence of those we mourned in death and the systemic absence of those same lives in everyday trans organizing. And I began to think critically about the centrality of trans death in this annual event organized by and for trans people.

What emerged from these early encounters with the (im)permanence of TDOR's chalk outlines were a series of tentative questions about the necropolitical value of racialized trans death in structuring trans life: how do narratives of racialized loss construct trans histories? How are these losses—and, by extension, the memories they engender—constitutive of identitarian politics? Which bodies are conjured up at the same time as others are consumed? How might we further complicate contemporary manifestations of trans-homonationalism—the realignment of configurations of race, class, and (trans)sexual citizenship within contemporary forms of national (in)security—through this consideration of the affective circulation of expendable bodies? In short, what is the affective register of the necropolitical work that racialized trans death performs in structuring white trans life?

In “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe suggests that “becoming subject...supposes upholding the work of death” (2003, 14). Mbembe argues that, so inextricable is the politics of race from the politics of death, that one only truly becomes a subject through confrontation with the death of an Other. To date, Mbembe's formulation of necropolitics has been of great interest to critical race theorists in examining how dead or dying marginalized bodies have been fetishistically inscribed into the order of power within state narratives to justify the geopolitical landscape of torture (Alves 2013; Dillon 2012; Haritaworn 2015; Puar 2017; Smith 2013). Several trans scholars, too, have explored the place of the racialized trans body using a necropolitical critique. Within these critiques, necropolitics converges with trans bodies via civilizational discourses that are inscribed upon the Iranian refugee trans body, whose death “is sanctioned in the state of exception as a refugee (outside of the nation-state) and as transgender (outside of the naturalized binaries of sex)” (Shakhsari 2013, 340). For others, necropolitics and homonationalism can be brought to bear on the geospatial distribution and regulation of erotic labor; the resulting “homo(necro)nationalism” (Edelman 2014) is reflective of the exclusionary practices that neoliberal citizenship demands. Necropolitics has also been linked to the rehabilitation of trans women of color

as ‘good victims’ that, in their death, ignite political activity under the umbrella of trans universality (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013). Finally, we see the “dark shimmers” (Cardenas 2017) of these necropolitical impulses in the digitization of trans of color death in social media.

These convergences illustrate that there is a pressing need to theorize trans politicality through an intersectional framework that goes beyond static formulations of “gridlocked” identity (Massumi 2002), and takes into account the affective intensities that circulate around, through, and within the trans body. As this article illustrates, although trans lives are seemingly expendable, trans deaths are not. The afterlife of trans death is a time of politicality: memorials and vigils are at once performed enactments of mourning and formative elements of melancholic worldings (Stewart 2007). Yet these unfolding worlds depend on a trans-normative whiteness that is predicated upon the mobilization of spectacularized and racialized trans death.

I argue that entrance into trans-normative belonging depends upon such spectacularized, racialized violence. As such, racialized trans deaths are memorialized retroflexively as losses whose re-membrances or re-enactions mark the limits of trans futurity within state-sanctioned rights protections. This occurs at the very point where the materiality of race circulates as pure abstraction. While impermanent by design, chalk dust is contaminative and stubborn, always leaving us with the traces of its instructive labor. Being attentive to these chalky encounters of memorialization requires an uncertain willingness to play with—what Todd Ramón Ochoa describes as—an unnameable “*something* that overflows, that cannot be captured, that saturates and consumes” (2007, 487; emphasis mine). Throughout this article, chalk marks the liminality of ordinary violence and raises questions about the haunting visibility of, as Avery Gordon has written, “what modern history has rendered ghostly” (2008, 18). Extending Achille Mbembe’s (2003) concept of necropolitics to bear upon the centrality of racialized trans death in organizing contemporary trans life, I argue that the circulation of necropolitical affects—what I have termed *trans necrointimacies*—coheres a morbid sense of belonging through fear, trauma, and the consumption of racialized death.

Key to this argument is Jasbir Puar’s formulation of homonationalism (2007). First, in *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar describes homonationalism as a form of “homonormative nationalism” (2007, 10) that results from the alignment of norma-

tive homosexual subjects within US imperialist exceptionalism. Subsequently, in *The Right to Maim*, Puar further develops homonationalism to reflect upon the increasing incorporation of trans subjects within “national discourse and legal frames of recognition” (2017, 34). In this article, I draw upon Puar’s work to illustrate how practices of trans remembrance rely upon both the anachronistic presence of racialized death and the absence of the racialized body, thus entrenching necropolitical forms of trans-homonationalism through the spectacularized, affective circulation of racialized trans deaths. Emerging as history’s ghostly residues within neoliberal narratives of trans rights and national freedoms, I utilize the concept of trans necrointimacies to position this racialized circulation of cannibalistic affects as structuring trans-homonational narratives of belonging.

Chalked Up: Expendability and the limits of (ac)countability

Chalked up [chawked up] *n. Brit.* A score, tally, or record.
—Oxford English Dictionary

Imagine the single, vertical stroke of a piece of white chalk against a blackboard. As a signifier for a single count, chalk marks are typically grouped in sets of five, such that each cluster is a simple representation of a number of related objects. Each chalked line indicates an ongoing count that need not be considered a final score; rather, these counts are cumulative, shifting, and open to subjective interpretation and human interference. A tally, then, is an additive record or an archive of gains. Paradoxically, each tally mark can also represent a loss. For instance, each vertical notch on the wall of a prison cell simultaneously signifies another day of freedom lost whilst gesturing to a gain in time as one moves closer to eventual release. Death tolls, tracked in times of war or conflict, also constitute tallies of loss. Therefore, the tally is a non-static (ac)count where a positive accumulation may be read in conjunction with a negative loss.

The work of tallying lives lost, in particular, illustrates how the aggregate representation of death—the positive numerical sum of each life added to a running score—is simultaneously a negative assemblage of individual losses. Typically, death tallies have been used to represent the number of lives lost within a specific location and timeframe, often due to natural causes or deliberate acts of violence. Importantly, in the latter case, numerical data on pre-meditated violence allows for an extrapolation of patterns of mortality from the chaos of each individual death. In so doing, they offer an explanation not just of the ‘why’ or ‘how’ of the deaths but also of the ‘whom.’ Tracing the lives lost draws attention to certain lives

that were (in theory) de-valued. Conversely, it is precisely through the valuation of loss that we come to understand registers of expendability. In this sense, the death tally becomes a symptom of our times, an indicator of expendability. For what is it if not the sum of those human lives that are worth remembering?

Few remember the life or death of Chanelle Pickett. In 1995, twenty-three-year-old Pickett, a black woman living in Boston, was savagely attacked when a man she had met in a bar discovered that she had a penis. According to reports, he beat and throttled her for almost eight minutes before she died. Her attacker, a thirty-five-year-old white man, was eventually acquitted. Upon hearing of the lesser assault charge of two-and-a-half years, Toni Black, a transgender activist, expressed dismay, stating, “I’ve seen people get more jail time for abusing animals...we’ve been judged expendable” (Steinberg 2005, 522).

Black’s observation about the ways in which trans lives have been “judged expendable” suggests that trans liveability is always already foreclosed by the predestined fate of a necessary sacrifice.¹ The disposability of Pickett’s life allows for an appreciation of the multiple arcs of expendability that characterize the narratives of trans women of color as marked by a banal disposability that Giorgio Agamben has previously called the “state of exception” (1998, 12). What is especially peculiar about the privilege of these states of exception is their indispensability to the project of communal meaning-making. To this end, I argue that first, it is only in premature death that these disposable (trans) lives have surplus value, and second, this is the case precisely because of their affective capacity to produce political effects within the trans community.

Globally, between March 1970 and December 2018, over 3000 trans-identified individuals were rendered ‘expendable’ as a result of anti-trans violence, yet only a handful of these people have been documented by name.² While the sheer number of trans murders is disquieting, my primary interest lies neither in a detailed account of the policies that foreclose trans lives as liveable nor in the increasingly sophisticated community-led methods of data collection for tallying their deaths. Rather, I am drawn to the haunting concept of human expendability: What is an expendable life? How does a community (ac)count for its own expendability? Can we reduce life even further within the margins of expendability? And, finally, does this quality of expendability, or valuelessness, endure even after death?

Each additional chalk mark on the TDOR tally of violent anti-trans murders represents the negative loss of a life that has a perversely positive post-mortem value and which, in turn, carries important affective currency. But if a tally is a kept score or a number to be accounted for, how do we reckon with the stories of loss that are likewise marked by its ongoing calculation? What bodily remains (are) accounted for in the painful work of classifying, labeling, isolating, and aggregating loss? For each count, there is an account—likewise, every death has an attending narrative.

The recent hypervisibility of the violated corpse of the trans person of color signals a profoundly political project wherein spectacularized violence has come to characterize the brutal poetics through which trans-normative intimacy is founded. The introduction of the internet era and subsequent ease of online accessibility—when paired with technological advancements and competitive electronic markets—have given rise to electronically mediated practices of mourning and facilitated the birth of virtual crypts. Certainly, the presence of memorial pages on Facebook and websites such as *The World Wide Cemetery* show this new turn to the uninhibited “broadcasting” of grief (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011, 10). Today’s virtual graveyards are the twenty-first century’s response to older forms of collective mourning, effectively shifting experiences of grief from private spaces into the public realm. As Margaret Gibson explains, “the modern experience of ‘sequestered death’ has passed” (2007, 415). No longer a private affair, the specter of death has become one of a public intimacy.

Necrointimacies: Affect and the virtual reverberations of violent intimacy

The face on my laptop screen is frozen in a mute scream of pain. Her matted hair and t-shirt are almost the same shade of yellow, splattered with shocking blooms of bright red blood. Her brown body, contorted with the exhausting agony of trying to protect itself from the blows being rained on it by the man looming over her, is covered in dust and streaks of blood. Captured with his arm mid-swing, the man’s threatening trajectory signals the certainty of further violence that will be directed at the pleading woman lying in the pockmarked rubble of a deteriorating street. A man in a blue shirt walks towards them, his indifference to the brutality betrayed by the casual trajectory of his stride. Nearby, with his arms hanging loosely by his side and his hands tensed in the universal gesture of readiness, another man stands, watching the scene unfold with an eerie expression of calmness on his face. There is no help for the woman being beaten in this screenshot: the men are at once casual observers and willing participants in this spectacle of violence.

In the second picture, the woman has clearly already been beaten for some time. The ground beneath the sky blue of her denim shorts is wet with the errant droplets of blood that completely obscure her swollen face. In the foreground, the bodies of the men have been frozen in a moment of malevolent deliberation. The third picture in this frame remains the hardest to look at. Because I now know what will happen next. In this final screenshot, there are five men in the process of lifting the woman's limp body and dumping it into a wheelbarrow. As two men wrestle with her legs, another man clutches the drenched collar of the woman's t-shirt in order to gain better leverage over her body. Partially obscured by the others, the last man in this frame carries a large plank of wood.

Her name was Dandara dos Santos. On February 15, 2017, the 42-year-old trans woman was dragged from her home in Fortaleza, Brazil, by eight men. In front of a group of cheering neighbors, Santos was kicked, punched, and hit with shoes and a large plank of wood. Still conscious and bleeding profusely, she was then dumped into a wheelbarrow and taken to a back alley where she was beaten again before being shot to death. Every painful minute of the savage attack—the laughter, the taunts, the sounds of an unyielding plank of wood on vulnerable skin, and those horrifying last minutes during which a terrified, bare-breasted Santos pleads for her life—was captured on video, shared on the internet, and circulated on Facebook.

Within a month of her death, these images of Santos' battered body appeared on my social media feeds. The most commonly shared link was to an article published by the *Daily Mail*; titled "Transsexual woman is beaten to death in Fortaleza, Brazil," this article included both video stills of Santos' murder as well as the streamable, uncensored video of her final moments (Al-Othman 2017). Shared publicly by trans-identified and gender-nonconforming friends and acquaintances, the real-time spectacle of Santos' death became an instantaneous anchoring point for reactions that ranged from the immediacy of communal outrage to disclosures of individual anger. Shaken, trans people in Canada reached out publicly and re-affirmed the need to keep fighting for the passage of Bill C-16.³ Meanwhile, peppered amongst reflections on the precarious nature of trans rights under the Trump regime, many comments from American allies also alluded to the barbarism of the cultural heritage of the Brazilian men responsible for Santos' murder.

Sifting through these comments and reactions, many of which cemented the brutality of anti-trans violence as characteristic of life 'over there,' another pattern emerged: an intimacy, or sense of belonging; a "shock or relief at being 'in' something with others" (Stewart 2007, 27) that can only be wrought from the unas-

similable nature of proximity to a spectacle of violence. Nowhere was this clearer than in a Facebook post that encouraged everyone to watch the video and “tell a trans person you love them.”

Posted by a white trans man living in Canada, this public status update subsequently appeared on my Facebook’s newsfeed because it had garnered over 261 reactions, including expressions of anger or sadness. What was immediately startling was how many times this post had been shared. Together with the embedded video, the screenshots of Santos’ final moments in this call to “[g]o tell a trans person you love them” was circulated 69 more times within the span of a few days.

