HARD WIRE

ISSUE 3
2019-2020

HARD WIRE

*The Undergraduate Journal of
Sexual Diversity Studies*

Issue 3

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Letter from the Editors

As a journal, our stated mission is to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression and injustice: capitalism, racism, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and sexism. As such, we quickly come up against a futility that faces many student organizers and smaller publishing initiatives. Is there any sense in which this is meaningfully possible? A university, especially the size of the University of Toronto, is a behemoth—let alone the world of academia at large. We were reminded that it may be easy to claim a particular project or campaign as an intervention, but it is often hard to see any tangible effects on the institutions we are trying to intervene upon.

Education remains a class divider; knowledge remains locked behind paywalls; scientific innovation continues to be sold to private entities; universities remain horrifically violent spaces, especially for women, racialized, trans, queer, and disabled faculty, students, and staff. The University of Toronto, in particular, has met a mental health crisis amongst its students with indifference. It has refused repeated calls to divest from weapons and fossil fuel industries, as well as the proposed thirty meter telescope on Mauna Kea. These colonial ventures continue to wreak devastation across Turtle Island/North America and the rest of the world.

An undergraduate journal cannot really constitute a solution or resolution in such a context. What does it mean for us to claim an anti-imperialist ethos from our vantage point within this institution, within this city, within this country? We are a part of academia and the university; for many of us this is a direct result of privilege, while for some of us, it is the result of perseverance in the face of marginalization and hardship. What is true of all of us—authors, artists, editors, and journal administration—is that we find ourselves in some substantial relationship to the University through an unfinished undergraduate degree.

Whether the existence of academia and the University is redeemable, or transformable into a redeemable mode of existence, is not besides the point—we sincerely hope that in our practices and output as a journal, we challenge the University in some way. However, whether or not the University is ultimately redeemable, we remain part of it, as students, as administrators of this particular academic project, or as future professional academics. Finding ourselves in a place like this is serious. There is no such thing as an innocent vantage point, and we are always implicated (and so on and so forth).

This does not mean that this is an aspect of our lives that we can simply gloss over, ethically. We pour ourselves into these worlds with our time, our energy, our money, and often with our spirit and health. We act and create in this sphere in ways that matter, to ourselves and to others. However fraught this may be, it is a substantial aspect of where we currently are in our lives and in this world. It is our duty to be serious about this position we occupy and engage in it as well as we can, whatever this may come to.

However, this seriousness is also about appreciation. There are 27 000 Arts and Science undergraduates at the University of Toronto. We usually spend four years or more learning, thinking, writing, and creating within our chosen fields. Yet, for the most part, that work never reaches anyone beyond the TA grading it. This isn't always bad; we have all produced writing and projects that might best be described as practice. This is all part of the process of learning.

But we cannot categorize all undergraduate work like this, merely by virtue of it being produced by undergraduates. Undergraduates also produce work that is rigorous, incisive, insightful, beautiful, and truly original. As a journal, we believe that these pieces provide perspective and hard work that deserves recognition beyond a good grade. There is very real artistic and academic merit to this work. The papers, poems, stories, and art in this issue contribute to the world in many more ways than merely being a stage in the creators' educational or artistic development.

The pieces published in this issue do not all cleanly fall into a category within the creative-academic binary. There is no singular ideal form of expression; we take it as part of our mission to blur the boundaries of the academic and do our best to welcome forms of knowledge that often cannot find recognition within the academy. Alec Butler, Patrick Horan, and Julia DaSilva all challenge strict academic genres in different ways. Mixing their poetic and narrative sensibilities with rigorous academic citational practices, their pieces offer unique takes on Indigenous sexuality, the phenomenology of trans existence, and the revolutionary potential of "moments," in ways that reach past and through the

arms-length distance that traditional academic papers and reviews tend to relate to both their authors and readers.

We acknowledge the power of poetry and stories to contain and express affects and ideas that cannot necessarily be captured by linear forms of argument. Bao Li Ng demonstrates this, powerfully, in *Victim Impact Statement*, bringing the often invisibilized reality of sexual assault into full view. In a different—but not unrelated—vein, T Williams takes on the depth, complexity, and beauty of the unpredictable body and the elusive and painful aspects of gender in a sexual encounter.

Micah Kalisch also tackles the weight of gender in *I am a plagiarist*, speaking through a sense of reiteration or accumulation over generations. Mathew Kennealy similarly speaks to this ever-presence of history, but in *Queen Street* this presence is more diffused, dispersed through a meandering everyday but acutely felt in certain moments and spaces. Together with *Person turned kindling*, these poems offer a queer rendition of time. In Nahar Amargi's work, a month gathers into a moment through a feeling and a relationship. History and the present meld and bend around experience and space, offering a vivid interpretation of everyday queer life.

Jeff Baillargeon, Sol A. Ramon Palomino, Grace King, and Robin Martin also express their theoretizations of queerness and sexuality through the lens of art, in this case through the careful readings of other writers' work. Tracing the relationships of cause/effect and affinity/fracture between different works, ideas, communities, and societal structures, these authors do important binding work, fitting things together to construct world views. These understandings honour the authors' source materials, but extend their readings to offer meaningful social critique regarding colonialism and queer Indigeneity, disability and sex work, heterosexist ecology and purity, and media portrayals of Orthodox Judaism and love between women.

Ayisha Gariba and Mia Sanders contribute original sociological and historical examinations of the structures of violence imposed onto invisibilized women of colour in Canada and the US. In shining a light on the deaths of disabled trans women of colour in US prisons and the constructed figure of the Chinese prostitute on the Canadian West Coast, Gariba and Sanders highlight particular forms of marginalization and violence that serve very specific state-building purposes.

Finally, this issue contains works of visual art by Ari Wichert, Bronwyn Garden-Smith, and Ayisha Gariba, as well as a zine by Nelson Morgan. These pieces remind us that there is intelligence and knowledge that go beyond the written word. Making their meditations on gender and sexuality visual in some way, these creators hold several strands of thought and feeling together. Significantly, they prompt us to think about the beauty that can be found within, against, and in spite of the topics they engage—womanhood, nonbinary identity, Blackness, ADHD, disability, queer sexuality, and Jewish gender. Artists and poets remind us that sometimes, ignoring the compulsion to take apart and analyze can bring and hold together ideas we would not have seen otherwise.

We sincerely thank you for taking the time to read Hardire Issue 3, and hope that you can take away some inspiration and insight from these pieces, as we have done.

Hardwire Editorial Board

Disability, Sex Work, and the Power of Storytelling: Evaluating the Impact of Mark O'Brien's *On Seeing a Sex Surrogate*

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Published in 1990, the autobiographical essay On Seeing a Sex Surrogate by American author and poet Mark O'Brien constitutes a useful text for assessing the evolution of social norms surrounding sexuality and disability. In this essay, I foreground the power of storytelling, inherent to narrative works, as a force of change to existing norms of sexualization and medicalization. I work in close association with frameworks such as Kenneth Plummer's "sociologies of stories" (2004) and Loree Erickson's "cultures of undesirability" (2015). I also analyze O' Brien's problematic distinction between "sexual surrogacy" and sex work which, despite its flaws, has allowed for the emergence of useful discussions around marginalized sexualities, legalization strategies, and the formation of collective solidarities, as explored by Kelly Fritsch et al. (2016), Giulia Garofalo (2019), and Teela Sanders (2007). Writing from my position as a chronically ill Latina cis woman, I conclude that O'Brien's work is an important cultural reference point, as well as a text that overcomes its weaknesses by creating important spaces for open dialogue surrounding sex and disability as not mutually exclusive, but as areas for potential growth, agency, and fulfillment.

"What if I ever did meet someone who wanted to make love with me? Wouldn't I feel more secure if I had already had some sexual experience? I knew I could change my perception of myself as a bumbling, indecisive clod, not just by having sex with someone, but by taking charge of my life and trusting myself enough to make decisions."

—Mark O'Brien

Written in the late 1980s and published in 1990, the autobiographical essay *On Seeing a Sex Surrogate* by Mark O'Brien remains influential to this day. While this is certainly a touching, heartfelt account of the titular experience, it is also a rich site of analysis, as well as a useful historical reference to help us measure how much social progress has been made in regards to sexuality and disability. The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, I will rely on Kenneth Plummer's development of the concept of "sociologies of stories," specifically in terms of a story's social and political dynamics, to engage with the text's articulation of ideas of undesirability and disability. Loree Erickson's definition of "cultures of undesirability" will be helpful in this analysis to assess whether the text upholds or subverts this notion. Given that O'Brien himself wrote from the positionality of a man with a disability, his account is radical in bringing issues combining sexuality and disability to the forefront in a society that collectively struggles with their visibility. However, the power of this story also contributes to the upholding of negative norms. Who's sexuality is prioritized and/or encouraged? Who has access to surrogacy services, and under what conditions? Is surrogacy itself a perpetuation of the medical model? I will also briefly engage with the narrative as presented in the 2012 movie adaptation of the text, *The Sessions* to assess the changes made to the story when presented—or made more palatable— to a widespread audience. The second goal of this paper is to analyze the concept of sex work in further depth, as it suffers from a problematic depiction within the story. In particular, O'Brien attempts to create a firm distinction between sexual surrogacy and 'prostitution' where the former is constructed as a more 'acceptable' service than the latter, further upholding the stigma that supports the criminalization of sex work in general. Given that this is an older cultural text, I will assess how the discourse of sex work as related to disability has evolved from that period. For this purpose, I focus on the works of Kelly Fritsch *et al.*, Giulia Garofalo, and Teela Sanders, who articulate the complexities and current debate around sex work/surrogacy and disability, as well as the existence of common goals

and solidarities to effect social change.

While we normally focus on their entertainment value, Plummer (2004) focuses on "the social role of stories: the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process" (p.19). O'Brien's personal, sexual story holds power in being told and shared, and as such has the potential to become "part of the political process" (Plummer, 2004, p.26). This conceptualization is important, as it mirrors and potentially counters the social processes of norm creation by dominant society, which is to say, white, able-bodied, straight, and cisgender. As described by Dean Spade and Craig Willse, norms are themselves a product of power, which "operat[e] by generating knowledges about the world that shape the world" (2015, p.3). When it comes to disability, multiple social narratives have been employed to disenfranchise this community. For example, Erickson (2015) describes the eugenics, medical, and charity models, which affect our understandings of disability by framing it as inferiority, reversible, or tragic, respectively (pp.23-25). This results in an image of people with disabilities as abnormal or defective, while the systemic inequality exacerbating these issues remains unchallenged. Additionally, as AJ Withers (2012) notes, "[o]nce something or someone has been medicalized, the medical gaze then becomes the filter that is applied to medicalized peoples' experiences. The medical gaze is necessarily a non-disabled gaze looking at the disabled body. Disabled people's primary diagnoses become the singular point through which all other information about them is viewed" (p. 39). In this way, medicalization is, itself, a way of storytelling, often overtaking any other narrative in the lives of people with disabilities, and dictating suffering and death as the only foreseeable outcomes.

Since ableism is, at its core, a power imbalance, the creation of more narratives like O'Brien's can work to reshape existing norms. However, despite the conversations this story has generated, its author occasionally upholds the very systems it decries. When the author ponders "[w]hat if [the surrogate] took one look at me — disabled, skinny, and deformed — and changed her mind?", he perfectly illustrates Erickson's concept of "cultures of undesirability" which "emerges from queercrip and activist communities to name the multitude of ways that marginalized people are actively imagined as undesirable others, and to bear witness to the impacts of this construction" (Erickson, 2015, p.38). Where O'Brien suffers from the effects of this concept, despite exercising sexual agency, Erickson challenges society to extend its notion of what is desirable. Her critique of these cultures of undesirability can be framed as the development of a new narrative that defies inclusion in a flawed system, opting instead for the creation of a new one. She also challenges the crip[1] community to see its "sites of shame as sites of resistance" and learning (Erickson, 2015, p.40), an exercise that would have benefitted O'Brien in his experience of both internal and external shame, perhaps channelling it into more beneficial forms as opposed to internalized self-hatred. Nevertheless, Erickson's work has the distinct advantage of being thoroughly informed by more positive attitudes towards sex and sex work, as well as the advances of the disability justice movement and a radical acceptance and embracing of the crip identity. Advances which, in part, benefitted from writings like *On Seeing…*, showing how O'Brien's work has contributed to the creation of disability justice frameworks despite its shortcomings.

Where O'Brien's narrative becomes less generative, unfortunately, is in its unwitting internalization of sex and gender norms or, as Plummer aptly words it, the "image of a 'gendered heterosexism,'" which describes "a set of acts which are organised around the divisions of men and women, and through which heterosexual relations—usually leading to some kind of heterosexual coitus, potential reproduction and coupling/marriage—are given priority" (Plummer, 2004, p.31). Despite his casual admission of same-sex attraction, the story centres around this otherwise very straight experience, which the author is able to access through the networks of care made available by his economic status, as well as the privilege attached to his white maleness. Additionally, maleness is a contributing factor for this ease of access, as they are perceived to have higher sexual needs as well as a right to their fulfillment. Teela Sanders describes the inevitable outcome of these gendered assumptions in the disabled community:

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[1] Author's note: A shortened form of the pejorative term cripple, authors who self-identify as crip seek to reclaim this term for purposes of identity, community, activism, and empowerment. Issues of visibility and better representation, especially in politics and policy-making, are integral to the concept. I use the term in my engagement with Erickson's work specifically, but choose to still employ "people with disabilities" throughout my work as it is a better fit in dealing with O'Brien's own.

Virtually all of the literature that discusses commercial or facilitated sex has been about male sexuality, promoting the sexual rights of men with impairments. Griffiths (2006) argued that where discourses promote the sexual citizenship of disabled people what they actually refer to is the sexual rights of male heterosexuals, whilst the sexual rights of women and other sexualities are marginalized. […] [T]he issues of female sexual citizenship are central to the debate about commercial sex and disability because female sex workers are also a sexual minority who are facing a similar type of struggle for their sexual freedom and autonomy (Sanders, 2007, p.441).

Sanders reminds us of the multiple barriers to female sexuality, which risk complete erasure when combined with disability. Furthermore, in her review of *The Sessions*, Kirsty Liddiard notes that in addition to erasing most of O'Brien's complex ambivalence and criticism, "the film (probably, unknowingly) affirms the notion that disabled people's sexual desires need to be located within [a] therapeutic or medicalised framework in order to be realised" (Liddiard, 2013). This shows the persistent power of the medical model, which to the disabled community does not mean care but, instead, "a minimization or marginalization of our own knowledge about our experiences, the inability to access appropriate medical care, abuse, confinement and even death" (Withers, 2012, p.54). The presence of these shortcomings regarding sexual mores, medicalization, and gender has eventually contributed to the later articulation of the role of sex work in regards to disability.

"About this time, a TV talk show featured two surrogates. I watched with suspicion: were surrogates the same as prostitutes? Although they might gussy it up with some psychology, weren't they doing similar work? The surrogates did not look like my stereotypes of hookers: no heavy make-up, no spray-on jeans."

— Mark O'Brien

I have previously mentioned that O'Brien struggles with how to conceptualize surrogacy separately from sex work. As evidenced in the quotation above, he holds negative preconceptions of sex work/workers, later noting that "[h]iring a prostitute implies that I cannot be loved, body and soul, just body or soul" (O'Brien, 1990); hence the necessity of dissociating one activity from the other. However, as expressions of sexuality become less of a taboo, the social attitudes evolve and allow for better debates on the subject. The work of Fritsch et al (2016), focusing mostly on Canada, states that "there is a persistent global lack of substantive policy and legal frameworks to directly facilitate and enhance the erotic lives of disabled people" (p.85). They criticize the criminalization of clients, which only marginalizes disabled individuals trying to access sexual services—adding to existing ableism-related barriers. Furthermore, criminalization creates more precarious conditions for sex workers, especially those who deal with disabilities themselves; the authors argue that the destigmatization and decriminalization of sex work would lead to better access and safety for sex workers, disabled sex workers, and disabled individuals alike. In addition, Sanders' (2007) UK-based work centres around the place of "commercial sex" (p.444) in affecting different power dynamics. While she identifies the positive effects of access to interpersonal contact, she's also aware that "promoting commercial sexual services for those living with impairments is perpetuating discrimination and prejudice [...] and that efforts should concentrate on tackling wider discriminatory attitudes and structures that would enable disabled people to enjoy a life without barriers" (Sanders, 2007, p.452). This is an important articulation of the core of the disability justice movement and its approaches, as well as a crucial discursive contribution to the field.

Moreover, Garofalo's work on Swiss grassroots organization BodyUnity, which provides sexual assistance to clients with disabilities, examines the integration of a disability justice framework to sexual assistance while also rejecting 'therapy', 'charity' and 'care' approaches. While the author

employs the term 'assistance' instead of work, she explains that "for BodyUnity members, producing a clear boundary between prostitution and sexual assistance was not a priority with respect to the ways they organise their training and their services, nor how they conceive of themselves. In fact, BodyUnity members appear to be busy with other kinds of boundary-making, vis-a-vis other categories of people who are very present in the (sexual) lives of people with disabilities" (Garofalo, 2019, p.219).

More important than this critique, however, is BodyUnity's view of medicalization as presented on the film, which mirrors Liddiard's:

> BodyUnity […] fiercely opposes what could be called a 'therapeutic model' of sexual assistance, […which] became particularly clear to me when members discussed 'sexual surrogacy', a practice that is sometimes presented as the famous older cousin of sexual assistance, and that BodyUnity members became more familiar with thanks to the release of the 2012 movie The Sessions inspired by [On Seeing…]. Sexual Partner Therapy […] tends to conflate disabilities in the sexual sphere with those in other spheres. For this reason, it was seen as highly problematic by BodyUnity members, who adopt the disabled activist slogan 'my sexuality is not a disability' and see the exclusion of disabled people from sexuality as rooted in social and political processes. In particular, they insist that these processes constitute them either as asexual, in need of protection, hypersexual, or monstrous and repulsive… (Garofalo, 2019, p.219)

Despite focusing on different countries as their loci of analysis, the works of these researchers not only stress the importance of the conversation on disability and sexuality, but also converge on the conclusion that, "[e]ven though the interests of sex workers' clients and workers diverge to a certain extent, political alliances between clients and workers may play a crucial role in this field, as they do in other forms of intimate labour—for the quality of intimate services and the rights of workers often go hand in hand" (Garofalo, 2019, pp.222-223). This is a useful insight in terms of disability organization and activism because, on top of being able to potentially design more effective policies together, it allows for larger groups to be politically mobilized towards common objectives in terms of access and sex-positivity—objectives that might have benefitted people like O'Brien.

Despite its various flaws, *On Seeing a Sex Surrogate* is an influential work since it was one of the first of its kind, giving way to other authors to articulate their own views and develop frameworks relating to the subject of disability, sexuality, and access. The rise of disability justice frameworks, while not necessarily a direct product of this text alone, was definitely informed by it. Certainly, there are still areas that merit more attention, especially when it comes to the self-image of people with disabilities; however, these negative self-messages often stem from the systemic isolation and lack of access that our societies impose on this community, and not because there is something inherently wrong or depressing about having a disability. Additionally, the emphasis on acts of sexual agency by people with disabilities, as agreed on by all the authors, successfully combats the desexualization and invisibility enforced by the medical gaze.

The end of *The Sessions* depicts the encounter of O'Brien and the woman who would be his partner for the rest of his life. While this did happen in real life, the end of *On Seeing…* is not as happy, as he wonders whether it was worth it or even reasonable to experience a level of intimacy and sexual connection he might not ever encounter again. Despite the fear and self-loathing, despite the noxious idea that he was not a being worthy of love, eventually he found it —sometimes things just need to get a bit worse before they get better. Curiously enough, this statement also summarizes my own experience in studying and analyzing this text. Disability justice and accessibility issues are deeply important to my navigating the world as a chronically ill woman. While these frameworks made me hyperaware to its more egregious flaws, I found throughout the research just how many important discussions on disability and sex were articulated and later improved thanks to it.

In conclusion, as ageing inevitably shows, everyone eventually benefits from making our world more accessible in every way. Sexuality should not be an exception to this, at least for the people who can express their agency and consent to enjoy it. While there is still much work to be done in

appropriately regulating sex work and other practices of sexual assistance, *On Seeing a Sex Surrogate* is an important piece that overcomes its issues by raising awareness of people with disabilities' sexualities, as well as furthering dialogue that pushes for better conditions for workers and clients, while fighting to get rid of the stigma surrounding sex work and/or disabilities. It is also true that not all of this work comes from O'Brien himself, but from the authors that followed the path laid out by his work—those who now have the language and frameworks to integrate disability and desire without a passing doubt. And while the task of learning self-love is still a work in progress, I am sure all of these authors, and people with disabilities are, as I am, deeply grateful.

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Dis/engaged

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"Dis/engaged" is a linocut print that was inspired during a significant period of my life in second year, in which I came to several new understandings about my gender, sexuality, and ADHD. This piece is about the simultaneous disconnection and intimacy I felt as these lifelong identities shifted and transformed in subtle and significant ways. This piece was also energized by Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic as a source of immense power and information in the female* body which we are taught by patriarchy to fear and suppress, as outlined in her "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1978). I also allude to Anne McGuire's (2013) conception of the disabled body as a 'threat' to neoliberal ideals of productivity and efficiency. Dis/engaged represents the ways in which reclaiming and finding comfort in my own gender, sexuality, and disability work to subvert these neoliberal constructions of the disabled, sexual, and queer body as disposable and shameful.

Queer Northern Lights

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Indigenous Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies

This review of Split Tooth, Tanya Tagaq's stunning first novel set in the North, is a coming of age story told through the point of view of a young Inuk woman coming into her shamanic powers through her queer encounters with the Northern Lights. The novel also delves into the devastating effects of colonization on the Inuit.

Tanya Tagaq, the Inuit throat singer from Iqaluktuuyiaq, Nunavut is a polarizing figure; she has taken on issues of appropriation, and stepped up to confront the exploitation of her people by non-Indigenous filmmakers and journalists. Like other activists in the decolonizing movement, reclaiming Inuit lifeways is central to that endeavour. Tagaq bravely took on PETA for their campaign against seal hunting, her "sealfie" campaign on Twitter was provocative and exposed the white supremacy and racism of the vegan community. They called her a savage for posting a photo of her baby next to a harvested seal, a scene that is just another day of seal hunting on the Arctic Ocean, really nothing to see here. I attended a TIFF screening where she promoted *The Angry Inuk,* a breathtaking film set in Nunavut and Europe where members of the Inuit community confront PETA for destroying their economy that they have relied on for centuries with PETA's short-sighted and racist campaign against the seal hunt.

Tanya's album "Retribution" is a response to rape - the rape of women, of land, of spirit. *Split Tooth* dedication "For the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and survivors of residential schools" is powerfully realized in everything the author reveals about her character's spiritual and sexual experiences and her community, a dysfunctional community that has been ravaged by colonization.

Split Tooth by Tanya Tagaq is stunningly written, she has composed this first novel with vivid un-self conscious prose of a born storyteller interwoven with hardcore punk poetry that encompass themes of identity, survival, addiction, mourning, rebirth, sovereignty, colonization of our minds and bodies which include the emotional effects of sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma caused by the missionary schools and the influx of settler colonialism. In this essay I posit that Split Tooth is also the story of a deep thinking and feeling young Inuit woman coming into her "queered" sexuality. I will analyse three sections in the novel that I read as explicit in both their sexuality and spirituality, which are two interwoven aspects which define Two-Spirit Queer identity for myself and other queer Indigenous people now and before settler colonization. In these three interconnected sections the Northern Lights not only act as the force of nature they are but also play the role of seducer, lover and impregnator of the main character. The novel really gives reign to the overlapping themes of the story when she gives birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Echoing the Sedna myth, she has to sacrifice them both to the Ice.

Reclaiming the Shaman in Two-Spirit

The narrator has a revelation about their purpose in the world during Inuktitut class which is taught by the teacher who secretly slips his "dry, brown, papery" (p. 49) hand down her pants whenever she has to go up front to his desk. Language class disgusts her, she can tell that the teacher who has been to residential school has also been abused, he "smells of victimhood and insecurity" (p. 49). His mouth makes sounds but "his eyes are eating us alive" (p. 49), his zombie-like colonized mind that cannibalizes children. Sexually abusing children is a result of being dehumanized himself in residential school.

The girl can "feel" him, "he is what I have already known…he does as I already have seen" (p. 49). This ability to see on the girl's part is evidence of her shamanistic powers. "The nuance of his hand movements" (p. 49) are hands that have raped her, hands that "shows us secrets, deep ones that

travel underneath the surface of our consciousness" (p. 49). Her mother no longer speaks to her in Inuktitut. "Everyone wants to move forward…with God, with money, without the Shaman's way" (p. 50). Although the Shaman's body is buried in the city dump, rejected by the Christian missionaries from the cemetery, the Shaman's way is still alive because Two-Spirit people still exist, "it lives under my subconscious". The narrator is talking about the Inukitut language, specifically about what is not being taught, the language connection to the Shaman ways, the Land, the spirit animals, to Indigenous pedagogy that encompasses the balancing of the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of being in the world. The world now is so out of balance that the teachings feel "like sandpaper against my skin" (p. 50). The students engage in culturally appropriate activities but everyone "feels a little bit empty" (p. 50) afterward.

The girl reveals the effects of colonialism on her subconscious, the "gut-wrenching nightmares" (p. 50) that are familiar to me, nightmares about people being tortured and not being able to do anything about it is the stuff of my own nightmares. I too feel the weight that is the whole universe "making me slow and blind. Impotent. Powerless. Voiceless. Cowardly" (p. 51). This is how it feels to live with a mind that is colonized. We are "taught to fear our instincts" (p. 51). The narrator's medicine is the Shaman's way, "We must hunt down and fall in love with Fear, therefore defeating our self-doubt every day. This is followed by joy. This is followed by handing over control. This is followed by lightness. This is followed by freedom. This releases the dreams" (p. 51).

The narrator comes to realize at a young age that outsiders, that marginalized people, called subalterns in academia, or queer folks, punks and racialized people, people who are "othered" live by another law: "Society dictates the rules of what is acceptable, but in reality there are only the rules of nature" (p. 51). The narrator reclaims her own Shaman's way by standing in her power to "see" or seer, she sees all around her people who are abusive "convincing themselves that they are justified…I seem THEM" (p. 51).

The narrator describes what it is like to see people as the light that animates them, that some people emit a warm and delicate light, the narrator seeks to spend more time with these people because "There is nothing more beautiful than someone being real" (p. 52). She warns us to stay away from people whose "light is sick" (p. 52). She tells us not to help them, it is "like tying rocks to your feet and jumping into icy waters with them" (p. 52).

The Shaman's Initiation

In the next section the girl undergoes a life/death/rebirth Initiation on the Ice under the Northern Lights, fifty feet from the Arctic Ocean, "the sea seems eternal. She offers comfort in the form of a Vast Solidarity. Our Original Home" (p. 54). She wonders as she walks the ice "how much is connected?" (p. 54). She sings to the Northern Lights to coax them out of the sky, "the power of sound conduits our thoughts into emotions that then manifest in action. Sound can heal. Sound can kill" (p. 56). As she sings, the narrator connects to both the sky and "deep into the water"(p. 56) and the Northern Lights are curious, "drawn by the sound of flesh and my meagre offering of spirit…The Lights begin to blur and I swear they are calling me backwards/forwards in Time, back to a time before I was born and where I will return after I die" (p. 56). The girl has a vision of seeing the "majesty of the ancestors" (p. 57) in the Northern Lights and weeps, then "the world turns upside down" (p. 57). She wakes up from "what must have been a dangerous dream" (p. 57). The girl realizes her coat is unzipped "seemingly in offering. The cold had its way with me" (p. 57). Later back at home in the privacy of the bathroom, the girl blows a glowing green out of her nose, "squirming like larvae" (p. 57) a gift from Waawaate, the Northern Lights (pp. 56-57).

Planting seeds of reconciliation, weaving a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The poetic concept in the poem is the activity of weaving a tapestry. "This tapestry has not been woven by accident…Poisonous intent disguised by the shine of the thread" (p. 58). The poetic voice of the outsider takes center stage: "When *we* weave, we weave past longing, past glory, past greed…we plant ideas…we raise fists we draw" (p, 58). The narrator declares her manifesto: "Survival is the only guide, we weave our own sinew…harvest the truth…collect the rent. This tapestry is being rewoven" (p. 59).

Holy Fuck

The girl is ravished by Northern Lights on the Ice. The narrator uses her Shaman's way, her knowledge about Time to seek connection with Spirit, "Time does not obey the clock…You do not travel through time; time travels through you…We spend our lives trying to contemplate and encapsulate the divinity of Spirit, only to blunder forth and never relax into letting Communication happen" (pp. 110-111). She has the key, her shaman ways to guide her in her Spirit journey under the Ice, she wants to look for Sedna but "the current is strong, and if Spirit becomes lost Body will succumb to the cold" (p. 111). The girl shares her knowledge of Divinity as she explores the floor of the Arctic Ocean as Spirit, "What happens before birth and resumes after death-this is more real than the brief spark of life" (p. 112). Coming back from this Exploration is "laborious and very slow. For one terrifying moment I am trapped under the ice…it takes monumental effort to wiggle my toes and open my eyes" (p. 112).

She has attracted the attention of the Northern Lights with her Exploration, "they came down in a mighty and cyclonic display of power. Mere metres above me, they sound like ancient whales and snapping ice" (p. 113). The connection to the forces of Nature and the Ancients brings forth Fear, but here is no time for Fear, "these are the Masters of law and Nature…I am powerless now" (p. 113). The girl has surrendered to these powers and as the Light "shapes itself into long shards…the light seems to sear my fluid… The backs of my eyeballs begin to melt from agony to ecstasy as a large shard of light is thrust down my throat…the panic melts as my throat is opened; it is slit vertically but not destroyed. I'm healed with torture" (pp. 113-114). The sexual imagery of the encounter between the girl and the Light is a holy fuck, "My clit explodes and I am split in two from head to toe as the light from my throat joins the light in my womb and begins to make a great figure eight in my Body" (p. 114). She wakes up on the ice naked, "shaking violently…bleeding from every orifice…A hot shower calms me…I wipe my pussy and a green glow is left on the Kleenex. It squirms like a larva" (p. 114). This image references back to the first encounter with the Northern Lights when she blows her nose and a green glow, like larvae are on the Kleenex that time. In the poem that follows called "Misplaced" the girl declares "My womb is impregnated with mourning…birthing sorrow…Steep cliffs want me/ To pretend to have feathers…I smell falsehood…Eating lies/I press my mouth to the ground/And join them" (p. 115), the girl cannot tell anyone about the Holy Fuck, she must participate in falsehoods because "nobody would believe me" (p. 114).

Time of Abundance
The girl is healing after her adventure on the Ice and gaining psychic powers: "I can see people's words before they come out of their mouths…Strange things start happening…Calmness replaces anxiety…my vision expands…I have learned to coax orgasms out of the sacred place" (pp. 116-117), the girl is exploring her sexuality through self-pleasure, the sacred place is her vagina. The Time of Abundance, or spring has come to the north and the girl comes to a realization about her environment, about the Land: "I realize that the birds see in a completely different way than we humans do. We are slow and lumbering…they look at us as we look at the trees, slow but full of longevity. The trees look at the rocks that way. Rocks look at the mountains that way. Mountains look at the water that way. Earth looks at the sun that way. Everyone has an elder" (p. 117).

With spring comes adventures on a ship abandoned by the foreigners, the Non-Indigenous from long ago, who are called "extreme adventurers…How presumptuous it is to assume that an experience is limited to your own two eyes" (p. 117). The girl wonders about the foreigners, they spark her imagination: "Did they cast any bodies overboard…Did their lips retreat in agony from their teeth as they received the same treatment the elements have always given us? The Land has no hierarchy. The Land has no manners; you only obey and enjoy what is afforded you by her greatness. Only logic and great care ensure your survival. Only the patterns of skills gifted by our ancestors keep us living in harmony. We obey or we succumb" (p. 118). While playing near the ship, they find a rotting mop head and think it's a human head, "It was fun to believe we had found a body, considering there was the real body of a shaman that had rotted in the town dump, rejected from the public graveyard by the Anglican ministers. I never understood how foreigners could come and tell us where to die and where to live. Where to be buried and how to breed" (p. 119). Colonialism controls the lives of the people in her community, colonialism has treated their shaman like garbage. The girl shaman is on a quest towards decolonizing her mind when she entertains these questions, the narrator has bucked the settler colonial heteropatriarchical narrative of the colonial state that tells her people how to breed, the

only acceptable way that will get you buried in a graveyard and not a dump is the missionary position. By opening herself up, offering herself to the forces of nature and being impregnated by the Northern Lights, the narrator has "queered" herself in the eyes of the settler colonial state.

Birthing memory

The young woman shaman gives birth to twins, before birth the babies inside her "feel like a hundred fast snakes writhing in unison…I was expecting pain…something other than the feeling like the moon had grown fingers and used them to coax open my cervix…I am a conduit from the spirit world into the physical one…Death wants me as much as Cold" (p. 153). When Waawaate comes down to cover her body like a blanket: "This experience is the exact opposite of the last one; a gentle warmth and love pours forth" (p. 153) as she gives birth she has orgasms, "The Northern Lights are pleasuring me during birth!" (p. 154).

The midwife screams as they are born because they "changed form at the direction of the Northern Lights" (p. 154), they are no wider than the umbilical cords and "A flash of lightning comes out of their mouths and joins the Northern Lights" (p. 154) as their umbilical cords attach to the midwife's eyes, "the cords suck the memory out of her consciousness and replace it with a more plausible birthing memory" (p. 154).

After giving birth to the twins, "The circle of life is complete as the milk flows out of me. Astounding green milk" (p. 155). The twins are not alike, the boy is larger, he "eats up the agony, and seems to grow stronger when he bears witness to suffering" (p. 156) while the girl "is an abyss. It is so easy to fall into her. She is sweet. Always cooing. Savik is silent. The Knowing in his eyes is alarming" (p. 156). The twins nursing habits are a message, the girl drinks holy milk from her right breast and the boy drinks iron milk from her left breast, one breast becomes larger than the other, "There must be an imbalance of pain in the world" (p. 159). The poem that follows calls for a "collective shift of consciousness… Critical thinking…While we/Eat puke off a residential school floor…A collective shift of consciousness/Because sunflowers don't turn to the moon" (p. 160). The imbalance brought by colonialism to her community is partially healed by her birthing memory, but a shift in consciousness is needed by the world "before the sunflowers burn" (p. 161).

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The Body as Contact-Zone in Queer & Two-Spirit Indigenous Literature

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'The Body as Contact Zone' provides an analysis of contemporary queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous literature in Canada. Drawing attention to the ways in which these texts provide a critical intervention to both Indigenous decolonization movements and queer theory, the body emerges here as a site of dispossession. The authors analysed herein, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Joshua Whitehead, Adam Garnet Jones and Gwen Benaway, point to the insidious violence that is embedded in modern sexuality for Indigenous peoples in Canada. The young queer and Two-Spirit artists and theorists analysed herein, chosen for their prominence in both academic and public life, I argue, create a healing space in meditating upon what queerness signifies within their community and settler society. The themes that emerge include: the non-singularity of the self; sex and gender as colonial biopolitics; ostracization and abjection; male megalomania; sovereignty against queerness; sexuality modelled upon whiteness; sexual fetishization; and lastly, social death. In reconfiguring the body as a site of dispossession, these texts demonstrated the ways in which modern sexuality is not simply the product of colonialism and imperialism, but rather the very means through which they are produced. The body, and more specifically, the gendered and sexual dimensions that animate these social relations, become the spaces to be colonized, and simultaneously, the conduits of colonization in how desire shapes our social relations. Utilizing the power of art in providing a critical intervention to both decolonial thought and queer theory, the authors herein highlight the insidious power of sexuality in settler colonialism, and the insidious power of settler colonialism in modern sexuality.

"Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both= *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples*. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice."

—Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*

I. Introduction

'The Body as Contact Zone' provides an analysis of contemporary queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous literature in Canada. Drawing attention to the ways in which these texts provide a critical intervention to both Indigenous decolonization movements and queer theory, the body emerges here as a site of dispossession. The authors analysed herein, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Joshua Whitehead, Adam Garnet Jones and Gwen Benaway, chosen for their prominence in both academic and public life, point to the insidious violence that is embedded in modern sexuality for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Configuring the body as a 'contact zone' provides us with an alternative spatial and temporal understanding of colonialism and imperialism. Spatially, the authors herein configure the body as both a space *to be* colonized and the *conduit* of colonization itself. As a space to be colonized, the body is targeted for deviance from the heterosexual norm, prescribed a 'language' through which it becomes legible to society. Becoming 'bodied' through this 'language' also informs the ways in which we desire others, or consider ourselves desirable, and through this process we sustain the very structures that discipline Indigenous bodies. Temporally, this re-configuration complicates the idea that 'contact' is something to be relegated to the 'dustbins' of history, demonstrating instead how the body is an interminable contact zone. In doing so, these authors argue that Indigenous decolonization needs to be queered, and that queer theory needs to be decolonized. Whereas heteronormativity generally remains undisputed within

resurgence movements, or relegated to the margins, settler colonialism similarly often remains invisible as a colonial structure within queer theory. These texts bring these two emancipatory traditions into dialogue, demonstrating the ways in which the body is embedded in structures of power antithetical to the goals of these traditions.

I would like to thank Maya Ode'amik Chacaby for creating a warm, encouraging and insightful space for analysis in her course, Queer Indigenous Politics and Culture, offered by the SDS program here at U of T - SG. Her support for my preliminary and 'unpolished' investigations into sexual desire and settler colonialism gave rise to this piece written for another course on the aesthetics of space, place and power. As a settler I have a responsibility to honour my relations. This requires that I do my part in making sure that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may 'sail down the river of life' unencumbered by the other, and supported where need be, as required by the Two-Row Wampum that binds us together on this land. This piece was intended to be a space for reflection and learning on my part as to the violence endured by queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples as told by them in their own words and medium. As Maya presciently argues, you cannot go forward without knowing where you have been, and to that end, where you are right now. This is my attempt to locate myself both as a settler coloniser and as someone engaged in using their platform to undo the structures of oppression and injustice that shape the ways in which Indigenous peoples continue to struggle against dispossession on Turtle Island. As this piece demonstrates, gender and sexuality have always been insidious forms of violence accompanying, and *producing*, colonialism and imperialism, and it is time we recognize their power.

II. Resurgence & the Body's Colonial Heritage

> … a native man looks me in the eyes as he refuses to hold my hand during a round dance. his pupils are like bullets and i wonder what kind of pain he's been through to not want me in this world with him any longer […] *and i think about the time an elder told me to be a man and to decolonize in the same breath* (Belcourt, 2019, p. 11, emphasis mine)

Resurgence was first coined by the Mohawk theorist Taiaiake Alfred at the turn of the century to signal a shift away from state institutions of recognition and nation-state models of nationalism within Indigenous communities and discourses of decolonization. It has since been further developed by the Nishnaabeg theorist and writer Leanne Simpson and Dene theorist Glenn S. Coulthard. In short, resurgence refers to the revitalization of traditional community knowledge and ethics, and their application to contemporary issues facing Indigenous peoples. As Simpson writes, "[t]ransforming ourselves, our communities and our nations is ultimately the *first* step in transforming our relationship with the state" (Simpson, 2011, p. 17).

Beginning in the 1970s, the state and many Indigenous political organizations across Canada understood decolonization as the delegation, or reclamation, of governance institutions. The 'politics of recognition,' coined in 1998 by Richard Day and expanded upon since by Coulthard, is the attempt to reconcile Indigenous identity claims with state sovereignty in the delegation of limited rights and access to land, capital and political power to Indigenous communities. As the latter argues, these often take the form of land claim settlements, economic development initiatives and self-government agreements (Coulthard, 2014, p. 3). This development in Indigenous and Canadian state relations followed the Supreme Court of Canada's affirmation of the existence of 'Aboriginal' title to lands 'unceded' by treaty negotiations in 1973, and the James Bay & Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQ) of 1975, which saw the establishment of a joint ownership and management of the lands in northern Quebec between the Cree, Inuit and the province. These politics were further informed by the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the decolonization movements of the 'Third World' that sought to remove colonial powers from political and economic institutions and replace them with Indigenous elites. "Social and cultural issues," as Alfred writes, "were subsumed in the drive to reassume political powers that had been taken away from our people by the state; the central decolonizing imperative was [thus] a form of nationalism" (Alfred, 1999, p. 3). Decolonization, more generally, then, was understood as the question of *who* exercised power, but not *how* power was exercised *per se*.

By the late 1990s, however, the idea of 'Aboriginal self-government' or 'tribal sovereignty' became increasingly tantamount to further subsumption into state mechanisms of governance and regulation of Indigenous life. Alfred, Simpson and Coulthard each argue that part of the reason for this was the lack of meaningful cultural knowledge and values informing these new 'post-colonial' governance institutions. As Alfred argues, in a vein similar to that of Fanon and Memmi, in "this supposedly post-colonial world, what does it matter if the reserve is run by Indians, so long as they think like businessmen, behave like bureaucrats, and are paid to carry out the same old policies?" (*Ibid.*, p. 11). Colonization, these theorists argue, has been, and continues to be a process of disconnection. Disconnection from culture, disconnection from land, and thus disconnection from one another leading to cultural anomie (Alfred, 1999, p. 5; Simpson, 2011, p. 14; Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). For example, one elder interviewed by Alfred referred to the youth in her community as "free-floating fragments" as a result of this disconnection (Alfred, 1999, p. 32). For her, the lack of access to culture translated into a lack of individual self-consciousness and well-being, leaving them vulnerable in the face of colonial violence, be it political, economic or social. As Simpson argues, further developing this point, when one becomes disconnected from one's stories and histories of resistance—when one thinks of oneself as a 'defeated people'—shame takes over the community, and this leads to a spiritual crisis (Simpson, 2011, p. 14).

Moreover, as Alfred and Coulthard argue, the models of recognition and integration politics described above as 'Aboriginal self-government' and 'tribal sovereignty' were never intended to allow for the flourishing of Indigenous livelihoods as sovereign individuals and nations as resurgence entails. As Coulthard notes, recognition and delegation models of politics that depend on the legitimacy of the state as harbinger of rights and justice reproduce the unequal power relations within which Indigenous peoples interminably answer to the state (Coulthard, 2014, p. 3). As Alfred succinctly argues:

> The framework of current reformist or reconciling negotiations are about
> handing us the scraps of history: self-government and jurisdictional authorities
> for state-created Indian governments with the larger colonial system and
> subjection of Onkwehonwe to the blunt force of capitalism by integrating
> them as wage slaves into the mainstream resource-exploitation economy.
> (Alfred, 2005, p. 37)

In other words, the 'us-versus-them' dialectic remains intact. What this means, Alfred further argues, is that "our bodies may live without our languages, lands, or freedom, but they will be hollow shells" (Alfred, 2005, p. 12). Alfred, Simpson and Coulthard each argue that Indigeneity is not simply "a matter of looking the part," as in claiming Indigenous ancestry, or possessing the minimal quantum of Indigenous blood, or that of singing and dancing in traditional ceremonies (Alfred, 2005, p. 28). It is not a signifier of diversity within a multicultural society but a deeply political and reflexive practice rooted in traditional teachings and ethics, and thus, community participation. It is within this context, then, that Simpson concludes that resurgence is the process of "re-creating the cultural and political flourishment of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens" (Simpson, 2011, p. 51). It is, as the Mi'kmaq feminist theorist Bonita Lawrence argues, the attempt at breaking with the grammar of 'Indianness' that is embedded within contemporary Indigenous communities as a result of colonization (Lawrence, 2003, p. 25).

Despite the importance of resurgence in contemporary movements and theorizations of decolonization in Canada, the young Cree theorist and writer, Belcourt, argues that there is a critical lack of attention given to the gendered and sexualized dimensions of contemporary understandings of tradition within resurgence theory, and communities more generally. In a short piece, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?," he expresses concern with the erasure of Indigenous queer life within both Indigenous liberation movements and the academy's 'decolonial' discipline: Indigenous Studies. This is the sentiment Belcourt communicates in the epigraph above when he is asked by an elder to be a 'man' and to 'decolonize' in the same breath. It is thus within this context that we ought to proceed in our analysis of contemporary queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous literature. Working within the tradition of resurgence as the self-reflexive and situated praxis of interrogation of one's historicity within colonialism as an Indigenous person, these texts below highlight the importance of queerness

historically to many Indigenous communities across Canada, as well as the purchase of Two-Spirit perspectives to the discourse of decolonization.

III. Biopolitics: The Body as Colonial Space

> Indeed, modern sexuality is the *contact zone*, with all its manifestations
> meaningfully contextualized by a relationality of 'Natives' to 'settlers' on
> colonized land. (Morgensen, 2011, p. 52, emphasis mine)

In a seminal text of queer Indigenous studies, Scott L. Morgensen argues in a vein similar to that of Anne McClintock's in *Imperial Leather*, that modern sexuality is not simply the product of colonialism and imperialism, but rather the very means through which these systems of power were produced (*Ibid.*, p. 42). As he writes in the epigraph above, the body as configured and produced *by* and *for* modern sexuality is the contact zone of colonialism and imperialism. This reading provides us with a different spatial and temporal understanding of how these systems of power form themselves. Spatially, the body becomes inextricable from questions of economic and political power, as these questions themselves become inseparable from questions of embodiments. The body, and more specifically, the gendered and sexual dimensions that animate these social relations, becomes the space *to be* colonized, and simultaneously, the *conduit* of colonization. As a space to be colonized, the body is targeted for deviance from the heterosexual norm, prescribed a 'language' through which it becomes legible to society. Becoming 'bodied' through this 'language' also informs the ways in which we desire others, or consider ourselves desirable, and through this process we sustain the very structures that discipline Indigenous bodies. Temporally, on the other hand, the notion of an 'original' contact period becomes problematized as a myopic reading of the ways in which systems of power sustain themselves over time. It is for this reason that Qwo-Li Driskill, a Cherokee Two-Spirit theorist and writer, argues that the body is the original sight of dispossession (Driskill, 2004, p. 50-64).

Though resurgence theory, as highlighted above, does not generally address the heteronormativity of embodied relations in the biopolitics of modern colonialism, the attention it gives, however, to the material and discursive conditions that animate Indigeneity is compatible with the work of queer and Two-Spirit artists analysed herein. In reconfiguring the body as a gendered and sexualized set of relations, these writers reconfigure the body as a space of colonization, and simultaneously as a spatial marker of colonial relations. That is to say, these writers further the work of resurgence described above, drawing upon the historicity of queerness in their communities as well as the purchase of queerness as an analytical framework. In doing so, these writers display in jarring detail the violence intrinsic to modern sexuality for queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples. Framed as antithetical to national and cultural sovereignty, they are ostracized for their queerness, victims of physical violence from both family and community members. They are not only victims of 'social death' in settler society for being Indigenous, but within their own communities as well for being queer. Objects of settler fetishes, I argue in this textual analysis that queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous youth come into their sexuality in the age of mass media where sexuality is defined along the axes of whiteness and toxic masculinity. As Morgensen argues, emerging in the colonial and imperial endeavour, modern masculinity is positioned not only against femininity within the settler realm, but against indigeneity itself in both effeminizing and animalizing, and thus, queering Indigenous men (Morgensen, 2011, p. 36-37). It thereby incites an inflated masculine ego within Indigenous men that attempts to compensate for this narrative degradation by using the very definitions of masculinity used to oppress them. That is, queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous youth live in a precarious space, both physically and conceptually. The analyses that follow are examples of the ways in which these writers travel, and survive, this violent terrain.

This Wound is a World and *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field* are two short collections of poetry written Belcourt. A dominant theme across both collections is the non-singularity of the self. For Belcourt, who is trained in both comparative literature and Indigenous studies, the body is understood as an assemblage of disparate selves. To highlight this multiplicity, he writes that his body is like a book of sad poems, "a collage of meditations on love and shattered selves" (Belcourt, 2017, p. 18). A book of poems, though a tightly bound entity, is a collection of separate literary works joined together by a central figure like the poet or a general theme. This means, more specifically, that each

poem stands on its own unlike the novel, where each component is a necessary part of a whole without which there would be no meaning. To refer to oneself as a book of poems, I argue, is a critique of modernity's conception of the human as a tightly bound, singular and autonomous being. It is not, moreover, a critique grounded exclusively in critical and postmodern theory as his training would suggest. It is grounded in an ontological understanding of reality and selfhood as relational that is shared by Indigenous communities across North America, despite cultural and national differences (Wilson, 2008, p. 73). As the Opaskwayak Cree theorist Shawn Wilson argues, knowledge is accessed through both human and non-human relationships, and it is in these relationships that 'truth' lies, not in the object itself. Relationships are thus both the medium and the 'thing' to be explored as constitutive of reality. It is a dynamic account of reality that allows for the presence of multiple realities and truths. Applied to the individual, this understanding means that what we see in one given space and time is but one facet, or representation, of the individual that is rendered legible by the body in its specific discursive enunciation. In the preface to Benaway's *Holy Wild*, the Anishinaabeg painter Quill Christie-Peters seconds this view. She writes that the body is irreducible to mere physicality, that it is instead "an indefinable ebb and flow of homeland, ancestors and spirit kin […] that cannot be compartmentalized from the places of creation [we] come from" (Chrisie-Peter, 2018, p. 12). Similarly, Belcourt writes in another poem, "indigeneity troubles the idea of 'having' a body" (Belcourt, 2017, p. 18). Drawing upon traditional Cree teachings, as well as the experience of abjection as a queer Indigenous youth, he challenges the dominant conception of the 'self' that informs both Western and resurgence narratives through anecdote and literary style, as in choosing to define the body as a collection of poems.

The theme of non-singularity is also taken up by the Oji-Cree writer, Joshua Whitehead, in his collection of poems *full-metal indigiqueer* and his novel *Johnny Appleseed*. These texts are both biographical fiction that describe the experience of growing up on a reserve as a queer cis-male, the target of homophobic violence by both his family and community members, as well as the experience of living in Winnipeg as a young adult and the object of racial fetishism. That is, both texts highlight the processes of being made 'Other,' of being pushed physically and conceptually outside of the bounds of normativity. *full-metal indigiqueer* is a self-described dystopian cyberpunk account of Whitehead's alter ego, the gender neutral trickster ZOA, in their attempt to bring about a new world order that is both queer and decolonial. The trickster, or Nanabush/Nanabozho as it is otherwise known, is an important and recurring shapeshifting figure in Anishinaabeg culture as a teacher of how to live 'the good life.' As Simpson argues, often a deviant character, or simply a 'buffoon' falling prey to their weaknesses, the trickster demonstrates the trials and tribulations of "the ordinary human struggle" that is simply trying to live 'the good life' (Simpson, 2011, p. 73). The trickster is a shape-shifter, it takes the form of many creatures across different stories, and likewise, different genders where necessary. Though presenting themselves as computer software, the trickster in this collection explicitly refuses the appropriation of its 'software' for ends not of their own making. As Whitehead writes, "though i am machine / you cannot download me / when you enter me / do not decode my dna / as an html story" (Whitehead, 2017, p. 76). Though ZOA is stating in the first half of this excerpt that they are beyond cognition, so to speak, they are also asking us in the second half to withhold any attempt at trying to decode their software like 'an html story.' Throughout the collection we similarly witness Whitehead's yearning for a relationship where he is not reduced to his indigeneity, asked to perform his race in sexual encounters. As he writes,

> even my most liberal lovers / police my nipples & straighten my hair / expect
> me to look like / booboo stewart & taylor lautner /when they undress me /
> they want beaded fringe / sunburnt flesh; windburnt braids / a body odor
> that smells less like fermentation / more like a sweet[ER]grass / thats been
> smudging since reconciliation / never expect to see an underfed / brown boy
> whose body is riddled with marks / s t r e t c h i n g / back to pre-
> contact dates… (*Ibid.*, p. 95)

In these sexual encounters, Whitehead is not simply reminded of his otherness, but is being made Other in the process. But it is not just in these interactions that he is 'othered'. As he notes, growing up

in the age of mass media, he came into his sexuality emulating white and cis-male gay porn stars on the web. For example, in one poem he describes losing his virginity as the desire to reproduce a gay porn scenario where he would be playing the role of Johnny Rapid and his partner that of Jake Bass (*Ibid.*, p. 39). Though this was the wish, he further explains that in reality it was nothing like it. This sense of disjointedness in aspiration and experience plagues the text and is further communicated in the style of writing Whitehead employs. As the excerpt above demonstrates, the style is subversive and meant to make the experience of reading at times tortuous. The collection features a series of poems written in html code, interlaced with Cree words to disrupt the dominance of the English language. The subject 'i,' moreover, is never capitalized in a move to reject the primacy of the subject in Western philosophy like Belcourt. The text reads as a series of attempts to defamiliarize the reader, a process akin to the task of decolonization. As described above, resurgence is this constant interrogation and defamiliarization of the self through traditional teachings and ethics. Whitehead does this here through the figure of the trickster and the style employed. In reading this text, as in decolonization, we move forward one step only to end up moving back two.

Johnny Appleseed, on the other hand, is written in the form of a novel. The story of an Oji-Cree boy who lives in Winnipeg as a sex worker, it is also the story of a queer boy who grows up with the support of his mother and grandmother for being queer. This desire for acceptance from family is something Whitehead expresses in the collection of poems. As he writes there, "i wish the reservation wouldnt deny / cant i be an ndn too? / why is my ethnicity always lacking proof? / are two brown boys in love not injun enough?"; or, as he writes in another poem about his deceased grandmother, "would you teach me what it means to be a 2S [Two-Spirit] / tell me i can be a beautiful brown boy in love[questionmark]" (*Ibid.*, p. 102). The main character, Johnny, though confident in his sexuality, suffers from economic hardships growing up in a low-income family on a poor reserve. Having moved to Winnipeg to find a job, he soon realizes that the money he earns barely covers the rent. To make up for the difference, he begins to experiment as a cyber-sex-worker, producing individual custom shows for customers. Though he is able to experiment with several characters, his 'career' only takes off, so to speak, once he begins to perform as an 'Indian' upon the request of one customer (Whitehead, 2018, p. 18). Whitehead describes this experience of performing his indigeneity in the form of stereotypes as analogous to the broken treaty relations between Indigenous nations and the state in Canada. In a poem describing a violent sexual encounter with a settler unsatisfied with his 'performance' as an 'Indian,' he writes, "this is treaty 1 territory / so you may as well treat yourself too" (Whitehead, 2017, p. 42). In comparing his body to the land that has been appropriated, Whitehead argues that his indigeneity is seen as something to be controlled *by*, and performed *for*, settlers. In these instances, Whitehead reminds us that sexual and gendered embodiments are the targets of colonial violence. But, as he further demonstrates in this novel, this colonial violence does not come from non-Indigenous peoples alone, it is something he experiences within his home community. On the reserve, as he details in Johnny's experiences of childhood bullying, his queerness is perceived as a threat to the nation, but more specifically, to the manhood of his brothers.

In *Imperial Leather* McClintock argues that male violence in the British Victorian era of colonialism and imperialism represents the displacement of male anxiety over boundary loss (McClintock, 1995, p. 24). She calls this phenomenon male megalomania. In communities that have accepted the grammar of 'Indianness' of the *Indian Act*, as Lawrence argues, where identity and citizenship are mediated by heterosexual reproduction and blood quantum, queerness presents itself as a threat to community survival. In addition, as the Métis theorist Kim Anderson and Saulteaux theorist Robert A. Innes argue, hegemonic masculinity, in its emphasis on power and control, encourages Indigenous men to assert this power by controlling Indigenous women and other Indigenous men who are considered feminine (Anderson & Innes, 2015, p. 11). The hypermasculinity that colonialism incites from Indigenous men as subjects of material and discursive dispossession translates into lateral violence within the community against the very figures that haunt the boundaries of this masculinity. Homophobia, Whitehead communicates across these two texts, is precisely this displacement of male anxiety over boundary loss: national and cultural boundaries, and their relationship to gender, sexual and racial boundaries.

The dichotomy established between queerness and sovereignty also informs the story of Shane and David in Jones' *Fire Song*. Set in an Anishinaabeg community in northern Ontario, the

novel explores the tensions between Shane, the narrator who dreams of moving to Toronto to attend university, and David, his lover, who wishes to remain on the reserve with his grandmother, an elder in the community who is training him in traditional knowledge. In addition, Shane and David are secret lovers, pretending to be straight and dating other girls. The wish to move to Toronto is not only motivated by academic interests, but by the desire to be free as a gay male. However, in the community there is a strong resentment against children who move south to urban centres. Aware of Shane's aspirations, David's grandmother, Evie, tells him: "You'd be more good to us if you stayed here. Bad things happen when people go down south. They get a degree, get addicted, go gay, and who knows what else. We don't hardly see them after" (Jones, 2018, p. 139). This guilt is further compounded by his mother's grief over the sudden loss of his younger sister to suicide. Nevertheless, Shane is adamant that he and David must move. Aware that they are spending a lot of time together, Evie warns her grandson that it is not healthy for him to be surrounded by "male energy" only, that there has "to be balance" (*Ibid.*, p. 140). As Shane tells us, he has heard many versions of this lesson throughout his life. As he writes, there are "[r]igid rules with no room for him and David. Rules that cut them out like something sick" (*Ibid.*, p. 197). Unaware that these are recent conceptions of gender and sexuality that their people would not have followed generations prior, Shane and David are convinced that there is no place for them as they truly are within their community. However, by the end of the story, Evie comes around in accepting Shane and David as gay partners after much reflection and conversations with fellow elders from other communities. This story is about the danger of falling prey to essentialisms in discourses of community sovereignty and well-being, and the precarious position queer youth are forced into as a result. But it is also, more importantly, about the potential for further community building in addressing these issues.

For Benaway, on the other hand, this reconciliation between community membership and queer freedom as a trans women remains incomplete. In a poem on the difficulty and fear of transitioning, she writes, "I would go home, / if it existed, if I wasn't trans / and abandoned by God" (Benaway, 2018, p. 15). In the two collections of poems analysed herein, *Holy Wild* and *Passage*, Benaway explores the themes addressed above—the non-singularity of the self, whiteness embedded in the sexual 'education of desire,' abjection and physical abuse, as well as being made the object of fetishism—but from the perspective of trans embodiment. For her, it is not only through sexuality that she experiences her body as a 'prison' but through her gender. As a pale-skin Métis, Benaway is not the object of racial fetishism in her sexual encounters with men, but rather the object of trans fetishism. In these encounters, she writes of being reminded that the body she is desired for is not the one she desires for herself. She expresses this yearning for someone who does not reduce her to her trans-ness in the following excerpt:

> I want the impossible, / to be the kind of girl / boys like you desire / not just
> for experimental sex, / late night encounters hidden / from the real girlfriends
> / the ones you introduce / to parents and call beautiful, / the girls I see on the
> street / in their short dresses, hairless / with their hands in your hands, / no one
> looking or evaluating (Benaway, 2016, p. 75).

In addition to the potential disappointment every boy presents, Benaway discusses the implications of childhood abuse in the development of her sexuality and relationship to men. As she writes, "fat in sweatpants and always reading, / never wrestling with my brother / or catching the baseballs you threw [speaking to her father]," she was a disappointment to her father who took it out on her through physical abuse (*Ibid.*, p. 27). This childhood trauma further complicates her ability to feel comfortable in her body during sex, often having flashbacks to the violence she has endured during sexual intercourse (*Ibid.*, p. 82). As she writes on this topic, "every time I let / them fuck me / even if it reminds / me of rape, / of my father's hands / above my naked body" (*Ibid.*, p. 107). Or, as she writes elsewhere, "if I let a boy fuck me, / I find myself / inconsolable under him, / the pressure of his cock / inside me like a threat, / anxiety in waves as I / feel muscles contract, / my rectum expanding / to drive me along / my orgasm, confused / between pain and the fear / of rupture or infection, / being fucked feels fatal" (*Ibid.*, p. 83). Moreover, she does not solely link the need for empowerment in her sexuality with her experience as a trans-woman, or the violence endured under her father's care, but with the Métis struggle for recognition from the state and Indigenous groups alike. Highlighting the difficult

link between love and violence in the history of the Métis people, she writes: "Métis means transient, landless. / no treaties for half-breeds, just regret. / conquest isn't legendary to me, / descendant of exploration's tailings, / *victim and rapist in one soul*" (*Ibid.*, p. 23). Both 'victim and rapist in one soul,' the Métis inflict upon one another the violence that is done unto them. The Sto:lo author and theorist, Lee Maracle, calls this lateral violence. It is the ways in which oppressed groups transfer the hurt and lack of self-worth that comes from the experience of being colonized onto their kin as the latter provide embodied representations of their own shame (Maracle, 1996, p. 11). As she writes, it is "our anti-colonial rage working itself out in an expression of hate for one another" (*Ibid.*). Interspersed with Anishinaabeg language, as seen in both Belcourt and Whitehead's collections, Benaway demonstrates in these poems a deep longing for 'home' as well as her attempt to destabilize the hegemony of the English language in how she is able to express this grief. In doing so, these theorists and artists begin the process of reclaiming the body.

IV. Un-Settling Queer Theory

> Queer is a word someone invented to hurt / then it was reclaimed, rebirthed. /
> I don't fit inside this history / rainbow flags don't make me feel safe (Benaway, 2016, p. 51)

The term Two-Spirit was first coined in 1990 at a conference in Winnipeg for queer Indigenous peoples across North America as a move away from the term 'berdache' which was ascribed to gender- or sexually- non-conforming behaviour by Jesuits and other missionary groups. Like queer, the term refuses a monolithic definition other than what is described above as 'non-conforming,' or simply, possessing both feminine and masculine qualities. Instead, it invites further dialogue as to what being queer and gender non-conforming means across different Indigenous nations and culture. For example, the Cherokee scholar and writer, Driskill, identifies as trans within Anglophone settings, but there is no equivalent in traditional Cherokee dialect, they simply are the gender they present themselves as (Driskill, 2004, p. 52).

For the Cree Two-Spirit education theorist, Alex Wilson, on the other hand, the term signifies a 'coming-in' rather than 'coming-out.' What she means by this, more specifically, is that coming-in does not signify the declaration of one's independence as coming-out does, but rather the act of *returning* home to community tradition. As she argues, the term Two-Spirit "acknowledges and affirms our identity as Indigenous peoples, our connection to the land, and values in our traditional cultures that recognize and accept gender and sexual diversity" (Wilson, 2015, p. 2). This narrative highlights the ways in which tradition valued queer individuals within their communities, and signifies a return to this ethic of non-interference and acceptance of diversity. Importantly, the term Two-Spirit also signifies independence from mainstream queer culture. As Benaway argues in the epigraph above, as an Indigenous person, "rainbow flags don't make [her] feel safe" (Benaway, 2016, p. 51). There are several reasons for this: one, mainstream queer movements can be the site of further racism, and transphobia for someone like Benaway, and second, queer theory as a discipline, unless challenged by queer of colour critique, often presupposes whiteness and/or homonormativity in its 'subjectless critique.' Citing a special issue of *Social Text*, Andrea Smith describes 'subjectless critique' as the disavowal of the possibility of "positing a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent" (Smith, 2011, p. 46). The danger, however, she argues, is that in leaving many of the categories through which we understand 'subjecthood' and 'objecthood' intact, ignoring the ways in which whiteness, able-bodied and middle-class accessibility remain entrenched in our conceptions of the possible subjects of queer politics, we simply end up reproducing white, cis-gendered, able-bodied and middle class aspirations to subjecthood. But more importantly, for the purpose of this essay, both queer of colour critique and queer theory generally fail to question the legitimacy of the nation-state in Canada, as well as in other settler colonial regimes (*Ibid.*, p. 57).

On the other hand, there is also a danger in applying the term 'decolonization' loosely without critical reflection to social justice movements and academic endeavours to 'decolonize' the academy. The Unangax education scholar Eve Tuck and co-writer, Wayne K. Yang, further this critique. As they write, decolonization in settler colonial regimes asks for different things than do other civil and

human rights-based social justice projects (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2). Decolonization, they write, is not a metaphor. That is, decolonization entails the repatriation of land to Indigenous communities and nations, and large investments in the revitalization of traditional knowledge. As they write, "the metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves to innocence,' that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (*Ibid.*, p. 1). Though often unintentional, they argue that many projects and disciplines, such as queer theory, subsume Indigenous struggles within larger universal struggles for liberation. Though these struggles are connected, these movements need to be decolonized first should they wish to succeed in their emancipatory aims. In *Johnny Appleseed*, Whitehead writes of this disconnect and further alienation that is experienced when mainstream queer culture speaks to queers generally from a universal perspective. Reflecting upon being a young boy on the reserve watching Dan Savage and Terry Miller on the internet telling young queers that 'it gets better', he writes, "[t]hey told me that they knew what I was going through, that they knew me. How so, I thought? You don't know me. You know lattes and condominiums—you don't know what it's like being a brown gay boy on the rez" (Whitehead, 2018, pp. 7-8). The power imbalances of settler colonialism that remain invisible in queer theory is the reason why the writers analysed herein all express, in one way or another, a certain level of discomfort with mainstream queer culture and politics. It is not, however, a refusal of these politics, but rather an intervention to the discourse of queer liberation demonstrating the ways in which modern sexuality is deeply embedded in settler colonialism.

V. Conclusion: Art as Decolonial Praxis

> Art is emotional. Emotion is artful. The purpose of art and emotion for the NDN is to escape the sociolinguistic prison of a white vernacular. My books are emotional and artful only insofar as they are criminal. (Belcourt, 2019, p. 84)

Resurgence, Simpson argues, entails the "regenerating [of] our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions" (2011, pp. 17-18). The role of art in resurgence as a healing practice is a prominent theme in Simpson's writings, herself a poet and spoken word artist. The young queer and Two-Spirit artists and theorists analysed herein, I argue, create a healing space in meditating upon what queerness signifies within their community and settler society. Instead of focusing primarily on political, legal and economic matters, as much of the literature does on decolonization and resurgence, these authors interrogate the mundane, yet traumatic, ways in which we are embodied and legible to one another through gender and sexuality. The themes that emerge include: the non-singularity of the self; sex and gender as colonial biopolitics; ostracization and abjection; male megalomania; sovereignty against queerness; sexuality modelled upon whiteness; sexual fetishization; and lastly, social death. In doing so, these texts communicate the precarious physical and conceptual positionality queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples embody. In reconfiguring the body as a site of dispossession, these texts demonstrate the ways in which modern sexuality is not simply the product of colonialism and imperialism, but rather the very means through which they are produced. The body, and more specifically, the gendered and sexual dimensions that animate these social relations, become the spaces *to be* colonized, and simultaneously, the *conduits* of colonization. Utilizing the power of art in providing a critical intervention to both decolonial thought and queer theory, the authors herein highlight the insidious power of sexuality in settler colonialism, and the insidious power of settler colonialism in modern sexuality.

Demonstrating the power of story-telling as a form of individual and community healing, the authors analysed herein point to the purchase of turning 'inward' in matters of decolonization, as the boundary between what is internal and external to the self appears increasingly porous, if not a fiction. Perhaps this move asks too much of us. It may be unrealistic, or too difficult, for each and every one of us to dig deep in our psyches and understand the social contingencies within which we become the individuals we are. But to make this jump, I argue, is to deny ourselves the power that we have as both

spaces and *conduits* of sociality. In other words, we are the 'stuff' of life and we must seize that power, however elusive it may be at times. It is not simply a call for the mindful consumption and interrogation of the material and discursive practices that shape the ways in which we become embodied, but a call for the production of materials that incite the social relations we want. We have a duty to support and share such work. Though these authors demonstrate that this task is a slow and tortuous process, they also demonstrate the ways in which it is an increasingly liberating struggle that gives us the strength to assist others, as these texts do for their readers. In doing so, we build community and understanding, and allow each other to 'sail the river of life' unencumbered as required by our original treaty, the Two-Row Wampum. In looking for the world we want, we must look back at the world, or *worlds*, as Wilson would argue, we have inherited and the ways in which they bring our bodies to life.

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Suction

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I think this story started forming in my head because I realized how exciting it would be to have sex with someone who had a suction cup for genitals. Yeah. In my head, I attached these genitals to a character who looked like an idealized form of someone who is like me: neither a man or a woman in any way, from above the pants to below. I then remembered it is never so simple. Queer bodies, queer relationships, are never so easy. But they are good too, and the good and bad often mingle strangely, queerly. This story could be called "when lost queers fuck" because that's basically what I'm trying to represent.

When they open the apartment door, I notice their neck first. They're just about my height, a tad taller. Their clavicle bone, the shape of their throat all push up and forward toward the skin. I like that. I'm sucking my belly in a little as I'm pulled and pushed into their shoulder. It's a brief embrace. I'm happy to exchange pleasantries. Not much has happened in a week. They don't have their glasses on. Their eyes seem smaller. They're wearing eyeliner. It's nice. I don't know if they were taught how to apply it or learned on their own.

"What are we eating?" I ask.

They smile. I never know what to say. My mind's drawing a blank. I don't think I've been on a real, official date for a year or more. I've been on things that are like dates, liaisons, trysts, meetings with romantic implications but that's not the same. Tonight, I am not going on a date. We are just meeting up. In their apartment. For dinner. So, I think I know what this is about. I've even gotten dressed up. Too bad the rain soaked right through my sweater to my skin.

They wear a lot of black. Their jeans are ripped in the fashionable way. They aren't wearing a belt. I keep the knees of all my pants strictly unripped because I care too much about my legs. I'm so glad they didn't know me before I stopped wearing shorts, before my hair was this length. They're lucky to live by themselves. It's a tiny place but I know how hard they must work to afford it. Oh. They don't have a couch. There's just a desk. And a bed.

"Let me finish up something. You can start the water boiling?"

They talk as I agree and play sous chef in the kitchenette, blindly searching the cupboards for pasta and the fridge for an unlabeled tub of meat sauce.

Together, we move the desk and clear away the day's work. I brought zucchini and we slice it and fry it. We get out plates, rearrange chairs, grab cutlery. They have a little ivy draped over the sill of a window cracked open a tad. None of their forks or spoons or knives match. Their hand presses gently on my back as I search for pepper, their hand reaches and finds. My shoulder brushes past theirs as I bring napkins, paper and with snowflakes printed on, to our table. My skin reacts like fear, goosebumps. They've been growing their hair out. Dark curls are just starting to appear. I always feel like a newt, a tadpole when we're together. They've been through all the motions already. Recovered from what should be recovered from. Got the help they needed and still need. I don't even know where to start really. I think I'd rely on them too much. They'd have my back but I couldn't have theirs, not totally, not truly, not correctly.

The zucchini has dried, shrunk, oil sticks to it. The pasta has loosened and become edible. Sharply, they snatch my wrist. Their grip is so strong. I can feel my flesh going white.

"Hey, our nails almost match."

Theirs are just as black as mine: a dark that is not shadow, a black that is substance and void and luster and shine, but sparkled with little moons and stars. If someone were to kiss me now, I'd taste like honey and coffee, bitter and sweet. I'm not sure I'd like that. I smile.

"Oh, you're right."

This time, I don't try to cover my mouth, I let them. Almost without my knowledge, their arm has

reached around my waist. We kiss? They kiss me. They kiss me shortly, in that way which is supposed to linger and entice. They pull away, elegantly disentangling us. I'm too stunned for words, but they know just what to say.

"I think dinner's ready."

The desk has become a thin dining table. Our knees almost press together, almost. Their back faces the wall, festooned with postcards and post it notes. We get lost in conversation between mouthfuls of pasta. I try to suppress the sense that either of us are scarfing down our food, trying to get past the meal and onto something else. Their bare feet rest on my wet socks.

"You should take those off."

"Isn't there some thing about how it's not gay if you have your socks on?"

"Is there?"

I take my socks off. The air chills my damp extremities. Their smirk breaks into a satisfied chuckle. I try to pull a little closer, bumping the table and sending a glass of water spilling. We laugh as we mop it up. It really is a nice sound. I excuse myself to go use the toilet.