In the midst of all of the political debates and emotional reactions, a handful of trans-identified people of colour posted their own responses to the Santos video, asking others to stop sharing this video of a trans woman of colour being killed. Qwo-Li Driskill, a prominent Two-spirit scholar, issued a public Facebook post critiquing the commodification of Santos’ death in the service of trans remembrance (Figure 2). For Driskill, the circulation of Santos’ death was akin to “postcards of lynchings,” a reminder of the ambivalence with which the racialized and gendered subject has historically been objectified and then disappeared in the service of whiteness, capitalism and empire.



Figure 2. Facebook screenshot, March 9, 2017 (included with author’s permission)

Driskill's reference to postcards of lynchings is particularly salient as it points to the complex ways through which individual freedom has historically been predicated on making visible intimate spectacles of racialized violence. To date, several critical race scholars have explored how the images of racial corporeal decay undergird the structure of historical white supremacy in the US (Carby 2004; hooks 2006). Likewise, these images of racialized trans death continue to bear the "strange fruit" of the state-sanctioned spectacularization of states of exception that are so integral to maintaining "landscapes of inequality" (C. Smith 2013). As a technique of discipline, the photographs of bloodied, unrecognizable brown and black "unruly" bodies (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013, 68) that litter the landscape of American memory find their genealogical parallel in contemporary displays of sovereign domination producing "macabre spatialities" (Alves 2013, 2). These topographies of racial abjection justify exercises of sovereign power over those who must always be excluded from society.

The work of Hazel Carby (2004), for instance, highlights how the "enslavement and dispossession of the not-fully-human" has been integral to building "the land of the free" (n.p.). Pointing to the images of tortured Iraqi civilians in the American-run Abu Ghraib prison, she explains:

The combination of brutal violence and desire that characterised lynching was developed and refined on the landscape of colonialism, has been taught by the US military to death squads in Latin America, and is to be found today in the prisons and precinct houses of the homeland. From lynching to Abu Ghraib, the continuous aim is the transformation of peoples from subjects into objects, what Frantz Fanon called 'decerebralisation.' In the shadow of the flag, of the Pentagon, and of an imperial democracy, lies the other's tortured body. (Carby 2004, n.p.)

Macabre spatialities point to the mundane work of racialized death in producing imagined political communities. They are likewise central to the organization of social relations, forming the "basis on which white life and citizenship [becomes] knowable" (Bassichis and Spade 2014, 195) through a consumptive racial economy that yokes whiteness to futurity and victimhood while relegating the racialized body to death and pathology. Still, while "the work of death" (Mbembe 2003, 16) is central to the reproduction of state sovereignty and the continuing assertion of power over racialized and gendered topographies of inclusion and exclusion, the corpse itself is not always the end of the story. Rather, it continues to hold the power to stir up more death. An object in perpetual motion, the corpse animates the stuff of life.

Viral Necrointimacies and Spectacularized Violence

Chalk [chawk] *n.* A white soft earthy limestone (calcium carbonate) formed from the skeletal remains of sea creatures.

—Oxford English Dictionary

In the aftermath of her death, the viral intimacy of Santos' dying body became a consumable event, generating affective responses that galvanized politicality or inspired public intimacy among white trans activists. Still, by the end of the week, the novel immediacy of the reverberations of that initial shock wore off and Santos disappeared into the archives of remembrance, her brown body forever frozen in the three screenshots that can still (always) be called upon to offer the viewing public a morbid panorama of yet another brutal end.

While it is important to bear witness to the undeniable fact that trans women of color are being killed in record numbers, what does it mean that the trans community often coalesces in feelings of belonging and communality via the virtual 'shareability' of the spectacularized, dis-membered racialized corpse? How can we think through these intimacies of belonging that can only ever be affirmed from the safe distance that is granted by the banality of ordinary trans violences that are emblematic of a place that is 'over there?' How do we make sense of the violent intimacies that are evoked in the re-membrance, or reverberative ritual, of witnessing bare life at its barest end? What then becomes of the possibility of racialized trans life when its value is produced always and only through death?

The re-animation of the death throes of Santos's racialized body works in the service of what, I argue, is a specifically homonational trans-affirmation, and it is not a singular phenomenon. In "Retelling Racialized Violence, Remaking White Innocence," Lamble (2008) illustrates how the online memorial pages for the victims of anti-trans violence are dominated by pictures of white trans victims while the individual memorial entries of trans women of color are often accompanied by a silhouetted outline of the missing body. As Lamble argues, this use of the generic "No Photo" photo has a two-pronged effect: First, by virtue of its genericization, the ghostly silhouette used on the TDOR website obscures the ways in which the bodies affected by anti-trans violence are also marked by interlocking oppressions of race, class, ability, and sexuality. Second, transphobia is privileged as the singular cause of anti-trans violence.

While Lamble's text is notable for its critique of the rehabilitation of the unrepresentability of racialized anti-trans violence through universalized whiteness, since 2008, the politics of trans remembrance has been transformed from one that decontextualizes the unrepresentability of violence—via Lamble's notion of genericization—to a consumptive spectacle that now reterritorializes the trans body of colour via repetitions of virtualized violent intimacy. The TDOR website is now peppered with media links that invariably spectacularize the murders of trans women of color in particular via graphic descriptions and uncensored pictures.

Curated with the help of volunteers, the hyperlinks posted under an individual's memorial entry are mostly found by “just hunting the web” (G. Smith 2016) to follow up on names that have been forwarded to the TDOR website. Because of this piecemeal approach, sometimes the media link meant for a particular victim of violence will redirect you to witness the brutal end of someone else entirely. At other times, this virtual misdirection masquerades in the form of a ‘dead link.’ Still, as with all sleights of hand, the misdirection of information *tells* us something about the other stories that are in play. Misdirections are inextricable from the close-up magic of mourning. The representational gaps they engender are simply extensions of ordinary violences that have historically marked the racialized body as fungible and expendable.

When examining the media links for over 600 victims of transphobic violence that were memorialized on the TDOR website between 2009 and 2018, I found that when a trans woman of color was murdered, the accompanying media link beneath her name invariably spectacularized her death, thus objectifying her body in service of the broader politics of remembrance. Racialized trans bodies are no longer erased through genericization but, instead, are graphically brutalized post-mortem. Replacing the staccatoed efficiency of descriptive nouns that are easily boiled down to the singular, bare-boned truth of a brutal end, this memorial website, populated with almost entirely racialized bodies, has become increasingly enflashed with the raw viscosity of visual representation.

On the TDOR website, these descriptions of the “causes of death” for trans women of color are frequently as bare as the “bare lives” they seek to represent: trans women of color have been variously described as dying from blunt force trauma to the head, to being shot multiple times in the face or head, to being burned beyond recognition. In extreme cases, the attacker may, indeed, choose to get close and personal: limbs are dismembered, heads are removed and tossed in dumpsters, and genitals are hacked off.

The first media link to feature the uncensored corpse of a murdered trans person of color was posted on the TDOR website in 2010, when the body of an unidentified trans woman was discovered in Chihuahua, Mexico (Int'l TDOR 2010). Although the cause of death on her individual memorial entry for 2010 states that she was simply beheaded, the TDOR spreadsheet tells us that she was “beheaded while still alive” and that “her head was found a mile away from her body” (Int'l TDOR n.d.). On her individual memorial entry, a hyperlink to a Spanish-language blog shows a very graphic picture of a bruised and bloodied decapitated torso lying on the ground. The image is haunting because it re-animates the duality of her erasure: first, in literal death—as a body stripped of the identifying characteristics that would have been granted to it by the presence of a head—and then in the subsequent narration of that death. In lieu of a name or a picture—for we are provided with only the generic “No Photo” photo for this “unidentified transgender woman”—this virtual injunction to behold the corpse via the media link highlights the disjunction between the hypervisible banality of post-mortem racial abjection and the convivial racial erasures that sustain the curatorial project of contemporary trans memorialization.

Curating Death

Notably, the vast majority of the graphic photos used on the TDOR website have been culled from both tabloid and mainstream South American press who, as website curator Gwendolyn Smith remarked, “[do] not hold back on those photos” (G. Smith 2016). As an example, in 2012, graphic pictures of the brutalized bodies of Carla White, Leandro Eduardo Campos Ferreira, and Paulo Robert Campos, all from Brazil, were available through hyperlinks on the TDOR website (Int'l TDOR 2012). This trend persisted in 2013. Among other pictures linked to the website, perhaps the most haunting hyperlink was that of an “unidentified child,” a thirteen-year-old who had been hanged to death in Macaíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil (TDOR 2013). In the five screenshots linked to this page on the TDOR website, a child's body lies in a dense thicket of bright green foliage. Close-up pictures show the black rope still tied cruelly against the delicate skin of their neck. Above the burst of white foam running down one side of their open mouth, their eyes have been left blankly open (Flintstone 2013).

The task of collecting and curating stories about the dead is a political one. The images and articles culled from the World Wide Web shape narratives of remembrance. As such, the TDOR website is a curated repository of mediated public memory. When I spoke to Smith about her choice to include these graphic pictures on the TDOR website, Smith said, “I don't think that we, that is to say, TDOR,

the project site, posts them. We're posting a link to a story. The stories have those photos" (G. Smith 2016). As Smith explained, often these links to graphic representations of violence are "the only media links for information linked on the cases" (G. Smith 2016), though she also acknowledged that there might be another way to go about the task of recording anti-trans violence: "You know, if that's what's there...um...and I'd rather they weren't. And maybe we should look at that and maybe we should change that" (G. Smith 2016).

Although these images of brutalized bodies are almost always available through the South American press, there is no obligation to recirculate them, since many memorial pages remain without. The links featuring such images have thus been chosen to supplement what were already sufficiently graphic descriptions of the "causes of death" for each victim. Regardless of Smith's intent, the spectacularized, graphic descriptions of brutalized bodies of color have become central to a kind of ordinary violent intimacy that has also become necessary for cohering the trans-cultural imaginary.

In her interview with me, Smith described this obligation to witness the death of another while sitting through court cases and looking at forensic photos. In particular, the trial of Gwen Araujo—a young trans Latina who was murdered in California in 2002—left her struggling with both the need to see and to *unsee* the brutalized body. Smith explains, "I can't unsee the things that I saw at the Gwen Araujo trial. It was very personally damaging to sit there and look at the forensic photos of Gwen and look at the murder weapons...I felt like I had to. But, in a lot of ways, I wish I didn't" (G. Smith 2016). As my opening example of the circulation of Santos' death illustrates, Smith's compulsion to witness trans death—especially a racialized trans death—is not unique. The self-professed obligation to behold the abject spectacle of the racialized corpse is often what structures practices of trans memorialization. In fact, it is my argument that spectacularizing dead trans bodies of color through tropes of belonging and intimacy is indicative of the centrality of race in the affective economy of necropolitics.

At once hyperlinked and hypervisible, the previously invisible racialized bodies populate the TDOR website with the reverberant force of banal abjection. The memorial archives between 2009 and 2018 are replete with images of unidentified trans bodies lying on dusty roads and of skeletons lying in shallow ditches. There are photos of bodies in bruised repose on sterile autopsy tables and bodies

in various states of decomposition. There are photos of bloodied corpses left in alleys, sugarcane fields, and shallow graves. Abandoned in rubble dumpsters or roadside dumps (Int'l TDOR 2008), the graphic details that enliven these discarded bodies can often, paradoxically, further disembody the dispossessed. As with other discarded objects, these bodies bear the mark of racialized and gendered abjection that suture the temporal narrative of trans citizenship through the necessary caesura of (in)difference.

By providing a frame of reference for how the living come to understand their position relative to states of exception, the graphic nature of the South American media links provides a counterpoint to the sanitized nature of North American media coverage. This was highlighted in Smith's observation: "I'm kind of glad the US media doesn't tend to do that."⁴ You know, they're not immune. But they don't tend to. They just mis-gender us..." (G. Smith 2016).

Necrointimacies

In *The Affective Fabrics of Digital Culture*, Adi Kuntsman (2012) traces the virtual banality of everyday violence in digitized spaces. Pointing to "the ways in which feelings and affective states can *reverberate* in and out of cyberspace, intensified (or muffled) and transformed through digital circulation and repetition" (1; emphasis mine), Kuntsman's thought-provoking ethnographic exploration of reverberation signals the importance of attending to the affective and political work of violence while remaining 'attuned' to the potentiality of movement. Kuntsman writes:

Reverberation is a concept that makes us attentive to the simultaneous presence of speed and stillness in online sites; to distortions and resonance, intensification and dissolution in the process of moving through various digital terrains. For example, it allows us to see how the movement of violent words in online domains can intensify hatred and hostility through what Sara Ahmed describes as 'affective economies' (2004a), where the power of emotions accumulates through circulation of texts. But reverberation also enables us to see how the injurious effects of online violent speech can be muffled. For example, it can momentarily dissolve into 'smileys', 'winks' and laughter (although not disappear entirely!). Or, met with some Internet users' *refusal* to engage in dialogue, it can fall out of circulation, become frozen in an online archive—ready to re-emerge again, but immobilized for the time being. The concept of reverberation, in other words, allows us not only to follow the circulation of texts and feelings, but also to trace and open up processes of change, resistance or reconciliation, in the face of affective economies of mediated violence (Kuntsman 2012, 2).

Spectacles of violence, as Kuntsman illustrates, leave traces of themselves not unlike the gradually fading vibrations left by an echo's reverberations. This linkage between 'reverberation' as a prolongation of sound and the affective economies of violence allows for an appreciation of the reflective continuity of effect, of those ripples and vibrations left in the wake of violent encounters that can be felt or sensed despite their remove. Indeed, as Teresa Brennan suggests, just as "every word, every sound, has its valence; so, at a more subtle level, may every image" (2004, 71).

The reverberating quality of violence produces a lingering effect, allowing spectacles of violence to 'bounce' around such that they transfer the watered-down traces of violence's origin stories through disparate moments of absorptive reflection or unpredictable refraction. For a brief moment, within the abstract and fragmented space of the internet, the feelings of loss, trauma, and fear that circulated as a response to Santos' death were given some semblance of substance, coalescing into something more than just emotion. Shared through the 'feeds' of trans-identified people and their allies, the close-up magic of Santos' re-animated death opened worlds by inviting intimacy ("hug a trans person") while also drawing the world's boundaries ever closer by positioning violence as a problem that is always already located 'elsewhere.'

Reverberation allows for an appreciation of the links between ordinary violence and intimacy, but it does not fully account for the way in which the intimate proximity with brutalized racialized bodies prefigure the "affective charge of investment" (Cvetkovich 2003, 49) that mobilizes trans communities within discourses of whiteness. Reverberation is an emergent expression of belonging pre-figured through visual economies of a violent intimacy with racialized abjection. In other words, the desire to 'reach out' in trans-personal affirmation is a re-active response to the displacement of yet another form of intimacy—one where the racialized Other is consumed for the purposes of community building (hooks 2006). In consuming the Other, the material realities that structure bare life are effectively effaced while structuring a de-racialized intimacy forged through proximity with racialized violence.

The task of defining the consumptive quality of an intimacy borne from spectacularized death is a difficult one because intimacy has an enigmatic boxing-with-shadows quality. At a basic level, intimacy describes not just the feel-

ing of connection to something, but it is evocative of an immediacy or sense of belonging. “Intimacy,” as Shaka McGlotten explains in *Virtual Intimacies*, gestures to “proximity, connection—a necessary precondition for certain affective states to bloom, especially those that have to do with other people. Affect happens in and through intimacy” (2013, 8). In this sense, intimacy is a form of identification or shared attunement; intimacy is both reverberation and resonance.

Following Kuntsman’s formulations, resonance is a phenomenon that occurs when the physical properties of a particular material allow it to emphasize or reinforce sound. Thus, if the reverb is the gradual “dying out” of sound, then resonance describes the buzzing/rattling sustenance of a particular frequency. What is important here is that resonance is object-based, and an object that ‘resonates’ is one that supplements the original vibration because of its ‘likeness.’ Expanding Kuntsman’s metaphor, we can say that the virtual proximity to the *event* of Santos’ re-animated death reverberated—or echoed—through the community as a sign of intimacy because her identity as a trans person ‘resonated,’ or provided a point of likeness, for those who identify as trans or gender-nonconforming. In death, the figure of Santos resonated because ‘likeness’ traversed along the figure of her imperiled body, coalescing into the immediacy of intimacy through which a “weirdly floating ‘we’ snaps into a blurry focus...[taking] on a life of its own, even reflecting its own presence” (Stewart 2003, 27–28). However, this reductive approach to an imperiled trans identity as the singular basis of victimized affiliation fails to account for how the specifically *racialized* figure of the dying Santos—marked by the state of exception in life—became a shareable object in death that one is obligated to first behold and then share.

Likeness, or resonance, gestures to the vibrational caesura borne of a forced proximity—a space where the borders between self and other struggle for articulation. As a form of intimate alignment, resonance points to the proximity to “a set of normative ideals and aspirations...tied to capital and corporeal” (McGlotten 2013, 59) achievement. The link between intimacy and the social distributions of life and death has also been explored by Elizabeth Povinelli (2005) and Lisa Lowe (2015). Povinelli argues that the “imaginary of the intimate event is always disrupted and secured by the logic of [racial] exception” (2005, 173–175), while Lowe adds that this allows for the emergence of “modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life” (2015, 18). Similarly, Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) have drawn parallels between the spectacularly violated body of color as “degenerate and killable” and the safeguarding of neoliberal transnormativity within the “realm of life” (67).

As fungible commodities, racialized corpses have historically been relegated to the status of spectacular objects, “permanently available for the ‘full enjoyment’ of white people” and “incapable of being violated” (Bassichis and Spade 2014, 195). The political economy of memorialization must be understood in terms of the colonial histories that govern the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy (Lowe 2015). “Sealed into crushing objecthood” (Fanon 1967, 109), trans women of color featured in the graphic pictures on the TDORwebsite mirror historical discourses that objectify bodies of color as both excessive and necessary for social life. This hyper-spectacularization of banal violence—where identification is formed through the ambivalent oscillations between categories of the human and the inhuman—finds its parallel in other situations. As Kuntsman offers, “the imprisoned orphan, the prepubescent sex worker, the refugee, and the innocent toddler dying of AIDS are such figures, figures of an appeal, a sex appeal that is racial, that is meant to humanize and naturalize what otherwise functions merely as a calculation of risk” (2012, 28).

Any object that resonates does so in a pleasure-driven, possessive economy. Indeed, we can also extend this analysis to explore how images of brutalized bodies of color have historically circulated as fetishistic commodities (Farley 1997; Rushdy 2000; Wood 2013; Yancy 2005; Young 2005). For instance, in his exploration of lynching postcards, Marcus Wood (2013) argues that the memorialization of these abject bodies through their aesthetic circulation can be read as a testament not just to the unique value of each body that is destroyed but also to the collective “white obsession with its inability to destroy this value” (207). Framed by economies of ritual and spectacle, photographs of naked and almost-naked bodies in “extreme states of physical abuse” are, argues Wood, almost pornographic in nature (2013, 217). Extending his analysis to the “trauma postcard[s]” (Wood 2013, 216) recording the systematic abuse of prisoners in the notorious Abu Ghraib Prison, Wood illustrates how these records of brutality create a casual social network of shared experience, shared national values, and shared pride in whiteness. These arguments are paralleled in Jenna Brager’s analysis of the viral consumption of racialized tragedy on social media; for Brager, such consumption underscores larger narratives of the West’s “fascinating cannibalism” of the “always-already violence” (2015, 1665) of vulnerable bodies in non-Western countries. Whiteness is thus formulated within this framework of pleasurable, ritualized returns to scenes of racialized destruction.

Practices of memorialization are symbolically and affectively mediated by discourses of inclusion and exclusion, yet, all too often, the consumption of racialized death is offered as a stand-in for the former while justifying the material structures that suture the latter. Only in death do trans women of color emerge as larger-than-life subjects, accruing macabre value in proportion to the violence of their ends. Bare lives and abject deaths highlight the excess of race, the safe remove from racialized space allowing the Other to “be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (hooks 2006, 380). Conspicuously absented from the theatre of trans politicality in life, the violent intimacy of death enlivens trans subjects of color through graphic descriptions of racialized corporeal obliteration sanitized by the façade of a re-narrativized post-mortem subjectivity. Since the act of witnessing death bypasses real-time individual presence, there is no risk in this version of proximity to the racialized object. Instead, death can be summoned up from the rubble, its value extracted and reconstructed for mass consumption, and then vanquished once again. And vanquished it must be, because the intensity that intimacy demands requires a sustained engagement through the repeated spectacularization of racialized loss.

Extending Mbembe’s focus on the disposability of bodies via the right to kill and reflecting upon the spectacle of the dying/dead trans body in the order of power, I return to my concept of *transnecrointimacies* to describe this spectacular affective economy of trans-homonationalism and the cannibalization of racialized decay upon which the former is dependent.⁵ As an object *par excellence*, the brutalized corpse of the racialized Other contains a resonant quality that is predicated on economies of fantasy and pleasure. By virtue of violence’s distance from the immediacy of real-time proximity, the racialized figure that is Santos is at once excessive and erased, allowing it to first be claimed as an object for trans memorialization, then be consumed in the service of whiteness, and then be further utilized as evidence of a distant barbarism. Thus, we see that together with the embedded video, the screenshots of Santos’s racialized body reverberated at an intensity through which the circulation of the consumable intimacy of her death tentatively resonated in the form of appeals to belonging within neoliberal frameworks of (trans)sexual citizenship (i.e. via recourse to Canadian or American nationalism, necessarily positioned as safely removed from the barbarism of ‘elsewhere’).

As the provisional end-product of an affective circulation of the violent intimacies so necessary to the political project of remembrance, “resonance” extends Kuntsman’s acoustic metaphor to describe a turn to a kind of trans-normativity that is dependent upon the spectacularized violent intimacy of racialized, trans(gender) bodies as the living dead. The intimate spectacle of the dead or dying racialized

body invites the witnessing white body into an affective citizenship that requires that the Other be simultaneously possessed and repudiated. To behold the corpse of the Other is to flirt with the exotic—with the possibility of being ‘changed’ by *transnecrointimacy*—while remaining securely attached to the tether of trans-normative positionality. What resonates is not trans identity as a point of affiliation but, rather, whiteness and trans-normativity as emergent forms of belonging through the scopophilic consumption of the racialized body. Resonance is thus the retrospective reproduction of reverberation,⁶ while ‘likeness,’ or trans-normativity, is formed retroactively through the chalky necrointimacies of racialized trans memorialization.

Endnotes

1. My use of “necessary” here is deliberate as I seek to highlight the ways in which racialized trans deaths are positioned as always already constitutive of trans political life.
2. This approximate figure has been obtained from combining the data available on Gwendolyn Ann Smith’s website with statistics available on the *Trans Murder Monitoring* project.
3. Colloquially known as the “Transgender Bill,” Bill C-16 was passed in June 2017 and added gender identity and gender expression to the prohibited grounds of discrimination enshrined under the Canadian Human Rights Act.
4. While media coverage of anti-trans murders in the US is certainly less graphic overall, it is not always the case with individual reports: The TDOR website’s memorial entry for Aniya Parker, for example, a black trans woman who was murdered in 2014, contains a hyperlink to an *ABC7 News* article that features grainy surveillance video showing Parker being approached by a group of youth who punch her before shooting her in the head as she runs away. The video shows how, after being shot in the head, Parker crosses the street and slowly sits down on the sidewalk before suddenly slumping over, her head hitting the street’s asphalt surface.

5. This attachment to the dead actually gives the corpse power over the living, an ironic instance where we see the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (Mbembe 2003, 39)