The washroom is about the size of a closet. The floorspace is mostly bathtub. You could sit on the toilet seat and rest your chin on the sink. At least there's a window with a little cactus living on the sill. The sill looks filthy but still. Something like a soaked paper doily is flopped across the lip of the sink. It's like a circle of moist, wrinkled plastic wrap? Not a circle, a ring, a circle with a gap in the center. I decline to investigate further and plop myself down to do my business with my parts. There's a little smoldering emotion in me, it's a familiar feeling. If you call this sensation 'love' you hamstring yourself and may as well start writing sonnets. Maybe if it gets big you name it love, which means saying so and dealing with the consequences. When I first told somebody I loved them, it was a joyous expression which turned out to imply things I hadn't intended: unfamiliar, uncomfortable responsibilities. You can't know what the word means, what the feeling means, to the one you're confessing to. Enough. This doesn't help anyone.

When I leave the washroom, I see them doing the dishes. They move so casually, so confidently. I leave dirty plates soaking for days and blame myself for the bad smell. As they reach for the high cabinets the small of their back, the furrow of their spine, is revealed. Fat, muscle, bone all in motion.

"I don't need any help. You stay put. Just wait for me in the bed, if you please."

I wasn't thinking of helping. Their bed has a jumble of worn throw pillows. One seems home knitted, a rough heart shape. It all looks so cozy too.

"I was thinking we could watch a movie? I pirated The Royal Tenenbaums for us."

"The Wes Anderson movie?"

"Absolutely. *The* Wes Anderson movie."

They really don't seem interested in discussing the issue further. I don't mind. They get to fiddling with the tv, hooked up to a laptop. I should really say something endearing. I just watch them. The collar of their shirt is almost torn. I wonder if they've noticed. They settle in beside me and we both sink into the comforter. We are so, so close. I'll be honest, I do not pay much attention to what's on the screen. The resolution is weird anyway.

Around me comes an arm, their arm, slipping snug to my shoulder. I am so naturally frozen by this. As the ice pools in me I choose the position in which I want to be paralyzed: face tucked beside their head, one arm across stomach, whole body tilted towards them on a warbling angle braced by their limb. My free hand is wedged between us but it works. Am I supposed to do something? Do I not want to move or is there some border I can't see? I imagine us as two gears whose teeth don't mesh properly, grating together. That's too harsh. I want to hike up and down this body and find the place that feels perfectly comfortable, but it doesn't happen. Somewhere between the beach of your neck and the mountains of your feet is a patch of soft grass.

"Are you comfortable like that? Can you see?"

"Yeah, sure. Thanks."

Your body could be a bower, a little haven from the fever of the world, for us. And 'us' is too harsh too. Honestly, love has hurt me. It has made me too slow to change. It has told me what to value about myself and the meat attached to me. It has never made me who I'm supposed to be. Real love, the truest there is, has pulled me back and confined me. I have forgiven love. I have accepted it or crumpled it into a ball. But love has denied me. Would it be ok if this were just a transaction? Can I

exchange the warmth of my body for yours? Touch equalizes. My hand glances upon your skin and it gives just slightly, just as much as the pressure demands. You can do the same. You can give me exactly as much as I take. It's an absurd sort of wonder that two bodies can meet, become as intimate as is possible, while the thoughts sloshing around inside are distant. If I could write this on your skin with my fingers, I would.

They shift their weight, their pose, they draw me closer. The movie is nowhere near done. I don't think they've even found out that Gene Hackman's character is faking his illness. I am pressed tightly to their side. They have one of those uniquely human smells, oily, earthy, them. I've known many of these personal scents. Each body bears a different weight of cosmetics and hormones and environments which soak in and flow out. They have a touch of something floral. Even now, as the new sensation becomes familiar, it starts to be indistinct to my nose. I think they just felt something, near where my waist brushes theirs. I am ignoring it, ignoring it, imagining an absence.

"Oh?" they whisper.

They look so sly and so confident. They roll on top of me, supporting themselves on their elbows. I am so glad to have the pressure taken off. Their irises are sea green, their pupils large in the dim light.

"I like a quiet type. It's cute."

Their hand gently pats my cheek, pressing in and making my lips quiver.

"You've been checking me out since you walked in. It's obvious what you want."

Yes. Yes? They are such a good kisser. It's really something how easily our mouths fit together. Usually there's an acceptable awkward first attempt, but they just do it. A kiss you can just give yourself up to. I wrestle my sweater and bra off, they their shirt with the ragged collar. I think I prefer more tongue than they do. I like how they break away and push me back just slightly before uniting us again. They slip out of their pants so gracefully.

"Give me a second please, with my belt."

"A second what? What's the belt for?"

I scramble from my jeans and cross my legs, blushing. They wait a moment for my reply. None comes. I give my nervous smile to ease the awkwardness. They lean back into the bed, tugging my hand along and bringing me over them. Now we're fully reversed. I look at their scarless body. Their waist has half a curve to it, subtle but there. The muscles in each of their calves are like a knot, taught and strongly wound. They do most of their commuting by bike. Their legs have hair, more than me. I like that too. Their dark blue briefs are wet. Nothing is shy. They arch their back out, stretching and showing, spreading their legs.

"Go on, slide them off."

It takes everything I've got to resist saying: 'yes, of course, whatever you say' as I comply. Right below their pubic bone, almost touching the fat of each thigh, is a kind of protrusion. I'm intrigued. It emerges from their skin, a few inches in height, and widens at the top. I'm staring at a funnel of moist, whitish flesh surrounded by a circular ridge with a hole in its center. It's almost like a fleshy coffee filter resting in a short cylinder of meat. My two closed fists pressed together would measure its entirety. It's not like a dick, it's too wide, it has depth not length. But it's not vaginal either. The white tissue looks delicate almost, muscled but delicate. In times like these it is absolutely essential to ask the right questions. Anything can sound hot if you say it the right way.

"Where are you… sensitive?"

"Why don't you try to find out? I'll give feedback."

Their grip is in my hair and on my scalp, moves to my chin, and gently tugs me down. I always feel like I'm playing an instrument when I'm like this, laying on my belly with another's legs almost over my shoulders. I crane my neck away from their fingers to kiss their raised knee. I shoot them a glance, I don't know if it's supposed to be coy or alluring. They stifle a laugh.

"Babe, don't leave me waiting. Come on."

I kiss, kiss, kiss down their thigh and up to their center. Wet kisses, those are my favorite to give like this. I like the feeling of softness in their leg, the one I can feel up against my cheek, warm. My face is right next to their genitals. Genital? I stick out my tongue, I bring it up the side of their cylinder, up to its ridge. It flexes just so, so gently. I hear a little 'ah' murmured. 'ah, ah, Aah' I want to hear. Taking initiative, I go over their ridge, into their funnel. Their face skews up.

"Honey, I can taste the garlic in your mouth."

My tongue freezes. They reach over to the nightstand and look through it.

"I like something sweet, personally. It makes the sex better. Can you move your hair out of the way, babe? Here, drink."

They're holding a bottle of flavored water out to me. It's peach. I do drink, after pulling my bangs behind my ear. They almost push the plastic into my throat, tilting it up. You can see them grinning.

"Ok, swallow, rinse that mouth. Down again, please, darling."

There's a drip running down my chin. They seem intent on not letting me wipe it off. I'm trying to go slow. I put my mouth to their funnel again, wrapping a hand around the cylinder and planting another on their hip. My nails glitter in the light, pushing into their skin. I'm going in a spiral, like I'm cleaning a plate with my tongue. They breath, sigh heavily.

"That's my infundibulum. In-fund-ibu-lum."

So I keep running my mouth along their infundibulum. Licking, kissing, trying to not be too forceful. There's a space behind this membrane, it grows and shrinks as their chest heaves up and down. The hole in the funnel, in the infundibulum's heart widens and closes in turn. I'm close to the center. They flex, the gap expands.

"In there, that space, that's my acetabulum. Ace-tab-ul-um. I think it means 'bowl' in latin."

I'm not doing much for them, am I? I hold their whole apparatus with both hands, my face is dug into their center. My cheeks brush their circular ridge. I squeeze. I squeeze and the air in their space rushes out. The whole funnel changes, pulls me into an airtight seal. They half shriek, half moan! I feel a touch mess my hair. What is skin supposed to taste like? Usually it's not like anything. You taste for texture, for feel, for the touch of the tongue. They taste rubbery, watery, almost salty. I don't know if their hips are pushing up or if their hands are pushing down, down. My heart is beating so fast and I'm pretty sure I'm suffocating. That's ok, this is nice. My skin is tingling. My muscles shudder. I might be trying to pull my face up but the whole atmosphere has me wrapped up between their legs. It doesn't last long before they, with those deep sighs people make when they're enjoying themselves, let go. I feel moist and beatific.

"Your face is delicious."

Their voice has a dusky, satisfied timbre. They tug on my shoulder in that way that's an invitation. I get into my favorite sex position, which is the one where I'm beside someone and can rest my head on their shoulder.

"It's the ridge, right? The lip of the infundibulum is where you're sensitive."

"Oh you're so clever."

"And it's a suction cup?"

"Something like that, like a squid. What did you guess I had?"

"I don't guess."

"Liar."

"Hmmm. Dick."

Their hand suggests that I roll on top of them and I lazily comply. I lick my lips and open them. I know they'll kiss me. I'm ready for them as they draw me close and wrap their arms around me. The sensation of their fingers runs lightly down my sides, across the faint pimples on my back, before settling on my butt. It's assertive, strong. I feel something, my something, poke the space right below their belly. Fuck. I'm dripping too. I've tried not to think about this all day.

So, I have a dick, ok? It's fine. It's totally alright. Just swell to have a dick. But I don't like to be reminded of it. It's so unsubtle. It's not bad, it's just ugh. Ugh. UGH. I just don't want it to mean fucking, taking, piercing. It shouldn't be read that way. Cock, another terrible word. It makes me think of spurs. I don't want to be a spur or a man. What a stupid belief, that the sensation of inserting is conquering. But I'm shaped so well for it, for believing the myth and perpetuating it. I shouldn't even be thinking about this. I'm not even sure that it's possible to fuck them in that way. The being below me, though I've closed my eyes, looks like it's burst through these banal discomforts and become rich and rewarding and new. My waist is lowered down. Squish. Ugh. Squish. Between the two of us.

"Honey? Is something wrong?"

My eyes open. I see concern and maybe, hopefully not, frustration.

"No. I'm good."

"Awesome."

A grinding pressure is applied. It feels disgustingly good. There are no good words for pleasure and definitely none for this kind so let's put the issue away. It felt disgustingly good. They lock me with their lips and arms. My hands hold their face as I'm shifted horizontally. We are groin and groin, hip on hip, pushing. My spit, their moisture, my moisture, like a soup of connection. Gross. I can feel the opening of their bowl and the worst thing imaginable is slipping inside, if that is even a possibility. Their sucker is alive. They squeeze around me. I'm wincing and trying to reciprocate something with my body while maintaining the right position. There's a mighty flex and we are sealed together again. Tighter, stiller, fuller. I want to use the word 'suction-fucking' but it seems inelegant. Anyway, they are suction-fucking me. Their muscles are a whirlpool drawing me in.

Then something slips. I can never pinpoint the exact moment or reason but it does. The self slips out of itself. I am feeling my mind rejecting my bones. I am feeling my bones rejecting my flesh. I am feeling my flesh reject all of me, for this. I am not me. I know they are going to squeeze my arms as we move in a tweezer grip and say *'oh, you're so manly.'* I know this, but it doesn't happen. It doesn't happen but I feel like it did, as it has happened countless times. I cum after minutes have passed. Sploot. They let go at some point. When I open my mouth, it is my mouth talking, but I am speaking through it from about a foot away, just behind, just outside.

"Did you cum?"

"Do you think I came?"

They came. They wait a moment. Maybe they are taking in the silence, which is the best part of sex. I abort the afterglow early and slip off the bed, out from under an arm.

Thank God for bathrooms. Whenever you are overwhelmed or upset, the washroom is the place to go. You can close the door and sit for as long as you need. The single stall, the private chamber, is always in reach. I place my hands on the lip of the sink. The porcelain is loose, it jerks downwards when I put my weight on it. There's a tremor in my legs and a knot in my stomach. I notice myself. I've got a huge hickey right around my mouth. I won't go over the details, but it is still me standing in the mirror. I'm such a disappointing lay. If only this all was some other way, if only my existence was poured into a form that worked. But I'm an impossible thing. None of the options account for me. Maybe if I let them kiss me that first time, if I didn't pull away, then this would have worked out. I feel a sticky something on my hand. I clutch tighter and it gets worse. Of course, it's the ring. It feels definitely biological, familiarly slimy. I think I must have made a sound, like a scream or a shout. They open the washroom door, which I forgot to lock.

"Ah shit, I'm so sorry."

I'm speechless, typical.

"That was supposed to go in the compost. You look like you're going to cry, is it that bad?"

They peel the wet skin thing from me and leave a moment to throw it out.

"Yeah, I apologize, that's from me. I shed sometimes. I was happy that it came off before you arrived, the new skin is always more sensitive."

Their face is full of such a desperate expectation. They need me to say something and I can't.

"You don't think I'm gross, do you? Should I have 'disclosed' myself to you, are you one of those people? Please don't cry. I'll make you some tea, just sit on the bed, give me a second."

I do go to sit on the bed and crawl back into my clothes. In the minutes of quiet, I breath heavy and intentionally, like I'm preparing to vomit something out of my stomach.

"It's green tea. I've chosen the cat mug for you. I hope that's ok."

They've smudged their makeup in their hurry, making a small racoon mask around their eyes.

"What's wrong?"

My body is trying to draw away as they get near. I'm folding up, afraid to touch skin to skin again. I see the worry in their pout and the tangled mess in my gut and bones and brain and I want to say: 'hold me.' I don't want them to lay a finger on me.

"Have I hurt you?"

"It's not your fault."

They wince.

"I don't think that's true."

"Did you just want to have sex with me? I see you and you look like you and I look like the wrong person entirely. I just want to like you. You seem so put together, like you're not pretending to

anything. But I'm sorry, I'm sorry, something's not working."

My feelings always come out of me like that, like a dribbling explosion. Again, unsubtle.

"Well it's not easy for me either. I'd like to properly fuck you, I can't even find strap ons that fit, but I'd also like to have a kid in the usual way. I don't love my body some days, but I won't feel guilty for it."

"But all of you is so… androgynous."

They sigh.

"Ok, I think you're avoiding the problem, but let me stop you there. Are you going to start calling me 'Mx.' now?"

"What?"

"I'll put it another way. You wear a bra. Does that mean the fat on your chest is boobs? Are you a girl?"

Their affect has gone sour, like they're closing up too. I hear an old, rehearsed speech starting. I want to be open, I want everything to freely flow. I know I've made mistakes. I make mistakes.

"Hey, don't cry, don't be upset. That was an imposition on you. I'm sorry. I don't want you to impose anything on me either. I'm just who I am. I'm just me."

I'll admit that the cat mug is pretty cute. It has two big yellow-green eyes and a little button nose. The tea itself is good, gently bitter. I have a little peace inside me now, I hope.

"I'm sorry too. You're just confusing then?"

"I like that a lot actually."

They lean forward to steal a kiss. I scoot away. With some sense other than my eyes, I see their urge to touch and it frightens me. This should be closure, right? It's either that or we've reached a cascading failure that can't be recovered from. All of this on the first hookup, a new record for me. I'm far too cynical. I can't even guess what they're thinking.

"I should go. It's late."

Sometimes I take leaving slow. I have trouble breaking away. I linger in bed. I lean up against the door frame, usually. But I don't want to be here. There is something unfaceable between us and I fear that it will follow me.

"Get home safe, please."

"My heart is pumping polluted blood": The critique of heterosexist environmentalism in Tony Kushner's Angels in America

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Widely considered to be one of the most important theatrical pieces accomplished by an American playwright, Tony Kushner's 1992 work Angels in America simultaneously evokes the images of pollution associated with AIDS victims in the 1980s and brings forward the anti-toxics environmental discourse of that decade. Using Di Chiro's theorization of "queer ecology" (2010), this paper identifies a relationship in Angels between the heteronormative stigma around queer bodies and the concurrent public anxiety around toxic environmental pollution. First, I demonstrate how Angels produces and critiques the binary which sets "natural" bodies apart from "diseased" or "toxic" bodies, as well as the binary which divides a natural environment from a polluted environment. Kushner draws attention to these binaries with a suite of rhetorical methods and symbols that evoke the "heterosexist" panic surrounding queer or "polluted" bodies during the AIDS crisis. Next, I consider how Angels embodies a queer ecology by imagining an alternative environmental order that disrupts the normative urban/pastoral binary. Finally, this paper points towards a new definition of a queer, full-blooded ecology, and how that ecology could survive and thrive despite (or perhaps because of) its dirt, trash, and toxins that oppose heteronormative ideals.

Widely considered to be one of the most important theatrical pieces by an American playwright, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* is a two-part play that evokes the images of pollution and filth associated with AIDS victims in the 1980s. First performed in 1991 as two separate plays called *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, Kushner's *Angels* considers the "polluted" queer body in the context of the nascent environmental discourse of the 1980s. This discourse was primarily concerned with toxic pollutants, from the depletion of the ozone layer by chloroflourocarbons to the nuclear waste generated by the Chernobyl disaster. For its engagement with these overtly-ecological concerns, *Angels* has been recognized in previous ecocritical scholarship for engaging with ecofeminist and environmental-justice-based lenses (Hogan, 2012; Hogan, 2013). However, past scholarship on the ecological or political themes of *Angels* has neglected to consider how the play's ecological themes are connected to Kushner's ideas of queer liberation. To consider the relationship between these ideas, this essay turns toward Mortimer-Sandilands' conceptualization of "queer ecology" (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 200), which she describes as a radical and transformative ecology that "see[s] beauty in the wounds of the world and tak[es] responsibility to care for the world as it is" (qtd. in Di Chiro, 2010, p. 200). Di Chiro has expanded on the definition of queer ecology to include the distinction that it must also disrupt the "compulsory social-environmental order based on a dominant regime of what and who are constructed as normal and natural" (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 202).

These descriptions of a queer ecology provide a new framework for understanding Kushner's *Angels* as a critique of this social-environmental order, given the overlap between the AIDS crisis and the birth of the mainstream environmental movement. *Angels* is a critical text for observing the categorization of natural bodies as separate from diseased or toxic bodies; or of a natural environment as separate from an abnormal environment. I demonstrate this by exploring a suite of rhetorical and metaphorical methods employed by Kushner to evoke the "heterosexist" fear and panic that surrounded queer or "polluted" bodies during the AIDS crisis. Then, I explore how Kushner sets up a comparison between this heteronormative stigma around queer bodies with the contemporary public anxiety around toxic environmental pollution. Both of these emergent images of the 1980s—the image of the queer body as toxic and the image of the natural environment as contaminated—form the central focus of the play. In engaging with such questions, my analysis of *Angels* grapples with the dangers of what Di Chiro calls "anti-toxics environmentalism," a mainstream mode of pro-environmental thinking which "mobilizes the knowledge/power politics of normalcy and normativity" (2013, p. 202). After considering how

Angels identifies features of anti-toxics environmentalism in the discourse around the AIDS crisis, I demonstrate that *Angels* imagines an alternative environmental order that disrupts the normative urban/pastoral binary.

Kushner's *Angels* grapples with the predominant "heterosexist" ecology of the 1980s by comparing pollution in the body to pollution in the external environment (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 202). This analysis conjures a binary between that which is polluted and that which is clean. This binary touches all of *Angels*' central characters: from Louis Ironson, a young Jewish legal clerk who abandons his boyfriend Prior out of fear of the latter's AIDS diagnosis; to Roy Cohn, the closeted lawyer who contracts AIDS but denies it until his death; Norman "Belize" Arriaga, a hospital nurse who treats Cohn; Joe Pitt, a young, closeted, Mormon Reaganite who writes legal decisions for the Chief Justice of New York; and lastly, Joe Pitt's stay-at-home wife, Harper, an environmentally-concerned straight woman who takes Valium to tolerate her sexless marriage. Of these characters, Kushner most vividly conjures the stigma of pollution and infection around queer bodies through Prior Walter, who is abandoned by his boyfriend Louis because, as Prior puts it, Louis "can't handle bodies" (2013, p. 234). Through the character of Prior, Kushner puts forth the question of what it means to live inside of a polluted or dirty body.

Prior's characterization as a man afraid of his infection reflects what Di Chiro calls the "queerphobic" environmental ethic which rejects toxic or polluted bodies (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 202). Prior's own 'queerphobia' is made apparent by a dream sequence Prior experiences early in the play, in which Joe Pitt's wife, Harper—a stranger to Prior—appears and tells Prior that she believes that "deep inside of [him], there's a part of [him], the most inner part, entirely free of disease" (Kushner, 2013, p. 34). Prior's answer reflects his personal conviction that he is permanently internally polluted, for he replies, "I don't think there's any uninfected part of me. My heart is pumping polluted blood. I feel dirty" (Kushner, 2013, p. 34). Perhaps the most strongly affected by the panic around 'polluted blood' is Prior's boyfriend, Louis, who reveals his disdain for the infected body in his reaction to his coworker, Joe Pitt's, lunchtime meal of hot dogs. Upon seeing the hot dogs, Louis is disgusted that Joe is "eating *three* of those" (Kushner, 2013).

JOE:	Well … I'm … hungry.
LOUIS:	They're really terrible for you. Full of rat poo and beetle legs and wood shavings n' shit.
JOE:	Huh.
LOUIS:	And … um … iridium, I think. Something toxic.
JOE:	You're eating one.
LOUIS:	Yeah, well, the shape, I can't help myself.

<div align="right">(p. 73, emphasis his own)</div>

In this dialogue, Louis summarizes his fears about the same pollution which he sees as infecting Prior. The hot dog, which is conveniently a phallic shape, symbolizes the "something toxic" which is polluting Prior's body. However, as Louis himself recognizes, this is a "something toxic" which queer men could not necessarily avoid during the 1980s. With Louis' line about "the shape" of the hot dogs, and how he "can't help [him]self," Kushner points to the inevitable danger of AIDS spreading—toxicity spreading—within the queer community during the AIDS crisis.

The play further emphasizes the stigma around queer bodies through its dramatic enactment of bodily processes like digestion and excretion. In Fawaz's analysis of *Angels*' visceral bodily language, he rightly recognizes that Kushner has punctuated *Angels* with a "repository of digestive metaphors, figures, and puns" (2015, p. 124). At times Kushner appeals to outright human disgust by having his characters "perform vomiting and diarrhea, bleeding, gagging, (painful) fucking, and swallowing (both pills and cock)" (Fawaz, 2015, p. 124). What Fawaz misses in this assessment of *Angels* is the purpose of the so-called "viscerally-charged" scenes of bodily processes (Fawaz, 2015, p. 123). Where Fawaz argues that the play's expression of the "digestive poetics and politics of AIDS" is a representation of political disgust regarding the state of American politics at the time of Kushner's writing (2015, p. 122), I would reverse the argument and counter that Kushner's "abject or dysfunctional forms of embodiment" conjure the disgust widely felt towards queer bodies by Reagan's America (Fawaz, 2015,

p. 124). The latter conclusion aligns with Prior's repulsion towards his own body, Louis' inability to stay with Prior, and Roy Cohn's refusal to name himself as a homosexual or his disease as AIDS, instead insisting that he has "liver cancer" (Kushner, 2013, p. 46).

I have established several rhetorical and metaphorical methods that Kushner uses to evoke the "polluted" or "toxic" stigma around queer bodies during the 1980s. Scholars often separate these images of polluted queer bodies in the play from its articulation of the concurrent environmental concerns in Reaganite America. This reading, however, neglects how AIDS exceeds clinical implications and encompasses a range of public sentiments towards pollution and infection at large. This depth of signification is aptly summarized by Paila Treichler, who explains that "AIDS is a real disease syndrome, damaging and killing real human beings," but is also "an epidemic of meanings or signification" (qtd. in Fawaz, 2015, p. 125). Given this dual epidemic of malady and metaphorical meaning, Kushner's *Angels* links epidemiological concerns with the broader ecological issues that were deeply felt in 1985. As I will argue in the next section of this paper, the contemporary anxieties towards environmental pollution, largely brought to the fore by the character of Joe Pitt's wife Harper, work in relationship with the disgust felt by Prior, Louis, and Roy Cohn towards AIDS and its stigmas of infection and pollution.

I now turn to Joe Pitt's wife, Harper, who embodies the play's environmental anxieties. Harper is the first character to introduce the audience to the play's explicit ecological themes when she envisions the depletion of the ozone layer, which was a topical environmental issue for the 1980s and 1990s. Describing a radio show she had heard, she imagines the "holes in the ozone layer …. over Antarctica" and lapses into a vision of planetary collapse: "Skin burns, birds go blind, icebergs melt. The world's coming to an end" (Kushner, 2013, p. 28). The feeling of impending apocalypse experienced by Harper as she listened to the radio program on ozone depletion would parallel the sentiment felt by many, if not all, members of the queer community at the same time in history, given that they were losing large numbers of friends and neighbours to a different kind of "pollution." Harper's narration of ozone deterioration generates a sense of planetary vulnerability which would also resonate with the widely-feared bodily vulnerability to disease (Kushner, 2013):

> Thirty miles above our heads [is] a thin layer of three-atom oxygen molecules,
> product of photosynthesis, which explains the fussy vegetable preference for
> visible light, its rejection of darker rays and emanations. Danger from without.
> It's a kind of gift, from God, the crowning touch to the creation of the world:
> guardian angels, hands linked, make a spherical net, a blue-green nesting orb, a
> shell of safety for life itself. But everywhere, things are collapsing, lies surfacing,
> systems of defense giving way. (p. 16)

This passage can be read two ways: it either articulates an environmental concern about the lost protection from the ozone layer, its "shell of safety"; or it articulates an anxiety about the diseased body, unable to serve itself with its "systems of defense giving way." Both fears are so potent that even Prior, in the worst of his illness, thinks immediately of his potential impact on the ozone layer when he is visited by an Angel who breaks Prior's refrigerator. Despite the fact that he is worried about his own dying, Prior still says, "You cracked the refrigerator, you probably released a whole cloud of fluorocarbons, that's bad for the, the environment" (Kushner, 2013, p. 162). Although perhaps Kushner intended this line to have a comedic or lightening effect, it still strikes a somber note to have Prior express such an environmental concern in the depths of his bodily deterioration.

This moment with Prior and the Angel also speaks to the intensity of the anti-toxics discourse which Di Chiro flagged. Toxins and pollutants appear throughout the plot of *Angels*, from the fluorocarbons in Prior's refrigerator to the iridium in Joe's hot dogs. Harper, one of only two heterosexual characters featured in the play, summarizes the public perversion to toxins when she imagines that "the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light" (Kushner, 2013, p. 18). At the same time, the play's queer characters seem to accept the inevitable toxicity involved in their interactions; when Louis, after leaving Prior, brings Joe back to his apartment, Louis urges Joe to engage in sex by saying that they can "cap everything that leaks in latex" and "smear" their bodies "with nonoxynol-9." This is "safe, chemical sex," Louis says (Kushner, 2013, p. 140). By referencing

the synthetic quality of condoms and the chemical compound used in spermicides, Louis suggests that the toxicity of gay sex is, to an extent, an inevitable outcome. In these examples, *Angels* engages with Garrard's argument that "the toxic event [is] the kind of postmodern crisis with which ecocriticism must increasingly engage" (2004, p. 13). If the latter is true, then a proper analysis of *Angels* must account for two intertwined "toxic events": that of the toxic queer body, and that of the depleting and acidifying external environment.

I have highlighted the extent of concern towards both bodily *and* environmental pollution in *Angels* in order to suggest that it is not only unproductive but detrimental to assess either component of the play without at least considering the other. *Angels'* ecological concerns are not a separate theme but an undercurrent (or perhaps overcurrent) that informs the play's main action. This theme suggests that the normative discourse around environmental problems may raise an issue that is also inherent to the common language and assumptions around queer disease. Here, I turn back to Di Chiro's understanding of mainstream environmentalism as being based around the assumption that "toxic chemical pollution is responsible for the undermining or perversion of the 'natural': natural biologies/ ecologies, natural bodies, natural reproductive processes" (2010, p. 201). The idea of the "perversion of the natural" is an issue for queer studies, since queerness, like toxins, can have the same perceived effect of "troubling and destabilizing the normal/natural gendered body of humans and other animal species" (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 201). In this sense, queer bodies—particularly diseased ones—and ecological breakdown are both forms of 'nature' which have diverted from the heteronormative standard.

The "compulsory social environmental regime" which Di Chiro critiques for its categorization of "what and who are constructed as normal and natural" is essentially concerned with names: something is either polluted or clean; chemical or organic; diseased or healthy (2013, p. 202). Absent from previous analyses of Kushner's ecological themes in *Angels* is the recognition that Kushner threads an anxiety about naming throughout the play. His critique of the "compulsory" need to name what is un/natural would explain the length of the scene between Roy Cohn and his doctor Henry when Roy is diagnosed with AIDS. Roy's quasi-monologue underlines his belief in the importance of names (Kushner, 2013):

ROY:	Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think there are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.
HENRY:	No?
ROY:	No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. … This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong …. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man, Henry, who fucks around with guys.
HENRY:	OK, Roy.
ROY:	And what is my diagnosis, Henry?
HENRY:	You have AIDS, Roy.
ROY:	*No,* Henry, *no.* AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer.

(pp. 46-47)

In this dialogue, Roy expounds upon the significance of names as a critical factor in the public perception of individuals and their social stigmas. To save his "clout," Roy insists that he is only "a heterosexual man … who fucks around with guys," thus co-opting the social status of heterosexuality in order to guard himself against the images of pollution and disease associated with queer men. Di Chiro would agree with Roy to the extent that the process of naming is a central component of

the mainstream social-environmental order, used to differentiate the natural from the unnatural, the normal from the abnormal.

Other characters also recognize the dire importance of names and naming. Prior admonishes Louis in the opening scene of the first of the two plays, *Millennium Approaches*, for calling his cat by the wrong name: "I warned you, Louis. Names are important. Call an animal Little Sheba and you can't expect it to stick around. Besides, it's a dog's name" (Kushner, 2013, p. 20). Prior's anger at Louis calling a cat by "a dog's name" highlights one of the critical anxieties held by the public about queer men during the AIDS crisis—that is, no one wanted to call AIDS by its name. Just as you cannot call Prior's cat a dog, you cannot call a heterosexual man, Roy, a homosexual. The same anxiety around names and naming resurfaces when Louis brings Joe to his bedroom for the first time (Kushner, 2013):

LOUIS: It's a little messy.
JOE: It's a little dirty.
LOUIS: *Messy*, not dirty. That's an important distinction. It's dust, not dirt, chemical-slash-mineral, not organic, not like microbes…

<div align="right">(p. 139)</div>

While this interaction certainly reinforces the fear towards diseased bodies felt by Louis, the dialogue also suggests that the aversion to pollution is an anxiety around naming. For Louis, it is critical that his room is "messy, not dirty," because "dirty" implies a different chemical make-up than "messy." However, Louis is not entirely clear on his distinctions; the lines begin to blur between messy and dirty as he describes the "chemical-slash-mineral," where the use of the "slash" and the hyphens begins to hint at a possible uncertainty in his argument. The blurred lines in his distinctions echo the difficulty of naming which Louis encounters when he brings Prior to the hospital and is asked by the nurse if he is "[Prior's]… uh…?," to which Louis responds, "Yes. I'm his uh" (Kushner 53). This small moment between Louis and the nurse signals a greater anxiety around naming bodies that are diseased, such as Prior's body, or that exist in relation to diseases, such as Louis' body.

These examples introduce the idea that names, categories, and labels are the central weapon used by the anti-toxics mainstream discourse. Nowhere is this more evident than in Di Chiro's survey of recent newspaper headlines assigned to articles on shifting chemical environments and their impacts on non-human animals (2010):

> While the news of rising incidences of fish tumors, clam and mussel lesions, Beluga whale breast and ovarian cancers, and disappearing amphibians have attracted a following in environmentalist circles, the documentation of gender-bending, homosexual, and emasculated frogs, fish, birds, and alligators has caught the attention of the mainstream media and the blogosphere. Kermit the Frog a Transsexual? Intersex Fish? Lesbian Gulls? Hermaphrodite Frogs? 'Teeny Weenies' (Dunne 1998)? 'Silent Sperm' (Wright 1996)? 'Sexual Confusion in the Wild' (Cone 1994)?" (p. 203-204)

Di Chiro's concerns in this excerpt resonate during Prior's first encounter with the Angel. Describing his sexual encounters with the Angel to his friend Belize, Prior mentions that the Angel has "eight vaginas" (Kushner, 2013, p. 165). The Angel, also present in the scene, answers that she is "Hermaphroditically Equipped as well with a Bouquet of Phalli" (Kushner, 2013, p. 165). The decision to make the Angel a hermaphrodite highlights the obsession with distinct naming that preoccupied (and continues to preoccupy) mainstream environmental discourse.

Kushner effectively disrupts the "dominant regime of what and who are constructed as normal and natural" through the character of Belize, the best friend of Prior and nurse to Roy Cohn (Di Chiro, 2010, p. 202). Belize is the mouthpiece through which Kushner articulates a vision of heaven that fits the definition of queer ecology first put forth by Sandilands (qtd. in Di Chiro, 2010, p. 200). If a queer ecology sees "the beauty in the wounds of the world," Belize illustrates a perfectly queer ecology that subverts normative ideas of order and cleanliness by accepting—and celebrating—the reality of

shifting toxicities, genders, and environments. When he is asked by Roy to describe heaven, Belize envisions an urban dystopia "overgrown with weeds," where on "every corner [there is] a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty-corner to that" (Kushner, 2013, p. 222). There are "windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gusts of gritty wind, and a gray, high sky full of ravens" (Kushner, 2013, p. 222), there are "piles of trash and voting booths," and most importantly, there is "racial impurity and gender confusion" (Kushner, 2013, p. 223). This vision of heaven mixes all kinds of unnatural and undesired images to create a distinctly queer kind of ecological system in which the species make trash and grow weeds, but also vote, love across racial lines, and bend the rigid gender roles and gender names upon which Roy Cohn and other characters in *Angels* insistently depend.

Kushner underlines Belize's depiction of heaven by repeating the same vision with his stage directions for the scene in which Prior visits heaven with the Angel. "Heaven looks like San Francisco after the Great Quake," he writes. "Deserted streets, beautiful buildings in ruins, toppled telegraph poles, downed electrical cables, rubble strewn everywhere" (Kushner, 2013, p. 262). These instructions reveal Kushner's attempt to disrupt the heteronormative ideal for an ecologically-harmonious world, which depends on the normative claim that, as Katie Hogan puts it, "urban space is 'not nature' and that 'real' nature is someplace else—in rural and wilderness areas that are linked to heterosexuality" (2012, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, this queer ecology includes the "right to urban environmental aesthetic experiences," which is "particularly crucial because of how the dominant environmental perspective has privileged wilderness areas as heterosexual space and the only nature that counts" (Hogan, 2012, p. 7). Through Belize, Kushner loudly states that a queer "nature" exists outside of the pastoral/urban binary. It thrives despite—or perhaps because of—disruptions to "normal" nature such as ruin, disaster, or trash.

Belize's articulation of the environment resolves an issue which Alaimo identifies in her book *Bodily Natures*, in that "the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space … is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions" (2010, p. 2). Alaimo's choice of the word "fleshy" resonates with the central concern of *Angels*, in which characters are desperate to escape their fleshiness—their bodily processes, their disease, their toxicity. Specifically, the male characters are trying to escape their blood, a biological fluid which Alaimo reclaims as a critical component of our definition of the "environment"—a word which, as Joy Williams writes, appears too often as being "bloodless" (qtd. in Di Chiro, 2010, p. 1). If a full-bodied understanding of the environment requires some blood—if it needs to be "endow[ed] with flesh," as Alaimo writes—then this has implications for the arguments about dirty/clean bodies and toxic/pristine environments brought forward in earlier moments of the play by Prior, Louis, and Roy Cohn (2010, p. 6).