6. Forgive the alliteration.

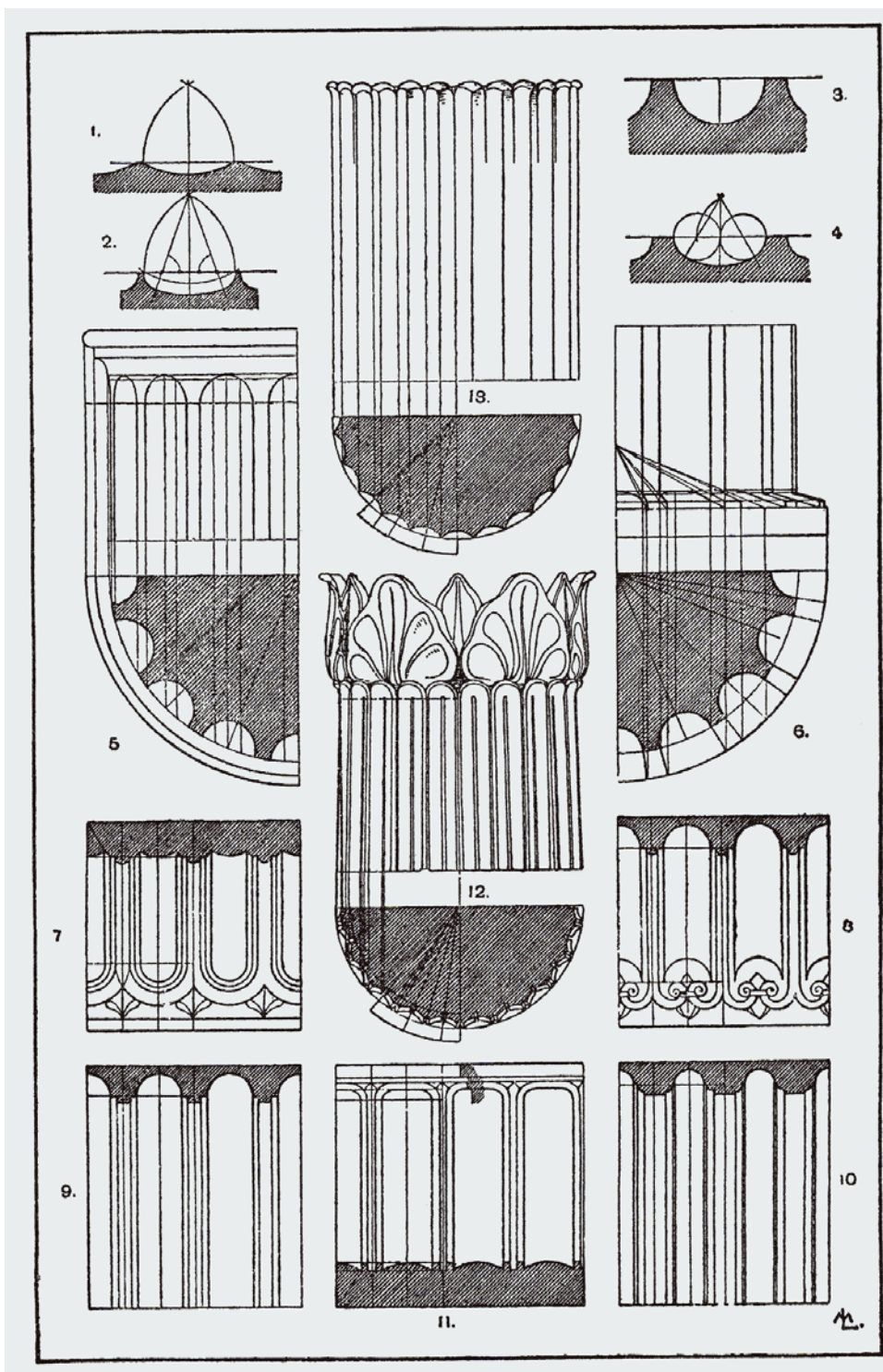
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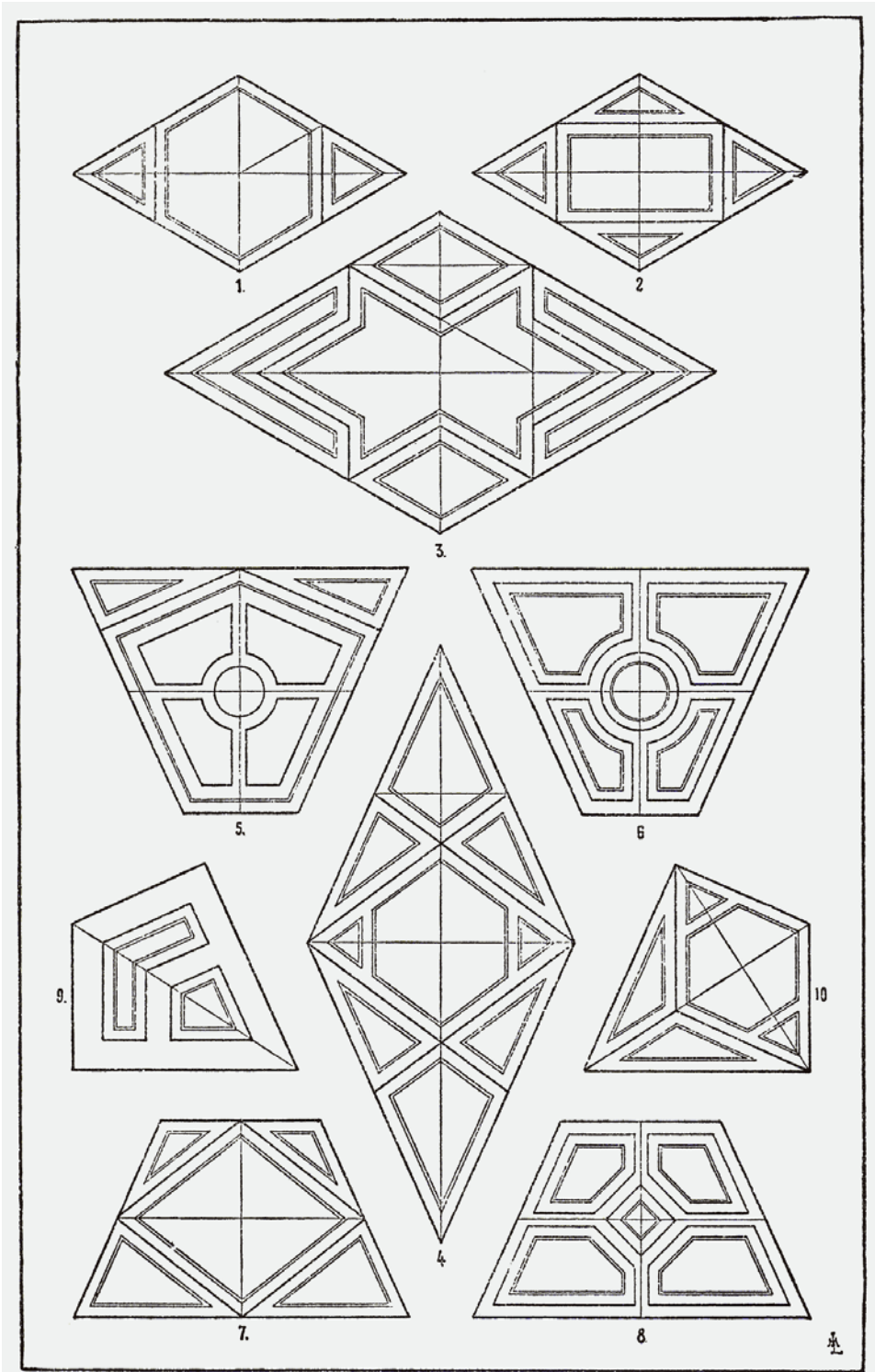
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REVIEW: THE POETICS OF TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA



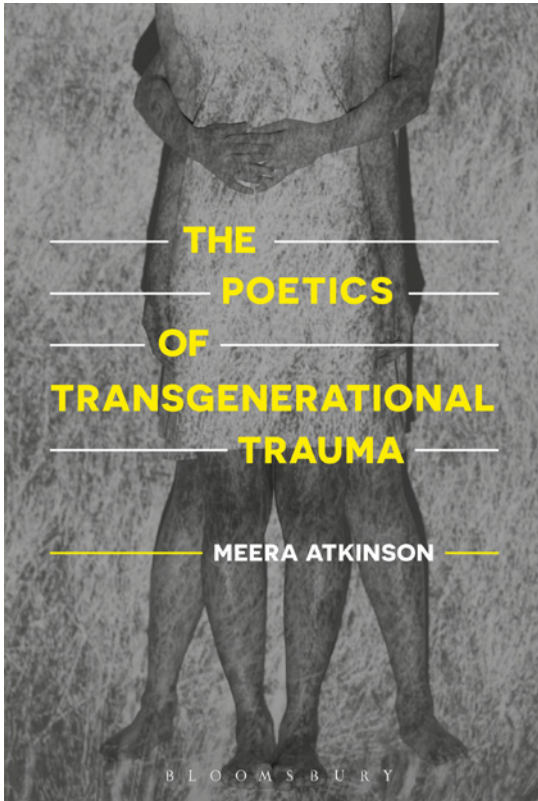
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Atkinson, M. (2017). *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma adopts a feminist, interdisciplinary perspective to challenging the entrenched notion of familial trauma as a historical and personal matter, rather than being embedded in the structural patterns of patriarchy. Atkinson makes a compelling argument for the importance of attending to literary testimony in unravelling the affective forces of transgenerational trauma, noting that “such works stand as vital political accounts, cultural critique, and political action” (2017, 3). Attending to the lived experience of violence, the book offers a persuasive argument for the importance of “literary testimony” as an urgent political category (Atkinson, 2017). The term intergenerational

trauma is adopted in order to emphasize the vexed relationship between familial, multigenerational trauma, and trauma as a social phenomenon. *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* is situated within the broad fields of affect studies,



ies, hauntology, and feminist trauma studies. Moving from Cathy Caruth’s psychoanalytic approach through to Silvan Tomkins’ and Baruch Spinoza’s approach to affect studies, and finally to Jacques Derrida’s hauntology, Atkinson (2017) develops a sound argument for the contagious, “cyclical haunting” of trauma in her close readings of literary texts. The literary works Atkinson (2017) analyses across five chapters are highly diverse in style and topics explored.

Chapter one of the book explores the poetics of transgenerational trauma in relation to the controversial notion of *écriture féminine* by focusing on two novels: Marguerite Duras’ classic work, *The Lover* (1992), and Elizabeth Smart’s *By Grand Central*

Station I Sat Down and Wept (1992). Here, Atkinson draws on Julia Kristeva’s work on “strange body”, aiming to complicate any fixed understanding on gender, in order to argue that “the writing of transgenerational trauma is not defined by... [a] gendered writing body” (2017, 20). In chapter two, “The Ethics of Writing (through) a History of Familial Trauma,” Atkinson (2017) explores the contentious terrain of writing familial trauma. Here, she focuses on Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), and Helene Cixous’ fictional memoir, *Hyperdream* (2009). Drawing on Spinoza’s philosophy of affect-ethic, Atkinson (2017) shows how these two texts stand as different and complex examples of affect-ethic of the poetics of intergenerational trauma. In chapter three, Atkinson (2017) turns her attention to the spectre and phantom in analysing the postcolonial and cross-cultural testimony of Australian author Alexis Wright in her seminal nov-


el, *Carpenteria* (2006). Drawing on the work of psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Mária Török, as well as Jacques Derrida's hauntology, this chapter demonstrates how trauma can operate as both political and social inheritance, entrenched in a cyclical trauma of colonialism and patriarchy. Chapter four, "Family Snapshots to Big Picture: Cyclical Hauntings," continues Atkinson's (2017) engagement with hauntology by offering a detailed reading of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1999) trilogy. The analysis of this text, which is set in the First World War and its traumatic legacy, serves as a springboard for further development of the concept of cyclical haunting in conversation with Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi. Chapter five then returns to Australian author Alexis Wright's more recent work, *The Swan Book* (2013). Here, drawing on the scholarship with which she develops the concept of cyclical hauntings in previous chapters, and in conjunction with critical animal studies and the environmental sciences, Atkinson (2017) ponders cyclical hauntings beyond the human.

Atkinson's aim to make an urgent argument for a "new understanding of the way trauma works cyclically and in assemblage in order to better recognise, intervene in, and prevent traumatic cycles" (2017, 8) springs forth from every page of this compelling experimental feminist writing. Refusing to abide by the psychoanalytic tendency to make the unknowable reified, Atkinson (2017) argues for writing as a strategy of living through, with, and outside of trauma. In so doing, *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* makes an important contribution to feminist trauma studies and literary studies.



The medium Stanislaw P.: emission and resorption of an ectoplasmic substance through the mouth, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, 1913 (public domain)

PHILOSOPHIZING IN PLATO'S CAVE: HÉLÈNE CIXOUS'S AFFECTIVE WRITING



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ABSTRACT

Hélène Cixous's work undermines the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy in the Western philosophical canon by (re)writing and (re)constructing history through lived experience and the quotidian. Her writings defy traditional genre boundaries, and I will thus look at both her fiction and non-fiction to suggest that her resistance to genre is a way of creating affective feminist narratives. In combining theory, poetry, philosophy, and personal experience, Cixous creates alternatives to mainstream academic and philosophical writing styles by allowing her writing to be intimately personal, artistic, and creative. I read Cixous's work in the light of contemporary affect theories and new materialism that are influenced by Deleuzian philosophy because the latter are concerned with many of the same issues as Cixousian writing—embodiment, affect, materiality, the non-human, and the move away from dualistic thinking. Cixous's affective writing is an example of philosophy that explores Plato's cave instead of transcending from it into some abstract realm.

KEYWORDS

Hélène Cixous, feminist philosophy, phenomenology, affect, new materialism

It is my way of indicating the reserved, secluded, or excluded path or place where you meet those beings I think are worth knowing while we are alive. Those who belong to the birds and their kind (these may include some men), to writings and their kind: they are all to be found—and a fair company it is—outside.

—Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*

Writing follows life like its shadow, extends it, hears it, engraves it.

—Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints*

Hélène Cixous's writing follows what Gilles Deleuze calls 'a life'—her writing is not engaged with individual linear life narratives of coherent characters but creates a sense of a book which lays everything out on a single sheet: affects, materiality, daily scenes, and philosophical musings. Cixous's work is an assemblage of literary criticism, philosophy, autobiography, and fiction. Her writings defy traditional genre boundaries which encourages me to explore both her fiction and non-fiction to suggest that her resistance to genre is a way of creating affective narratives. I read Cixous's work in the light of contemporary affect theories and new materialisms that are influenced by Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's philosophy because these theories are concerned with many of the same issues as Cixousian writing, namely affect, embodiment, materiality, the non-human, and the move away from dualistic thinking.¹ Cixous's work, like much French psychoanalytical thought, Deleuzian philosophy, and theories of affect and new materialism, undermines the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy and Platonic binaries in the Western philosophical canon by (re)writing theory and philosophy through focusing on the quotidian. Cixous's affective writing is an example of writing that is simultaneously poetic and philosophical, thereby exploring Plato's cave instead of transcending from it into an abstract realm.²

In what follows, I will discuss Cixous's theoretical writings such as "Sorties" (1975), "The Laugh of Medusa" (1975), *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993), and *Rootprints* (1994), to demonstrate how her concept of *écriture féminine* has developed over decades and should be examined alongside contemporary studies in affect and new materialism as well as being read in French psycholinguistic tradition. I read closely Cixous's novel *Hyperdream* (2006) to explore how she depicts what Deleuze defines as 'a life' in "Immanence: A Life" (1995). I begin by examining the idea of a self as an assemblage of a life in *Hyperdream*, and how Cixous expresses this idea in writing. I then look at embodied, non-human

affects to finally explore the “texxture” of material things, whether human or non-human, and return to the importance of embodiment and touch (physical or otherwise) in affect and affective writing. I propose that in Cixousian writing a self becomes an affective assemblage in relation to and with other bodies, and that for this reason, the self in Cixous’s fiction cannot be understood merely in terms of psychoanalytical and deconstructionist models, but has to be examined with theories of affect and new materialism.

A life, and a self as an assemblage in *Hyperdream*

Hyperdream does not deal with identity, autobiography, or characters in the traditional sense; it is not a feminist confessional narrative but a meditation on affective experience of the narrator’s own singular subjectivity which is an assemblage of memories, hopes, dreams, daily life, and materiality of things and other people. The narrator takes an everyday scene, usually a scene from a daily life—her mother laughing, the narrator sitting among her books or staring at an old bed, or losing her nightdress. *Hyperdream* is a novel *par excellence* of haecceities (not just her mother but her mother’s moods and appetites in specific times of a day or a year; not the whole bed but mattresses and corkscrews and frames and their relation to the narrator and their changing meaning in time), of hopes, dreams, memories, losses, mourning, mornings, and cats.³ It is written as a first-person narration and although the reader never learns who this ‘I’ is, we can assume by references to a friend called ‘JD’ to be Jacques Derrida, and a certain mother Eve, and to past history of growing up in Algeria as a Jewish French girl, that the narrator is a version of Hélène Cixous. Mairéad Hanrahan proposes in “Of Altobiography” (2000), that like many of Cixous’s novels, *Hyperdream* is *altobiography*—not autobiography but biography of alterity(ies) of oneself.

However, it seems there is no *one* self in *Hyperdream*, as the novel explores the thoughts around Walter Benjamin’s bed, the narrator’s nightdress, and her mother’s skin, to show how materiality and the different ways it affects us makes us different subjects in each specific relation. The characters (if one can call them so) in *Hyperdream* do not have linear and coherent subjectivity but a subjectivity that is fragmented. That is, none of the characters in *Hyperdream* have a full name: only JD is used, and the narrator’s mother is sometimes called Eve. Otherwise, only words like ‘brother’, ‘mother’, ‘friend’, and ‘beloved’ are used. Neither does the narrator ask who the self is who speaks, and what it means to be this self, but asks something small, like “what is my mother doing” and “what can this bedframe tell me”, and from those questions, via poetic musings, she begins to explore philosophical questions about life and selfhood.

All these questions and their potential answers are given equal importance and space for contemplation in *Hyperdream*. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write: “The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out ... on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations. Kleist invented a writing of this type, a broken chain of affects and variable speeds, with accelerations and transformations, always in a relation with the outside” (1980, 10). Cixous too is theorising this kind of writing, as well as practising it in her fiction. *Hyperdream* feels like a text that could and should be laid out on only one sheet, where all events, both virtual and actual, happen at the same time, where all objects and people are equally relevant at all points in time, and where inside and outside (material and psychological) are depicted equally. Perhaps the most apparent stylistic device to create the effect of a single page is the use of repetition. In *Hyperdream* paragraphs and phrases are recycled and repeated and reimagined. For instance, phrases like “you can always lose more” (Cixous 2006, viii, 10), “I mean the ultimate, the last last” (Cixous 2006, vii), “the ultimates—the last lasts—I’m in them” (Cixous 2006, viii, 6), are repeated from the beginning of the text, though slightly altered each time, to demonstrate how thought grows and changes around these phrases—how the same phrases lead to different virtualities, depending on the moment and situation the narrator is in when the thought comes to her. Towards the end, the narrator also acknowledges that: “my book I say is on the move, we are moving each other” (Cixous 2006, 78). In *Hyperdream*, writing is not something the author/narrator does, but something that also does the author/narrator. Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “contrary to the deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is a parallel evolution of the book and the world” (1980, 12).

The same is happening in *Hyperdream*—as a novel, a physical book, *Hyperdream* is not beyond or outside a life but embedded within it. In “Immanence: A Life”, Deleuze describe ‘a life’ that is not subjective but is impersonal and asubjective; an assemblage of all things, animate and inanimate, natural and artificial. He writes, “we will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. A life is everywhere ... an immanent life carrying with it the events and singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects” (1995, 27–29). A life is not something that happens to an individual or something that individual does or has; a life is immanent in itself. Something very similar to a life seems to be depicted in *Hyperdream*—a life of a singular version of Hélène Cixous lived in relation to other singularities, existing in objects, expressed in a book that is written by her while the book simultaneously also writes her into the book.

The idea of a coherent self is overthrown in a life. Deleuze argues in “Immanence: A Life” that “the real problem dramatized in Hume’s humorous picture of the self as incorrigible illusion is how our lives ever acquire the consistency of an enduring self, given that it is born of ‘delirium, chance, indifference’” (1995, 26). Deleuze then explains, referring to a dying character in Charles Dickens’ novel:

Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life ... The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other....This indefinite life does not itself have moments, close as they may be one to another, but only between-times, between-moments; it doesn’t just come about or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened, in the absolute of an immediate consciousness (1995, 27-28).

The nameless yet singular and recognisable characters, also seemingly existing between life and death in *Hyperdream*, all seem to inhabit this in-between time, freed from their subjective lives, yet very present in their singular life. From the beginning, the narrator muses:

The ultimates—the last lasts—I’m in them, I know this now without knowing it except in every pore of my being. These times are divided into two stretches of time, shifting, unstable, like two transparent continents that in turn meet mingle, mix, separate. There’s the time before the interruption of my mother. There’s the time after the interruption of my friend. Henceforth I am paradoxical. I am before after and after I am late and I am early (Cixous 2006, viii).

She explains how the ultimate last times do not have a date; that she knows this not as a human subject orienting in human time but knows this because she feels it in her pores. I will return to the importance of embodiment in relation to this knowledge shortly. For now, it is important to stress that although there are specific dates in the novel, the general timeframe or feeling of time in the novel is that of in-betweenness that the narrator describes in the above quotation. Importantly, the interruption here stands for death, meaning that like Deleuze’s reference to Dickens’ dying character, the in-betweenness of *Hyperdream* is also an in-betweenness of life and death. In this in-betweenness, time is suspended, and so is subjectivity—a self becomes an assemblage with that which is outside of itself and lets itself be made and remade by this in-betweenness in time and of encounters with other nameless singularities.

Écriture féminine as affective writing

But how, then, to *write* a book that is capable of depicting a subjective yet singular life? Cixous’s contemplates that question throughout her *oeuvre* and explores such writing in her concept *écriture féminine*. She first introduces *écriture féminine* in her

1975 essays “Sorties” and “The Laugh of Medusa”. In both essays, she sees writing “the feminine”, writing the body, and writing the other as possible alternatives to Western philosophical canon (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel) and critical writing and thinking that stems from the aforementioned philosophers’ works and produces phallogocentric, xenophobic, and misogynist narratives. Cixous’s writing is informed by that which is considered feminine in the Western philosophical thought; *écriture féminine* engages with the qualities that are on the right of the binary oppositions outlined in “Sorties”: Head/Heart, Intelligible/Palpable, Logos/Pathos, Mind/Body. Cixous’s *oeuvre* in its entirety is dedicated to deconstructing these dualistic binaries; a dedication which is entrenched in French psychoanalytical and deconstructionist thought, notably articulated by Jacques Derrida, whose work has a central importance to Cixous, and also in the French feminist tradition—Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig, and Cixous herself. The latter tradition, for instance, pays attention to that which is feminine largely because Freudian psychoanalytical thought and Western philosophy fail to include the feminine in theorising and philosophising.⁴ In *Rootprints*, written in the early 1990s, Cixous explains how her work in the 1970s served a political purpose—it drew attention to the underrepresentation of women in the public sphere and the psychological and historical reasons around it (Cixous 1994, 20). Accordingly, much criticism on Cixous’s work has centred around its political impact.⁵ Instead, I draw on the aspects of *écriture féminine* that are less explicitly concerned with gender roles in a social and political context—I focus instead on materiality and affectivity, and how the radical alterity that femininity marks also expands to the world of non-human. Because of the way that Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine* has developed over decades, it is important to acknowledge the centrality that affect and materiality play in her writing. This shift in focus demonstrates how the so called ‘feminine qualities’ are rather affective, and how including them helps to develop a writing that is also affective, and that has the potential to write asubjective yet singular narratives.

Such writing, however, requires thinking through ways that are not yet thought in most traditional philosophical discourses. That is, if traditional philosophical discourse is thought to be rational, then *écriture féminine* also leaves space for that which is affective and emotional. Elizabeth Grosz explains that the modern style for philosophical discourse is based on its separation from poetry and myth (1990, 150). She notes that Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* embody philosophical, psychological, poetic, theological, and narrational features, and proposes that

it was around the fifth and the third centuries BC that philosophical discourse gained specific standards and style (Grosz 1990, 147–175). It was then when “its propositions gain precise, unambiguous formulation and a truth-function; only, that is, when philosophy carefully controls language, clears up ‘poetic’ ambiguities, is cast into a propositional form, placed within the structure of the logical syllogism and assessed in terms of truth and validity will a statement become philosophical” (Grosz 1990, 147). Grosz argues that the project of feminist philosophy is, with its focus on poetics, rhythm, and sensory experience, a revolt against the traditional philosophical discursive style.⁶ Grosz does not give specific examples from philosophical writing that works with poetics, but it is in Deleuze and Guattari that we find references to various philosophical novelists such as Kafka, Woolf, and Kleist. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari say that, although they acknowledge that art deals with affects and percepts and philosophy with concepts, “art thinks no less than philosophy,” and that they “often pass into each other in a becoming that sweeps them both up in an intensity which co-determines them” (1991, 65–66). Such an approach allows seeing Cixous’s fiction writing as philosophy that includes poetry, myth, and the everyday in philosophical musings.

Cixous seeks a new mode of writing in *écriture féminine* that could write the myriad, affective ways by which selfhood and subjectivity is constituted in a life. That kind of writing for her is:

the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who?—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars (Cixous 1975, 201).

Here, the emphasis is not so much on self and other anymore, but on various multiplicities: “a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown” (Cixous 1975, 201). The feminine here is no longer a biological difference of the female body, but a signification of radical alterity, or rather, multiple alterities. I briefly want to turn to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ‘multiplicity’ here, as their term might help to clarify Cixous’s criticism of Western philosophy and especially Plato. Nicolas Tampio explains in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* that “Deleuze employs the term multiplicity as part of his broader project to overturn Platonism” (2010, 911). Tampio writes that:

Platonism codifies the commonsense belief that human concepts match up with nature’s articulations. Plato posited a universe of the One and the Multiple in which humans perceive inferior copies of perfect ideas ... for

Deleuze, the task of modern philosophy is to break from the Platonic cast of mind and grasp multiplicities in their singularity. A multiplicity is neither a copy of a model nor a fragment of a higher totality, but a purely unique event (2010, 911).

Deleuze, like Luce Irigaray in *Speculum* (1985), criticises as false Plato's idea of a dichotomy between copies and originals. In the same way, Cixous also engages with multiplicities not binaries. Her engagement with multiplicities helps her to invent and practice the kind of writing that is both conceptual and affective. In this writing, what matters is not individual subjects with their life histories, but virtual and actual assemblages these subjects form with the world around them, creating a singular life.

Although affects are thought to be non-subjective, in Cixousian writing, experiencing them starts from an embodied subject, even if this subject is fractured. In fact, the fractured subjectivity, the acknowledgment of one's self as an assemblage might be what makes one open to experiencing affect. In the quotation from "Sorties" cited above, the awareness of a multiplicity comes from the sense of being embodied: "the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I *feel* passing, *that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me.... what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars* (Cixous 1975 201, emphasis mine). For Cixous, life, the desire to live, and being alive are triggered by sensations of the body that acknowledges its multiple nature. Embodiment is also emphasised in the quotation from *Hyperdream* where the narrator muses that she is in "the ultimate last last times," knowing it "without knowing it except in *every pore of [her] being*" (Cixous 2006, viii, emphasis mine). The pores of her being are bodily—she knows this not by mind but by body, sensations, and each pore of her bodily experiences. The emphasis on bodies is already present in Cixous's early writing. In "The Laugh," she emphasises the importance of the intelligence of the body, arguing that if you "censor the body you censor breath and speech at the same time" (Cixous 1975, 880). She argues that when she writes: "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs" (Cixous 1975, 876). Cixous suggests that writing like this "[takes] place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" (Cixous 1975, 883). That is, it takes place in the body or via the body. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write that "aesthetic composition is the work of sensation" (1991, 291). For them, good art, including good novels depict percepts and affects: "percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of

those who undergo them” (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, 164). Yet, for Cixous, affects, and writing affectively, do begin in an embodied subject, even if this being who is embodied changes in time and forms various new assemblages with other bodies constantly.