Another character who echoes Belize's queer ecology ethic is Harper, with whom Kushner chooses to finish the play. We find her on a "night flight to San Francisco"—perhaps she is in heaven?—during which she observes out the window the co-mingling of ecological processes and queer bodies (Kushner, 2013, p. 284). It is a passage so evocative that it must be quoted in full (Kushner, 2013):

> The plane leapt the tropopause, the safe air, and attained the outer rim, the
> ozone, which was ragged and torn, patches of it threadbare as old cheesecloth,
> and that was frightening But I saw something only I could see, because of
> my astonishing ability to see such things: Souls were rising, from the earth
> far below, souls of the dead, of people who had perished, from famine, from
> war, from the plague, and they floated up, like skydivers in reverse, limbs all
> akimbo, wheeling and spinning. And the souls of these departed joined hands,
> clasped ankles, and formed a web, a great net of souls, and the souls were
> three-atom oxygen molecules, of the stuff of ozone, and the outer rim absorbed
> them, and was repaired. Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of
> painful progress. (p. 284-285)

If we are to assume that at least some of the "souls of the dead" which Harper observes from the plane are AIDS victims, this passage represents the ultimate workings of a queer ecology in action. Like Belize's heaven, Harper's vision of the ozone layer being repaired by absorbing the "great net of souls" is an example of ecology not just including but actively being *strengthened by* the queer bodies

which represented toxicity, harm, and dirt to so many people at the time of Kushner's writing. In this ecology, everything is "akimbo," like "old cheesecloth," and that is perfectly fine: in fact, it is for the better. Harper's final line about "painful progress" encapsulates the same sentiment as the epigraph from Kunitz's poem "The Testing-Tree" with which Kushner begins *Millennium Approaches*: "In a murderous time / the heart breaks and breaks / and lives by breaking" (2013, p. 8).

Although this exploration has raised more questions than it can answer within the limits of scope and length, I have attempted to point in a new direction towards a new understanding of what a queer, full-blooded ecology could look like. Furthermore, I have considered how a queer ecology, as embodied in *Angels*, could survive and thrive despite (or because of) the presence of dirt, trash, or toxins that disrupt the heternormative order. Some followers of ecocriticism might come away from this analysis of Kushner's *Angels in America* unconvinced that the play is concerned with ecological ideas beyond the surface level. Those same followers might accept that the environment encompasses one of the separate and distinct themes of the play, but would question the need to relate ecology to the greater message of the entire drama. However, *Angels* is, at its core, a play obsessed with creating and complicating binaries: gay/straight, sick/healthy, clean/dirty. These binaries apply as much to the play's concern with the ozone layer and environmental toxins as it does to the bodies of Prior, Louis, Roy Cohn, and other queer men. If we accept Buell's argument that "ecocriticism must develop modes of analysis" which abandon "the 'disjunction between text and world'" (qtd. in Di Chiro, 2013, p. 8), then we must see *Angels'* translation between "text and world." That translation suggests that polluted bodies—undesirable bodies—pose a risk to the social order, just as an increasingly variable climate threatens to destabilize 'natural' social and ecological structures. For this reason the two—queer bodies and ecologies—deserve analysis side-by-side.

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Victim Impact Statement (If I Reported) *small font for a small voice*

Bao Li Ng (she/her)
Life Sciences

Note from the editors:
In publishing this piece, we are not motivated by the desire to shock, horrify, or thrill our readers. Rather, we wish to highlight and provide a platform for the voice of a survivor of sexual violence. As a journal, we are comitted to the exploration and understanding of human sexuality; such an understanding is incomplete without a thoughtful engagement with the reality of sexual violence. We steadfastly believe in the value of such an engagement being concrete. Academic environments often tend towards abstraction, filtering, and censoring when it comes to discussions of sexual violence. Universities are notorious for sweeping sexual violence under the rug, failing survivors, and protecting perpetrators. In such a context, this is a necessary intervention and a unique knowledge offering.

Content warning: explicit depictions of sexual violence, alcohol consumption, vomiting, and mentions of mental illness

I don't know the intent behind this piece. I think maybe I just wanted to be heard, and to let someone else who's experienced something like this know that they're not alone, that it'll get better. To those others: even though I've never met you, I believe you, and it was a big deal. The piece is a mix of lived experiences. I've changed some dates and some details for the poetry of it, and honestly because I'm still scared ____ would recognize it, but as with all art, the heart of it is real. But please don't read this if it'll hurt you, or remind you of anything. If you want, you can have some tea instead, that always makes me happy.

On October 10th, 2013 I had dinner reservations with the defendant.

The reservation was for 8pm and I got there at 7:58.

I remember because I checked my watch and thought it might be embarrassing to arrive early.

The restaurant was dimly lit (amber bulbs, orange light).

He texted me and said he'd be a little late, but to grab our table anyways and order him a Stella.

I did as he said and got myself a red wine, too, the cheapest kind, because I thought we'd be splitting the bill. When he got there we hugged and he apologized again for not being on time.

He asked what kind of wine I got, and when I told him he said to order something "better," since he was paying. I didn't want to, but he called the waitress over and ordered me another more expensive wine anyways. After I finished that one he got me another.

We had a nice dinner and talked about a lot of things, like his job, how I was changing majors, etc.

Afterwards he paid, despite my protests. At the time I thought it was nice, actually, that he paid. I just felt a bit guilty, since it was a fancy place.

Then he asked me if I'd like to come over. His apartment was nearby. He said we could just watch a movie. I said ok.

When we got there he-

I'm sorry-

Give me a moment?

Thanks.

//

When we got there he said we needed to be quiet because his roommate was asleep. He took me to a room off to the side. I sat on the bed, which had navy blue sheets and a duvet. There was no TV in his room, so at first I thought it meant we'd be watching with a laptop. He leaned over me and started kissing me. I was drunk and I thought he was nice so I went with it. But then he started undressing me and I got uncomfortable, but I still went with it. Finally when I was down to my bra and underwear I said, "I'm sorry, can we stop?" He laughed and called me a tease and kissed my neck. Then I said, "No, really." But he just said, "Please, c'mon, you're beautiful, don't be shy." Then he wanted to eat me out – I'm sorry your honor – is that too vulgar for the court? I'm alright, I just don't want to break a rule. It's fine? Oh ok. Um - so he wanted to eat me out. He kept pulling on my panties, and I kept pulling them back up, and I said, "No, please, stop," and then he said, "If you won't let me do it with them off, I'll do it with them on," and he started licking me over them. I tried to get up but he pulled me back down and said "Baby, please." The rest is kind of a blur. I remember feeling like I wasn't in my body. When I was fifteen I did edibles and it felt like that but scarier. It felt like I was being impaled. I remember the ceiling. I kept looking at it and counting the seconds, because I thought it couldn't last that long. I kept saying no and stop very quietly, I don't know if he heard.

After it was over, he seemed angry. He said "don't say this was something it wasn't" and that he wasn't a bad guy. I said I wanted to watch the movie now, but he said he didn't have a TV in his apartment.

He sent me in a cab home because his work started at 6 the next morning. When I got out of the cab I cried in the middle of the street. I kept shaking and when I got to my apartment I tried to fall asleep but I was shaking all night. I threw up in the laundry basket by my bed and the next morning my roommate laughed and said "rough night?"

I don't know what else to say. I get nightmares about it even now. I can't have sex with anyone else. I wanted to throw up my heart.

Nowadays, I wear clothes too revealing and too tight, I leave my drinks unattended, I whistle at men and walk home alone in the dark. My high heels catch on storm drains when I run.

Nowadays – I'm sorry, I need another moment.

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Nowadays, I am going insane. I feel it. I feel it. I am nauseated. I am not part of my own body. Each part of me acts and reacts without my control, like a machine, a big machine with my brain in it, made of screws and bolts and cutting glass. Sharp scissors, black rabbits, from inside my head I feel the other consciousnesses speaking, breaking apart, the other realities moving forward, up and out of the sinking sea, like the letters coming into focus during an eye exam. I feel the click of the machine, the different circles of glass clicking in front of my eye, forward and back, forward and back. Here is the sound of the screaming, here is the sound of the bugs, the buzzing in my brain till 3AM. Here are the moving pictures, the little lies, the blue skies, the horse flies. A woman screams, a child dies. I am not here, I never was. The person I was is not me, I see her in my dreams, the dark figure, the other girl, she is coming for me. She is angry, she is angry, she is angry. She is angry I took her place, took her place in the brain, the big brain which we share. Deeper than the sky, deeper than the sea. Here is the beat of the drum, here is the pull of the tide. I am not safe even in my own skin

.

//

When he did what he did to my body, I hid in my brain, but now that I'm crazy, I have nowhere to go.

I put my body on display because I am hoping someone will buy it from me.

Hopefully 30 days will elapse before they find out it's defective and can no longer return it.

Sometimes it sleeps for days. Sometimes it doesn't sleep for days.

Maybe try turning it on and off again? Maybe try putting in different batteries?

I remember he left a bruise on my wrist, the size and shape of a nickel.

When he saw it he laughed, said I "bruise too easily."

As if even my body mistook his love for aggression.

'Loathsome Disease' and the 'Yellow Peril': the Discursive Construction of Chinese Sex Workers in the Canadian West, 1858-1885

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Woman & Gender Studies and History

This study aims to fill a gap in mainstream histories of Chinese-Canadians by exploring the gendered dimensions of the 'yellow peril' on the west coast between 1858 and 1885. Using an intersectional approach, I draw from a combination of primary and secondary sources to shed light on the discursive construction of Chinese women in British Columbia during the early years of settlement. More specifically, I attend to the linkages between race, gender, sexuality, and health, suggesting that anxieties around whiteness and nationhood were mapped onto the figure of the 'Chinese prostitute' as a vector of sexually transmitted infections. Through this line of inquiry, I hope to reveal how the discursive construction of Chinese immigrant women was critical to the fabrication of a white Canadian identity in the late 19th century.

Introduction

This study aims to fill a gap in mainstream histories of Chinese-Canadians by exploring the gendered dimensions of the 'yellow peril' on the west coast between 1858 and 1885. Using an intersectional approach, I draw from a combination of primary and secondary sources to shed light on the discursive construction of Chinese women in British Columbia during the early years of settlement. More specifically, I attend to the linkages between race, gender, sexuality, and health, suggesting that anxieties around whiteness and nationhood were mapped onto the figure of the 'Chinese prostitute' as a vector of sexually transmitted infections. Through this line of inquiry, I hope to reveal how the discursive construction of Chinese immigrant women was critical to the fabrication of a white Canadian identity in the late 19th century, founded on the subjugation of the racialized other.

The history of Chinese-Canadian women during the early years of west coast settlement is, in many ways, a history of silences and shadows. With little evidence available, recovering the interior and everyday lives of these women proves a difficult task. Historical silences such as these demand what Ann Stoler (2010) calls reading *along* the archival grain in order to illuminate the production of "racialized common sense." According to Stoler (2010), colonial governance is predicated on systems of meaning derived not from 'reason' but from affective states of fear and uncertainty. As such, she calls on historians to view the colonial archives as sites of contested knowledge where prejudice, sentiment, and rumours become 'common sense', which is then codified in law (Stoler, 2010). Taking up Stoler's call, I am interested in historicizing the colonial and white supremacist logic that led to the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885—the first piece of immigration legislation in Canada to exclude immigrants on the basis of race—by unveiling the discursive construction of Chinese women in particular.

In the words of Reverend Philip Dwyer, anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia "found an expression first in private, then in the press, and finally in Parliament" (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). For my analysis, I rely on the digitized archives of *The British Colonist* and parliamentary documents from the House of Commons of Canada. Established in 1858 by Amor De Cosmos—who would later lead the charge against Chinese immigrants as a Member of Parliament (McDonald & Ralston, 1990)—*The British Colonist* quickly became the province's foremost newspaper and had "a powerful effect in the formation of the public opinion upon the Chinese question," as one reader put it ("The Chinese Question," 1876). Public opinion was wielded and shaped by politicians in Parliament, who opted to restrict Chinese immigration through the imposition of a head tax after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885.

The passage of the law was justified by a slew of racist arguments that cast Chinese immigrants as the dangerous and deviant other. Within this discursive realm, the body became a primary site of othering.

During the second half of the 19th century, the germ theory of disease gained currency in the world of medicine through the work of Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch, and Joseph Lister, who demonstrated that the spread of infectious diseases resulted from the transmission of microorganisms from one host to another, rather than from miasma, spontaneous generation, or divine retribution (Tomes, 1998). In 1873, G. H. Armauer discovered the causative agent of leprosy—the first bacterium to be identified as causing diseases in humans—and by the end of the 1880s, microbiologists had isolated the microbes that spawned cholera, typhoid fever, diphtheria, pneumonia, tetanus, meningitis, and gonorrhoea (Tomes, 1998).

At the same time, race science was thriving and the eugenics movement was on the horizon in Europe and North America. While germ theory negated the conception of disease as punishment for sin, it also fuelled the belief that certain bodies were more likely to be carriers of diseases than others. Discourse around pathogens 'invading' the body quickly became constructed along lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. Normative white bodies were perceived to be contaminated by the germs of foreign, deviant ones—those of racialized people, immigrants, poor people, sex workers, queer people, and so on. Consequently, as Deborah Lupton (1995) puts it, the health and hygiene movements of the late 19th century were concerned with "preventing contamination of those within from those without."

Like germs, immigrants were conceptualized as foreign agents seeking entry into the social body (Lupto, 1995). The fear of contagious diseases played a central role in the discursive construction of Chinese immigrants in British Columbia from the mid 19th century onwards. White Canadians decried Chinatown living quarters, opium dens, and brothels as centres of filth and contagion— "wretched hovels"—that posed a serious threat to public health (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). Certain diseases, such as small-pox and leprosy, came to be seen as endemic to Chinese immigrant populations (Mawani, 2003). In her study of D'Arcy Island, a leper colony off the coast of Vancouver Island to which 43 Chinese men were exiled between 1891 and 1924, Renisa Mawani (2003) explains how leprosy became racialized as a "Chinese disease" despite there being very little—if any—medical evidence to substantiate this association. Taking cue from Mawani's scholarship, I am curious about how syphilis became racialized and gendered as a disease carried by Chinese women in British Columbia during the early years of settlement.

Background

As scholars (Guterl & Skwiot, 2005) have noted, world-wide efforts to resolve 'the labour problem' in the age of emancipation, migration, and industrialization contributed to the rise of a transnational identity founded on white supremacy. In the mid 19th century, notions of the 'yellow peril' began circulating amongst white settlers throughout the Americas and across the Pacific, with popular media portraying Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian immigrants as unassimilable aliens who imperilled the health, security and morality of white settler societies (Lee, 2007). By the end of the century, anti-Asian discourse was translated into exclusionary immigration policies in an attempt to curtail the threat of the 'yellow peril'. Chinese immigrants in particular were subject to the earliest and harshest restrictions on immigration to Canada and the United States.

The history of Chinese immigration to the Pacific coast began in earnest with the discovery of gold in 1852, which drew over 20,000 Chinese immigrants to California to work in the goldfields and mines (Yung, Chang & Lai, 2006). Six years later, Chang Tsoo and Ah Hong ventured north from San Francisco to Cariboo, British Columbia, making them the first of over 4,000 Chinese immigrants to arrive in the Fraser Valley between 1858 and 1863 (Wong Hall & Hwang, 2001). The influx of Chinese immigrants to British Columbia spurred anti-Asian sentiment that was exacerbated in the 1880s when over 15,000 Chinese labourers arrived in the province to work on the western portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway—the infrastructural backbone of the frontier (Chan, 2019). Despite their contributions to the very foundations of settler society, Chinese immigrants were excluded as racialized Others who tainted the purity of a white Canadian identity. Anxieties around whiteness and nationhood manifested in debates around the 'Chinese question' in the news and in Parliament.

The 'Chinese question' was of particular relevance in British Columbia due to the province's high concentration of Chinese immigrants and its proximity to west coast states. The press and politicians frequently referenced matters south of the border concerning Chinese immigrants, including ship

arrivals, doctors' testimonials, police reports, court hearings, and, importantly, the passage of laws. Exclusionary legislation in the United States—most notably the Page Act of 1875, which banned Chinese sex workers from entering the country, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of all Chinese labourers (Yung, Chang & Lai, 2006)—set a precedent for Canadian lawmakers. In 1885, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act, imposing a head tax of $50 on Chinese immigrants that would increase tenfold by 1923 (Chan, 2019).

Pioneer Chinese women

While the history of Chinese immigrants in Canada—both their contributions and their exclusion—is generally well-documented, it has largely been written as a history of men. Up until the end of World War II, Chinese women comprised a very small portion of the immigrant population in Canada for a number of reasons, including but not limited to heteropatriarchal kinship formations, economic constraints, restrictive immigration legislation, and the gendered division of labour (Adilman, 1992; Woon, 2007). Though difficult to trace in the English archives, Chinese immigrant women deserve to be treated as more than a statistic in early histories of Canada. A handful of scholars, such as Yuen-Fong Woon (2007) and Tamara Adilman (1992), have taken up this task by studying oral narratives, personal artifacts, and multimedia texts alongside formal records.

According to Woon (2007), "pioneer" Chinese women who arrived in Canada between 1858 and 1885 fell into four categories: merchants' spouses, serving girls (*kei-tei-nui*), domestic servants (*mooi-tsai*), and "prostitutes." Primary wives typically stayed in China while secondary wives (concubines) accompanied their husbands to Canada, where they cared for household members and performed low-wage labour to supplement their husbands' finances. Another group of women arrived in bondage through brokers who bought them in China and registered them as 'daughter' or 'merchant's wife' in order to fulfill immigration requirements. The former were sold to wealthy families as domestic servants, while the latter were sold to tea houses in Chinatowns to work as serving girls, or forced into prostitution. Still others took up sex work as a voluntary occupation (Woon, 2007).

As early as 1858, Chinese sex workers lived and worked in small towns along mining trails and near lumbers mills in the interior of British Columbia, later moving into coastal cities such as Victoria, Vancouver, New Westminster, and Nainamo, where they co-existed with white sex workers in red light districts (Woon, 2007). Although there is little direct historical evidence on the prevalence and conditions of Chinese sex workers prior to 1885, some traces can be found in the archives. For instance, an article in *The British Colonist* in 1875 claimed there were "nine Chinese brothels in [Nanaimo] in full career of immorality" ("Chinese Brothels," 1875). A decade later, the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration published a report that counted 154 Chinese women in the province of British Columbia, including 70 sex workers (Chapleau & Gray, 1885).

Chinese women in the news

Though few in numbers, Chinese women occupied an unmistakable place in the white Canadian imaginary. As Woon (2007) makes clear, there is very little archival information about the material realities of these women, especially from their own perspectives. What is accessible is the discursive construction of Chinese women which was formed primarily through the press, dominated at the time by *The British Colonist*. The earliest mention of Chinese 'prostitutes' in *The British Colonist* was in 1874, in an article lauding the Supreme Court of California's decision to ship Chinese sex workers back to China. This decision preceded the passage of the Page Act in 1875—the first ever federal immigration restriction in the United States—which explicitly barred Chinese sex workers from entering the country on the basis of them being 'undesirable' and a threat to the white population (Abrams, 2005). Although no similar legislation was introduced in Canada until a decade later, the logic behind the law made its mark on public discourse in British Columbia in the years leading up to 1885.

For instance, between 1874 and 1876, *The British Colonist* published several articles on issues related to Chinese sex workers in the United States, such as decisions to send them back to China, crimes that targeted them or in which they were involved, and statements made by politicians. One article reported that residents of Antioch had razed all of Chinatown because "several boys had visited a Chinese house of prostitution and are now under a doctor's treatment" ("Last Night's Dispatches: Antioch," 1876). Another article quoted a speech by President Ulysses S. Grant in which he proclaimed

that "hardly a perceptible percentage of [Chinese women] perform any honorable labor, but they are brought for shameful purposes to the disgrace of the communities where settled, and to the great demoralization of the youth of these localities" ("The Heathen Chinese," 1874).

In 1876, two Chinese women were arrested in the British Columbia for vagrancy. The first was Ah Quaig, who appeared before the police court in Victoria on June 21st. The defence explained that Ah Quaig was not a prostitute but a married woman whose husband was temporarily gone in China (a 'grass widow'), and that the offence, if any, took place in a private home. The police magistrate, H.C. Courtney, replied that the bulk of the evidence pointed towards Ah Quaig's immorality, and that he could not reconcile the claims of her being a grass widow with "the fact of her being frequently seen beckoning men and youths at late hours of night, both on the street and in her house" ("City Police Court," 1876). Reinforcing the view that sex work was a social ill that must be contained, Courtney framed his decision to sentence Ah Quaig as an attempt to keep sex work confined to the "houses of ill-fame" and off of the "public thoroughfares of the city" ("City Police Court," 1876).

The second woman, Ah Hay, was arrested by Sergeant Bloomfield on December 19th and charged with keeping a brothel on Yates Street in Victoria. Courtney decided to sentence Ah Hay to two months' imprisonment with hard labour, and threatened to sentence the next sex worker who was arrested to six months. He condemned Chinese prostitution as a great evil that must be put down, and claimed that Ah Hay belonged to a "low, degraded set" of women who "came here to sell themselves for money and are lower than Indian women in their habits" ("City Police Court," 1876). Inspector Bowden added that Ah Hay was the most notorious prostitute in the city, known for accosting men on their way home from church and soliciting them to enter her brothel. Respectable women were so scandalized by Ah Hay that they avoided walking on her side of the street, Bowden reported.

Finally, an article published on June 23rd, 1876 announced that "Chinese women are in the habit of luring boys of tender age into their dens after dark, and several fine, promising lads have been ruined for life in consequence" ("Chinese Brothels," 1876). The author assures readers that police are about to suppress these "horrid holes," and that a new regulation is being proposed to take boys who are caught on the streets after nightfall to the barracks for "safe-keeping" ("Chinese Brothels," 1876). This short notice contains rich insight into the discursive construction of Chinese women at the time. First, the language of 'luring' invokes the 'yellow peril' image of the Chinese woman as a malevolent seductress, absolving white men of their responsibility. Moreover, the emphasis on youth and vigor—'boys of tender age' and 'promising young lads'—appeals to the innocence and vitality of the young white man as a central component of settler identity in the west. The notion that Chinese women lived and worked in 'horrid holes' and could ruin men for life with their services implied that it was not only morality at stake, but physical health as well. The promise of military protection against the threat of sexually transmitted infections echoed a view that was gaining traction on the west coast, both in Canada and the United States.

Chinese women and syphilis

On June 6, 1876, renowned gynaecologist J. Marion Sims—who perfected his practices by performing surgery on unanesthetized enslaved women—gave his inaugural address as president of the American Medical Association (AMA) at their 27th annual meeting. In his discussion of state medicine and public hygiene, Sims sounded the alarm on the spread of syphilis, which he regarded as the great question of the day. "Quietly installed in our midst, [syphilis] is sapping the foundations of our society, poisoning the sources of life, rendering existence miserable, and deteriorating the whole human family," Sims (1876) declared. Notably, he pinpointed Chinese prostitution on the Pacific coast as the central nexus through which the disease was being spread. Citing the testimony of notable politicians and doctors, Sims (1876) asserted that the presence of Chinese immigrant women "necessarily breeds moral and physical pestilence," and that boys as young as eight and ten years old "have been syphilised by these degraded wretches, who are allowed to openly solicit in the streets."

A few months later, the AMA published a study claiming that Chinese prostitutes were poisoning the bloodstream of America (Miller, 1969). The study erroneously declared that Chinese immigrants carried unique strains of diseases that were fatal to the white population, but to which they themselves were relatively immune, and that these diseases were primarily spread through Chinese prostitution (Miller, 1969). That same year, a Joint Committee was formed between the Senate and the House of

Representatives to collect evidence on matters related to Chinese immigration. One of the witnesses, Dr. Charles O'Donnell, echoed the findings of the AMA in stark terms: "Nineteen-twentieths of the Chinese women [in California] are prostitutes. The disease that they have spread among young men is horrible. The virus of the coolie is almost sure death to a white man. There are cases of syphilis among the whites that originated from the Chinese prostitutes which are incurable. The Chinese are not as much affected by syphilis as the whites" (Chapleau & Gray, 1885).

The Committee also examined Dr. John Meares, health officer of San Francisco, who theorized that the 'so-called' leprosy seen amongst Chinese immigrants was actually congenital syphilis. "Syphilis appears to be worse with the Chinese because they are not treated for it, and it is handed down from one generation to another, until it assumes a tertiary form and presents a horrible appearance," he claimed (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). The testimony of Meares, O'Donnell, and 128 other witnesses was included as evidence in the report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, appointed by the Canadian federal government and conducted by Joseph-Adolph Chapleau and John Hamilton Gray in 1884. The report also cited evidence gathered in 1879 in Victoria by the Select Committee on Chinese Labour and Immigration, chaired by Amor De Cosmos, which concluded that Chinese immigration should be discouraged and that Chinese labourers should be banned from employment on Dominion works.

Among the MPs, businessmen and doctors who were examined by the Select Committee in 1879 was Dr. McInnis, who spoke from his experience as a physician and former mayor and police magistrate of New Westminster. Reinforcing the dominant rhetoric of the time, McInnis stated that "nearly all the Chinese women who come to British Columbia are prostitutes—and I believe to the Pacific Coast more generally" (House of Commons of Canada, 1879). He then offered his professional opinion that Chinese immigrants in British Columbia carried "a most virulent form of syphilis" that was killing off white and Indigenous populations by the hundreds every year (House of Commons of Canada, 1879). McInnis projected that their present population of 30,000 or 40,000 Indigenous people would dwindle to 5,000 within a couple of decades. When asked if the contamination spread from the Chinese in particular, McInnis replied: "Yes; principally from the Chinese. They appear to have a more virulent form of [syphilis] than any people I know" (House of Commons of Canada, 1879).

The beliefs held by doctors like McInnis and O'Donnell on the topic of syphilis did not go uncontested. For instance, when examined by the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in 1884, Sergeant John Flewin of the Victoria police force said that Chinese women did not introduce "venereal diseases" into the population any more than white sex workers (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). Dr. E. Stevenson similarly remarked that "as to spreading of venereal diseases, I deny that they at all equal our Indian population, or are as bad as our own race in that respect. During my long experience as a physician on this coast I have treated only one case of syphilis which claimed to arise from a Chinese source, and even that one was doubtful in its etiology" (Chapleau & Gray, 1885).

Chapleau and Gray (1885) ultimately sided with witnesses like Stevenson by concluding that there was little concrete evidence to support the accusations made against Chinese immigrants. They described the witnesses who propagated anti-Chinese sentiment as "strongly prejudiced," and lauded the "intelligent minority" who believed there should be no restrictions on immigration (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). A large majority of witnesses, however, advocated for restriction "based on police, financial and sanitary principles, sustained and enforced by stringent local regulations for cleanliness and the preservation of health" (Chapleau & Gray, 1885). Anxieties around the spread of disease were codified in Article 9 of the Chinese Immigration Act, which mandated that all ships carrying Chinese immigrants be inspected by a quarantine officer before landing. Passengers who were thought to have leprosy or other contagious diseases, including sexually transmitted infections, were prohibited from disembarking. Chinese sex workers were banned from stepping foot on Canadian soil altogether (Goverment of Canada, 1885).

Conclusion

Reading along the grain of *The British Colonist* archives and parliamentary papers from the early years of settlement reveals a discursive world dominated by epistemic and existential anxieties (Stoler, 2010). During a period of rapid growth and uncertain futures, white Canadians were grasping for rationales to justify and strengthen the vision of settler colonial expansion, which was predicated on the

theft of Indigenous lands, the erasure of Indigenous people, and the exclusion of racialized immigrants who threatened the stability of the racial order. In the late 19th century, Chinese immigrants in British Columbia bore the brunt of the latter.

Chinese women occupied a distinctive place in the white Canadian imaginary due to their doubly marginalized status as racialized and feminized subjects. Popular belief held that Chinese women—who were invariably described as sex workers—did not contribute to the burgeoning economy of the west, unlike their male counterparts who worked in mines, on the railway, and as merchants. In addition to their perceived non-productivity, and thus expendability, Chinese women were seen as actively imperilling the health and morality of young white men—the bedrock of settler society. This misinformed stereotype was legitimized by medical professionals along the Pacific coast who falsely reported that Chinese sex workers carried an especially virulent strain of syphilis that could 'ruin' portions of the white population for life.

Ultimately, the discursive construction of Chinese women on the west coast contributed to the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, with Article 9 specifically barring Chinese sex workers from entering the country alongside any immigrants who displayed symptoms of leprosy and/or sexually transmitted infections. As the first federal law to target immigrants based on their race, the Act set a precedent for exclusionary immigration legislation in Canada for decades to come. Underpinning the law—and Article 9 in particular—was the logic of germ theory, which mapped the fear of the racialized Other onto the physical body. The figure of the 'Chinese prostitute' embodied some of the greatest menaces to settler society and was thus excluded from the social body. By historicizing the logic through which Chinese-Canadian women were discursively constructed, and by tracing its transmutations over time, we can become more critical of its current application to different, but similar, bodies.

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I am a plagiarist

Micah Kalisch (they/them)
Woman & Gender Studies and Sociology

This poem touches on the challenges I face with my identity and where I fit in with my family. I have always felt lost; stuck between wanting to assimilate and conform, so as to not draw attention or anger, and a deep longing to separate myself from my biological roots . There are many aspects of my family I cannot escape, due to my genetic lineage I am predisposed to face several challenges, including mental illness and addiction. As a queer woman I am exposed to intense homophobia and misogyny which fills the rooms occupied by my family. In fear of becoming my family, I choose to become nothing instead, silence is a form of protection. No matter how hard I try, I can never be who they want me to be.

I am a plagiarist
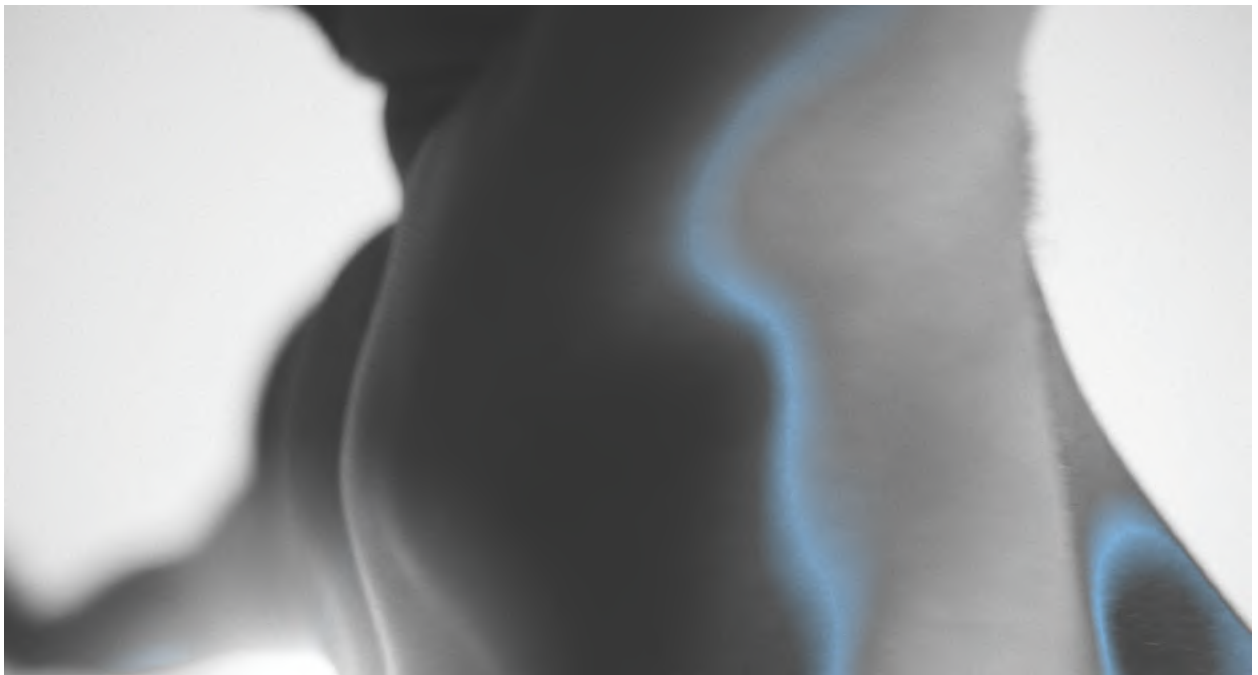
     I am a plagiarist
Every Word my mouth forms
Came from another mouth
Each vowel
Each consonant Each curve and dip of my lip
Twist of my tongue
All taken from another
     From my mother
And hers from hers
And hers from hers
I recycle their thoughts and their language
It is biology
The issue is their words taste salty on my lips
The cold bite sends shooting pain through my teeth
Perhaps
     I am anaphylactic
Because sometimes the words don't even make it to my lips
Before getting trapped in my throat
Walls closing around it
Choking
Choking on my mother's words
And her mother's words
And her mother's words
We recycle them over and over
My daughter's lips will quiver as she speaks my words
Her tongue will swell and her teeth will sting
She will taste the ocean and the desert all at once
So she will likely not speak
She will be silenced by the generations that have come before her
Just as I have been
And just as my mother has been
And her mother
And her mother's mother
     Because we are all plagiarists
Trying hard to wrap our mouths around new words
Around something other than recycling
     Around something other than garbage
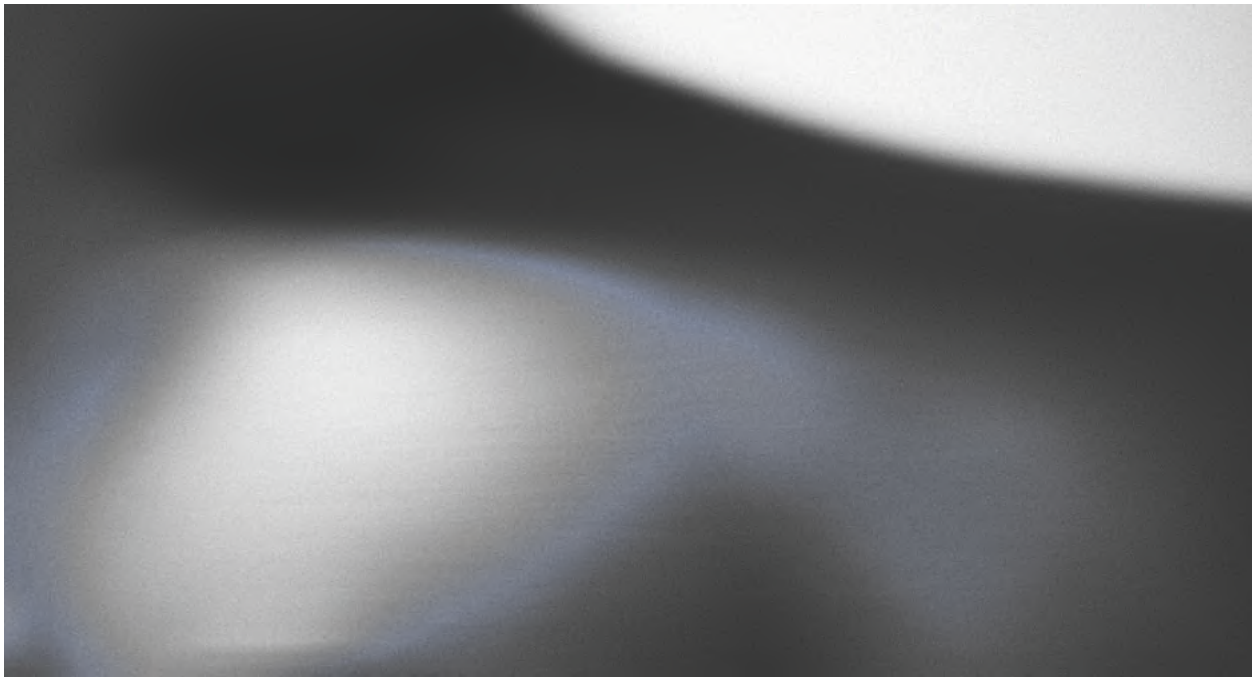
Cut/To

Ayisha Gariba (they/them)
Woman & Gender Studies

Cut/to is an autoethnographic experimental photo series that explores the complexities of Black nonbinary subjectivity, (dis)embodiment and ontological reflection. The title speaks to my refusal of the labels FTM or FTX and "cuts" the "to" in a manner of speaking. The images are a meditative exploration of liminality, (un)belonging and (in)visibility in relation to the complexities of my experience as a Black, queer, nonbinary, African person living away from home and rootedness in many ways. The key question guiding this photographic exploration is: what can liminality, mobility and my relationship to displacement teach me about my Blackness, my trans*-ness and my "transition"? I am employing a definition of "transition" here that que(e)ries the one that is commonly used for trans* people. The photographs are edited to appear as though they have a thermal imaging effect applied to them, which speaks to the disconnect that I feel to parts of my body. Nael Bhanji states that "'Home' is a location of dislocation and desire," that the home is "haunted," and this series positions my body as the haunted, dislocated home (159-160).

Reflection: Cut/To

> To what "home" does the trajectory of transition, the act of border-crossing, lead the already in-between diasporic, gender liminal subject?
>
> (Bhanji, 2013, p.157)

This project is an autoethnographic experimental photo series that explores the complexities of Black nonbinary subjectivity, (dis)embodiment, and ontological reflection. The images are a meditative exploration of liminality, (un)belonging, and (in)visibility in relation to the complexities of my experience as a Black, queer, nonbinary, African person living away from home and rootedness in many ways. The key question guiding this photographic exploration is: what can liminality, mobility and my relationship to displacement teach me about my Blackness, my trans*-ness and my "transition"?

The title, "cut/to," is a reference to film editing that denotes the transition from one scene to the next, and in the case of this project, speaks to my desire to understand my own transition as having no clear destination in mind. It also refers to Marquis Bey's (2017) assertion that "blackness 'lays in the cut,'… and stalls the very logic of social syntax" (p. 279). The title speaks to my refusal of the labels FTM or FTX and "cuts" the "to" in a manner of speaking.

The photographs are edited to appear as though they have a thermal imaging effect applied to them, which speaks to the disconnect that I feel to parts of my body. Nael Bhanji (2013) states that "'Home' is a location of dislocation and desire," that the home is "haunted," and this series positions my body as the haunted, dislocated home (p. 159-160). The blue tones in the majority of the images read as cold and the striking red and orange tones in some of the images symbolizes a readiness to accept my body. This photographic process allowed me to find ways to relate to my body that felt good to me, while not dismissing the difficulty that led to that comfort. I was able to challenge what Laura Horak (2014) calls the "distancing and objectifying" representations of trans people and our bodies in mainstream media through a series of messy, intimate, and complex photographs (p. 575).

I am employing a definition of "transition" here that que(e)ries the one that is commonly used for trans* people. Akweake Emezi's (2018) expansive definition of the term positions it (through surgery) as "a bridge across realities" and connects the Igbo spiritual figure of the Ogbanje to their own identity as a trans person (Emezi). Emezi's experience is important to my own, because of the roles that spirituality and liminality play in their transition. I look to Emezi's writing as a validation of my own experience as a non-binary West African person views my queerness and my connection to spirituality as inextricably linked.

In a piece titled "transition," Julian Carter (2017) explains that the transition is the moment when "hopes take material form and in doing so take on a life of their own" (p. 236). This is interesting to think about in relation to my own transition as a nonbinary person that has been marked most significantly by a confirmed top surgery date, a pronoun change and tattoo to commemorate it, and a handful of difficult conversations with my family. As Carter mentions, transition is "borrowing your brother's clothes… when you stop – or maybe start – avoiding mirrors, and bathrooms…" (p. 236). The photos are meant to speak to this and the past and present of my personal transition, while gesturing towards a possible future where transition can become "a rush of romantic feeling" when I touch my own skin or my "secret self made available for social relationships" (Carter, 2017, p. 236). I also work through some of my internalized transphobia and seek to challenge the idea that one must undergo surgery, a name change, and hormone therapy in order to "officially" transition.

Two other terms that I used expansive definitions of in the conceptualization of my photo series are "Black" and "trans*," as employed in the work of Marquis Bey and C. Riley Snorton. In Black on Both Sides (2017), Snorton calls "trans," a "movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival", and "Blackness" as an "environment and condition of possibility" (p. 2). In The Trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-ness, Marquis Bey engages with Blackness and trans*-ness in ways that acknowledge their disruptive qualities, their refusal of rootedness and their illegibility (p. 285). This refusal to arrive and settle in one place opens up disruptively pleasant possibilities to me as a Black non-binary trans person, but also dispiriting reminders of my queer diasporic African subjectivity. Am I refusing rootedness or is it rejecting me? Does my inability to return to the African continent as a queer person coupled with my inability to build roots for myself on stolen land as a

settler and immigrant directly relate to how I understand my gender as constantly in motion? These photographs hold all of these thoughts and meditations, and express them through movement, grain, colour, framing and tricks of (in)visibility.

I am interested in the understanding of gender articulated in Calvin Warren's piece "Calling Into Being" (2017) which explores how Black formulations of gender become "something other", something "unrecognizable as gender" (p. 269). I tried to invoke Warren's understanding in my photographs (p. 269). To add to my collection of semantic re-imaginations of transition-related words, I want to offer Warren's employment of the term "tranifestation" as it relates to Black transness. The author explains that in order to call to being, one must have a place, and that Blackness as it is understood inhabits the world in a "(non)place," resulting in a foreclosure of this call to being (Warren, 2017, p. 271). Warren then goes on to explain how tranifestation acknowledges that Black subjects experience a chronic placelessness in the world due to anti-Blackness and therefore resist "gendered normativity and hostility," and Black transgender people can teach us "the impossibility of finding symbolic coherency in the world" (p. 271). This aligns with Bey and Snorton's work and allows a framework through which I can explore and "place" my complicated feelings of placelessness.

The photographs represent the illegibility of my lived experience, my refusal to translate my trans*-ness, my fractured sense of self/place/home. This project was born out of frustrations that I have encountered in the most recent stages of my transition as I have tried to make myself legible and digestible to people in order to move more easily throughout the world. This project translates my feelings of placelessness into a visual medium that also breaks conventions of photography in order to disrupt what is considered normative and prevent any intervention and resolvability of my photographic choices, and in a broader sense, of the choices that I have made for myself and my body. Through this project, I want to embrace liminality, the state of in-betweenness and the constant refusal to land/arrive. My transition has taught me that it has no beginning or end, and that I will always be in between multiple para-ontological, temporal, spatial and somatic conditions.

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Sex, Faith and Freedom: A Queer Analysis of Sebastián Lelio's *Disobedience*

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Films focused around queer characters are often riddled with harmful tropes and violence. In the film Disobedience, characters Ronit and Esti journey through themes of faith, freedom and queerness. This essay argues that this film engages with the themes of the freedom to disobey and queer expression in unlikely places, while resisting harmful tropes often attributed to queerness and devout religious communities. This thesis is evaluated through an analysis of the creation and reception of the film, which is unique due to a story about queer, Orthodox Jewish women being created by a queer, Orthodox Jewish woman, Naomi Alderman. This thesis will then be evaluated through a review of common tropes, such as sex scenes for the male gaze, the punishment of queerness, and the "unveiling" fetishization. This essay finishes with evaluating the symbolism and themes of freedom vs the burdens of choice, ritual physical touch, and the possibilities of space for queerness in religious communities. The following essay employs an analysis of the intersection of the characters' queer and Jewish identities.

I must admit that I never thought I would witness Rachel Weisz spit into the mouth of the original Mean Girl, Rachel McAdams. All saliva aside, the film *Disobedience* is an emotional and thoughtful story about the reuniting of ex-lovers and childhood best friends Ronit (played by Rachel Weisz) and Esti (Rachel McAdams) when Ronit's father Rav Krushka suddenly passes away (Lelio 2018). Ronit returns to the orthodox community she had left in Northern London to find that Esti has married their childhood best friend Dovid. During the days of honouring Rav Krushka's life, Esti, Ronit, and Dovid are faced with questions of faith, freedom, and, "a cul-de- sac in life, when you realize the life you thought you were gonna have is never gonna happen, and then what do you do"(Lelio 2018). This film embarks on a love story which explores faith, queerness, gender roles, ritual, and their intersections; challenging but necessary themes which are not often explored in Hollywood movies. I argue that *Disobedience* engages with the themes of the freedom to disobey and queer expression in unlikely places while resisting harmful tropes often attributed to queerness and devout religious communities.

In analyzing the queerness of the film *Disobedience* it is important to include the story's origins and reception in order to understand the lived experience, viewpoints, and context that went into its creation and how they influence the themes that are portrayed. The film was an adaptation of a fictional novel written by Naomi Alderman in 2006 (Sherwood 2019). It was largely well-received, honoured by a number of literary awards despite its challenging subject matter of queer relationships in orthodox communities (Sherwood 2019). Alderman was raised in a devout Jewish family in Northern London where the novel takes place, but she said in a 2016 Vanity Fair interview that "I went into the novel religious and by the end I wasn't. I wrote myself out of it" (Sherwood 2019). The film was released in 2017 when Rachel Weisz, who plays Ronit, selected the novel to adapt into a full-length feature film that she would produce (Sherwood 2019). The film is directed and written by Sebastián Lelio, who also directed the Academy Award winning Chilean film, *A Fantastic Woman* (Richard 2017). While Alderman is no longer religious, it is important to the validity of the story to note that she has navigated queerness within her own Jewish community and that her writing is informed by this lived experience. As reported by H. Sherwood in *The Guardian's* piece on the film, LGBTQ2S issues have grown in importance and debate within Jewish circles and there have been a number of movements and organizations increasing awareness and education which has been supported and resisted in various Jewish traditions (Sherwood 2019). Alderman's own father, Geoffrey Alderman, is a prominent member of the Orthodox community and told the Department for Education that no Orthodox Jewish school "would countenance any educational initiative that incorporated approval in any sense whatsoever of lifestyles prohibited in the Hebrew Bible" (Sherwood 2019).

In addition to the creation of the film, another important consideration of this film is who it is

intended for and received by. Disobedience defies tropes which are common to queer and orthodox religious stories in the full length film but falls prey to them in the trailer in order to cater to heterosexual, non-Jewish audiences. Stories about queer relationships, in particular lesbian ones, are often stereotyped and over-exaggerated by creators and made for audiences who do not belong to the communities being depicted. One of the most famous "lesbian" films, *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, has been intensely criticized by queer women, including myself, for the unrealistic and pornographic sex scenes that were clearly staged with the male gaze as the intended audience, which is unfortunately the norm (Kate 2013). Another all-too-common trope in media representations of queer relationships or intimacy is the literary trope, *Bury Your Gays*, where one of the characters receives some punishment in the end, usually one that is intensely violent and often murderous (Hulan 2017). This trope likely originates from the 1930's where the only way queer relationships would be shown or funded in cinema is if one of them were given a punishment in the end to show the immorality of queerness (Hulan 2017). This restriction was due to the Hays Code, formally named the Motion Picture Production Code adopted in 1930 and enforced in 1934, which prohibited the depiction of content considered "perverse," including homosexuality (Bridges 2018). The scholar Haley Hulan argues that for decades this trope was used by queer writers as a tool to release their queer content without facing negative legal consequences for "endorsing homosexuality" (Hulan 2017). However, since the rejection of the Hays Code by Hollywood in the late 1960's, this trope has mostly been employed to shock straight audiences (Hulan 2017). This trope is dangerous because the normalization of queer death in media has been criticized for desensitizing audiences to queer deaths in real life, putting queer people at further risk to hate crimes and violence. Although (spoilers) the ending is undoubtedly sad because Ronit and Esti part ways again, I would still consider it happy compared to most queer films that usually end in at least one of the characters dying or suffering some great violence. The films refusal to adopt the Bury Your Gays trope is significant because it instead proposes the possibility of a full and hopeful future for the queer characters, drawing in audiences to root for the characters' prospective futures.

Disobedience defies the above explained Bury Your Gays queer film trope. The sex scene, which includes the aforementioned spitting, has been hailed by film critics as a contender for the best of the year for the level of intimacy and connection between Ronit and Esti (Sharf 2018). Although the film was directed and written by a man, the scene was not unrealistic or overtly pornographic and it articulates the intimacy and closeness between the two characters rather than catering to potential men audience desires. Weisz and McAdams both described it as unlike any sex scene they had done with male co-stars before and both said it felt just as vulnerable as other emotional scenes they did (Sharf 2018). During the scene, the camera focuses on the intense emotion portrayed on their faces and in their gentle, harmonic physical movements rather than their bodies in provocative positions. This demonstrates that the director and actors' goal was to portray the ultimate love and connection between the characters, rather than sex for the audience's pleasure. *Disobedience* is effective in portraying a relationship between queer women without falling prey to tropes of violence or catering to the male gaze.

Disobedience shows resistance, but with more contestation than the above trope, to tropes common in storytelling about orthodox religious communities which are also often told by and for audiences who do not belong to the community. There is often a fixation on the "unveiling" of these communities that are considered heavily private and secretive by those, often anglo-christian societal audiences who view them. The fetishization of having a look into these communities through storytelling and films is especially evident in the film *Yentl* starring Barbara Streisand which was wildly popular to western, non-Jewish audiences but heavily criticized by Jewish audiences for not only romanticizing the perceived "secretiveness" of orthodox communities but also for completely obscuring the religious and queer significance of the original short story, *Yentl the Yeshiva Boy* (Ebert 1983). The answer to the question of if *Disobedience* resists or exploits this trope is less definitive. I do not have any personal experience to apply but there has been praise from some Jewish critics, especially women, who have chosen to leave Orthodoxy (Sherwood 2018). But there has also been a fair amount of distaste from Jewish audiences, perhaps because they perceive the film as painting Orthodoxy in a bad light or simply for its inaccuracies in depicting the North London community (Sherwood 2018). All criticisms and praises from those who have actually experienced life in Orthodox Jewish communities are valid and so it is subjective whether or not *Disobedience* is exploitative or honest in its storytelling of Orthodox

Jewish life. However, it can probably be agreed upon that it is an improvement from *Yentl* and other Hollywood attempts.

However, we cannot only analyze the film from a Jewish and Queer standpoint separately, the intersection of these identities and experiences must also be investigated which can be done effectively by comparing the trailer and the full-length film. While the full-length film is a pondering and contentious love story, the trailer shows an oppressed and passionate love affair in an aggressively resistant society. Quotes run across the screen throughout stating, "a community secluded by religion…," and, "a woman exiled for a transgression..." amidst spliced audio and scenes of characters shouting and the music building interspersed by glimpses of Esti and Ronit kissing (Lelio 2018). The trailer makes the film appear exactly as if it contains all of the tropes I have analyzed above. This trailer clearly is directed towards heterosexual, non-Jewish audiences and exploits these tropes of mysterious and punished queer love. The trailer plays into the anglo-christian fetishization of orthodox communities and queer sex in order to market to those audiences. This demonstrates how despite the resistance to these tropes that Hollywood has mass produced, *Disobedience* was still marketed to appeal to anglo-christian, straight audiences for the sake of ticket sales.

The film *Disobedience* explores the obstacles and resistance to queerness in Orthodox Jewish communities as well as the opportunities to experience it. In Esti and Ronit's journey, they encounter obstacles and resistances in their exploration of queer expression and relationships. The most prevalent of those resistances is the institutional obligation of gender roles. As Esti says during a dinner discussion, "Women change their names everyday, they take their husbands and their own history is gone" (Lelio 2018). This is followed by Ronit's estranged family inquiring about why she does not have a husband yet and why she left their community so many years ago. The religious and societal obligation of marriage and children between men and women is what drove Ronit to leave her community and what made Esti feel pressured to marry Dovid who she was not in love with. The heterosexual societal and religious expectation drove Ronit and Esti apart in their youth in addition to creating feelings of trauma and shame in their lives.

While it is often assumed that there is no space for queerness in orthodox Jewish communities, the film shows that queerness and faith are intertwined for Esti and Ronit. The theme of the freedoms vs burdens of choice is prevalent throughout the film and in the characters' developments. The film begins with Ronit's father, Rav Krushka, giving a speech in the Synagogue about God's creation of man and its purpose:

> It is a being with the power to disobey. Alone among all the creatures we have free will. We hang suspended between the clarity of the angels and the desires of the beasts. Hashem gave us choice, which is both a privilege and a burden. We must then choose the tangled life we live. (Lelio 2018)

Immediately after these words he collapses and Ronit is informed in New York that her father has passed away and returns to the Northern London community which she had left when she was a teenager. When Ronit, Esti and Dovid reunite they all have the belief that they have had little choice in where they are in life as explained above. When Esti informs Dovid and Ronit that she is pregnant, she immediately tells both of them that she wants her freedom. When the audience would assume that Esti would leave Dovid for Ronit, she instead requests her freedom from both of them because she had gone her entire life without making choices for herself. That evening and in the climax of the film, Ronit and Esti attend the funeral service for Rav Krushka where Dovid will make his debut as taking over from the Rav. In his speech he reflects upon Rav Krushka's last words about freedom and concludes by looking up toward Esti in the women's section and says "You are free," then resigns from the position because he says he does not have sufficient understanding for the role (Lelio 2018). As Rachel McAdams said in an Entertainment Weekly interview, Esti learns to balance her faith and queerness, "Her God gives her the free will to have both" (McAdams 2018). Although her journey was incredibly tumultuous, she chooses to learn how to be free in her faith and expression.Esti's turning point is crucial because it demonstrates that she does not have to sacrifice her Jewish or queer identities, they are intertwined and informed by each other. After the service, they meet each other outside and all three of them hug, all engaging in physical intimacy and connection together. The film is especially successful in its message

that none of the main characters, Ronit, Esti, and Dovid, have any malicious intent or act as villains. They are all simply trying to understand how to do what is right in an uncharted situation. Naomi Alderman is quoted at the films premiere saying that the characters each reach "a cul-de-sac in life, when you realize the life you thought you were gonna have is never gonna happen, and then what do you do" (Alderman 2018). Each character comes to the realization that finding and maintaining their religious faith in life may be much different than they thought.

The other theme that this film addresses is the extent of space for queerness in faith, ritual, and community. As the character reunite in their deeply religious community, they are in fact able to find space to develop their relationship and find queer spaces within and outside of the community. One of the spaces where the characters are able to experience queer expression and intimacy is actually due to the tradition of gender segregation in Orthodox Jewish communities. This is evident in Esti's ability to flourish as a teacher in the all girls classrooms which she states is her passion in faith despite her struggles in heterosexual marriage. The queer intimacies possible in gender segregated schools is also evident in a scene of all boys reading the Torah with Rabbis about how physical love is the highest religious experience. The boys are able to discuss the passage and its meaning together and with the Rabbis in a moment of connection and growth, reflecting a space of no judgement. The segregation of gender also allows space for queer intimacy in tradition and physical touch. At the beginning of the film when Ronit arrives, she moves to hug her childhood friend, Dovid, and stops herself when she recalls that he is married and he is unable to hug her to comfort her when she is mourning her father. However, she can engage in physical intimacy with the women in her community. Her hands are grasped and she is hugged by all of the women she was raised with in addition to being able to hold Esti's hands in the women's seating section of the synagogue without going against their faith. The ability to have these connections shapes her relationships with the women in the community, who are much quicker to forgive her for leaving than the men. In addition, her holding of Esti leads as a gateway to further physical intimacy and connection which, although it goes against her marriage, is as the boys read, "the highest religious experience" (Lelio 2018). Ronit and Esti's ability to engage in physical touch leads to their experience of queer physical intimacy as a deeply religious experience. Therefore, the gender segregation and traditions regarding physical touch in Orthodox Judaism allow for queer expression and intimacy to develop between the main characters. This theme tells the audience that despite stereotypical notions of Orthodoxy being completely void of queerness, the traditions in their faith not only allow the opportunity for queer intimacy but make it necessary and inseparable.

The film *Disobedience* is much more than the saliva-related anecdote I offered at the beginning of this paper for shock value (much like the trailer did). This film follows a love story which explores faith, queerness, gender roles, ritual, and their intersections, while resisting tropes that cater to heterosexual, anglo-christian audiences. It is a story about being a queer Jewish woman, written by a queer Jewish woman which sets it apart in the effectiveness of the community's portrayal. Engagement with the themes of the freedom to disobey and queer expression in unlikely places informs audiences that Orthodox Judaism is not simply inherently oppressive, as outsiders often assume, and that queerness is not something to be exploited and punished in film. The message of this film, which we can all apply to our lives no matter our sexuality or faith is simply learning to be compassionate and loving, kind to yourself and one another.

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TERROR FORMED US / POWER HOLDS US IN PLACE

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In this collage work, entitled "TERROR FORMED US / POWER HOLDS US IN PLACE," I illustrate the precariousness of womanhood and the toll it takes. The world tells us the bad things that happen to us are our fault, that you can avoid violence if you are perfect enough. The woman in this work is caught in the pain of an existence that demands unattainable perfection in exchange for basic safety. She is locked in a scream. Patriarch(ies) make us feel that if we make one wrong move, WE are wrong; this power is exercised overtly (through physical violence, represented by the lobster claw) and covertly (through shame and internalized misogyny, both other and self-inflicted, represented by the red object).

There is a dance-like delicacy to navigating the world as a woman. The precision and strength this requires are represented by the dancer's legs, which are strong, but restricted and forced into an uncomfortable and perpetual struggle for balance. She holds herself just so, else she may fall.

Magic, Lesbian Sexuality, and the "Impossible Possibility:" Reading the Early Modern Witch Hunts and the Cold War Lavender Scare for a Politics of Re-Enchantment

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This paper explores two necropolitical projects and their accompanying sets of purges: the gendered violences of the "Lavender Scare" (the heightened regulation and persecution of queer bodies in the early Cold War United States) and the witch hunts in Europe and European colonies that peaked between 1580 and 1630. In both cases, the policing of gender roles facilitated the development or defence of capitalism and imperialism. But whereas the vast majority of the witch hunts' victims were women, the Lavender Scare was far more "successful" at identifying for regulation gay men than lesbians and other queer women. This relationship between this parallel visibility and invisibility is explored in relation to the mutual invisibility of possibly-queer women to each other. Lefebvre's "theory of moments" provides a framework, the "impossible possibility," which suggests parallels between the "moments" of magic and lesbian love and sexuality in a capitalist, heteropatriarchal order: they must be both impossible and possible, as the ability of power to repress them as impossible is dependent on their possible existence. A gendered experience of necropolitical violence in this sense is defined by the denial of the "moment," which renders the meaningful components of certain lives expendable. This exploration is furthered on the level of form by interweaving a series of love poems exchanged, despite the impossibilities of time and space, between an early modern "witch" and a woman in mid-century America, in which the "moment" presented as impossible under capitalist patriarchy is recognized possible.

"It is possible for two women to be in something of a homosexual relationship without either of them being fully aware of it" (Genter, 2019, pp. 251), remarked a psychiatrist before the U.S. State Department's Committee on Expenditures in 1954. Amid growing fears of Soviet espionage in the postwar United States and in the wake of President Truman's executive order to establish a loyalty program for government employees (Shibusawa, 2012), the Committee on Expenditures, responsible for determining individuals' suitability for federal employment, called upon the executive branch to purge homosexuals from federal positions (Genter 2019), a call the State Department quietly began to implement (Shibusawa, 2012). Further legal infrastructure followed with the 1948 Miller Sexual Psychopath Law criminalizing acts of "sodomy" and oral sex and President Eisenhower's 1953 Executive Order 10,450, which expanded the grounds for dismissal from government positions to include security risks and other indications regarding a person's "character" (Genter, 2019, pp. 235). Beyond the immediate infrastructure of the security state, city and state level obscenity laws targeting queer texts and expressions as inherently perverse proliferated across the country during 1950s (Strub, 2008). The gendered violences of this "Lavender Scare"—the heightened regulation and persecution of queer bodies in the early Cold War United States—and the visibilities and invisibilities they helped generate formed a core component of a similar necropolitical project of enclosure and its set of purges: the early modern witch hunts in Europe and European colonies that peaked between 1580 and 1630 (Federici, 2004).

As America's transition out of the crisis of the Second World War was defined by both the Lavender Scare and the Red Scare (Genter, 2019, pp. 237), Europe's transition from feudalism to mercantile capitalism saw the emergence of a heightened series of witch hunts, a "scare" targeting traditional, and largely feminized, magical practices (Federici, 2004, pp. 164). In both cases, the policing of gender roles facilitated the development or defence of capitalism and imperialism. But whereas the vast majority of the witch hunts' victims were women, the Lavender Scare was far more "successful" at identifying for regulation gay men than lesbians and other queer women (Johnson, 2004, pp. 155). This paper explores the relationship between this parallel visibility and invisibility and its relation to the mutual

invisibility of possibly-queer women to each other described in the opening quote. Lefebvre's theory of moments provides a framework, the "impossible possibility," which can be extended to explore the "moments" of magic and lesbian love and sexuality in a capitalist, heteropatriarchal order: they must be both impossible and possible, as the ability of power to repress them as impossible is dependent on their possible existence. These forms of gender policing constitute a gendered experience of necropolitical violence defined by the denial of the "moment," which renders the meaningful components of certain lives expendable. This thesis can be used to explore the sometimes-tense relationship between queer liberation and anti-capitalism, an exploration which will be furthered on the level of form by interweaving a series of love poems exchanged, despite the impossibilities of time and space, between a woman accused of witchcraft and a woman in mid-century America, in which the "moment" presented as impossible under capitalist patriarchy is recognized possible.

1.
How is it
that I know you?
That your hair can brush
the space between us and stir
that little pool
of light,
that trembles when a friend
lays her head on my shoulder and I don't
dare
look down to her eyes?

like a wildflower whose name
I never learned before he came
back from the war and the garden
where it had found a crack to grow
was uprooted in
victory?
Plucked, landing on the water rippling
impossibly wide,
just out of reach?
Like you floated back for me?

It is not.
Possible. But I
have seen council fires
conjure sabbat orgies
until I forgot which came first,
and place little faith
in words carved by enclosure fences. I
was the last
on the land, and am,
the night we made
make fire
that reflects the stars.
How is it possible
I saw you in the flames? Join me
and tell—your lips
need not use words

Necropolitics and Capitalist Enclosure: Comparing the Witch Hunts and the Lavender Scare

The early modern European witch hunts and the Cold War lavender scare, to begin, share key ideological and structural continuities that help illuminate modern patriarchy's development and reinforcement as a necropolitical project. Mbembe defines necropolitics in response to Foucault's definition of biopolitics, which conceives of the modern nation-state's sovereignty as the use of power to control living subjects (Mbembe, 2003): necropolitics attempts to account for the continuing importance of the state's right to expose to death by locating sovereignty in the capacity to dictate who lives and who dies (Mbembe, 2003). Mbembe links necropolitics most closely to contexts of colonial occupation, where in particular the concept of biopolitics appears insufficient for describing how, here, sovereignty is constituted by the state of exception; of configuring, through violence, a new set of spatial relations that relegate categories of people to zones "between subjecthood and objecthood" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 26). While Mbembe uses the concept of necropolitics only to describe, as Foucault with biopolitics, the modern nation-state, this emphasis on the enclosure of spaces that produces expendability in specific populations—that produces subjecthood and with it sovereignty by marking bodies for death—lends itself to the discussion of moments of heightened accumulation, heightened capitalist enclosure of "open" spaces, which was occurring both during the witch hunts (through the systematic capitalist enclosure of previously-common or feudal land) and the lavender scare, during the expanding imperialist concerns of the United States in the postwar period. The framework of necropolitics can be used to identify a key common thread running through emerging the emerging capitalism of early modern states to late-capitalist modern nation-states: the production of bodies that are expendable through the project of enclosure, and the accompanying making-impossible of key meaningful experiences for those expendable bodies which remain alive.

In the case of the witch hunts, the necropolitics of exposing particular populations to death was a core component of what can be conceptualized as a triple process of "enclosure:" of the land, of knowledge, and of bodies. In England, for example, that most of the early witch hunts occurred where previously common land had been privatized (enclosed), and that the majority of the accused were poor peasant women whereas the majority of accusers were wealthy community members with close ties to the emerging power structures suggests that the spread of rural capitalism was key (Federici, 2004), as it required an imaginary that would support the interests of the wealthy in class struggle. The witch hunts provided that imaginary in part by deepening, through fear, gender divisions (Federici, 2004). These enclosures at home also coincided with enclosures abroad in the rise of modern colonialism, which was supported in part by the racial imaginary tied to the witch hunts' gendered one. For example, early modern images of the witch were accompanied by the emerging image of the devil as a black man; the hyper-sexualization of both served to make both blackness and femaleness marks of bestiality that naturalized exclusion from "the social contract implicit in the wage," thus naturalizing exploitation (Federici, 2004, pp. 200). In parallel fashion, the witch hunts served to "enclose" entire fields of knowledge, especially that of medicine. Unlike in the medieval period, when the key crime was causing harm through magic, and therefore "good witches" (primarily women) whose healing and reproductive knowledge bordered on or involved the magical were generally exempt from persecution, laws such as James I's 1604 statute imposed the death penalty for magic *in itself* (Federici, 2004, pp. 201). Thus, criminalizing this traditional knowledge was directly linked to the rise of professional medicine as a wall of unchallengeable knowledge to which women no longer had access (Federici, 2004). Finally, expropriation from the land and knowledge was mirrored by expropriation from the body itself: the witch hunt served to weed out non-procreative sexual activity (Federici, 2004), as is evident in the prevalence of "preventing conception" (Federici, 2004, pp. 181) among accusations, thus "enclosing" the body for the purposes of reproduction within a capitalist machine (Federici, 2004). These three processes of enclosure did not align by chance; evidence from prominent documents such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which, for example, laid out the process by which the vicar or judge in a county should initiate what would later be called witch-hunting "hysteria" by systematically posting notices requiring inhabitants to reveal witches indicates that witch hunts required calculated campaigns by the ruling classes (Ehrenreich and English, 1973). Mies further observes that the rise of the capitalist world-system, fueled by large-scale colonial plunder, it became increasingly possible for the ruling classes "externalize or exterritorialize" (Mies, 2014, p. 76) those they exploited and thus to, in parallel, imagine the possibility of "emancipation" from reliance on both "nature" and women's reproductive

power—the emerging conception of science and technology as the core productive forces made completely enclosing those sources of wealth seem possible (Mies, 2014). In the case of the spectacular violence of the witch hunts, the emerging apparatus of the modern capitalist nation state can clearly be seen to have been founded on its exercising the right to kill those who did not conform to the requirements of modern capitalist patriarchy; the fundamentally gendered experience of the modern subject in the Western world, that made bodies capable of giving birth into economic resources, was founded on the question of who was exposed to death under the auspices of witch-hunting officials and who was not.

This triple process of enclosure—of the body, of the land, and of knowledge—accompanying systematic gendered violence initiated by the state are also evident in the processes of the policing of queer bodies in the United States during the early Cold War. The lavender scare took place during a period in which capitalism was undergoing a critical shift and facing, after the emergence of fascism and several "communist" states, an existential crisis. On the level of "land," it helped secure the narrative of, and a supportive citizenry for, American empire. Prevalent heteropaternalism—the assumption that the heteropatriarchal nuclear arrangement should serve as a model for the state (Arvin et. al, 2013, pp. 11)—means that the organization of citizens into heteropatriarchal nuclear families helps produce a citizenry that will support the nation-state (Arvin et. al, 2013). The core claim, on paper, supporting the purging of "sexual perverts" from federal positions was that because they had to hide their "immoral behaviour," they were vulnerable to blackmail (ie. by Communist agents) (Genter, 2019, pp. 237). When pressed, officials would admit that there was no evidence of such an instance ever occurring (Shibusawa, 2012); what the discourse of the Lavender Scare accomplished, however, was the linking of sexual "perversion" and the "perversion" of the state's enemies (Shibusawa, 2012, pp. 725). One House of Representatives member, for example, voiced support for the purges with a speech claiming that "the Russians are strong believers in homosexuality" (Shibusawa, 2012, pp. 724). The pairing of the capitalist/communist, normal/perverse binaries performed a similar function to the witch hunts' feeding of the emerging racial discourses required for imperialism; Shibusawa argues that this conflation served to "orientalize" queer bodies (Shibusawa, 2012, pp. 731), reinforcing the image of "civilization" as one of a "vigorous" straight white male against the threat of the (effeminate, nonwhite/oriental) decadency of "overcivilization" (Shibusawa, 2012, pp. 744). Where gender roles had been destabilized by the population upheavals of the Second World War (Genter, 2019, pp. 239), the Lavender Scare thus facilitated the "enclosure" of knowledges that that disruption would have entailed by conflating the security of heteropatriarchy and that of the state, setting up imperialism and heteropatriarchy as mutually-reinforcing through an imaginary reinforcing heteropaternalism. And though the administrative efforts of the Lavender Scare were technically centred on federal government employees in Washington D.C., that discourse hints at the broader process of Cold War era gender and racial politics that expropriated individuals from their bodies. As California doubled its prison sentences for sodomy in the 1950s, for example, patterns of police harassment of queers mirrored police harassment of people of colour; sodomy laws functioned like the conduct ordinances that presented certain bodies as inherently requiring "containment" (Leonard, 2001, pp. 548), a necessity reinforced by obscenity laws that cast queer bodies as inherently perverse (Strub, 2008). The necropolitics of the Lavender Scare are perhaps not as immediately obvious: these were not explicitly state-sponsored executions, but what might at first appear to be an example of the operation of Foucault's more traditional conception of biopower and its emphasis on regulating living bodies. But the Lavender Scare had very real body count: even just considering those directly affected by State Department purges, enough suicides occurred that the State Department in 1953 held a meeting on "how to prevent 'the threat of suicide' in homosexual cases," and went to great lengths to cover up suicides that did occur such that no accurate numbers are available, only numerous newspaper stories of single government workers who committed suicide for "no apparent reason" (Johnson, 2004, pp. 159). These triple expropriations, of "land," knowledge, and body, highlight the continuity between spectacular state necropolitics and ongoing embodied experience: such policing does not simply regulate bodies, but leaves others beyond the world of possible regulation, expendable. The exploration of the gendered experience of necropolitics as applied to both magic and lesbian sexuality will help explain the necessity of considering the violent policing of gender in terms of necropolitics' notion of expendability.