Writing embodied affects and non-human assemblages

In *Rootprints*, an interview-format book, Cixous talks about affect, contemplating that human behaviour and feelings are influenced by “the flood of affect that manifest themselves in our body and influence our being” (Calle-Cruber and Cixous 1994, 18). Thinking about the nature of affect, sensation, and experience, she muses that: “It begins in this way, and it is only belatedly, and to go quickly, to sum up, that we give general and global names to a whole quantity of particular phenomena” (Calle-Cruber and Cixous 1994, 18). That which begins this way refers to the experience that starts in our body, through our senses; a feeling that we cannot name until time has passed and words and concepts invented for what we felt. In other words, it is affect that a body experiences and from which writing starts for Cixous. For her, writing begins in the same place as affect, with the same sensation in the body; it comes, as she states in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, “from the heart where passions rise to the finger tips that hear the body thinking: this is where the book springs from” (Cixous 1993, 156). Yet, Cixous is not reducing the self and affects the self experiences merely to a single body. Rather, she is saying that what is often ignored is perhaps that we are realized by our bodies. That is, we are something beyond our bodies: we lose parts and shed cells, also regenerate, but remain ourselves in relation to things and people that surround us – for example, our mothers, our nightdresses, and our furniture. What remains are the assemblages that were formed in the process of the meeting of various bodies, human and non-human. In fact, like Deleuze, Cixous does not really want to call a body ‘a body’ because she means various small complex parts of various matter (cells, nerves, tissues) that make up the body. By including the fleshy, mattery part of bodies in her writing, Cixous challenges the dominant discourses and genre boundaries, letting her affects overflow.

Although Cixous is careful of not falling into the idea of a coherent self, or of clarifying purely human subjectivity, humans and humanity are still relevant for her theorising. In *Rootprints*, Cixous indicates that:

the word human is very important. When I say ‘more human,’ I mean: progressing, I ought to say: better human. This means, while being human, not depriving oneself of the rest of the universe....After all, what do we do? We live, but why do we live? I think: to become more human: more capable of

reading the world, more capable of playing it in all ways. This does not mean nicer or more humanistic. I would say: more faithful to what we are made from and to what we can create (Calle-Cruber and Cixous 1994, 30).

But what are we made from and what can we create? Cixous has a potential answer, suggesting that humans are made of the rest of the universe, which perhaps indicates that humans are not separated from the rest of the world of animate and inanimate matter, or that humans are more-than-human (cells, nerves, tissues). Materiality for her, or what she calls the rest of the universe, is there to remind us that human subjects are not abstract but embodied in the world among other beings and things, and that is what makes them perceptible as affecting and being affected, as well as writing affectively. Perhaps it can also be said that for Cixous, affect is never purely human or non-human, it is the encounter between the two, and the acknowledgement of that encounter.

Accordingly, even if affect begins in a specific embodied subject, it does not remain subjective, or become subjective. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write: “affect is not the passage from one lived state to another but man’s nonhuman becoming... It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons. Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation” (1991, 173). In other words, art can capture a human’s non-humanity, or humanity that is itself partly non-human and material. In *Three Steps*, Cixous creates an image of the ladder of writing that descends towards the ground rather than ascending—an image that I would also like to see as a critique of philosophy’s Platonic desire to ascend from the cave rather than exploring the cave. It is a final step in the ladder of writing leading towards affective writing that is not afraid to capture the asubjective, more-than-human part in humans.

In the “School of Roots” section which is the last step on the ladder of writing in *Three Steps*, Cixous focuses on materiality, embodiment, and on that which lies on the ground, and also on that which lies deep inside the human psyche. Her ladder of writing does not reach for the sky but remains on the ground and goes deep into the earth, where humans meet animals, vegetables, and other non-human animate and inanimate matter. Cixous writes:

It is my way of indicating the reserved, secluded, or excluded path or place where you meet those beings I think are worth knowing while we are alive. Those who belong to the birds and their kind (these may include some men),

to writings and their kind: they are all to be found—and a fair company it is—outside; in a place that is called by Those Bible, those who are the Bible, abominable...Outside we shall find all those precious people who have not worried about respecting the law that separates what is and is not abominable according to ThoseBible (Cixous 1993, 883).

Cixous names writers like Jean Genet and Clarice Lispector, and says their writing inhabits the nether realms which are closer to the physical world where different beings reside. Referring specifically to Lispector's work, Cixous explains that conventions ask people to repress in writing that which they are made of, matter, because matter, according to the Law, is abominable. Interestingly, the Latin roots of 'abominable' refer to "away from man," and to "beastly," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, establishing a concrete relation between matter's non-humanity, even beastliness, and the dislike of it.

To challenge this perception, Cixous follows Lispector to argue that matter is far from being dislikeable, but is intelligent, alive, and powerful:

[Clarice Lispector] returns the ability not to forget matter, which we don't notice: which we live, which we are. Clarice descends the ladder to the point of returning to think over matter. We are unable to think matter because we consider it to be invisible. We are made of assemblings that hide their truth, their atomic side, from us. We dislike matter, that is, ourselves, because we are destined to matter, because anonymous matter is called: death. Perhaps it isn't matter we dislike, perhaps it is anonymity (Cixous 1993, 130).

The above quotation demonstrates the importance of matter in Cixous's work by drawing attention to the fact that we often forget matter because it is an encompassing part of our existence, something that we take for granted. The books that include matter are for Cixous rebellious books, "book[s] without an author... book[s] that take life and language by the roots...[books that are written] from the heart where passions rise to the finger tips that hear the body thinking" (Cixous 1993, 156). Cixous does not fear the anonymity of matter. On the contrary, she embraces it because for her our physical bodies remind us that humans are a part of the rest of the universe of molecules, cells, and other non-human phenomena. Instead of pursuing the transcendental by reaching for light and escaping the cave as much of Western philosophy does, Cixous encourages us to stay in the cave, to wonder about our bodies, and understand our lives in relation to the non-human world of animate and inanimate matter that we inhabit side by side with plants, animals, and microbes.

If Cixous theorises about matter in *Three Steps*, then in *Hyperdream* she explicitly includes matter in her writing. There are concrete material objects that affect the narrator—these objects do not represent careless capitalist consumerism, but intimate relation to everyday practical things such as pots, mirrors, pens, beds

and other familiar objects—without which, the narrator writes, “the dead would be lost, terrified by death, tormented by the prospect of the voyage to the foreign land” (Cixous 2006, 72). Contrary to the idea that matter is anonymous and close to death, the reverse happens here—life depends on matter. The narrator talks about a bed, which her mother had supposedly purchased forty years ago from a certain Mr. Walter Benjamin. Until her mother tells her that she bought the bed from *that* Benjamin, the bed was regarded as a simple everyday commodity. After her mother tells her, however, the bed obtains a special status for the narrator. She muses: “I feel myself loving [the bed] for each of the powers fate has endowed it with: history, philosophy, neurosis, friendship, chagrin, the ideas of immortality, the genius of dreaming, the mystery of the resurrection, the resistance to being reduced to nothing” (Cixous 2006, 73). The narrator knows that the bed only has meaning through her. She wonders: “its esthetic value, this depends on me. On my gaze. On the way my skin, my surface, my depths receive the traces of twentieth-century history as it was lived and recorded by this bizarre machine with its cork-screw vocal cords. For the bed speaks. But it only speaks if you speak to it” (Cixous 2006, 74). The bed is wide open to the narrator—it offers her insights into the twentieth century’s history and philosophy—this physical object of non-human matter is what makes the narrator wonder about not just her personal life but a life - and makes her write down this life.

When the above passage focuses on the human mind and how subjectivity shapes our understanding of object world, then there are instances in *Hyperdream* when objects gain more explicit vitality. For example:

[The bed] lay there. I imagine it suffering, if it has a soul, as being similar to that of an old mother-in-law who keeps herself busy in the kitchen enveloped in a silence beneath which she shuts up a terrified prayer: may I not be sent to the hospice. As part of the bed the least visible furthest removed from the fabrics and the body you might say the bedframe occupied the lowest, humblest place,...What’s a bedframe? It is as yet unthought. Wretched I am for everything that has not yet been thought and only my friend could have thought...Who will swear [the bedframe] hasn’t a soul? Who will say what quantity of soul is containable and contained in its frame, its corners, its springs, its empty space? (Cixous 2006, 73).

She muses that the bed has a specific “force”, a “secret strength” that lodges in the metal of the bedframe, which she associates with old age, and wisdom, but also with the “lowest, humblest place” because it is mere material object (Cixous 2006, 73). Here, like in ‘The School of Roots,’ the narrator asks us to think about that

which is not yet thought—matter. Because materiality is no longer equivalent to anonymity and death but becomes that from which the desire to think, know, and live springs. In fact, it is through matter that the mother in law's prayer not to be sent to hospice might be answered—the very human desire to live, and to be remembered, can happen through objects.

It is clear from the above passage that as far as the human subjectivity perceiving the object is concerned, senses are relevant. The object's ability to affect us depends on the tactile, whether this tactile is via physical touch or simply gazing, as was the case with the bed. When it comes to the narrator's mother and her nightdress however, physical touch, and the relevance of skin becomes apparent. For example, thinking of the nightdress that the narrator loses, she laments:

This gown I said for me evokes Venice, Prague, Rome, Edinburgh, Cambridge, Bombay, the desire to go there, the anguished happiness of having been there, the fear of returning and of not returning, and it is not merely the nightdress, it's the whole Hotel, and dozens of moments followed by poems, I said, I cried, I went crazy. And the disaster?... It was as if they'd stolen my skin (Cixous 2006, 70).

The nightdress here stands for an inhuman, or more-than-human part of the narrator—her skin. The nightdress, that is her skin, is not just a nightdress or a skin but something similar to a Deleuzian assemblage; it is a network of all the cities the narrator has visited and all the memories made and feelings experienced there. The stealing of her skin-like nightdress is not tragic because of its commercial value, but because it holds parts of the narrator's self.

Affective texxture

The metaphor of the skin is also important because of its tactile properties. The nightdress, and her mother's skin, to which I will turn to shortly, are relevant as they embody stories that can be touched. Similarly, the text in *Hyperdream*, or *Hyperdream* as a book, functions as an object that touches the reader; both its 'texture' and 'texxture' are significant. Sarah Jackson in "So Close: Writing that Touches" (2012), refers to Renu Bora's, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of Bora, arguing that texts have both 'textural' and 'texxtural' qualities. What Bora calls 'texture,' "signifies the surface resonance or quality of an object or material. That is, its qualities if touched, brushed, stroked, or mapped, would yield certain properties and sensations that can usually be anticipated by looking" (Jackson 2012, 414). 'Texxture,' on the other hand, "refers not really to surface or even depth so much as to an intimately violent, pragmatic, medium, inner level (at first more phenomenological than conceptual/ metaphysical) of the stuffness of

material structure" (Jackson 2012, 414). For Sedgwick, texture blocks or defies object's history, but "texxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being" (Jackson 2012, 414). The ability to affect depends precisely on the thing's texxture. Benjamin's bed and the narrator's lost nightdress, and the narrator's mother's skin in *Hyperdream* play with the importance of objects' texxture. For example, in the above passages about the bed, the narrator touches the bed with her gaze, and in exchange the bed touches her with stories of the past, and her nightdress has almost become her skin. Texxturality of these objects allows the reader to learn not only about the narrator's life though the past of those objects, but to see life as a life, as a web of connections. The text itself too becomes intense with meaning through objects' texxture and thus encourages the reader to be touched by its texxture, just like the physical touch between the narrator and her mother is conveyed from the story to the reader.

Some of the most important everyday moments in *Hyperdream* are the moments when the narrator has to anoint blisters on her mother's ill and aged (dated) skin. At first, anointing is annoying, even repulsive for the narrator, but gradually she starts to see these moments of anointing as special. The touch of her mother's skin is presented as the main form of communication in the novel between the narrator and her mother. That is, affect transfers from the narrator's mother's skin - from matter and its texxture - to the narrator through sensory knowledge and physical touching; the narrator is feeling her mother when she anoints her mother's skin, and through her skin, gains knowledge of time and history, just as she did with the bed.

In "Sorties", Cixous writes that "History [is a] history of phallogentrism, history of appropriation: a single history. History of an identity: that of man's becoming recognised by the other (son or woman)" (Cixous 1975, 204). In *Hyperdream*, history gains new meaning—it is no longer a single history, but an assemblage of multiple stories, accessed by the narrator via an encounter with the texxture of the people and objects she meets, and touches. During the moments when the narrator anoints her mother's skin, she tells her mother: "you are time," while continuing to think: "the far-off bottom of my whole history" is "what is right under my eyes, beneath my nose, my mother's skin" (Cixous 2006, ix). Here, the narrator discredits the binary where a woman is equated with space and body rather than time and mind. The narrator's mother's skin is more accurate canvas for learning

about the past than books, databases, and archives, as her skin has experienced what might be called life or history. The narrator refers to “time’s horizon-line” that also opposes the hierarchical, vertical way of writing and thinking about history where the political and the public are more important than the personal, the intimate, and the poetic:

It crosses my mind that the skin of my mother standing in front of me this July morning in which we go on living, in which, that is, life continues to weave its fabrics within the framework of the body of my mother and within the framework of my body—that my mother’s skin, dated, would be the most faithful canvas, or mirror or painting of my most basic, dated state of mind and soul, or of what one calls life, or maybe time’s horizon-line on which are painted or deposited the physical effects of what we happen to live (Cixous 2006, ix).