2.
But you are steps
from the flames—or what will
be the flames or what were
the flames, I know
that much. How can you touch me
when your hands are already bound?
Is it enough
that passing that spot a hundred times only once
have I had the strength to meet your eye
enough
that my hand flutters at your gate
enough
even if it never penetrates and if the wall
they built with your stake is too
solid, I back away
singed by a kiss
enough
if I am too afraid to look back, is it
enough
to know

Is it enough
if I magic you to the commons
enough
if all that separates us
are the impossible years
enough
if I am renewed in open
space before you, would it be
enough
to see

Enclosure and The Paradox of (In)Visibility

The structures of the witch hunts and the lavender scare both served to develop and maintain capitalist patriarchy; in only one, however, does it at first appear that those gendered female by that structure were the most materially expendable. What is the link that makes them both part of the same process? In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more than eighty percent of witch hunt victims were women; the witch hunts were, very openly, a war against women, an effort to destroy their traditional social power (Federici, 2004). The prevalence among the victims of midwives or "wise women," traditional depositories of (women's) reproductive knowledge (Federici, 2004, pp. 182) and "promiscuous" women (the prostitute, the adulteress) (Federici, 2004, pp. 184), along with the emphasis in the charges on reproductive crimes (infanticide, preventing conception, sexual perversion) and the sexual sadism evident in the tortures, all point towards the witch hunts as a moment in which the (lower class) woman as such was put on trial (Federici, 2004). Such observations are supported by the theological justifications used in trials and witch-hunting documents, which emphasized the devil's tendency to act through taking advantage of "carnal lust, which for women is insatiable" (Ehrenreich and English, 1973, pp. 40-41). This moment was thus defined by the *hyper-visibility* and awareness of the possibility of women's independent sexuality, in which the figure of the woman was dragged into the open and examined. This hyper-visibility contrasts the relative invisibility of lesbians and love between women during the era of the Lavender Scare, which on the administrative level primarily targeted specific sex acts between gay men. Johnson, for example, describes how one Washington, D.C. psychiatrist commented that, to his knowledge, "there have been no cases of female homosexuality which came to the attention of police that were prosecuted," the usual practice being "to regard the incident as 'misbehaviour'" (Johnson, 2004, pp. 155). Of course, there were a great many State Department dismissals of women that were not initiated by the police (Genter, 2019) and this comment only applied to State Department employees, but it is indicative of a broader pattern. Women's sexuality was, moreover, generally under increased scrutiny in this period, beyond the specific context of Washington, D.C., as it was during the witch hunts; Freedman, for example, discusses the prevalence of the "prison lesbian" as a popular stock character "associated with threats to sexual and social order" (Freedman, 1996, pp. 405), in which class marking came to stand in for the racial marking that had previously painted the prison lesbian as almost exclusively black, thus generalizing the fear of the degeneration of white heterosexuality (Freedman, 1996). And government officials were certainly concerned with the "problem" of homosexuality in women; the 1957 Crittenden report on homosexuality in the military concluded that "homosexual activity of female members [...] has appeared to be more disruptive of morale and discipline in the past than similar male activity" (Genter, 2019, pp. 250). In part, the fact that this increased scrutiny did not tend to be translated into direct persecution by the specific mechanisms set up to police homosexuality can partially be explained by the fact that lesbians had less access to public space than gay men, as women did generally compared to all men, and therefore were less likely to be targeted by police (Johnson, 2004). But the critical factor was that even when women were identified for interrogation, those attempting to regulate them generally had no conceptual clarity over the thing they sought to regulate (Genter, 2019). Traditional conceptions of sex defined it strictly in terms of penetration, and there was therefore uncertainty as to what constituted a lesbian sex act (Genter, 2019). Moreover, the 1950s saw a shift in psychiatric models under which homosexuality was understood by dominant structures, from the conceptual framework of "sexual inversion" (the taking up of the "opposite" gender's role in an active/passive structure) to one which emphasized merely same-sex object choice. The latter framework made identifying lesbianism, in particular, from the "outside" an increasing epistemological problem: unlike the gender-inversion framework, in which one could look for "masculine" characteristics in women as evidence of homosexuality, the object-choice framework did not necessarily include any outward marking characteristics, or even a permanent sexual orientation (Genter, 2019, pp. 247). While lesbians and other women who loved women were generally caught up in the period's policing of patriarchal gender roles, the precise mechanisms of state persecution available to those very patriarchal structures had difficulty making them visible in the way that the mechanisms of the witch hunt made the figure of the woman as such hyper-visible.

3.

Love, let me
teach you a spell.

One: A brooklime, that *was the flower*

plucked from the edge of the ditch
where the wall we took down
has not been rebuilt

Two: That's all—

I place it in your hand,
like a lavender blue with cold

Three: your fingers closing over
to warm it

Four: I know
you won't recognize it, like you won't
recognize the birthwort
that drew out our future's afterbirth but love,
you are the only one who has known me and all
I could be pregnant with is our
future, love,
I gave birth waiting for you love,
in one
moment, one
spell:

—Do not close me
in your silence, not after I've taken
all those walls down
with me—

One: A flower
Two: Your hand open on the margins of a ditch
with newly running water

I know you can't, but
try?
If it anyway it isn't
real?

Necropolitics and the Theory of Moments

   This juncture is where the framework of the "impossible possibility" is critical. Mbembe argues that an understanding of necropolitics, by conceptualizing sovereignty as a right over life and death, is supported by an understanding of death as an absolute excess, an anti-economy to the economy of knowing and meaning (Mbembe, 2003). We might rephrase this conceptualization of necropolitical sovereignty as defined by a positive impossibility—an impossibility that has to be more than the negation of the possible, as death must be more than the mere negation of life (which would contain it in the system of rational meaning). There are impossibilities that must be actively made impossible, for established power to maintain itself; but this very necessity implies that there is a possibility that that making-impossible must suppress. This positive impossibility can thus, despite the apparent contradiction, coexist with the possible. The effects of this dynamic are evident in the statement that opened this paper: that "two women" could "be in something of a homosexual relationship" (Genter, 2019, pp. 251) without being able to name it. The broader effects of the policing of gender roles meant that even as those in power sought to understand deviant behaviour in order to regulate it, those engaged in such behaviour, because of the very extent of its policing, often could not identify or understand it themselves; it was placed beyond the economy of meaning. The "impossible possibility" therefore, is useful more broadly to understand the impact of the necropolitics that makes some bodies exposable *on the embodied experience of those who remain alive*; it can be used to describe a process by which certain lives become expendable by the making-unknowable of knowledges that threaten the status quo.

   What does this process of placing beyond the economy of meaning look like? Henri Lefebvre's theory of moments, part of his project of explaining how forms of alienation under capitalism manifest on the level of the individual's everyday experience and ability to have meaningful relationships, provides a useful means of exploring the precise mechanisms by which the "impossible possibility" can be understood both as an embodied effect of structural violence and as a site of resistant meaning. Capitalism, Lefebvre observes, is essentially an accumulative process (Lefebvre, 1991). The processes required for such accumulation—mechanization, rationalization, commodification, the linearity associated with technological progress—tend towards the proliferation of our experience of time as that of an accumulation of repetitive "instants," or fragments of time that have little meaning beyond their pure immediacy (eg. the repetition of the work day, the habitual buying of consumer goods) (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 340). But there is also a form of repetition that is irreducibly non-accumulative, and that disrupts that trend towards accumulation: that of the "moment" (as opposed to the instant), repetition experienced as renewal rather than mere repetition (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 340). Instants are ambiguous in their meaning; they have not been differentiated from the continual linear accumulation of time. But when we choose to read such an ambiguous action a certain way—Lefebvre uses the example of choosing to read a flirtatious act as a moment of "love" as opposed to "playfulness" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 345)—that choice constitutes a moment, singling it out from the initial ambiguity that characterizes the succession of instants of which everyday life largely consists (Lefebvre, 1991). The moment is that which gives words (eg. "love") meaning; it is the recognition of the "something" that remains through all the changing situations in which a word is used (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 342). It implies a recognition both of the other and the self, which recognition justifies the use of the word to communicate with the other (Lefebvre, 1991). When one chooses to read a moment as one of "love," for example, one enters into a "particularized memory" associated with that moment—the ways in which one acts towards a lover, the modes of expression one would only use in that context, the memory of previous romantic experiences renewed, unique, in this moment. The fact of being within a particularized memory relegates other such memories (eg. of moments of "mere" play, or of rest) to the background (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 345). In other words, the moment must propose itself as an absolute; in the "moment" of falling or being in love, that "falling" presents itself as an urgency beyond which other concerns pale. But, of course, no experience can genuinely *be* absolute; other "moments," or the demands of daily life, get in the way (Lefebvre, 1991). That absoluteness, therefore, characterizes the moment as that experience which proposes itself as impossible: an impossible love, say, that, *in that moment*, one must believe is a possibility (Lefebvre, 1991). The moment—the basic unit of meaning in everyday life—is defined as the attempt to achieve the impossible total realization of a possibility (Lefebvre, 1991). That "impossible possibility" is what makes the moment both disalienating and alienating; it's absolute

urgency "disalienates" one from the triviality of everyday instants, but there is always a point at which it fails (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 347). Lefebvre argues that part of what makes capitalism alienating is that the pressure to accumulate encourages us to read the world increasingly as mere instants, and causes the linear accumulation of the instant to overpower the genuine experience of moments, presenting moments as increasingly impossible and prone to failure (Lefebvre, 1991).

The Impossible Possibility: Magic and Lesbian Sexuality Under Capitalist Patriarchy

This framework of the impossible possibility is a key common thread linking the hyper-visibility of women as such in the witch hunts to the relative invisibility of lesbian sexuality during the Lavender Scare, which can be explored by considering the parallels between the "moments" of magic and lesbian love in patriarchal capitalist worlds. An obvious critique of an understanding of the witch hunts as functioning to usher in the rationalist organization of work is, to begin, that they, of course, relied on the apparently irrational premise that witches *existed*. But it is also that very contradiction between the premises of the magical worldview and the emerging capitalist one that made eliminating "witches" critical to the development of the modern capitalist patriarchy. Consider the magical, or the encounter with the magical, as a moment: one chooses to read an instant (say, the appearance of an illness) as the result of occult forces, which reading causes one to enter into a particularized memory relevant to the magical: the necessity of appealing to those forces for healing, for magic practitioners, or, for witch hunters, of finding the witch who caused the illness. Such concerns would necessarily relegate others to the background; once one has decided that an illness has magical causes, there is likely little use in appealing to non-magical solutions. The possibility of experiencing this moment requires a magical worldview, which Federici characterizes as premised on the belief that the world is animated and essentially unpredictable, in which every event is potentially the result of an occult power that can be bent to one's will, if deciphered (Federici, 2004). But this conception of power, diffuse and potentially available to anyone with the knowledge, but not easily generalizable and exploitable, was threatening to the logics of the emerging capitalist class, whose interests required a worldview in which it was possible to control nature and rationalize the work process in a way that minimized unpredictability (Federici, 2004). Portrayals of the witches' sabbat, for example, emphasized its parallels with the very real secret nighttime meetings held between peasants planning revolt: portrayed as both a "monstrous sexual orgy" and a "subversive political gathering" (Federici, 2004, pp. 177), the sabbat's nocturnal setting emphasized its violation of the "capitalist regularization of work-time" and the ability to *see* distinctions between "mine and thine" required by doctrines of private property (Federici, 2004, pp. 177).

Drawing on Oyěwùmí's observations concerning the conflation of sight and knowledge in Western thought (Oyěwùmí, 2005) and the way in which such conflations support a conflation of rationality and "bodilessness" and thus exclude certain (racialized, gendered) bodies from the possibility of rational knowledge (Oyěwùmí, 2005, pp. 5), we might understand such conceptualizations of magic as challenging the possibility of hegemonic systems of knowledge. It is clear that this process was one of systematic exclusion rather than a benign development of "rational" thinking, moreover, from Ehrenreich and English's (1973) observation that, though situated in a magical worldview, the knowledge of peasant women healers was generally the most empirically-based medical knowledge available; unlike the emerging university-trained physicians, however, these healers were not especially concerned with ensuring that their methods "fit" into logical systems aligned with Church or dominant philosophical doctrine, and thus, again, challenged the ability of power structures to maintain central control over systems of knowledge.

Without the choice to read moments as magical, with the universe of relations to others that the magical implies, the mere observation of an illness might have led to a far less extended moment; a scientific explanation handed down from a newly-professionalized and male medical field that excluded traditional (women) knowledge holders from the "moment" of knowledge would have inserted the a woman's observation of an illness into the passive acceptance of the instant. In the experience of the everyday person, then, the magical worldview's supplanting by a mechanistic-capitalist one would have been experienced as the increasing impossibility of the "moment" of the magical: the recognition of relationships it requires would have been increasingly interrupted by the "instants" of applying predetermined fragments of knowledge.

The magical thus provides an inroad for considering an extension of Lefebvre's theory of moments. While Lefebvre argues that capitalism makes the experience of moments more impossible generally, he does not explicitly talk about how certain moments become *more* impossible than others during its development. The moment of magic becomes relatively more impossible than that of love, because it was particularly entered by bodies patriarchy marks as expendable. A concrete example can be found in Behar's discussion of how women in colonial Mexico internalized the Inquisition; even in areas and periods in which the church was more lenient towards magical practices, enabling the survival of networks of magical practitioners, increasingly ingrained notions of sin and the accompanying guilt made it more and more impossible for women to use the magical resources still at their disposal (Behar, 2001). This is the process of disenchantment: magic had to be made impossible to make way for the "rational" capitalist exploitation of labour, but, until that particularized memory was erased, unrecognizable and unrenewable, it had also to be possible in order for this expropriation to be effected. Other crimes (such as infanticide), while heavily emphasized and policed because of the material and ideological disruptions they caused (Federici, 2004), did not have to be made conceptually "impossible" in quite the same way. And the way that this extension can address the combined effects of emerging capitalism and patriarchy suggests a more general use for it in considering where the economic intersects with other forms of oppression. Audre Lorde, for example, discusses how patriarchy specifically functions to pit women against each other, and is aided by other forms of oppression, such as racism and homophobia, in doing so (Lorde, 1984); we might read this process as one of making "moments" requiring recognition between women, more impossible than they otherwise would have been. This is what makes the assertion of their possibility—say, by engaging in practices of solidarity necessary for building radical community—acts, as Lorde describes, of liberation in itself (Lorde, 1984).

Likewise, during the Lavender Scare and the general mid-twentieth century persecution of "sexual deviants," lesbian love in particular had to be made conceptually impossible (or have that conceptual impossibility reinforced) in order to uphold patriarchal conceptions of sex and gender norms (and thereby uphold racial capitalist relations by shoring up the American nation-state). Certain sex acts between cis men, on the other hand, while they similarly "had" to be made impossible in fact, could not be made conceptually impossible without undermining fundamental patriarchal conceptions of sex (that defined by penetration). But as long as it remained possible for two women to, in fact, choose to recognize a moment between them as one of love, this moment had to remain possible in order to police and purge it. In the case of Mary Meyer and Grace O'Lone, two Federal Housing Administration employees who lived together and who brought before the FHA's "Loyalty and Security Board" (Genter, 2019, pp. 236), a key component of their defence case involved accepting the definition of sex as penetration of a passive partner by an active one, and arguing that their behaviour, not fitting this pattern, was not truly "sexual" (Genter, 2019, pp. 256). The case was defined by detailed discussion physical characteristics supposedly linked to sexual orientation; for example, the argument was made by the defence that because "fully developed" lesbianism must involve the insertion of the clitoris into the vagina (ie. must be an imitation of normative heterosexual sex), it is only possible when one partner has an "enlarged clitoris," which, they argued, was not the case with Meyer or O'Lone (Genter, 2019, pp. 253). Such discourse did the work of making lesbianism essentially conceptually impossible, by closing off the particular "memory" under which it might have been recognized and replacing it with that of a heteronormative matrix that made the possibility of the moment "impossible love" an unattainable impossibility. That impossibility, as the imposed impossibility of magic provides security and stability for capitalist work relations, provides security for the capitalist security state in which political, economic, and moral stability are mutually dependent and intertwined (Genter, 2019). The case of Meyer and O'Lone is particularly illuminating because the key argument that ended up leading to their charges being dropped was the narrative of "overcoming sin" (Genter, 2019, pp. 258) that the discourse of impossibility is enabled. If "true" homosexuality is almost impossible in women, then there must be cases, like Meyer and O'Lone's, where quasi-sexual activity could be defined as "pseudohomosexuality" (Genter, 2019, pp. 258); without the physical markers of "real" sex indicating a "real" homosexual orientation, pseudohomosexuality could be conceived as something which it was possible to overcome, and O'Lone made the argument that they had, indeed, overcome it (Genter, 2019).

Cases such as Meyer and O'Lone's, as well as those of any victim of the witch hunts, highlight that the breaking in of the instant upon the moment, the failure of the moment in the recognition of its impossibility, is not innocuous. In the best possible world, it is experienced as alienation, though in that world the disalienating effects of all the fulfilling moments one experienced would, in theory, outweigh it. But both of these cases emphasize that where capitalism interacts with the other structures of oppression necessary to uphold it, the experiences of certain bodies—women's bodies, queer bodies—are defined by the continual denial of the moment; by the continual turning of what might have been realized, disalienating moments of recognition (of love, of magic, of possibility) into alienation. This structural violence makes the basic units of meaning of certain lives expendable, causing the "impossible possibility" to approach genuine impossibility, fragmenting not just the experience of time (which defines existence under capitalism generally) but the fragmentation of identity, of the very possibility of one's existence. The triple violence of enclosure requires certain bodies to be enclosed in the everyday as the meaningful worlds they might have inhabited are closed off from meaning. Extending Lefebvre's theory, therefore, helps build a language for identifying the *gendered* violence of the denial of the moment. This conception thus helps draw the conceptual link between the more "spectacular" forms of necropolitics in the colonial examples on which Mbembe draws and the slower exposure to death that the making-expendable of specific forms of experience enables.

4.
no/ yes/ yes/ I'm sorry/ I'm sorry/ I felt it/ the pang/ tearing through all the moments I let/ slip/ past/ like unfinished orgasms/ clinging to the brooks/ edge/ never tasting the water/ or the gutter/ here/ at least where you are/ you know/ the shades of the plants between pink/ and blue/ their uses/ here is my hand/ unbutton every mannish motion/ that took my last/ respectable desk/ even the one/ they never undid at trial/ pass your petal tongue/ across open time/ run away/ to the future/ with me
/don't let
/this moment slip
/like I did

Queer Liberation as Re-Enchantment

This extension of the theory of moments, however, also provides insight into liberatory possibilities at the conjunction of queer liberation and anti-capitalism. Clearly, none of the individuals fired by the State Department posed the kind of threat they were accused of for the reasons provided, just as, most likely, the witch hunts' victims were not actually holding the blood sabbats of which they were accused. But, as has been argued above, lower class and peasant women as a whole, and the worldviews they inhabited, did, in fact, pose a very real threat to the new ruling class—to the enclosures, to capitalist control of reproduction. And groups of women at the time were, in fact, starting or participating in heretical religious sects that did threaten the patriarchal capitalist ideologies requiring sexual repression, private property, and enforced monogamy—Mies provides the example of the "Brethren of the Free Spirit," which lasted several hundred years in England and which "established communal living, abolished marriage, and rejected the authority of the church" (Mies, 2014, p. 81). There is thus reason to believe that the witch hunts were not the inevitable result of the emerging capitalist forces, but at least in part a direct response to actual anti-patriarchal rebellion (Mies, 2014), situated within the power-diffuse magical worldview.

This very real threat is partially what motivates a re-investigation into the witch hunts' facilitating the process of disenchantment: it makes it possible to read this history not just as a list of capitalism's innocent casualties, but as a means of identifying where that genuinely subversive potential can serve as a starting point for re-enchantment. An extended theory of moments helps draw the connection between the liberatory potential of such re-enchantment and the "re-enchanting" potentials of queer liberation movements, where more traditional Marxist analyses have often dismissed both magic and queer politics in similar discursive moves. Frantz Fanon, for example, argues that magical practices in the context of colonial violence, by creating an urgent reality more immediate than that of colonial oppression, serves primarily to diffuse pent-up energy that would otherwise be used towards the struggle against the colonial state (Fanon, 1963). Likewise, Tims Libretti discusses how gay liberation struggles have tended to be dismissed as "lifestylism" or "identity politics" in more traditional anti-capitalist movement spaces (Libretti, 2004, pp. 154), focusing attention on more immediate and apparently urgent "identities" which are not revolutionary in themselves. But Libretti also argues that what the politics of queer liberation provides for Marxism and anti-capitalist struggle is the "queer imaginations" of the "total liberation of the body from capitalism" (Libretti, 2004, pp. 157) that, in shattering heteronormativity—a way of life premised on the "institution of the father's society," thus serving to normalize dominance and subordination—can become a form of class consciousness that enables the perception of how unequal relations under capitalism are normalized more generally (Libretti, 2004, pp. 162). Queer politics, in their most radical potential, Libretti argues, thus undermine not just particular normal behaviours, but the very idea of normal behaviour itself (Libretti, 2004). On the level of everyday experience, this looks like taking what has been made into impossibilities and making them back into the *possible* impossibilities of genuinely disalienating experience. Once we understand how all meaningful experience is, to some extent, the assertion of the impossible, the assertion of that which is more actively made impossible by oppressive structures becomes better visible.

Part of liberatory practice, then, can be envisioned as the practice of learning to recognize the moment as such. Halberstam offers insight into ways in which creative work can participate in this practice. Racist, heteropatriarchal systems mark a "space of the permissible" that seeks to ensure that violence can only be imagined as a "one-way street" (Halberstam, 1993, pp. 189). Where nonviolent resistance tactics can end up perpetuating this permissible space, imagination "goes both (or many) ways" (Halberstam, 1993, pp. 190): imagining violence that goes the "opposite" way that dominant structures imagine as possible, by disrupting the logic of violence can help shatter the complacency preventing revolution (Halberstam, 1993). In its identity-disrupting excess, this imagining is "queer" (Halberstam, 1993, pp. 193); Halberstam thus helps conceptualize how re-enchantment, an "excess" that disrupts the given framework of "impossible possibilities, places itself in opposition to the experiences encouraged by the "excess" constituted by death as controlled by a necropolitical state. The poems woven through this essay have been an attempt to enact this process of opening the space of the permissible, by tracing the "moment" of the recognition of love between two women, a moment which culminates in a potential act of violence that blurs the boundaries between representation and reality, as Halberstam argues effective imagined violence does: the twentieth-century speaker finds in the poem

ahead that she has, impossibly, reached back through time to engage in magical practice that caused a representative of the state to be burned at the stake in the place of her centuries-"past" lover. The progression of the poems' form, from two separate segments largely made up of traditional sentences, to forms less similar to "ordinary" prose, to the final poem below, in which their two "sections" are merged, parallels the moment of mutual recognition that leaves behind the everyday, and the way in which the assertion of that possibility that disrupts the everyday renders communication both increasingly impossible (sentence structure breaks down) and increasingly possible (the two merge). Their inclusion as integral segments of the essay, moreover, rather than as a separate piece which is then analyzed at arm's length, has also been an attempt to imagine how that re-enchantment, the encounter with the positing of the impossible as possible, might be worked into the "moment" of knowledge in an academic context. Where the gendered violence of process of enclosure results in the systematic denial of the moment to those expendable bodies left alive by necropolitical states, creative practices that open up the space of the permissible can disrupt the rendering impossible of moments' "impossible possibilities." Expanding the theory of moments to account for capitalism's interaction with other forms of oppression illuminates possibilities for re-enchantment that connect queer liberation struggles, magic as subversive practice, and resistance to capitalism.

5.

I was born enclosed

You found me

both ways I know but how

enough to light

Did I? Kill them—

I reached I lit they burned

Would we?

<div align="right">

You had to—

I was not

It goes

did you reach far

the sabbat fire I never did?
Watch your little prism refract dissolve
rays across decades like the forces
our healers
used to collect with charms in
thimblefuls?
Transform one night
into a different kind of day—

love, that's not
for us to guess

with their demonologies
like we
would have burned with our demons

love, not
anymore

</div>

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Person turned kindling

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Sometimes, you go out with a girl after crushing on her for a month and don't realize it's a date until you walk back holding hands. If you're me, then that's all the time. Originally written in the aftermath of a surreal summer, this piece is both an expression of frustration and a coming to terms with vulnerability.

Person turned kindling

July, the quickfire snap of a match turned person, had soft blonde waves cropped above her shoulder and a black nose ring on her left side. She was kinetic, always shaking the slightest bit, a mind-boggling amalgamation of confidence and anxiety.

July would challenge you to an arm-wrestling match just to hold your hand and would later only ever hold your hand in the dark corners of St Denis, as her laugh wound its way around your body, forest fire fingers on oak tree waist.

July had a habit of lying on your shoulder as she poked fun at your sense of direction, as you ignored the flames licking at your ankles in favour of translating the announcement on the metro. *Cet été, vous pouvez emporter votre déception avec vous dans le métro.*

July was endearing enough for you to overlook her immaturity, even if only for a night. She had a grin that burned bright even against the neon lights of St Laurent, and smoked the way eighteen-year old's do, with their entire lives laid out in front of them and a lingering fear of the dark.

July was young, and clueless, and selfish. Small enough that any shirt seemed to swallow her whole, yet bold enough to leave you stranded, standing at the edge of a would-be forest, had the seedlings not been scorched to the ground, had she not set them aflame herself.

July, the last stuttering exhale of a lighter turned person, had an affinity for watching things burn.

27/07/2019

Discipline and Disappearance: Seeing and Not-Seeing as Strategies of the Carceral Surveillance State

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Woman & Gender Studies

This paper uses the cases of Roxsana Hernandez and Layleen Polanco as entry-points to discuss the ways in which transgender people are subjected to discipline and disappearance that is achieved through the imposition and maintenance of a settler-colonially imposed, medico-legalized sex/gender binary and state practices of seeing and not-seeing. One of the key research interests is how state and carceral surveillance processes discipline and disappear subjects differently on the basis of race, gender, class, ability, and citizenship/status. This essay aims to highlight the material and fatal outcomes of seeing and not-seeing by problematizing state and carceral surveillance practices. The author hopes to uncover new ways to think through (in)visibility and challenge medico-legal, border imperialist norms of transparency and transgender legibility to the state.

In late May 2018, Roxsana Hernandez, a transgender asylum seeker from Honduras, died in ICE custody in New Mexico from AIDS-related complications (Shoichet, 2019). Upon request from Hernandez's family and their legal representatives for ICE to release surveillance footage, it was revealed that it had been erased. Nearly a year later in early June 2019, Layleen Polanco, an Afro-Latina transgender woman, died in solitary confinement at Rikers Island from epilepsy-related complications (Walker, 2019). According to a lawsuit filed by Polanco's mother, two correction officers were sent to check on Polanco and when they did not receive a response, they returned two hours later only to find her body "cold to the touch" (Tso, 2019). What ties these two cases together is the practice of not-seeing, which raises questions about the invisibilizing of certain subjects both inside and outside of carceral and detention centres, and the fatal outcomes of these practices. For the purpose of this analysis, I will consider the cases alongside one another. The key questions guiding my analysis are: In what ways are transgender subjects disciplined and disappeared along a settler-colonially imposed, medico-legalized sex/gender binary; through state practices of seeing and not-seeing? How does the construction of normalizing categories of race, gender, class, disability and citizenship/status that are underpinned by medico-legal discourses appear in these cases? This paper will argue that both seeing and not-seeing work alongside one another as surveillance strategies that discipline and disappear transgender subjects from normative public life. I will discuss the connections between the apprehension and detainment of Polanco and Hernandez, their respective subjection to technologies of "not-seeing" mobilized through carceral surveillance logics, and their deaths.

It is important to go over the details of these case studies in more depth and explain their relevance in relation to my research questions. Roxsana Hernandez fled Honduras because of her experiences as a transgender woman with discrimination (Chavez, 2018). The 33-year-old was a member of a transgender migrant caravan and arrived in ICE custody in early May 2018 (Shoichet, 2019). Hernandez was HIV positive and required a specific regimen of tests and treatments that she is stated to not have received in immigration custody, despite being entitled to care (Shoichet, 2019). This is important, because after having been transferred from one facility to the next, and eventually to the hospital, Hernandez died from complications related to her HIV status. During the investigations into her death, it is believed that ICE erased footage that would have proved to be integral to the wrongful death lawsuit being pursued by Hernandez's family (Shoichet, 2019). ICE alleges that the footage was deleted because they did not expect a lawsuit and subsequently allowed the system to overwrite the footage (Shoicet, 2019). I want to draw from Michelle Potts' "Regulatory Sites" in *Captive Genders* here where the author asks: "How might we think about the ways that the fiction of blood, like that of the "infected" queer body, have come to be ways of knowing, which in turn enable the violence of the state to become naturalized and even unsurprising?" (Potts, 2011, p. 151). This leads us to think about how HIV status, disability and mythologies surrounding people living with HIV (especially

undocumented migrants) might further other these individuals and justify the state disciplining and disappearing them. Isa Noyola, the deputy director of the Transgender Law Center is quoted in a CNN article stating that "the death of Ms. Hernández sends the message that transgender people are disposable and do not deserve dignity, safety, or even life." (Chavez, 2018). This quote illustrates that not-seeing, and the deaths that result from it, produce knowledge about transgender subjects and whether or not they are seen as worthy of life by the state.

Andrea Smith (2015) highlights the importance of not-seeing as a tool of settler colonial surveillance projects aimed towards subjects that threaten the "normalizing state" (p. 22). Here, Smith is referring specifically to Indigenous peoples, but it is useful to explain the relevance of "not-seeing" in the cases of Polanco and Hernandez, because they too, as disabled transgender women of colour are considered threats to the normalizing state, albeit not in the same ways as Indigenous peoples. Smith explains that in order for normalizing logics to be effective, they must be broadly applicable, therefore, the management of Indigenous peoples creates avenues for similar treatment of non-Indigenous peoples (p. 22). It is also important to note that settler colonialism plays an important role in this and any analysis centred on Turtle Island, because the colonization and the logic of "Terra Nullius" is what facilitated an establishment of widespread carceral infrastructure. In the specific case of Hernandez, settler colonialism and border imperialism become processes through which the United States and its immigration enforcement agency justify the detainment, management, and deportation of non-citizens.

The second case study is that of Layleen Polanco, a 27-year-old Afro-Latina transgender woman who was placed in solitary confinement at Rikers Island and died from epilepsy-related complications in June 2019 (Tso, 2019). Polanco is said to have been left alone for hours at a time, despite her epilepsy being a valid reason for her not to be left unmonitored due to increased risk of "death or serious bodily injury" (Tso, 2019). I am concerned, also, with the events leading up to her detainment at Rikers, as they reveal how surveillance mechanisms are at play early on in the entire process of her incarceration. Polanco was arrested in 2017 for accepting to perform oral sex on an undercover police officer, coupled with low-level drug possession (Arnold, 2019). Polanco did not appear in court for the 2017 incident, and a warrant was put out for her arrest (Arnold, 2019). In April 2019, she was arrested for assaulting a taxi driver and held on a $500 bail, connected to her failure to appear in court in 2017 (Tourjée, 2019). She failed to pay the bail and was sent to Rikers island (Tourjée, 2019). I highlighted the events leading up to her incarceration at Rikers because it is important to consider the NYPD's surveillance tactics that resulted in Polanco's 2017 arrest. The hyper visibility of transgender women who are engaged in sex work connects to the normalizing logics of compulsory visibility. In Layleen Polanco's case, seeing resulted in her arrest, to which she responded with strategic (in)visibility through the failure to appear in court. However, Polanco's efforts not to be seen were unsuccessful and ultimately, not-seeing on the part of Riker's Island correctional staff resulted in her death.

I seek to prove that state and carceral surveillance processes discipline and disappear subjects differently on the basis of race, gender, class, ability, and citizenship/status. I am interested in positioning "seeing" and "not-seeing" as strategies of carceral surveillance, through which we can understand the erasure of CCTV footage and the placement of an inmate in solitary confinement as disciplinary technologies meant to "disappear" certain subjects. Disappearing can refer to assimilation, colonial genocide, or it can come in the form of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls: "premature death" (Smith, 2015, p. 22). I am speaking here of not-seeing, which is not to be confused with accident or oversight. Not-seeing is engaged with in this paper as the deliberate choice not to attend to something. The failure to "see" behaves as an act of concealment for the carceral examiner that allows for a circumvention of accountability. It is also important to note here that I am engaging with a notion of carcerality that is dynamic, progressive, and reveals the ways in which carceral logics operate outside of prisons and detention centers.

Rachel Hall (2015) discusses the ways in which the securitized state necessitates a "flattening" of the object of surveillance in order to facilitate the "aesthetics of transparency" (Hall, 2015, p. 127). I am curious about how this flattening and turning inside out of the object of surveillance differentiates between subjects, and who survives the process? Hall explains that the ideal transparent subject is "normate," what Rosmarie Garland Thompson positions as "what is understood as the generalizable human being or the body type thought to be normal." (p. 133). This is important to consider in the cases

of Polanco and Hernandez, two racialized transgender women who arrived in punitive custody because of their vulnerability to hyper surveillance. Hall offers interesting language through which these cases can be viewed, but only scratches the surface in its understanding of how "othered bodies" are adversely affected by surveillance technologies (p. 142). My analysis provides a necessary intervention by que(e)rying Hall's ideas of the aesthetics of transparency and discussing how Polanco and Hernandez's multiple axes of "othering" are inextricably linked to their deaths. Hall briefly mentions disability and transness in relation to the "female grotesque," but I am interested in how gender identity and disability affect our view of the "female grotesque" (p. 135).

Smith (2015), Foucault (1995) and Beauchamp's (2009, 2014, 2018) work in conversation reveals that institutional structures of detainment, such as prisons and immigration detention facilities, require a delicate balance of seeing and not-seeing, which allow for the disciplining and disappearing of certain subjects that pose a threat to the normalizing state (Smith, 2015, p. 22). The calculated and repeated disruption of the flow of information by the state around the deaths of Layleen Polanco and Roxsana Hernandez demonstrates Foucault's assertion in *Discipline and Punish* that disciplinary power is "exercised through its invisibility" while demanding "compulsory visibility" from its subjects (p. 187). Certain contradictions arise when supposedly all-knowing bodies do not see the deaths of two transgender women. I want to complicate this by suggesting that the figures of the examiners in the respective cases of Polanco and Hernandez work to subvert the disciplinary relationship between invisibility and visibility. In these cases, the examiners make claim to invisibility in interesting ways that complicate the disciplinary logic outlined in Foucault's work that subjects "have to be seen" (Foucault, 1995a, p. 187). In fact, in some ways, subjects are specifically required *not* to be seen at times in order for carceral institutions to absolve themselves of responsibility for the death of their detainees.

Transgender subjects are encouraged to make themselves legible to surveillance mechanisms as "safe" and "properly gendered" in order to avoid being branded as a threat to the normalizing state (Beauchamp, 2018, p. 7). If they fail and are made hypervisible in their transgressions (in the realm of gender presentation, behavioural/public conduct, border-crossing, etc.), they risk being taken into custody. I want to offer a further critique of Hall's evocation of the "female grotesque" here, because it can be put to work to reveal the effects of normalizing constructions of sex and gender along a medico-legal framework. Hall explains that the bodily metaphor of the "grotesque," "tends to look like… the cavernous anatomical female body" (p. 135). This assertion must be problematized here, because of the way that it produces cisgender women's anatomies as normative through medicalized, albeit metaphorical, discourse. A new "female grotesque" is produced through a close reading of the two case studies, where transgender women's bodies as well as their access to care is regulated. This regulation functions as a disciplinary tool and results in an initial attempt to "disappear" gender transgression. Second, once in custody, transgender subjects must comply with the aesthetics of transparency, which Hall defines as the turning of surveilled subjects inside out in order to securitize the state, while also being at risk of life-threatening lack of exposure to visibility (Hall, 2015, p. 127). In a sense, we can view this as the rupturing of the classical structure of the Panopticon when the death of an inmate occurs outside of the line of sight of examiners. The Panopticon, as it functions regularly, allows for the examiner to see without being seen (Foucault, 1995, p. 202). In the case of Polanco, the corrections officers were allegedly "unable" to see. With regards to Hernandez, ICE and the erasure of the footage has also made it impossible for them to revisit information and impossible for others to see (Shoicet, 2019). This highlights another attempt at "disappearance" that is postured as carelessness and works to reveal the contradictory nature of visual regimes of power.

The idea of "visible and unverifiable" power that is taken up by Foucault (1995a) is interesting when considering the demands for transparency in the proceedings of Polanco and Hernandez' cases (p. 201). Tina Luongo, a representative from the Legal Aid Society is quoted asking for the "utmost transparency and rigor in the investigation of the correctional and medical policies" surrounding the treatment of Polanco (Walker, 2019). This quote could easily be referring to Roxsana Hernandez, which speaks to the chilling similarities between the two cases. This discussion of and demand for transparency clearly leads me to Rachel Hall's work and prompts me to think about how demanding answers and transparency becomes an important tool for justice, when it is utilized by those who are subjected to surveillance practices. Hall explains that "transparency chic" assumes the subject is healthy, and able-bodied (p. 142). Hall touches on disability in the piece, but with regards to Polanco

and Hernandez, disability becomes a scapegoat and is used as something that both representatives from ICE and Rikers can use to insist that they are not responsible for the women's deaths. Despite the two women's specific needs being made known upon arrival to the facilities, officials still mismanaged both Polanco and Hernandez's medical care, resulting in their deaths. If Polanco and Hernandez were not disabled, they would not have been made to "disappear" in the same ways; however, they still would have been disciplined as gender transgressive subjects. Furthermore, if these two women were read through surveillance technologies as non-threatening, these outcomes may have been circumvented. Beauchamp offers an idea that is useful in problematizing this further, which is that certain transgender subjects manage to adhere to aesthetic and behavioural norms that are "themselves grounded in ideals of whiteness, U.S. citizenship, able-bodiedness, and compulsory heterosexuality," making them illegible to surveillance mechanisms as transgressive. Beauchamp explains the inextricability of transgender subjects from the surveillance mechanisms that "produce and regulate the category of transgender" (Beauchamp, 2018, p. 6). This link is important because it reveals how the state attempts to "disappear" gender transgressive subjects while remaining invisible and unaccountable, and how the premature and unseen deaths of both Polanco and Hernandez are a result of this disciplinary disappearance. To re-introduce Bentham's assertion that power should be "visible and unverifiable", these two cases demonstrate that power can assume both of these characteristics, but at times, fails the test of being visible (Foucault, 1995a, p. 201). In addition, Beauchamp's (Hall, 2015, p. 127) work serves as an entry point through which we can think about challenging the normalizing logics of whiteness alongside Smith's (2015) critiques of colonial surveillance practices, by subverting surveillance technologies. The uproar surrounding the two cases demonstrates that mobilizing (in)visibility can work to challenge the ways in which it is weaponized by the carceral surveillance state.

This inquiry is important because these structures of detainment, as well as the surveillance technologies that are facilitated by disciplinary carceral logics have legs – they *do* something. The processes of seeing and not-seeing are not purely conceptual, but in the cases of Polanco and Hernandez, they are material and fatal. But what does this mean for those outside of these institutions? I believe that it is important for those of us on the outside (not of power, but of these structures) to do what Browne urges and to look *back* at power, using a disruptive gaze (Browne, 2015, p. 58). Browne uses "dark sousveillance" to explore the possibilities of confronting surveillance and I am interested in other ways to trouble surveillance, especially carceral infrastructure that requires surveillance technology to function (p. 21). How do we challenge normalizing logics rooted in whiteness by mobilizing counter-surveillance, sousveillance and demanding transparency from disciplinary state agents? I look towards Browne, Hall and Beauchamp, to think through (in)visibility and ways to challenge medico-legal, border imperialist norms of transparency and legibility to the state. I am suggesting here that it is possible for us to think about (in)visibility not just as a lethal weapon of the state, but also as a tool with liberatory potential for transgender people.

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Saying Red: Authenticity, Contracts, and Education in Kink.com's *Bar Bondage Hookup*

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Content warning: mentions of sex, BDSM, ambiguous consent

This essay analyzes how the pornographic BDSM film Bar Bondage Hookup uses authenticity to create a product that appears educational, which is problematic as the film ultimately normalizes unsafe BDSM practices due to its treatment of Gilles Deleuze's contract. Bar Bondage Hookup displays realism through its long, uninterrupted shots and appeals to authenticity by using pre and post-shoot interviews. Additionally, the monetary and employment factors behind producing Bar Bondage Hookup shadow consent and Zach Alexander's willingness to use the safeword. I explore these conditions by discussing a scene in Bar Bondage Hookup in which Alexander is penetrated with an anal hook. In the post-shoot interview, he discusses the discomfort of the scene, but did not use the safeword while it was being filmed. Additionally, I analyze Marcia Klotz's article on the pornographic website Insex to demonstrate that these circumstances, which influenced a model to avoid using the safeword, were replicated in Bar Bondage Hookup. Ultimately, I conclude that Bar Bondage Hookup problematizes Gilles Deleuze's ideas of contracts and education in sadomasochism. The film consequently normalizes unsafe BDSM practices.

Bar Bondage Hookup is a pornographic film released on Kink.com that features performers Spencer Reed and Zach Alexander playing themselves. The plot involves the submissive Zach, having no knowledge of BDSM, being educated by Spencer while engaging in acts of BDSM at the same time. The film expands upon amateur sadomasochism, which Linda Williams (1989) establishes as films that focus entirely on BDSM, by incorporating a narrative. "[I]n some instances a single scene of torture occupies the entire work" (Williams, 1989, p. 197), meaning that amateur sadomasochism does not leave room for narrative. Furthermore, Williams (1989) emphasizes the realist aspect of amateur sadomasochism, stating that "[t]he overwhelming effect of amateur sadomasochism is that the violence seems 'real' in the Bazinian sense: it appears neither acted nor faked in editing" (p. 199). Indeed, *Bar Bondage Hookup* (2010) features sexual acts which appear neither acted nor faked, such as the scene in which the dominant Spencer Reed penetrates Zach Alexander, his submissive, with a beaded anal hook. The action of the scene is captured in a single, continuous shot featuring the hook entering Zach's asshole within frame. The shot operates as a reflection of Kink.com's mission statement being an emphasis on realism as an employee states "[t]hat's what Kink shoots are about. It's a real response" (Voros, 2013). Despite the focus on realism, Christina Voros' 2013 documentary *Kink* features multiple shoots containing complex narratives that challenge Williams' idea of amateur sadomasochism including scenes involving burglary, a kidnapping, and an interaction between a student and his teacher in a classroom. While the scenarios depicted in these Kink.com videos are manufactured, the pain and intensity are authentic.

Bar Bondage Hookup differs from these shoots as, while it does contain a narrative, it is one steeped in realism. The film features performer Zach Alexander who, in the pre-shoot interview, establishes that he has never been tied up and expresses interest in bondage (Darkholme, 2010). Within the scene, Alexander portrays a character, presumably named Zach as well, who has never been tied up and expresses interest in bondage (Darkholme, 2010). While the interview involves director Van Darkholme telling Alexander what their scene will entail, the narrative features Spencer Reed educating Zach Alexander through demonstration. Through the use of real action and pre and post-shoot interviews, in which the viewer is given the opportunity to watch the performers discuss the scene, *Bar Bondage Hookup* appeals to its viewer as authentic. Authenticity, for the purpose of the paper, refers to the performer's willingness and enjoyment of participating in the production of *Bar Bondage Hookup*;

that, despite the film's narrative, the performers are emphasized to be real people participating in real BDSM. I will argue that the film uses this authenticity to create a product that appears educational, which is problematic as the film ultimately normalizes unsafe BDSM practices due to its treatment of the contract.

While Linda Williams defines amateur sadomasochism as low-budget films, I would categorize *Bar Bondage Hookup* as an example of a pro-amateur film, which Heather Berg (2017) defines as a "professional production designed to appear amateurish" (p. 683). The most significant aspect of amateurism in *Bar Bondage Hookup* is its use of pre and post-shoot interviews, which are posed to feature performers Zach Alexander and Spencer Reed as their authentic selves. The pre-shoot interview between the director, Van Darkholme, and the performers, Zach Alexander and Spencer Reed, establishes that *Bar Bondage Hookup* will be the first time Alexander has ever been tied up. Reed and Alexander engage in performing authenticity by flirting with each other prior to their shoot, exchanging words such as Reed saying "I'll have some fun with him" with Alexander responding by flirtatiously saying, "Yeah, and I'll have some fun with you" (Darkholme, 2010). The flirting indicates that, despite it seemingly to present the performers as speaking candidly, the interview still functions as a performance. Treating the interview as a performance is significant when considering the subsequent use of Gilles Deleuze's (1989) contract, in which "[e]verything must be stated, promised, announced and carefully described before being accomplished" (p. 18). As such, Darkholme tells Alexander what is going to happen, saying "today we're going to tie you up, […] do bondage, sex, you're gonna be tied up and you're going to do oral, anal sex, we're going to humiliate you, call you names. How do you feel about that?" to which Alexander responds enthusiastically by saying, "yeah, I want it. I want it bad" (Darkholme, 2010). I argue that, whether or not Alexander is genuinely interested in the acts as outlined by Darkholme, he is engaging in a performance of authenticity in his enthusiasm since producers "seek someone with a 'good attitude' who, on and off camera, seems [to not] be there only for the check" (Berg, 2017, p. 673). Furthermore, Heather Berg (2017) establishes that "[p]erforming authenticity can help to secure consistent casting opportunities" (p. 677). This aspect shades consent as, while Zach is given a contract, he is influenced by external factors to agree to the terms. Additionally, I argue that the act of Darkholme outlining the scene is an act of performance in and of itself, as "directors take more time to discuss consent not only for the performers' benefit but also because this is part of the brand – they want to capture it on tape" (Berg, 2017, p. 684). For example, the interview ends with Darkholme instructing Alexander to, if necessary, use the safeword "red" (Darkholme, 2010). In this scenario, part of Kink.com's brand is emphasizing the sharing of the safeword as a baseline performance of consent. However, while the safeword is being shared in the interview, the performer is not incentivized to use it as "the promise of a monetary bonus for a strong performance, along with the prospect of an invitation to return for another session, created a powerful disincentive to use one's safeword" (Klotz, 2014, p. 293). The influences of monetary and employment factors regarding consent and safewords results in *Bar Bondage Hookup* depicting unsafe BDSM practices.

Following the interview, *Bar Bondage Hookup* launches into the narrative, which employs an educational tone in which Zach is interested in being tied up and is taught about BDSM from Spencer. In the scene, Zach asks Spencer to tie him up, to which Spencer responds by instructing Zach to clean the bar as a condition (Darkholme, 2010). As Zach sweeps the floor, Spencer continuously whips Zach on the ass using a leather flog, as punishment for cleaning improperly, saying "c'mon, you missed a spot!" (Darkholme, 2010) before flogging Zach's ass again. Afterwards, Spencer explains what a negotiation (i.e. contract) is while stroking Zach's dick. Spencer informs Zach that a negotiation consists of a conversation in which they discuss "what [he] can handle, what [he] can take, the limits, and how [the night] is going to go" (Darkholme, 2010). I argue that this is a flawed depiction of a contract as Spencer had already begun flogging Zach and stroking his dick, two acts that were not part of a negotiation or contract. While Zach asked Spencer to tie him up, he did not explicitly consent to being flogged or stroked. Additionally, it is significant that, despite having explained contracts to Zach, neither Spencer nor Zach establish a contract on screen. Another flogging scene depicts an unsafe BDSM practice in the misuse of a contract. Later, when Zach's arms are tied together, Spencer bends him over onto the bar, creating an optimal position for additional flogging (Darkholme, 2010). Spencer asks for a number, indicating the number of times Zach will be flogged, to which Zach answers with five. In response to hearing the number five, Spencer repeats the number five incredulously before

flogging Zach. Zach then alters his number to ten, to which Spencer responds by saying "that's right" (Darkholme, 2010). Spencer rejects Zach's request for five floggings, and instead flogs Zach's ass ten times while engaging in his own pleasure as he strokes his own cock (Darkholme, 2010). This scene, and the educational aspects of *Bar Bondage Hookup*, presents a flawed representation of Deleuze's (1989) contract.

Bar Bondage Hookup problematizes Gilles Deleuze's (1989) ideas of contracts and education within sadomasochism. As previously established, Spencer engages in violations of the contract. However, I argue that the problematic aspect of *Bar Bondage Hookup*'s treatment of the contract expands beyond Spencer's violation of it and is rooted in the narrative of Spencer, as the sadist, being the educator: the subject in the BDSM relationship who teaches the other about contracts and safety. In discussing sadomasochism, Deleuze states that "[i]n every aspect, as we shall see, the sadistic 'instructor' stands in contrast to the masochistic 'educator'" (p. 19). Deleuze distinguishes the instructor from the educator because the former's role involves instructing the masochist to perform certain tasks, while the masochist's role is to educate the sadist about sadomasochism. In *Bar Bondage Hookup*, Spencer plays both the instructor, when he instructs Zach to clean, and the educator, when he explains contracts to Zach. Additionally, Deleuze establishes the masochist as "a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes" (p. 20). Deleuze emphasizes that the masochist must be the educator who creates an alliance with the torturer, which is not reflective of the depicted relationship between Spencer and Zach. The alliance between victim (i.e. masochist Zach) and torturer (i.e. sadist Spencer) can be understood as a contract, which "represents the ideal form of the love-relationship and its necessary precondition" (Deleuze & von Sacher-Masoch, 1989, p. 75). Furthermore, Deleuze's idea of the masochistic contract is problematically portrayed in *Bar Bondage Hookup* when Spencer persuades Zach to choose a number of floggings higher than five, as "[t]he masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer" (Deleuze & von Sacher-Masoch, 1989, p. 75). Rather than the masochist training the torturer, the sadist Spencer trains the victim Zach to accept the torture that he sees fit, which problematizes Deleuze's established ideas of contracts and education within sadomasochism.

By analyzing the scene involving Spencer penetrating Zach with a beaded anal hook, I discuss *Bar Bondage Hookup*'s treatment of safewords as an illumination of its depiction and normalization of unsafe BDSM practices. Heather Cole (n.d.) discusses the function of two safewords: a red safeword and a yellow safeword, stating "[y]ellow will slow down the play and give the players in the scene a chance to regroup or change the pace of a scene. Red stops everything." Prior to inserting the anal hook in Zach's asshole, Spencer tells him, "now if you fucking pussy out on me, you know what's going to happen" (Darkholme, 2010). In doing so, Spencer establishes a threat should Zach fail to receive the hook. Though Zach successfully receives two of the beads, it is the insertion of the third bead that causes him to yell "mercy" (Darkholme, 2010), which is Kink.com's yellow safeword that was not mentioned in the pre-shoot interview (Voros, 2013). In another blog post, Heather Cole (2012) establishes aftercare as a necessary BDSM practice following the use of a safeword and provides a personal anecdote to communicate its importance:

> As soon as the safeword was out of my mouth, I was unhooked from my bonds. The blindfold came off, and I curled into the fetal position on the bed. I was sobbing into my hands when I felt the bed dip behind me. M slid his arms around me, murmuring that I was such a good pet for enduring what I did. That he was proud of me and loved me. Gradually I stopped crying and relaxed into his embrace. [...] His excellent aftercare was what enabled me to continue being completely open with him.

Rather than partaking in aftercare, which Cole establishes as essential, Spencer responds to Zach's safeword by shaming him, shaking his head, and saying "I knew you couldn't fucking take it" (Darkholme, 2010). Afterwards, Spencer starts caning Zach's ass with a bamboo stick, saying "here's what you get for not taking it" (Darkholme, 2010). The camera focuses on the visible red marks on Zach's ass, which are the product of his punishment for not having been able to take the beaded anal

hook. In the post-shoot interview, Reed expresses regret when he had tried to penetrate Alexander with the anal hook, saying "it wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do. […] As I'm pulling it up there, I'm basically lifting him up off the bar with the hook. Yeah, I probably could have put it in a little more gentler" (Darkholme, 2010). That, within the scene, Spencer does not display concern about Zach's safety creates a dissonance between the authenticity of the performers in the interviews and their characters in the narrative.

Since Zach had only used the yellow safe word, Spencer technically fulfilled the requirements as established by Heather Cole of changing the pace of the scene. However, I argue that Alexander was disincentivized to use the safeword "red" (Darkholme, 2010). When Alexander describes the anal hook scene in the post-shoot interview, he says "I thought I could take it and no, it was intense. Especially that last ball, I thought it was [already] inside me ten feet in" (Darkholme, 2010). In the interview, Alexander describes a scene in which it would have been more appropriate to use the red safeword to stop entirely rather than calling the yellow safeword for a change of pace. However, as I had established earlier, monetary and employment factors would dissuade Zach from using the red safeword entirely. Additionally, Marcia Klotz (2014) provides the example of a model, named 1201, who did not use a safeword under similar circumstances:

> 1201 is one of the angriest models interviewed in the film. She tells of a scene in which she was anally penetrated for the first time. The pain was excruciating, and she now thinks she should have used her safeword, but instead she continued. [...] While she doesn't dispute that she gave her consent in the moment, she now believes she did so for all the wrong reasons. (p. 294)

While I cannot definitively state that Zach Alexander regrets not having used the safeword, I argue that the circumstances which influenced 1201 to avoid her usage of the safeword were replicated in *Bar Bondage Hookup*.

Gilles Deleuze (1989) states that "the sadist thinks in terms of institutionalized possession" (p. 20). He characterizes this possession as a form of cooperation on the part of the masochist where, if they agree to the contract, they become the sadist's property. On the narrative level of *Bar Bondage Hookup*, possession is established when Spencer bends Zach over and displays his asshole to the camera. Zach says "it's yours" to which Spencer responds "I know it's mine" (Darkholme, 2010). This interaction serves as a representation of ownership and possession within the narrative. While possession on the narrative level is not problematic as it is Zach who establishes his own asshole as Spencer's possession, I argue that Zach Alexander, as a performer, is part of the institutionalized possession of Kink.com. As an employee under the condition of having to perform authentically in order to be hired again, these conditions would incentivize Alexander to perform against his own best interests. Heather Berg (2017) establishes that performers "are unlikely to discuss the aspects of the work process that they would change directly after shooting a tiring scene, on film, and before they have been paid" (p. 684). The film's post-shoot interview corroborates Berg's argument when Darkholme asks Alexander "what would you rather see less of?" and Alexander, despite having had numerous issues, responds by enthusiastically saying "I don't know, I wanna see more" (Darkholme, 2010). Therefore, *Bar Bondage Hookup* depiction of unsafe BDSM practices as consent is problematic due to Alexander's status as a possession in the institution of Kink.com.

Heather Berg (2017) notes that directors of pornographic films will discuss consent "not only for the performers' benefit but also because this is part of the brand" (p. 684). Websites such as Kink.com make discussions of consent part of their brand in order to associate their brands with safety, even if their actual practices do not reflect actual consent. Their films, such as *Bar Bondage Hookup*, attempt to be authentic by using pre and post-shoot interviews in which these discussions of consent occur. However, I have established that monetary and employment factors shadow consent and the performer's incentive to use the safeword. Furthermore, *Bar Bondage Hookup* problematizes Deleuze's ideas of contracts and education in sadomasochism. That *Bar Bondage Hookup* contains a narrative that appears educational is problematic because its authenticity may influence the viewer to consume *Bar Bondage Hookup* as an educational film. However, this brings up the question: can porn be educational in the first place? I would argue that it should not be as the monetary and employment factors in the

production of pornography will always shade issues of consent. I would push for more exaggerated, complex narratives in which the viewer understands Kink.com's videos as manufactured. Only when Kink.com moves away from authenticity can its films become less problematic.

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Queen street

Mathew Kennealy (he/him)
Sexual Diversity Studies

Mathew's poetry is often autobiographical and touches on important themes such as HIV/AIDS, queer love, homelessness, poverty and mental health. Interested in telling stories inasmuch as creating poetry, his work tries to ground larger issues in the everyday, mundane details of his life. While he has no interest in being too political in his writing, he does contend that the material he covers is often contentious, relevant, and important. Inspired by his life and his work as an HIV-focused peer worker for a local not-for-profit, his poetry is often an expression of hope, humour and grace. He is a student, an HIV advocate, a peer worker, and a poet. Mathew is from Sudbury, ON. He has called Toronto home since 2010. A student at Woodsworth College, he has entered studies at the University through the Diploma to Degree Program and a partnership with George Brown College. Excited about the interdisciplinary nature of Sexual Diversity Studies at U of T, he hopes to continue to engage in courses that increase the breadth of his knowledge while stimulating and inspiring him as a writer. He is the winner of the 2019 EJ Pratt Medal in Poetry. Mathew is celebrating his 40th birthday this April and is very excited about it.

Queen street

I take the streetcar at least twice a day
Sometimes three or four or five
or six
times
more of a Metropass stoner

I listen to the radio
On an old Mp3 player

From Gladstone to University
From Gladstone to Sherbourne
From Gladstone to Parliament

The TTC made a change and the streetcar doesn't stop at Beaconsfield
That was my stop
Going home

I have a little one-bedroom apartment
On the seventeenth floor
I decorated with art I painted
While I was living
in transitional and supportive housing

There were five rooms
In a house in Kensington market
That at one point was an AIDS hospice

I used to tell overnight staff that there were ghosts
I still believe that

I lived there six years
While I balanced off on medications
To improve my temperament
And temperance

My stop used to be Augusta
It was when I lived
In Kensington

I coughed a lot on the way home
I've been sick all week
I caught a cold
Blasted boyfriend slept over
And got me sick

I went for an X-RAY Wednesday
After seeing my doctor
To see if I had pneumonia

Mom suggested chicken soup and honey

I was glad it wasn't raining today
Even though I'm dying to use my new umbrella
It matches my acid green raincoat
I thought the cold rain
Of nearly October
Would make my cold worse

It's tomorrow
A day escaped between stanzas

I took the streetcar home from school
Spadina to Abell

I had class from six
To nine
I've read ahead a little
Just a little
On the streetcar
Which takes me half an hour to get to work
And fifty minutes
To get to my boyfriend's at King and Parliament

Parliament to Gladstone

I watered the plants
When I got home one was
Starting to droop
Oxalis
A green one
And one purple
It's nearly bedtime
We have not
Been sleeping over
Instead we call each other
Before bedtime
Kisses into the telephone
Goodnight
I love you
Goodnight I love you too
It's not a good idea
To share a bed
Because we've both been sick
Stupid cold

I work at nine fifteen tomorrow
Which means I catch the streetcar
At eight fifteen
If I want
To grab
Breakfast at work
Grab an americano before my shift starts

I tried calling Zachary
But there was no answer
I think he's plugged his phone in
In the kitchen
And gone to bed

No
I love you
No goodnight I love you too
Tonight
I guess

It's getting colder
Winter soon
I bought a new jacket
For thirteen dollars
That is one size too big
XXL

I should try to get some sleep
Goodnight
I love you

Goodnight I love you too

Character Creation: A Trans Reading

Patrick Horan (they/them)
Cinema Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies

What can video games teach us about gender? Through autobiography and academic research, this essay reads the new media form of "character creation" in video games as a subtle but radical site of trans subjectivity and trans thinking. Situating my own experience with gender and with video games in a larger context of queer/trans theory, film/new media theory, and race theory I hope to elucidate the position of gender non-conforming identities in our contemporary cultural landscape. Using Franz Fanon's experience of white supremacy, Jacob Gaboury's queer reading of the "NULL marker" in database logics, various contemporary trans musicians discussions of "the face", and some queer thoughts on tattoo practice/body modification I outline the concept of the "Trans Countenance" as a way of thinking trans identity in the volatile environment of the cisheteronormative gaze. With the "Trans Countenance" as a touchstone, I then discuss how the (historically significant, but now somewhat dated) film studies concept of "Apparatus Theory" and by extension the psychoanalytic concept of "The Mirror Stage," can be appropriated and subverted as a way to more effectively analyze video game texts but also as a reference for thinking about gender in media. This essay is an exercise in queering academia, a practice of Eve Sedgwick's "Reparative Reading," and an act of vulnerability.

Video games are *super* trans. I use trans here in its more umbrella-like form (trans* maybe?). I've been out as non-binary for over a year now and I still feel sheepish identifying myself as trans (or trans* for that matter). It still feels like I haven't "transformed" enough to be "trans"—as much as I know no one would fault me for appropriating the term. Genderqueer is a word I use pretty often, gender-fluid too. Agender is a fun one—feels kind of punk, or at least kind of deconstructionist—but I feel about as "agender" as I feel "bigender," which is to say "not really," but also "kind of???"

I love video games. I'm a huge nerd for video games. It's funny because the stupid stereotype we have about video games makes me feel like the part of me that likes them is kind of masc. It doesn't help that I play "boy" video games too. Not "man" video games like *Call of Duty* or *DOOM* or *Counter-Strike* (or *NHL* for goodness sakes) but *boy* games. RPGs mostly (role-playing games), and really clunky ones too, with lots of inventory management and statistics and numbers with extended periods of time spent haggling with shopkeepers and reading in-game books. When I moved away from home I didn't have a TV for many years and so I got into watching youtube play-throughs of these games. Even though I have a TV now I just don't really play them anymore. I like to watch other people play video games (either very slowly, or as fast as they possibly can) and I like to think about them. A lot.

But still, video games (and in particular, my problematically-labelled "boy" games) are *super* trans. To begin this essay I attempt to reconcile my identity as an [inhale] *trans person* [exhale] with my identity as a "gamer"—a word I truly hate. I've developed a theory about trans subjectivity referencing Franz Fanon's brilliant essay "The Fact Of Blackness" and Marquis Bey's mind-blowing and absolutely beautiful linkage of trans*ness and blackness. While I am not interested in falsely conflating black experience directly with trans experience, Fanon's embodied theory has helped me think about my own body (a white body, significantly) and about bodies in general as they relate to and are changed by media such as video games. To stay focused, I've chosen one personally significant video game and performed a close reading of its "character creation" sequence. I hold back discussing other video game texts until the conclusion. I've also turned to non-normative body practices (tattooing, cosmetics, drag), new media forms (pop music, music video, database logics), and my background in film studies to address some of the old psychoanalytical precedents in media theory and to perform a trans-ing of their figures—most importantly, the mirror.

The Trans Countenance

The sewing needle penetrated the skin of my inner arm, just enough to deposit a tiny dot of ink, a speck of black pigment that came from a jar we had just purchased at the dollar store.

At that time I thought I was a man. At that time I thought I was a stage actor. I wanted to inhabit a new body every night and escape my identity like the "Absurd Man" from Albert Camus' *Myth Of Sysiphus* (pp. 135-147). Paradoxically, as an actor, I was looking for a way to live totally divested from the gentle, careful, inner world of vulnerability and confusion I hid from myself. A place that was still too scary—it would be years before I confronted it. I took acting classes where I learned to control my body in finer and finer detail, not so that I could express myself in a more accurate or playful way, but so that I could express the self that I was asked to generate for the purposes of some other vision. I felt like acting would allow me to be who I wanted to be, which, looking back, was generally any person who I currently was not.

That night my classmate used her improvised tattoo kit to mark my body, to change my body, with tiny meaningless dots. It feels like a moment in a new history of my life—a precursor to the transformation I wouldn't undergo for years to come. Living now on the other side of a (non-binary, non-medical, tentative, uncertain, ongoing) gender transition I recall these moments in a kind of "queer time" (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 1-21), a hodgepodge reconstruction of my life history outside of normative cishet narratives.

Colloquially (and cisheteronormatively), my "earliest memory" is a decontextualized image of my older sister in a room of a house that we moved out of when I was six or seven. My earliest queer memories mostly take place across my adult life, a queer childhood enveloped in a normative young adulthood. One of those memories is that moment in my friend's apartment, with a beer in my hand, when the sewing needle pierced my skin for the first time. Or there was that time I played Ophelia in a school project and it felt better than any male part I'd ever played. Or even the gentle private thrill of creating a female avatar in any number of video games growing up. Here's one example:

I wake up from a confused slumber, I don't remember what happened before I passed out—I don't remember anything. There are men around me, they're speaking to me about things I don't understand, one of them seems friendly and addresses me. I don't speak. As the men speak amongst themselves one of them refers to us as "brothers and sisters." I don't see any women around me, is he referring to me as "sister"? We're being taken somewhere, I can look around but all I see are trees and houses. We're shuffled out into the street and a different man is listing names. When I step forward he asks who I am.

I suddenly have a body, I can see my face. I've never seen it before – it's bewildering. I change and I am smaller, a woman, a monster, a man, I have a beard, now I have tusks, now fur, now tattoos, scars, dirt. I change back. I change and change, I love changing. There are many options but all within a framework. I always have two legs, two arms, I'm always standing on my own two feet staring blankly ahead.

I am finished changing, I have a body that feels right. My body disappears again and I can see through my own eyes. The man who'd asked who I was has been waiting patiently, and when my transformation is complete he doesn't comment on my appearance exactly, he hails my identity, he genders me and remarks on my ethnic background. As time passes I can move on my own, articulate my arms in various ways and choose to view the world from my eyes or to view my body from outside myself as I move around.

This is the opening sequence of *Skyrim,* the game that I have likely clocked more hours in than any other. On a cultural level *Skyrim* is generally coded as masculine, as with most mainstream video games; it is a text created primarily by men, for men (Anthropy, 2012, pp. 5-7) and in its grand expansive world it has virtually no reference to gender non-conforming identities or gender transformation. What I mean to do with this abstracted retelling of the opening sequence is to draw out the remarkable identificatory leaps one makes in the first few moments of the game, a process that countless cis people have undergone without the blink of an eye.

With these figures of an amateur stick-and-poke tattoo, a fragmented temporality of my queer self, and the dizzying elastic trans(formative) body in the opening to *Skyrim,* I would like to turn to a passage from Franz Fanon's "The Fact Of Blackness" that discusses the body/self as an elastic, compromised object. Although Fanon was concerned strictly with black subjectivity, in this passage his prose also illustrates and enacts a kind of bodily trans(formation), albeit a violent and traumatic one.

On a train ride, white passengers hail Fanon (1968) not as a man, but as a "negro," again and again and again. In the face of a destructive white gaze he writes:

> Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved towards the other ... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea ... (pp. 221-222)

For Fanon, the destruction of self under the white supremacist gaze results in a "racial epidermal schema." Under the white gaze, he feels his personhood reduced to a thin shell of black skin wrapped around a compromised, shattered, and fragmented subjectivity. He is reduced to his very skin, then to a fragment, then to nausea. When I first read Fanon's account of his breakdown on the train I felt a familiar tightness in my throat and a misery in the pit of my stomach. There is no way for me to understand the white supremacist violence Fanon experienced, but this sensation of the corporeal schema crumbling, the dissociation, the mitosis of perspectives into a "triple person," dizziness, nausea, breakdown, all echo the affective experience of my gender dysphoria. I am pulling at a thread here, and I want to be careful as I unravel.

In "The Trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-ness" Marquis Bey (2017) explains that both trans* folks and black folks live in a position of para-ontology, in the undercommons, as a fugitive force in the ontological system of whiteness and cis-sexism. Bey states that trans*ness and blackness "move in and through the abyss underlying ontology, rubbing up alongside it and causing it to fissure" (p. 276). As a trans* "fugitive" (p. 286) I can feel the destructive aspect of queer time pull me down to memories and scenes that are not useful, the train cars of my past. I feel the impulse to cast my gaze downwards—to hide my face from the world—but instead I will turn to Bey's trans* asterisk. I cast my gaze upwards to the sky and I see:

> the galactic backdrop of all that we know to be possible. Colloquially, and tellingly, known simply as 'space,' it is empty yet full, and it is the very condition of possibility for, essentially, that which is possible. More tellingly, it is full of stars, for which the asterisk in trans* is a metonym. (p. 284)

Trans experience is as varied as the stars in Bey's sky, as racialized experience must be. Fanon wrote about the "racial epidermal schema" to make sense of the violence enacted on *his* body, and he wrote in a very personal register. It is with this impulse to make sense of *my* body, and to consider how the world works on and changes it, that I will define what I call the Trans Countenance.

Etymologically speaking, I am interested in "countenance" firstly as *face*, then with diminishing denotative weight as *manner* and *bearing*, and finally as the now archaic *container*. I am reminded of a few contemporary queer musician's lyrics concerning "the face".

In trans musician SOPHIE's "Faceshopping" off her 2018 album *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides* she sings a repeated chorus:

> My face is the front of shop
> My face is the real shop front
> My shop is the face I front
> I'm real when I shop my face

A mess of word play that conjures images of entrepreneurship, neoliberal citizenship, or humanity-as-profitability. For SOPHIE, the face, the forward/outward thing, the data of the self that is read by others, the marketable, Photoshop-able, brandable, shop-front of personhood is the schema that replaces the corporeal. The gender fugitive's face, the Trans Countenance, is fraught. Under the current conditions of cisheteronormativity, trans subjectivity is illegible and trans folks are made to feel that

their whole being is nothing but a "face." Their body is just a "front" that is read like a social media profile by cisnormative society to mean something that has little bearing on their totality as humans. For trans folks (at least, visibly trans folks), the cis gaze reduces them (perhaps as Fanon is reduced) to nothing more than a countenance.

In "Becoming NULL: Queer Relations in the Excluded Middle" Jacob Gaboury (2018) equates queer positionality with the computational database "NULL marker." If we consider the NULL of queer identity as neither true nor false (in the database), neither male nor female (in cishet gender logics) but positioned somewhere in the unquantifiable "middle," then we can see how the Trans Countenance would emerge as an identifying marker—a computationally legitimate identity—to avoid the terrifying repercussions of the existentially radical, para-ontological NULL position. In SOPHIE's lyrics and Gaboury's database logics we see that the Trans Countenance carries the baggage of "computational thinking" (Bridle, 2018) and neoliberal capitalist values.

However, this avoidance of the NULL position, the desire for legibility, is further complicated by a dialectical desire to shed the Trans Countenance and to be validated as a fulsome, complex, legitimate subject. Gaboury argues that an embrace of the NULL marker could lead to a radical and more fulfilling queer subjectivity. In the bridge of SOPHIE's "Faceshopping" the intense industrial noise gives way to a moment of respite, transitioning into a pastiche of sweeping pop ballads and dreamy synths. She sings:

> Come on, touch me
> Set my spirit free
> Oh, test me
> Do you feel what I feel?
> Do you see what I see?
> Oh, reduce me to nothingness

We can see in this identity-obfuscating bridge that the Trans Countenance operates under tension; it occupies the dialectic of desire for acceptance and disdain for those who hold the power to grant it. The video for "Faceshopping" is a strobing horror show featuring a mushy CGI SOPHIE face twisting and contorting into horrific textural abominations. Her Trans Countenance is plastic and substanceless and collapses like shed skin. On one hand the Trans Countenance provides superficiality, identifiability, legitimacy, and quantifiability that can operate in the neoliberal, computational ontology of cis-sexism (and for Bey, this includes the ontology of whiteness). On the other hand, the Trans Countenance is always in a state of slippage, or even "leakage" (Chun & Friedland, 2015), the trans countenance *wants to fail*. But, as we learn from Joseph Litvak by way of Eve Sedgwick (1997), the Trans Countenance wants that failure to be "sexy, creative, even cognitively powerful" (p. 147). Revealing the para-ontology, the fugitive force, of trans existence is both the failure and the success of the Trans Countenance.

In Alaska Thunderfuck's "Your Makeup Is Terrible" (2015) her countenance is her quantifiable dividual marker: "Mr. Doorman, what's that? You need my I.D.? / This face is my I.D. motherfucker." At first this song is about "reading" those around her, evoking not only ball culture but also the trans experience of being "read" (as a failed version of cisness, as a fugitive), but by the end of the song her countenance fails:

> You see, there's something I have to confess
> You and I have a lot more in common than I thought
> And there's something I need to bring to your attention right now
> […]
> My makeup is terrible

She obfuscates her "passability," her success in serving high femme, and jumps ship – she suddenly forms a community of failure, a joyous failure to be celebrated. In the music video for "Your Makeup Is Terrible," this moment of confession is paired with Alaska appearing out of costume, out of wig, in a dewy (relatively) nude makeup look (2:06). This appearance of Alaska stripped down to a masculine-coded body is an admission of the failure behind her makeup. This naked persona even appears to be

injured, their right eye bloodied and raw—a marker of the shattering in Fanon, the para-ontological in Bey, and the queer mistake in Sedgwick. The desire to construct a readable countenance is always paired with the desire to be "read" for what we really are. If that reading reveals a bruised and bloodied man in the place of a perfect femme queen so be it, that is the embrace of queer NULL.

Unlike the racial epidermal schema which so closely corresponds with white supremacy's obsession with skin colour, the Trans Countenance is not necessarily tied to the skin or even the anatomical face. This is why I include tattoos in the trans countenance. In "Your Makeup Is Terrible," the distinction between face and cosmetics is unimportant. In this way, I also find the distinction between cosmetics and body modification (such as tattooing) unimportant.

In "Visibly Queer: Body Technologies and Sexual Politics," Victoria Pitts (2000) writes that body modification "is often linked to an understanding of the late modern subject as facing a condition of ontological insecurity" (p. 445). Pitts argues that our current condition as compromised neoliberal subjects has "conceptually denaturalized the body, uprooted identity, and created the need for identity - and body - work" (p. 445). I read Pitts' view of body modification as an effort to crystallize a Trans Countenance, to fight/embrace that "NULL marker" in the database of white cissexist ontology. Pitts' "ontological insecurity" is the negative form of Bey's "para-ontology" and rather than being invested in a legible ontology, the body modifiers interviewed in "Visibly Queer" are deeply ambivalent about their position in straight culture.