In other words, seeing the horizon line allows seeing the past as a whole, including women and the quotidian, private experiences. There is beauty and knowledge that comes from touching her mother’s wounded and wrinkled skin because she sees a life, not just her and her mother’s lives, but all kinds of stories, by touching her mother. Through her skin the narrator learns about German, French, Algerian, and Jewish history.

When Cixous uses the word ‘history’ in *Hyperdream*, she uses it to denote its phallogocentric nature. Her mother’s skin is time, and a different kind of history for her, as she muses: “I could no longer stop thinking about time, about time and times. [while I] cultivate time with both hands, one on top of the other hers yours mine ours, I spread them, I browse and I ruminate the future” (Cixous 2006, vii, x). As suggested at the beginning of this essay via Deleuze, the time in *Hyperdream* is in-between times, suspended. Instead of creating a historical linear timeline, the narrator creates something very similar to Deleuzian sense of a life in in-between time. And this life, like an ideal book in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense, is laid out not on a single sheet, but on a skin of one person, or in a bed, or a nightdress in *Hyperdream*, or indeed the physical book itself. Importantly, it the affective texture of these things that allows the narrator to sense how her self, and her life is an affective assemblage with these things.

Textuality of objects and things is important precisely because it draws attention to the affective encounter that happens between humans and the non-human. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth suggest in *The Affect Theory Reader* that:

affect arises in the midst of inbetweenness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passage or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves (2010, 6).

This in-betweenness exists both between human self and human other, and also in the in-betweenness of human self and non-human other in *Hyperdream*. Russell Pavlov-West in *Temporalities* highlights Bruno Latour's suggestion that the conception of a multiplicity of human, animal, plant or mineral actors "blurs the organic and inorganic by emphasising an order of ceaseless connection and reconnection" (Pavlov-West 2013, 154). Latour suggests that "if the opposite of being a body is dead [and] there is no life apart from the body ... [then] to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning 'effectuated', moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or nonhumans. If you are not engaged in this learning, you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead" (qtd. in Pavlov-West 2013, 157). The narrator of *Hyperdream* is certainly aware of this ceaseless connection between organic and inorganic, human and non-human. When the narrator muses that "my book I say is on the move, we are moving each other" (Cixous 2006, 78), she hints to the fact that the book has just as much power over her as she has over the book; her book is an encounter of various textures.

Affective, tactile poetics in *Hyperdream*, then, is not contained in an individual but "refers to the fluid movement of feeling between surfaces as different textures" that make contact with one another (Jackson 2012, 414). The encounter between different textures becomes affective precisely when the subjects who experience these encounters are not coherent but fractured. Cixousian poetics, and her *écriture féminine*, is a move away from a coherent subject towards a more Deleuzian, complex, and fluid representation of subjectivity, where the latter is largely made up of affective contact with human and non-human worlds. The narrator of *Hyperdream* touches and affects, and is touched and affected by the book, and objects in the book, such as Benjamin's bed, the nightdress, and her mother's skin—her subjectivity, her self is an assemblage of all the things, ideas, and people she comes into contact with and that form a life. Accordingly, Cixousian model of the self cannot be understood solely in terms of psychoanalytical or deconstructionist readings but should be explored in the light of new materialist and affect theories because materiality and embodiment are pivotal in her writing *per se*, and her writing about selfhood. This affective writing assumes following a life; of going along new avenues that canonical philosophical and theoretical writings often avoid—paths that descend towards the earth to explore the texture of the material world, rather than ascend in reach of transcendental heights.

Endnotes

1. My aim here is not to offer a comprehensive overview or examination of Deleuze's and Guattari's various terms but to point out how Cixous's writing can be understood by certain concepts from Deleuze's and Guattari's writings such as 'a life,' 'multiplicity,' and 'affect'. The most influential of their writings for this essay have been "Becoming-intense, becoming-animal" section of *A Thousand Plateaus*, an essay 'Immanence: A Life,' and the section on art in *What is Philosophy?*

2. My reference to Plato's cave in this essay functions first and foremost as a way of indicating that Cixous theorises and also practices a writing that is influenced by new materialist thinking, and Deleuzian philosophy—traditions that dissolve binaries and engage with what is inside the cave: material, embodied beings, human as well as non-human. In other words, I read her work with theories that do not aim to transcend the cave. Cixous writes about things close to earth that are unique in themselves, and she writes about them because they are important parts of ourselves and our lives.

3. Haecceity is a specific nuance about, or in relation to, a person or an object that makes it what it is, and is created in an encounter between movements and speeds. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write: "There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, things, or substance. We reserve the name haecceity for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" and "for you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realise that this is what you are, and that you are nothing but that... you are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration)—a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity)" (1980, 288–289).

4. To move beyond the phallogocentric writing that focuses on the ego, the self, and identity, which Cixous also associates with both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, she urges writers in "The Laugh of Medusa" to "break out of the circles; don't remain within the psychoanalytic closure. Take a look around, then cut through!" (Cixous 1976, 892). In this sense, Cixousian writing also echoes

Deleuze's and Guattari's criticism on psychoanalysis, and more specifically of Freudian concern with Oedipus complex in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972, p. 54).

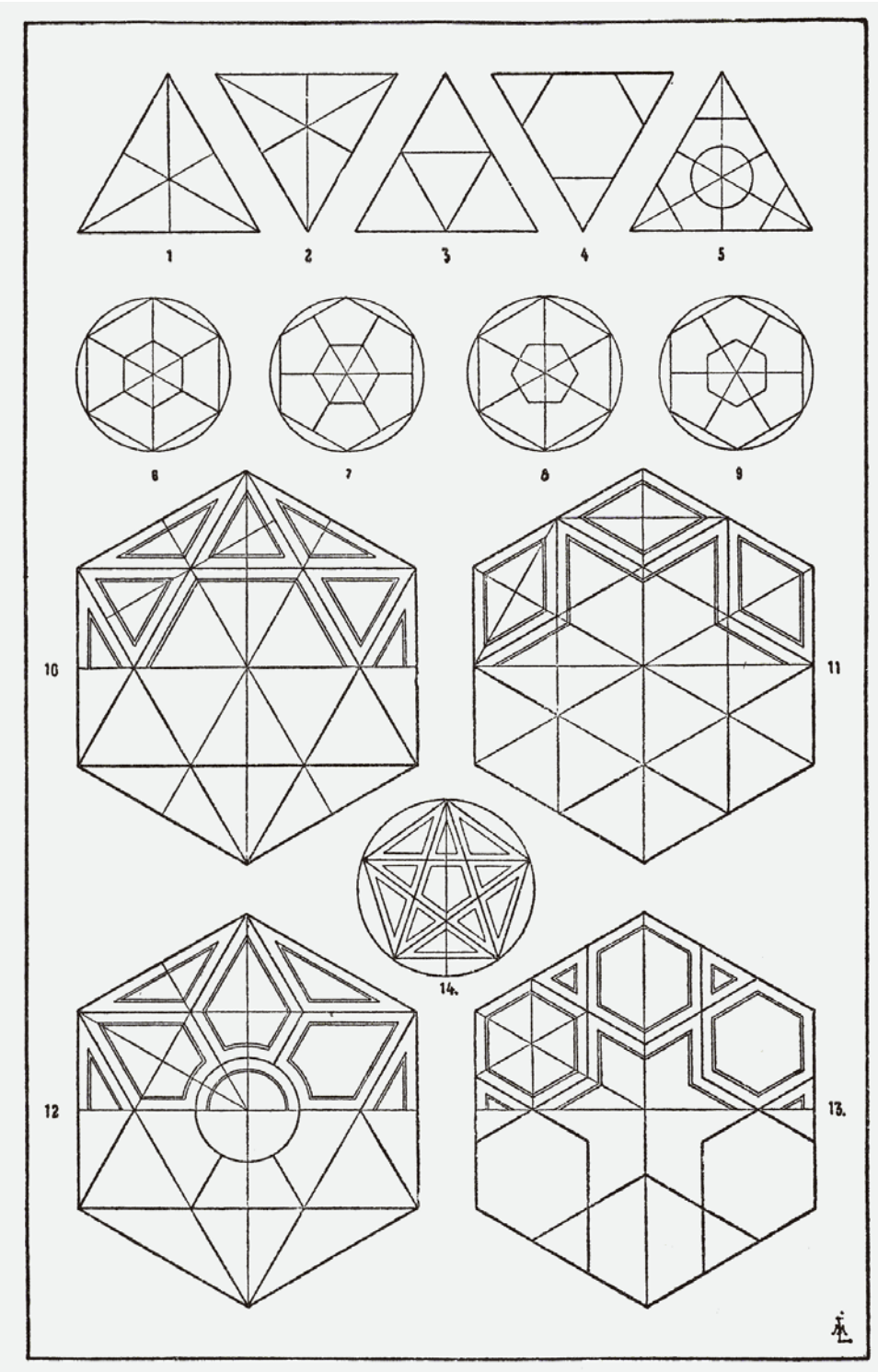
5. See Toril Moi's *Sexual/ Textual Politics* (1985), Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987), and Joanna Zylińska's *On Spiders, Cyborgs, and Being Scared* (2001).

6. My understanding of feminist philosophy is influenced by the continental tradition but there are of course feminist philosophers in the analytical tradition who write from feminist perspective but focus on logical argumentation and the analysis of thoughts. For example, these philosophers include Daniel Stoljar, Sally Haslanger and Clare Chambers. My aim is not to undermine their work but to focus on the continental tradition.

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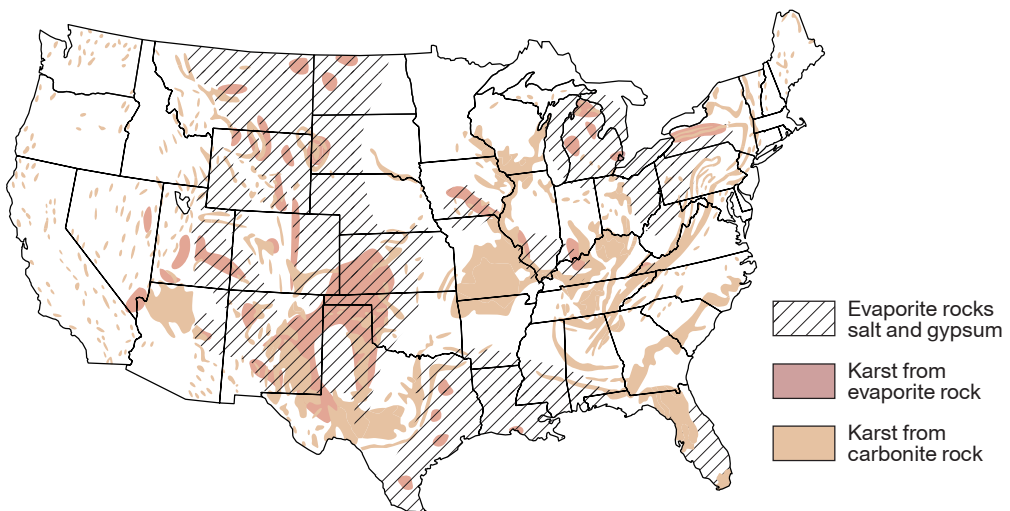
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THAT SINKING FEELING

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The District of Columbia, where I live, is not one of the parts of the world usually identified with sinkholes. It's not that they don't happen; they do. But they tend not to be numerous or dramatic enough—with one significant recent exception—to draw much media attention. Sinkholes can happen anywhere underground water meets porous rock. However, the riskiest sinkhole zones within settler-defined US borders include: most of the state of Florida, parts of Texas, Alabama, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and much of central and southern Pennsylvania, home of *Capacious*.



Map of sinkhole-prone land in US
modified from Davies and Legrand, 1972
(water.usgs.gov/ogw/pubs/fs00165)

I didn't know any of this until I was invited by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman to participate in a WalkingLab event during the affect conference last year (Truman and Springgay). WalkingLabs are research-making events, occasions for "critical consideration[s] of place"; researchers and fellow travelers are asked to move their thinking through spaces that academics too often overlook when attending a conference or visiting a city for "work" (Truman and Springgay, 2). In this case, drawing on my interest in speculative geology, and motivated by the high incidence of sinkholes in the area—there have been, they told me, over a hundred of them in the past few years¹—Springgay and Truman wanted me to bring the two together at a talk that would be delivered at the site of a recent sinkhole. Like many of the conference's attendees, I was unaware of the history of sinkholes in the area— even though Pennsylvania has a relatively high incidence of sinkholes, abetted by the area's porous bedrock, they rarely garner more than local media coverage, just as in DC.



Steve Herman tweets about the White House Sinkhole, May 22, 2018

Now I've said that sinkholes tend not to garner much media attention in the District. The White House sinkhole was, of course, an exception. After Voice of America correspondent Steve Herman posted the photos above, the sinkhole was immediately, gleefully taken up on social media. In effect, it happened twice: the first time geological, the second time virtual—as one headline neatly summed it up: “White House sinkhole engulfs DC Twitter feeds.”



Twitter responds to the White House Sinkhole, May 2018

Some ascribed the hole to human activity, identifying it as an escape tunnel built by desperate White House employees, or by Melania. Others understood it as a sign of retributive geological agency, the earth taking appropriate action against the current presidential administration. The sinkhole soon opened its own Twitter accounts to confirm the latter view, declaring an alliance with its “natural di-sister,” the hole that had opened on the street in front of Mar-a-Lago in 2017.² Though White House groundskeepers soon filled in the physical sinkhole, it

remained active on Twitter, taking issue not just with the White House's stance on environmental issues but also with other offenses, such as the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in fall 2018 and the racist behavior of Virginia lawmakers.



@WHSinkhole's Twitter

The feeling of glee that erupted across the Internet at the sight of this sinkhole was, geologically speaking, a bit unusual. Like other unpredictable geological phenomena, sinkholes tend to evoke a sense of dread: they are frightening reminders of life's precarity, the earth's indifference, and the threadbare fantasy—for

CAPACIOUS

that subset of humans who lay claim to it—of human omnipotence. They remind us that no matter how carefully we tend our fantasies of the good life, at any moment, the ground can literally open up beneath us. This is not an easy feeling. Yet the response to the White House sinkhole was welcoming, even euphoric. This can be seen in the Twitter thread above, in which numerous respondents declare their support for the sinkhole's future presidential candidacy, while another user comments, "Such a weird thing to give me hope."

It isn't really that weird, on one level. Depictions of the White House sinkhole as retaliatory geology—the moral "just-desserts" of a planet-destroying administration—are part of a much longer geo-anthropomorphic tradition: the tendency to depict geological disaster (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions) as a mode of divine chastisement, a punishment for human hubris or wayward behavior. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) exemplifies this perspective, painting the first-century Roman CE city as a cesspool of sin ultimately cleansed by a well-timed volcanic explosion. By ascribing to the earth the capacity for ethical action that humans seem to lack, this sort of geo-anthropomorphic thinking effectively reverses figure and ground, rendering the earth agentially active so that humans in turn become inert, geological material—strewn about like the wreckage of earthquakes or, as indexed by the plaster casts made from cavities left by the vaporized victims of Vesuvius, literally turned to stone.³ In the case of the White House sinkhole, it's especially satisfying to think this way in light of the current White House occupant's apparent ability to escape human justice systems. Something's got to catch up with him, we think: why not the planet itself?

And yet it also *is* a weird thing for a sinkhole to give one *hope*. Hope, here, seems to stand in for more than the possibility that the asshole in the White House might someday get his. As the gleeful nominations of the sinkhole for president suggests, hope, in the shadow of this administration, signals not simply retribution, but the possibility of active transformation. The weirdness of hope, in this light, is a departure from naïve optimism; it comes from the drive to think differently, to engage what José Esteban Muñoz, following Ernst Bloch, identifies as: a "certain practice of hope" that "helps [us] escape from a script in which human existence is reduced" (Duggan and Muñoz, 278).

So where are we, historically speaking, when the event of geologic collapse can become a sign and an agent of hope? In this context, geology becomes an accomplice of speculative thought.⁴ The geological has been appealed to, in recent critical thought, as a means of opening new intellectual pathways: a way to

account for history differently, as in Manuel De Landa's experimental retelling of the rise of capitalism as in part a series of geological processes; to refocus critical attention away from the relatively unimportant actions of the human; or to imagine different futures, in which the human/nonhuman divide is displaced or dissolved (De Landa; Cohen; Yusoff). The positive zeal for the displacement of the human that accompanied some early instances of what Mark McGurl termed the "new cultural geology"—a series of appeals to geology as a kind of anti-anthropocentric toolkit, a way of emphasizing "the relative puniness of the human in the play of fundamental and evolutionary forces"—might give us pause (McGurl 380–81). For in dwelling too long on this point—the human's puniness—some inhumanist thinking ironically risks replicating the geo-anthropomorphic tradition. Even if the earth's indifference to, rather than its disapproval of, human agency is the point, it seems once again to be looking to the geological to chastise us for wrongdoing, and in this gesture failing to specify *which* form of the human needs to be cut down to size and neglecting the very histories that have produced the need to ask that question. Gesturing toward deep time and/or planetary indifference as, ostensibly, a mode of inhuman chastisement contains a paradoxical comfort for certain readers. Part of the appeal of such geologically-coded gestures as Quentin Meillassoux's turn to the arche-fossil, Elizabeth Povinelli points out, is that it neatly skips over the violence of human history: "things that existed before we got here...are the things we have been taught not to feel responsible for, things that cannot demand accountability from us" (Povinelli 76).

Yet not all inhumanist thinkers get stuck inside the geologic sublime. Rather, a generation of theorists has emerged who think through the instability of the human/nonhuman divide by amplifying the materialist implications of woman of color feminism, queer, decolonial and indigenist thought. Thinkers like Povinelli, along with Vanessa Agard-Jones, Mel Y. Chen, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Zoe Todd, and Kyla Wazana Tompkins engage materiality in ways that illuminate how speculative geological thinking might intensify rather than marginalize social and ecological justice projects—how the land can remember histories both deep and recent, and how our apprehension of that memory may create space for alternative futures. Inspired by these scholars and others, I want to ask not how sinkholes demand that we look away from or diminish human agency, but rather how we might begin to think it anew—to ask, that is, what sinkholes, acting co-agentially with humans, show us about ourselves, our hopes, our blind spots, and our failures, and how we might use these to begin to think and act differently.

Thinking with the sinkhole, in this light, means eschewing the turn to geology as a pedagogy of awe or wonder. Instead, it offers a mode of “staying with the trouble” in located and historicized ways, of thinking about how the geological overlaps and intersects with, rather than overwhelms or chastises, human worlds (Haraway 2016). Now sinkholes are not always anthropogenic—unlike potholes, with which they are often confused. Potholes are the result of a seasonal *pas de deux* between human infrastructure and nonhuman nature. Water seeps into small cracks and holes in pavement and pushes down the soil below it, until the pavement above the resultant air pockets crumbles. Sinkholes, however, are a more complex, temporally dispersed geological phenomenon. Potholes originate just below the surface: sinkholes start deeper, resulting from erosion or displacement of the bedrock. Limestone (as in Pennsylvania) or other kinds of porous carbonate rock create the most sinkhole-friendly terrain, which the US Geological Service calls “karst terrain.” They can form slowly (cover-subsidence) or quite suddenly (cover-collapse)—they can be caused entirely by nonhuman forces or partly by anthropogenic ones.

Yet like other geological processes in the Anthropocene, sinkholes are ever more frequently affected by human action, or lack thereof. And because they are local, located, and usually traceable events, they can pinpoint, often with uncanny precision, precisely what is going wrong. Urban sinkholes are usually the effect of neglect—often of aging, crumbling infrastructure, resulting from erosion caused

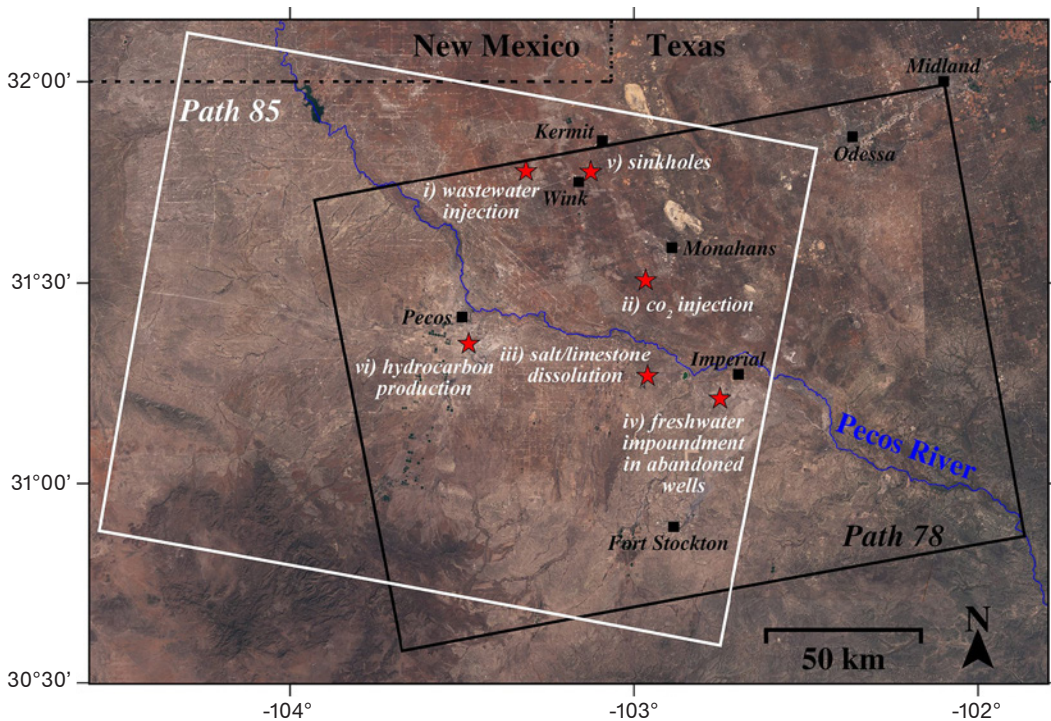


Sinkhole caused by leaking drainage pipe, Gwinnet, County, GA, June 2018
(ajc.com/news/photos-few-metro-atlanta-biggest-sinkholes)

by leaking sewer and water lines, etc.⁵ This is made directly visible in the image below, a sinkhole that opened up in Atlanta, Georgia in June 2018.

In this sense, sinkholes can be understood to expose (sometimes literally) neoliberalism's history of deliberate *underinvestment* in systems of social support, both materially and ideologically.

Outside city centers, though, sinkholes also expose an *overinvestment* in the false promises of petromodernity. The map below, from a 2018 report by two geophysicists, links the incidence of sinkholes in West Texas with destabilization and erosion caused by oil and gas drilling in the area.



Sinkholes and Human Activity in West Texas, March 2018
([nature.com/articles/s41598-018-23143-6](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-23143-6))

If the dream of modern energy infrastructures, in the minds of those for whose benefit they were built, was that they would be kept neatly out of sight, their toxicity hidden away or banished to somewhere else, the messy unpredictability of the sinkhole reveals that fantasy for what it is: a wish to be untroubled by our own implication in networks of ecological and social exploitation and domination.

This dual exposure—of infrastructural *over-* and *under-*investment—is crucial. It reminds us that despite the different means by which substructural erosion takes place, anthropogenic sinkholes insistently draw the gaze to that which petro-modernity's intended beneficiaries have been privileged enough, for a time, to overlook: its material and ideological disintegration as a supposedly progressive project. And that dual linkage might serve to remind us that a call to repair the crumbling infrastructures of the first example, a demand that we reinvest in public-sphere projects, cannot be undertaken apart from a move away from the global toxicity of petrocapiism. We can't simply keep plugging up the holes; we need, rather, to reimagine infrastructures entirely, along with a concomitant reinvention of social relations. Sinkholes will keep happening. But if we want to lessen their occurrence and mitigate their harms, we need to think about rebuilding infrastructure as an ecological and justice-oriented, rather than a merely anthropocentric and convenience-oriented project (Boyer).

The sinkholes in DC and Florida have, unfortunately, not yet succeeded in getting rid of the current occupant of the White House. But if we keep paying attention to what sinkholes expose, we might see them working in tandem with humans, providing ways to envision interrupting the reproduction of structural and infrastructural damage. For instance, an increase in the number and severity of sinkholes in central Pennsylvania persuaded the state legislature, in the summer of 2017, to temporarily halt construction on the Sunoco pipeline, a potential proximate cause. The shutdown didn't last, unfortunately. Yet we can use this suspension as a hopeful moment. Imagining sinkholes as a partner in the increasing volubility of protests against pipeline construction might help us continue to imagine otherwise. Sinkholes can remind us both of how *little* power we humans possess and how *much* we do—they might help us to better attend to what it means to plan a human energy infrastructure around a geological substructure whose events we can't predict or control but whose harms we do, in fact, have some knowledge about how to mitigate.

Endnotes

1. On the high incidence of sinkholes in the area, see: <http://www.gis.dcnr.state.pa.us/maps/index.html?geology=true>; <https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Parts-of-Pa-Vulnerable-to-Sinkhole-Formation-197055451.html>.

2. See @WHsinkhole 22 May 2018. Several Twitter accounts purporting to be the voice of the White House sinkhole were opened in May 2018. All quotes and references in this article are from @WHsinkhole, which remains active as of this writing.

3. These casts, first made by archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli in the 1860s, have become iconic. See Victoria C. Gardner Coates, “On the Cutting Edge: Pompeii and New Technology,” in Coates et. al., ed, *The Last Days of Pompeii: Decadence, Apocalypse, Resurrection* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), pp. 44-51.
4. For Nigel Clark, Alexandra Gormally, and Hugh Tuffen, for instance, speculative geology is “at least as concerned with creative, explorative, and conjectural probings as ... with establishing causal relations or all-encompassing interpretive frameworks.” See Clark et. al. (2018). Speculative Volcanology: Time, Becoming, and Violence in Encounters with Magma. *Environmental Humanities*, 10 (1), p. 276.
5. See, e.g. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/huge-sinkholes-are-now-appearing-in-the-wrong-places/>.

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Cover image:

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