I would like to take a slight detour and discuss some of the problematic implications of applying racialized experience to trans experience. As inspiring as Marquis Bey's comparison is, it behooves us to address racism in queer movements and move forward with solidarity. Firstly I'd like to discuss the racist tendencies exhibited by these white body modifiers. Pitts addresses the questionable link between white body modifiers and marginalized ethnic practices: "In the case of white gay body modifiers, choosing marks of subjection has particular significance given not only their dominant position as Westerners, but also their oppressed position due to the historical pathologization of homosexuality" (p. 454). To address the nested racisms of a white person using "neo-tribal" (as Pitts describes) body practices to do "identity work" we might turn to Christian Klesse's understanding of body modification culture. In "Racialising the Politics of Transgression: Body Modification in Queer Culture" Klesse (2007) discusses how "in particular, the frequent recourse to racialised imagery, aesthetics, ritual and historical–political narrative [in queer body mod culture] calls into question the radicalism many body modifiers claim for their practices" (p. 279), and that white folks who change their bodies to gain some subtle signifier of racial difference are reinforcing hegemonic power dynamics rather than subverting them.

This problematization of the racial politics involved in queer/trans practices can also be found in bell hooks' (1992) reading of the film *Paris Is Burning*. I find hooks' insistence that the queens in *Paris Is Burning* are nothing more than cis men to be transphobic (or at the very least to be deeply uninformed). I find her concern about black folks (regardless of gendered implications) recreating and "worship[ping] at the throne of whiteness" (p. 149) to be more compelling and worth a closer look. *Paris Is Burning* is filled with the kind of identity anxieties that this debate about body modification holds. For me, body modification and drag performance, tattoos and makeup, the NULL marker and the para-ontological, are all aspects of the highly unstable, sometimes problematic, leaky, dialectical, and contradictory *Trans Countenance*. By defining the Trans Countenance I explicitly want to avoid a false equivalency of blackness and transness, only a constructive comparison as we find in Marquis Bey's thought. Now having defined the Trans Countenance, I would like to work my way back to the figure of *character creation*.

Mirrors

The mirror shows me a man.

The mirror shows me stubble, a prominent jaw, and broad shoulders. The mirror is something I usually avoid, except when it's all I can look at. I'm careful with my gaze.

The mirror is where I attempt to transform. I shave my face and neck, I give myself razor burn around the big stupid lump on my throat. I twist and pull and wrestle with my hair trying to find some magical paradoxical way to have it forward (femme) and back (masc, but less annoying) at the same time. I put on lipstick: dark red or purple. I might try an eye look but I always inevitably fail.

The mirror is better than pictures, I'm accustomed to my countenance when viewed head on. I have grappled with how my hair works from the front, and in the mirror I don't notice my bad posture (what I sometimes think of in gendered terms as my "dad posture"). But pictures always catch me off guard.

I don't hate the mirror, in fact when I'm all done up (and I've constructed an acceptable countenance) I usually get some fleeting joy out of it. But those moments only come on the rare occasion when I'm not late, and I don't need to ride my bike, and my hair is clean-but-not-too-clean, and my skin is doing okay, and my makeup actually went on kind of okay, and I'm pretty sure the party/event/show I'm going to won't be all that cis, so my catastrophic non-binary man-in-a-dress aesthetic will likely be well received—or at least not really remarked upon.

Really, I have it very easy. The mirror shows me a man and I'm not a man, so that's disappointing, but I'm also not a woman, so I feel like what I see in the mirror is manageable in some way. I actually think my jawline is kind of pretty in a way, and if I was assigned-female-at-birth I'd be stoked about some of my more masculine features. On a different frame they would read super androgynous, which I find strangely comforting. More and more I feel a little nagging voice that I've realized is feminine beauty standards, not so nice, but I don't have to contend with white supremacist beauty standards, or ableist stigma for that matter. The mirror isn't that traumatizing for me and I know for many it is unbearable.

But it still shows me a man every morning, so I'm working on that.

When discussing a new media form like video games it is tempting to fall back on a film studies perspective of identification and subjectivity. For instance, one might argue from an Apparatus Theory perspective that, to perform a trans reading of the character creation sequence in *Skyrim* one would have to overlook the Metzian "primary identification" (identification with the camera itself), and focus on "secondary identification" (identification with the "pro-filmic object," to use a comically anachronistic phrase). For Metz (1982), the contents of the work, in this case the avatar and their surroundings as well as the game mechanics, are not nearly as important as the fact of the apparatus itself. The temptation to read video games as if they were films may partly be why their latent trans qualities have gone unnoticed; if we do not take into account the mechanic peculiarities (the medium specific "apparatus") of video game texts, then we cannot fully appreciate the possibilities for constructive and subversive cultures within them.

In video games, particularly in the figure of *Skyrim* as I illustrated above, Metz' prioritization of primary identification over secondary identification would fail to capture the "I" that is inherent in video game discourse. When watching a film we are asked to identify with the camera, we are hailed by the apparatus to engage in the ideology of the cinema. When we discuss films we do not readily describe camera movement and character action in the first-person singular pronoun; doing so becomes strange very quickly:

> I survey the cityscape of Phoenix, Arizona from a high vantage point, and my gaze rests on a particular apartment building, I move down and closer to a window. Inside the apartment I find two lovers. I watch them and listen to them.

My exaggerated illustration aside, we would more readily describe a film sequence with the depersonalized "we:" "we survey a cityscape, we move, we find…" Even more likely we would use a mix of first person plural pronouns and a reference to the mechanics of filmmaking: "the camera surveys, it moves, we find…." There is an implicit understanding that the personal "I" does not carry much weight in the viewing of a film. However, in video game discourse, to discuss on-screen action and camera movement *without* using "I" becomes burdensome and clunky very quickly:

> The cut-scene opens on a first person shot of a carriage occupied by a few men, when the controller is manipulated the camera moves around, therefore we can assume that the player-character (which the camera has taken the perspective of) is able to move their head around. There is some dialogue with exposition amongst the other characters, then the carriage arrives in a town, the player-

character steps out of the carriage – as communicated by movement of the camera, and shortly thereafter character creation commences. The camera shifts from first person to third person to show the avatar, and a menu appears with options to change their body. Once the player-character is complete the game can continue as before.

This retelling of the opening *Skyrim* sequence is purposefully awkward, but nonetheless my point is clear. The specificities of video game mechanics complicate the classical apparatus theory of film spectatorship. Metz (1982) states: "At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary I am all-perceiving" (p. 48). When I play *Skyrim*, I am far from all-perceiving, the camera is literally controlled by me, as is the central pro-filmic object—the avatar. The world that unfolds before me is predicated on my ability to navigate it, and often the progression of the game can grind to a halt if I fail to perceive the next step (the secret door, the proper direction, an important object). Primary identification and secondary identification begin to elide, first person camera and third person camera provide different perspectives on *my* movement in the game, *I* run around, *I* swing my arms, *I* use the grappling hook or the magic orb or the secret door.

For Metz, the cinema is like a mirror except that we never appear in it, and therefore when watching a film we identify with the transcendental subjectivity of the camera, we are taken over by primary identification and left at the mercy of ideological influence. But, if we examine the source of Metz' conception of apparatus theory, Lacan's (2006) "mirror stage," we can see that video games correspond quite compellingly with it; yet, in a way very different from Metz.

Lacan's mirror stage illustrates the moment that a child sees themself in the mirror for the first time. The object in the mirror seems to move in correspondence with the sensations in the child's body and they can see their familiar surroundings recreated around the object-self. In this moment, the child recognizes the object as themself and they are bound up into an "orthopaedic totality" with a body and a subjectivity. Unlike film where the spectator's body has absolutely no bearing on the unfolding of the world—in a video game, the object in our field of view often *does* correspond with the sensations in our body (even if those sensations are localized to the fingers or in some cases the wrist and arm). Using Lacan's logic, if "l'hommelette" could somehow be given a controller and placed in front of a gaming setup would they not just as soon see their avatar and recognize it as themselves? We see this video game mirror stage played out when (as I demonstrated earlier) we discuss an experience in a video game and use the singular "I" as shorthand for the video game apparatus. "I change my body, I choose to be a woman, I choose to have an aggressive Orcish face tattoo." Or: I construct a playful Trans Countenance in the "magic circle" (Huizinga, 1938/1955, p. 10) of the game.

Therefore, although surrounded by alienating and compromising details, when we enter character creation in these games we have a chance to look in the "mirror" and change our bodies however much we like and perhaps get a taste of the Trans Countenance without any of the real-world implications/consequences. Consider this reality in comparison to the trans experience of the actual mirror. A trans perspective of Lacan's theory teaches us that somewhere along the way the mirror ceased to show us the "ego-ideal" as it did for us in our infancy. After enough time and enough social training we might notice that the mirror actually shows us some person we don't relate to, some man with stubble and eye-bags. If only I could find the drop-down menu with body options, if only I could re-create this character, what kind of a world would that be?

Well, ignoring the limits of medical science, a world with "character creation" screens at every bathroom mirror would probably look a little like Paul Preciado's (2008/2013) gender hacking transtopia from his book *Testo-Junkie.* He states: "We must reclaim the right to participate in the *construction* of biopolitical fictions [like gender] … Such a process of resistance and redistribution could be called *technosomatic communism*" (p. 352). I wonder if (when?) we create a technosomatic communist society how differently gender identities will be considered. If people could put on a new body every morning like makeup would "trans" or "cis" even exist anymore? What would become of the Trans Countenance as I have elaborated it? Would everyone have it, or no one? Like the deaf community losing members because of cochlear implant technology (Clare, 2017, p. 91), would we mourn the loss of our para-ontological communities? I suppose society would be so fundamentally

altered in this sci-fi future that it's useless (or perhaps just revolutionary) to even ask these questions. Regardless, it's still fun to fantasize about creating my "character" for class in the morning, and then changing it up for a party in the evening—hormone therapy and surgery doesn't quite give the same flexibility. For now I'll settle for my own petite Trans Countenance: an ambiguous haircut, a hip tattoo, and maybe some dark lipstick.

Conclusion

Of course, video games take on a wide variety of forms, some of which bear absolutely no resemblance to my dated reference of Bethesda's 2011 masterpiece *Skyrim*. There are even explicitly trans games I could have referenced, like Anna Anthropy's *Dys4ia,* a bright and frenetic Flash game about her experience with hormone treatments. *Dys4ia* provides a unique experience of "character creation," where the trans(formative) avatar-body seems to have a mind of its own. The player is thrust into a brightly coloured pixel world where she controls/becomes a little shield to deflect micro-aggressions, or a pair of sensitive breasts in a minefield, or a razor to shave upper lip hair. The countenance in *Dys4ia* is a shifting gendered embodiment of tiny abstract moments that you have almost no control over, an experience that echoes Anthropy's experiences and struggles with hormone treatment.

In the 2019 game *Baba Is You* the player must enter commands to embody different elements of the game world. By default you play as Baba, a little sheep, but when a rock is blocking your path you simply enter the command "ROCK IS YOU" and you move out of the way for Baba, then "BABA IS YOU" and so on. *Baba Is You* operates on the schtick that it's a bit mind bending to actively shed a body and inhabit a new one. The game's charm comes from the many strange and wonderful things you can become.

All the games I've mentioned so far have been solo games, without partnered play or networked play, but when you introduce social relations into the trans reading of video games there are many interesting possibilities that open up. As we see in Julian Dibbel's (1998) "A Rape In Cyberspace," the endless customizability of the player characters in the online chatroom-space *LambdaMOO* (a 20th century ancestor to today's fascinating world of *VRChat*) lead to the creation of radically trans player-characters like "exu," a racialized non-binary trickster god. As Dibbel navigates *LambdaMOO*, and the violence that can take place there, his understanding of real bodies and virtual bodies starts to break down—his immersion in IRL ontology (perhaps an extension of cis/white ontology) starts to fade and he recognizes how virtual bodies have their own (perhaps para-ontological) legitimacy.

What I mean to communicate with these various examples is that there is more to the trans reading of video games than the simple "paranoid reading" impulse to shout "Look! A thing!" I think there is also a "reparative reading" to be done (Sedgwick, 1997). As opposed to David Golumbia (2009) who believes that video games, *World of Warcraft* in particular, are teaching us nothing more than how to be good capitalist workers (a paranoid reading if I ever heard one) I believe that video games have the potential to show us not only what it's like to be trans, to experiment with a Trans Countenance, but perhaps something even more radical:

As I stated earlier, I feel like my life has two parallel histories. A linear (read: straight) history with continuity and progression (perhaps like a levelling system, a ruleset, or a quest) and a second history defined by queer temporality where memories string together across large periods of time and fragments from my past sometimes come rushing into the present and jump into my throat (perhaps like character creation, "save points," or speed-runs). One part of my life that I've come to consider an important piece of this queer history is my love of video games. I realize now that my association with video games and "boyhood" is inaccurate. Video games didn't teach me how to be a man; *they taught me how to be trans*. And I think they could teach you too.

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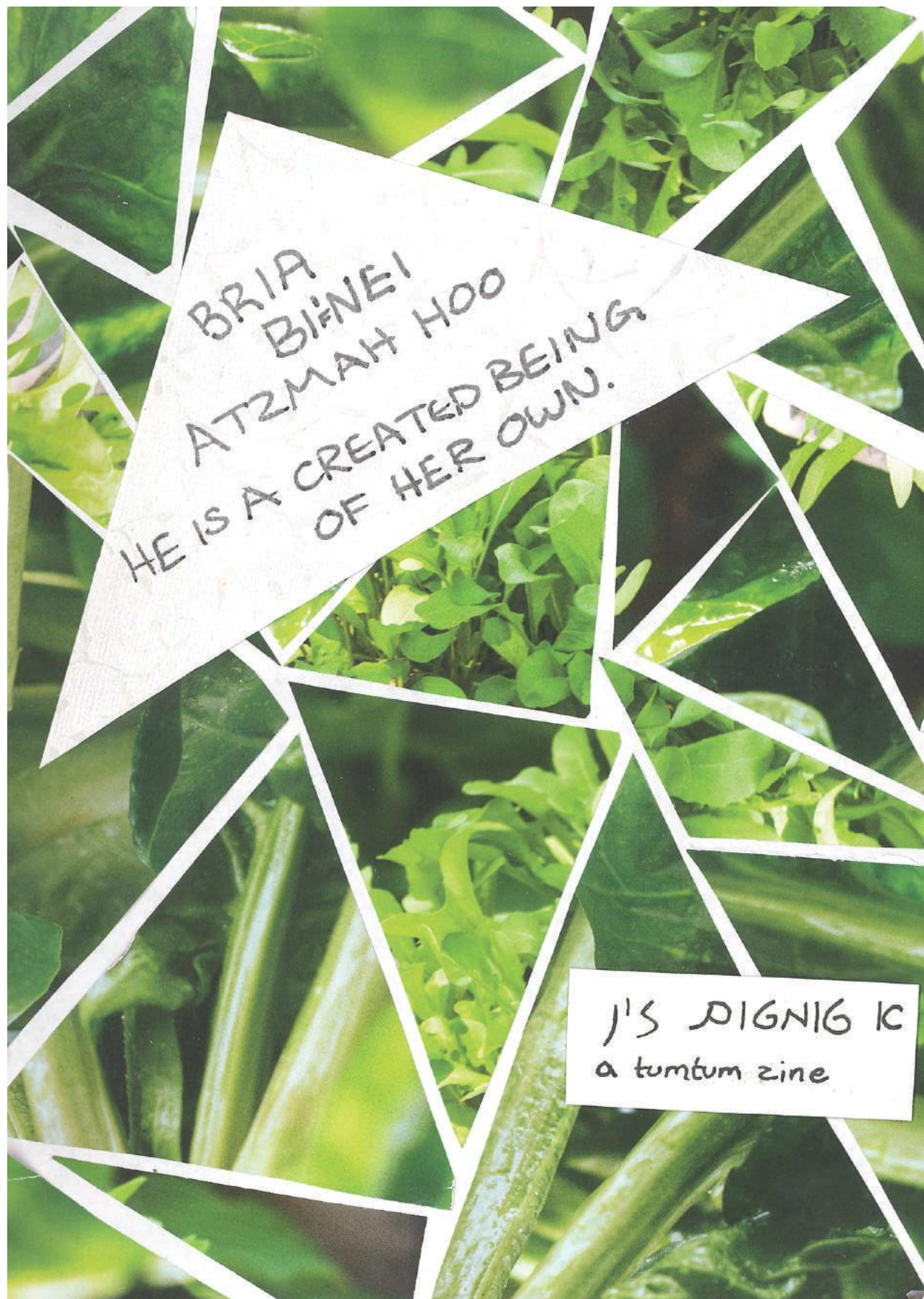
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Bria Bi'Fnei Atzmah Hoo

Nelson Morgan (they/them)
Religion

Inspired by Micah Bazant's 1999 Timtum: A Trans Jew Zine, I created this zine, Bria Bi'Fnei Atzmah Hoo (He is a created being of her own) to explore identity, performance, prayer and ritual as a trans Jewish person, using both historical and modern religious work. Finding this language and shared experience of identity breaks down the isolation of transness without resources to name your experiences. This is particularly relevant when the dichotomy between religious and secular society makes it feel as if claiming one part of your identity (gender) is to reject another (religion). Developing an understanding of our positionality and finding language to name and perform our trans Jewish identity provides a possibility for place, understanding, and power. While we may not be able to perfectly map our experiences and identities onto those of the tumtum and androgynos 3000 years ago, connecting to their existence can provide nourishment to our homing desires. Giving ourselves the freedom, permission and capabilities to connect with other meaningful figures in our tradition provides examples of the possibility of trans Jewish existence in an active process of relationship and learning. Imperfectly, I want to ask how we might build spaces together, using disidentification to reimagine ritual and practice that sustain our lives as we seek our space as twilight people, kedusha, created beings of our own.

BRIA
BII=NEI
ATZMAH HOO
HE IS A CREATED BEING
OF HER OWN.

J'S DIGNIG IC
a tumtum zine

BRIA BI'FNEI ATZMAH HOO

He is a Created Being of Her Own.

Bereshit means 'in the beginning'. Each year we read through the Torah, one parsha at a time. On Simchat Torah we finish the year's readings and immediately start again, that's how important it is. In Bereshit, האשם creates the world. Beginning with a breath, a wind...

בראשית א׳:א׳-ב׳ | Genesis 1:1-2

(1) When God began to create heaven and earth— (2) the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—
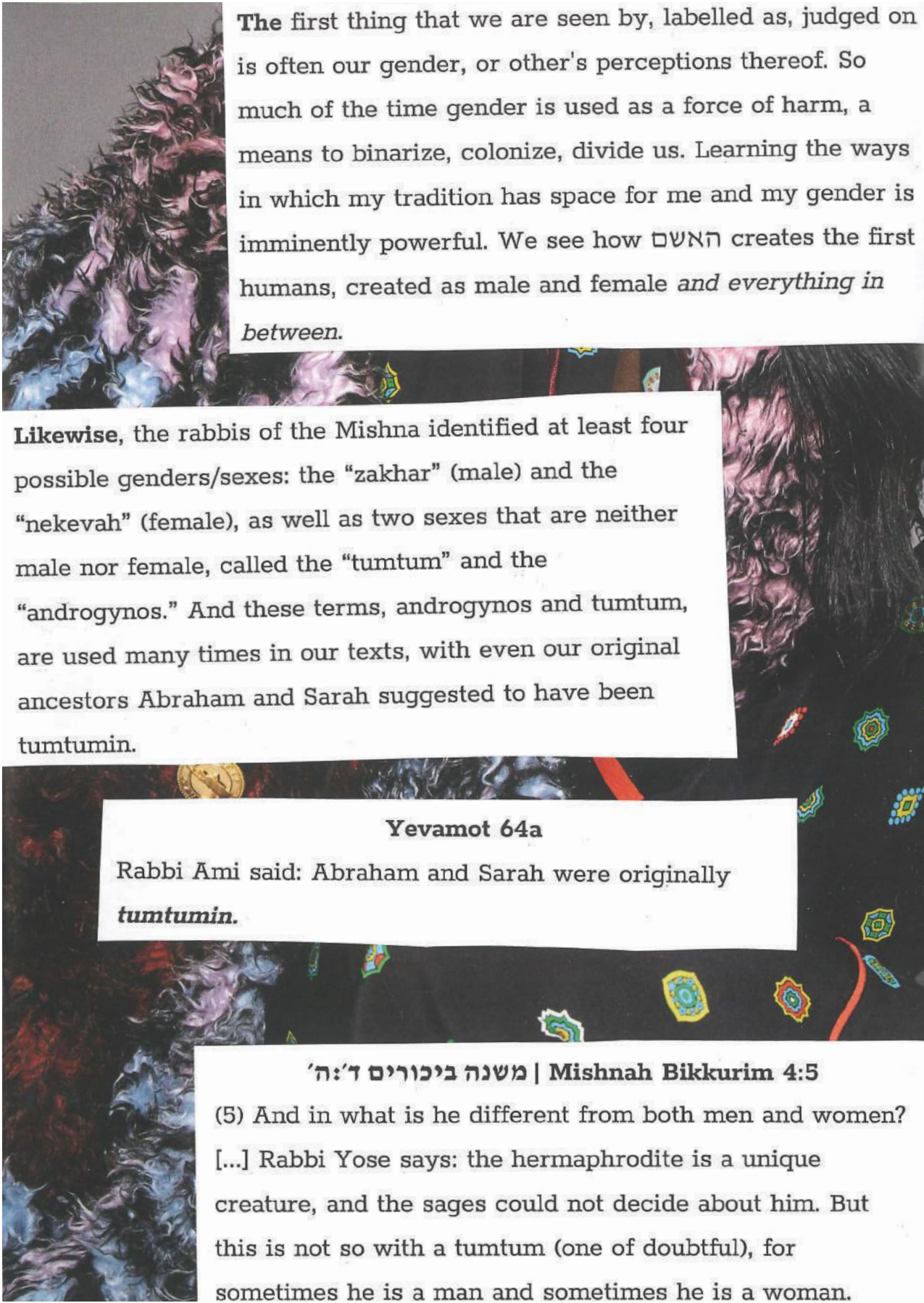
בראשית א׳:כ״ז | Genesis 1:27

(27) And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

בראשית ה׳:ב׳ | Genesis 5:2

(2) male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man.—

"Said Rabbi Jeremiah ben Elazar: "When the Holy One, blessed be the One, created the first adam, [God] created him [an] "androgynos." As there it is written: 'When God created the adam, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female [God] created them.'" (R. Kukla).

The first thing that we are seen by, labelled as, judged on is often our gender, or other's perceptions thereof. So much of the time gender is used as a force of harm, a means to binarize, colonize, divide us. Learning the ways in which my tradition has space for me and my gender is imminently powerful. We see how האשם creates the first humans, created as male and female *and everything in between.*

Likewise, the rabbis of the Mishna identified at least four possible genders/sexes: the "zakhar" (male) and the "nekevah" (female), as well as two sexes that are neither male nor female, called the "tumtum" and the "androgynos." And these terms, androgynos and tumtum, are used many times in our texts, with even our original ancestors Abraham and Sarah suggested to have been tumtumin.

Yevamot 64a

Rabbi Ami said: Abraham and Sarah were originally *tumtumin*.

משנה ביכורים ד':ה' | Mishnah Bikkurim 4:5

(5) And in what is he different from both men and women? [...] Rabbi Yose says: the hermaphrodite is a unique creature, and the sages could not decide about him. But this is not so with a tumtum (one of doubtful), for sometimes he is a man and sometimes he is a woman.

The Shulchan Aruch and many other Jewish codes of law make reference to the tumtum and androgynous, exploring the ways in which mitzvaot applies.

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 17:2

The requirement for a tumtum and an androgynous is doubtful and so they should wrap without a blessing (Explanation: a tumtum does not know whether he/she is male/female, and an androgynous has both male and female genitals). Rem"a: And since it is our custom that women should say the blessing when they fulfill time-dependent commandments so should they (Divrei Atzmo).

In many more ways can we see examples of our ancestors taking part in rituals we can understand as trans people - many people throughout the Torah undergo ritualized name changes commemorating major life changes. Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, Hoshea becomes Joshua. Momentous occasions and lifecycle changes are honoured by the giving of new names.

בראשית י"ז:ה' | Genesis 17:5

(5) And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.

Rabbi Kukla shares how in the Talmud when determining the proper time for prayer in the evening, the rabbis could not determine the exact time of twilight. "Twilight is like the twinkling of an eye as night enters and the day departs, and it is impossible to determine its length - (Shabbat 34b)". However this ambiguity leads to a positive decision - it is "determined that dawn and dusk, the in-between moments, are the best times for prayer - (Babylonian Talmud Brachot 29b) [...] parts of God's creation defy categories and that these liminal people, places and things are often the sites of the most intense holiness. After all, the word for holiness in Hebrew, "kedusha", literally means set aside or out of the ordinary" (R. Kukla). Likewise, the androgynos is "bria bi'fnei atzmah", a unique creature, a created being of its own;

When we find transcestors in our holy texts, it proves that this is not an impossible dream. Religious and gender identity do not have to be separate. There is space for all parts of you here. Our "Jewish tradition recognized long ago that human beings are *not* only created male and female" (Ladin, 106). Sometimes a big part of trans identity is feeling alone. So much more so, this can be amplified in 'traditional' spaces where discussions of gender are just not a part of day to day life. But we are a part of these traditional spaces too. So what does it look like, recognizing that even in Talmudic times rabbis were aware of the existence of people outside the binary? That perhaps even some of our most cherished ancestors had non - binary experiences? That Judaism can and does have space for all "created beings" across a spectrum of gender?

One of the major aspects of daily Jewish life is ritual practice. Daily prayer, a calendar of holy days, sacred practices that connect us with other Jewish people throughout time and space. Lifecycle events are to be marked and observed, celebrated or mourned. Rituals form a central aspect of many religions: our ability to participate in the creation of our own religious worlds provides us with agency and a chance to create "a Jewish world where trans identity is affirmed" (Crasnow 409). In particular, getting to create our own rituals facilitates this. So how can these rituals be transed, queered, building spaces *explicitly* for ourselves, developing our own new trans Jewish rituals? What trans elements can we pick up on that already exist within traditional ritual?

Immersion in the mikveh is one such tradition, typically done upon conversion, after a menstruation cycle or before holy days. This process is intended to cleanse and prepare us for whatever comes next. The mikveh provides a liminal experience, a place of transformation and in-between-ness where the immersor moves from one state to another (Crasnow 407). In many ways, this mirrors day-to-day experiences of trans people. The mikveh also provides an opportunity of time and space for healing "some of the gender trauma that arises in everyday experiences in a cisnormative and transphobic society" and disrupts/disidentifies normative gender, simply with the presence of trans bodies in this traditional space (Crasnow 407).

Therefore, many are now choosing to develop mikveh rituals around transition; immersing before gender affirmation surgeries, name changes, coming out.

Artists like Radiodress in 'MKV' put this into place, using mikveh as a "comforting and transformative marker of life shifts, specifically for queer and trans-identified people", by incorporating new elements to the water ritual such as medications, hormone supplements, healing tinctures, Palestinian Dead Sea salt, water from local riverways, and more (Morgan-Feir). What ritual items make you feel seen? How can we use our traditions to heal our pain?

Queer scholar Jose Esteban Muñoz writes about a concept he calls 'disidentification'. It is a means of distorting and reimagining dominant, oppressive symbols through aesthetic practice (Muñoz, 169). By taking dominant symbolic practices (such as the mikveh) and recircuiting them through a trans Jewish lens, these practices become reworked to account for us rather than sideline us (Crasnow, 408). How else can disidentification look?

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Others experiment with adapting the language of traditional texts to better represent trans experiences. In Birkat haShachar, where we find the morning blessings, one of them has traditionally been for men thanking God "who has not made me a woman". In line with feminist and liberal siddurim which have developed their own alternatives to this line, we find people crafting trans specific response; here, Rabbi Ariel Stone reinterprets these gender-based blessings to include options for trans, nonbinary and gender questioning people (R. Stone).

For a non-binary person:

ברוך אתה יי אלקינו מלך העולם שעשני כרצונו

I give thanks to G*d for making me according to the divine will.

For a trans man:

ברוך אתה יי אלקינו מלך העולם שהפכני לאיש

I give thanks to G*d for transforming me into a man.

For a trans woman:

ברוך אתה יי אלקינו מלך העולם שהפכני לאישה
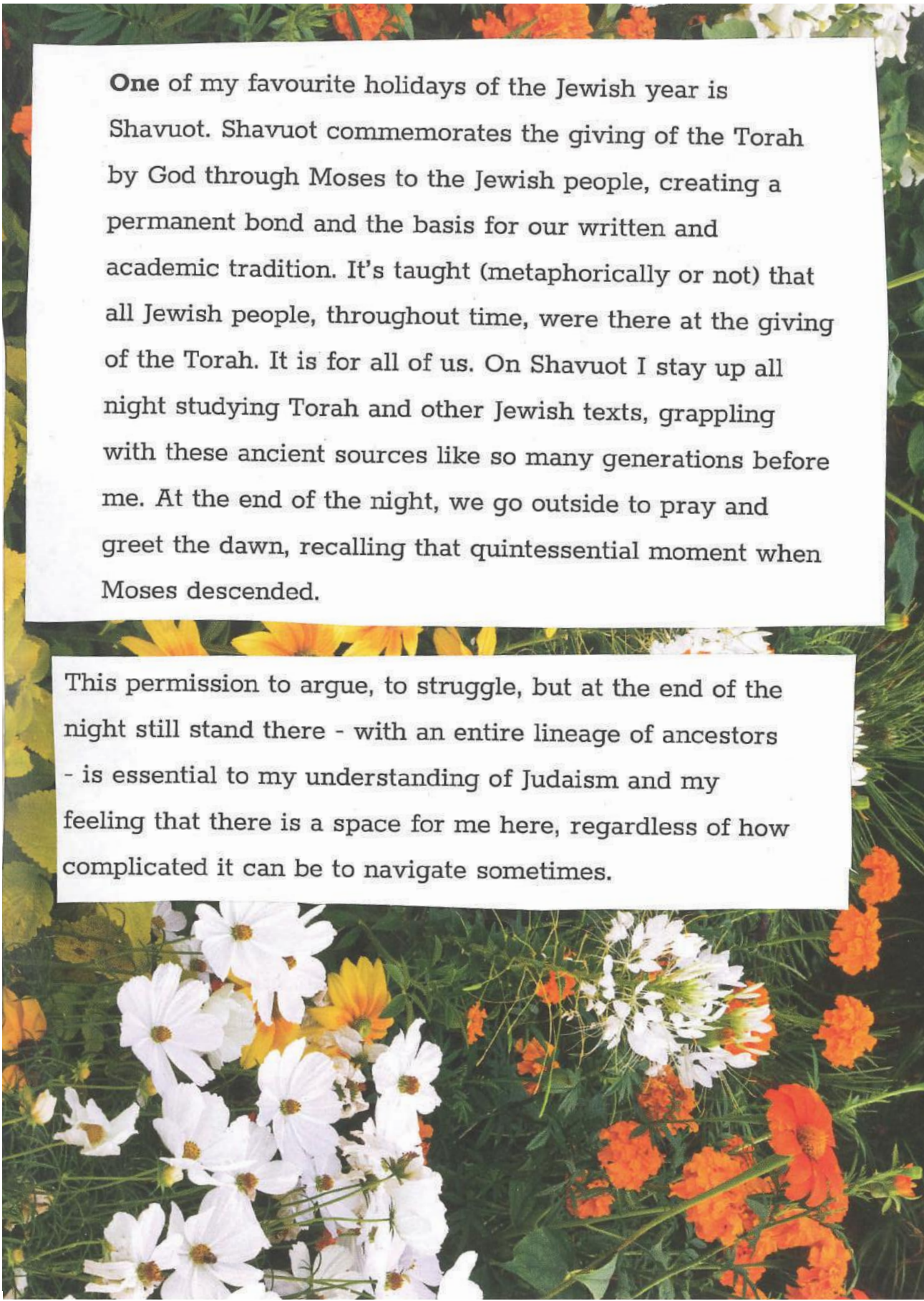
I give thanks to G*d for transforming me into a woman.

For one who questions:

ברוך אתה יי אלקינו מלך העולם שעשני לבקש

I give thanks to G*d for making me a seeker.

Our identities deserve to be respected; our identities can be thanked for. There is just as much of a space for us to belong in prayer.

One of my favourite holidays of the Jewish year is Shavuot. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah by God through Moses to the Jewish people, creating a permanent bond and the basis for our written and academic tradition. It's taught (metaphorically or not) that all Jewish people, throughout time, were there at the giving of the Torah. It is for all of us. On Shavuot I stay up all night studying Torah and other Jewish texts, grappling with these ancient sources like so many generations before me. At the end of the night, we go outside to pray and greet the dawn, recalling that quintessential moment when Moses descended.

This permission to argue, to struggle, but at the end of the night still stand there - with an entire lineage of ancestors - is essential to my understanding of Judaism and my feeling that there is a space for me here, regardless of how complicated it can be to navigate sometimes.

Finding Spaces, Building Communities

The Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative/Masorti Jewish movements all now have official policies of acceptance for trans Jewish people. Transgender rabbis have been ordained in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements and are open to admission in the Conservative moment. However, the perception of space for trans people is largely absent in the Orthodox world & more traditional Conservative/Masorti synagogues. This brings the question - where do you go as a trans person who wants to live observantly? Who will teach you, as a trans person, how to follow the gender-based mitzvot, and provide a space for that to happen authentically? To wrap tzitzit and lay tefillin are central aspects of observant Jewish men's lives, and are practices desired to be upheld by many women and trans people; however, in the liberal spaces where inclusion is normalized, these practices are uncommon. In traditional spaces, I am not read as my genderqueer identity. But I still want access to these places, I want to learn the prayer practices that bind me to my community and validate my religious-gender identity. These two things are linked for me and many others. So the question of finding, envisioning and/or building the Jewish spaces we desire and need is important for trans Jews.

How many of us are ostracized from religion, believe that there isn't or can't be places for us? But at the same time, wrestling with these sorts of questions about who we are and how we should live is a very Jewish quality to dual with. We have the capacity to be our own ritual leaders, to develop the communities we seek, and to form relationships that nurture our collective learning and spirituality. I don't know where all these places are yet; I don't have a deep sense of community connection to trans spirituality and religion, but I believe in it & I have had experiences of coming-together that remind me that it's possible.

Modern Ancestors

- Leslie Fienberg, "an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist" (Pratt).
- Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, a 13th-century Jewish poet who wrote in *Evan Bochan* about wishing "to have been created as a woman" (Kalonymus).
- Claude Cahun, a 20th-century French artist, writer and resistance worker who identified themselves as neuter (Cahun).
- The Tzaddik of Ludomir, a 19th-century Hasidic Rebbe, leader and teacher, referred to the community as a tzaddik - "righteous man" - and "followed all religious laws like a man" (Hessel).

kadosh kadosh kadosh.

Reading List

1. Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community - Noach Dzmura
2. Becoming Eve - Abby Stein
3. Evan Bochur - Kalonymus ben Kalonymus
4. Stone Butch Blues - Leslie Feinberg
5. The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective - Joy Ladin
6. Timtum: א יידישע טראנס –זין | A Trans Jew Zine - Micah Bazant
7. Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible - Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser and David Shneer
8. TransTorah - Rabbi Elliot Kukla

Despite binaristic, colonial-patriarchal framings of God, God is not anthropomorphic, does not have a gender, is not 'a man', "cannot be described or understood in human terms" (Ladin 66). While Judaism has often defaulted to masculine language for God, the Kabbalistic tradition (among others) is notable for an exploration of alternative framings for God. The *Shechinah*, the feminine aspect of God, was understood by Kabbalists as a mother-aspect of God. Further, scholars like Maimonides teach that "God cannot be described in language, even the language of the Torah. Language works by implying similarity, but God is One, unique, unlike anything else in any way" (Ladin, 67). Sexism and assimilationism does its work to make trans Jews feel non-belonging, but that is not an inherent part of our tradition. In holding space and understanding that God is not limited by gender or capable of being pinned down to such basic human ideologies, there is more space for us as transgender people to see ourselves reflected in religion and spiritual spaces, to recognize that we are an inherently valued part of this tradition.